

## CREATIVE NONVIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION- Seeking JUSTICE

BY Brenda Carr- 12/28/2018

In 2006 when I first encountered The School of Living the catch word I knew nothing about was "permaculture." Its mythology was dispelled when I took the Permaculture course offered at Heathcote in 2010 taught by Patty Ceglia, Dawn Shiner and Karen Stupski . In September of this year I received an email from Sunny Rehler at Julian Woods inviting SoL members to participate in a "Creative Nonviolent Conflict Resolution" workshop. The communique promised that "Participants will learn and practice various ways to actually apply these skills to real-life situations in their lives."

If "permaculture" was the catchword of the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of this century, then "non-violent conflict resolution" and "restorative justice" are the concepts driving the current decade's peace community. It was time for me to jump in and learn the meaning of these concepts, so I signed up for the workshop to be led by Marie Hamilton, the founder of Centre Peace in Centre County, PA.

On a beautiful sunny Fall day I headed up the Appalachian ridge along Rt 99 to Julian Woods to attend Marie's workshop. The colorful Fall foliage was a delightful backdrop to the two banks of Wind Generation Farms I passed in route to J.W. where I was hosted by Jeff Wilkins for my two day stay. The view of the Fall splendor from Ann & Jeff's dining table was worth the trip and Jeff and I visited while watching the birds.

After arriving at Ann's and claiming my spot in the guest room, I was off to State College to spend Friday evening and all day Saturday with a talented collection of Centre County activists

and professionals seeking to apply the principles of non-violent conflict resolution to their lives. It was an honor to be in their company and a privilege to receive the wisdom of Marie Hamilton's lifetime of service to the St. College community and the PA criminal justice system.

Melanie G. Snyder has artfully documented Marie's story in **GRACE GOES TO PRISION** which I highly recommend to anyone involved with our criminal justice system whether as victim, perpetrator, concerned citizen or professional in contact with our justice system. It's an inspiring story which appeals to our better angles and challenges us to seek the human spark in the soul of all humans.

In the 1800's Fyador Dostoevsky observed: "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." Marie Hamilton entered the PA Rockview C.J.I. near State College in the early 70's to participate in a program to prepare inmates for release (a pre-release program). It was a bumpy start but Marie was persistent and eventually was teaching non-violent conflict resolution to both inmates and their guards. Her story tracks the development of such programs throughout the PA C.J. system and tracks the impact of the "war on drugs" on the system and the rising awareness that the "system" is neither just nor humane.

If you are interested in advocating for and creating a more just and humane system for dealing with criminal offenders this book is a good place to start and a workshop on non-violent communications a 1<sup>st</sup> step toward taking meaningful action. At the heart of N.V. communications is the power of "active listening."

