



RPEC NEWS

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

March-April 2009

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Profiles in Peacemaking

Al Simmons

Vietnam Veteran, Retired Teacher, One of the "SOA 6"

Interview conducted by Adria Scharf

On November 23, Richmond community member Al Simmons and five other human rights advocates engaged in a nonviolent act of civil disobedience to protest the School of the Americas, by "crossing the line" or trespassing onto the Fort Benning military base in Georgia, which houses the school. The School of the Americas trains Latin American military and militia leaders. Human rights groups have long linked its graduates with incidents of torture, political murder and other rights violations throughout Central and South America. Simmons was convicted of trespassing, and began serving his two-month sentence at Butner Federal Correctional Institution in North Carolina on March 9. He shared these reflections a few days before he began his sentence. For more information about the School of the Americas, see www.soaw.org.

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Next Newsletter
May 10

RPEC
Web Page:
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Q: Describe the protest against the School of the Americas.

School of the Americas Watch (which organizes a week-end-long protest at Fort Benning each November) was begun in 1990 by Father Roy Bourgeois. The year before, several priests and nuns had been killed in Latin America. He and 11 other people gathered outside the base. The protest has grown over the years. Now 18,000 to 20,000 people go each year. I went for the first time five years ago. They read a list of names of people killed in Latin America. They hold up a white cross and say "presente." I was moved by that.

Q: Why did you choose to go beyond simply marching at the protest? Why did you take the next step, and "cross over" onto or trespass on the base, knowing that you would be arrested for doing so?

After I went to the protest five years ago, I always knew that I'd return when I retired. I knew that if SOA were still operating, I would take the additional step of crossing over. I feel that there's a window of opportunity right now to move the country toward less use of force and in a direction of more peaceful dialogue. Real security will happen when people respect us rather than fear us. President Obama has shown authentic human emotion in his desire

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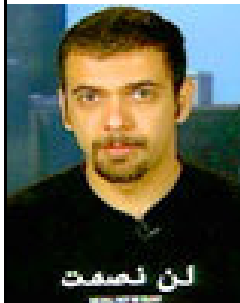
Reflections

Adria Scharf, Executive Director

Please join us on April 15 at 7 pm for what is sure to be an illuminating discussion. Iraqi political analyst Raed Jarrar will present a talk, "Is the Occupation Really Ending?" at the Pace Center for Campus Ministries, 700 W. Franklin Street, across from Monroe Park.

On February 27, President Obama announced a plan for withdrawing troops from Iraq. The president set, for the first time, a deadline for withdrawal, saying that he plans to remove combat troops by August 2010 and all remaining advisory forces by December 2011. While some key questions (about private military contractors and the plans for U.S. bases in Iraq) have yet to be answered, for many of us who opposed the war from the start, who have held vigils, marched in the streets, and written letters continuously over the past six years, this announcement seems to represent a turning point.

Raed Jarrar has a strong understanding of the situation on the ground in Iraq, the internal politics of the country, and its challenges. On April 15, he will share his reflections about the planned troop withdrawal and the continuing impact of the U.S. occupation on Iraqi society. He will also discuss why the peace movement must continue to call for a faster timetable for withdrawal, and for U.S. troops to come home with no detour in Afghanistan. For more information about the event, see the "Happenings" section of this newsletter.



Raed Jarrar (Arabic: راج ديار) is an Iraqi architect, blogger, and activist resident in the United States. He is currently the Iraq consultant for the American Friends Service Committee.

Jarrar was born and raised in Baghdad, and is half Iraqi and half Palestinian. He holds a degree in architecture from the University of Jordan.

Read his blog at:
<http://raedinthemiddle.blogspot.com/>

Don't miss John McCutcheon in Concert
May 17 at 4 pm,
VCU Singleton Center for the Performing Arts,
922 Park Avenue.

Profiles in Peacemaking

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to close Guantanamo and end torture. The SOA is the same thing in different clothing.

Q: What is it about the School of Americas that made you take this action?

Its exploitation of poor people in foreign lands reminded me of Vietnam. What I learned in Vietnam about myself and about others is that if you take well armed people and put them in cruel and oppressive situations, they become cruel and oppressive.

Q: Describe the act of nonviolent civil disobedience that you and five other activists took on November 23.

The only place we could cross over was at the main gate. We were driven to a secret location, giving no one any idea of where we were going to go. We were taken to a drop off point and told to “walk as quickly as you can,” and to keep walking until we were on the base. We were told “if they say stop, don’t stop.” There were six of us, three men and three women. We were in a single file, with the person in front pushing a wheel chair. (Activist Louis Wolf of Washington, D.C., was in the wheel chair.)

We began walking fast. A policeman was yelling “stop, stop.” We walked a half mile, up a ramp that led only to the base. We went about 300 yards with a police officer chasing after us on foot. We

wanted to be sure that we made it to the entrance of the base.

Within a minute after we arrived at the entrance, there were six or seven military police cars, and about 16 or 17 individual military police, surrounding us. They pulled up on both sides, front and back. I was in handcuffs within 30 seconds. The MPs weren’t gentle but they weren’t rough. They were nervous. This is not something that happens often with them. We’re civilians, and they know that we’ve taken a pledge of nonviolence.

One of the women who was handcuffed, Theresa Cusimano, was treated badly. They put the cuffs on her from behind her, then told her to take off her coat, which was physically impossible. She fell to her knees and started singing and praying.

Q: The school has re-branded itself with a new name, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. Has it changed?

Subsequent to the name change, there have been numerous graduates who’ve been implicated in murder, torture, rape, drug smuggling. Even if everything changed, the stench of this school is impossible to overcome. It has such a terrible reputation among poor and working people among Central and Latin America, that anything good that the SOA might do would be better served by an

agency that doesn’t have 65 years of human rights abuse.

Q: Share more about how this action reflected a commitment to nonviolence. What preparation, spiritual or training-wise, was involved?

Before you cross over, you commit to a statement on nonviolence. We read it to ourselves. We did not want anything to happen there that could be construed as violence in any way.

I have had what Quakers call “seasoning.” I had really sat with this decision for a while, and had talked with Marcia about it. I knew that I would do it. Still, the day of the action, I felt some natural apprehension. I’m not used to being arrested. I’m not used to breaking the law.

I think that nonviolence incorporates not just not kicking or hitting, but also talking with people in a calm and respectful way. It’s not baiting people emotionally or abusing them. It’s reflecting a peaceful attitude out to the people who are arresting you.

When I was arrested, a young soldier pinned my number onto my coat. The number was matched to a number on a baggie with my wallet to ensure that I would get my belongings back. He was putting the number on very carefully so as not to stick me with the pin. I saw how much trouble he was having. I said to him, “does this remind you any of trying to put a corsage on a prom date?” He almost smiled.

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Happenings

Recent Events

Generation Dream

Jen Lewis

On January 22nd, RPEC hosted its annual "Generation Dream" edu-concert in commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth from throughout the Richmond community performed original pieces that expressed performers' perspectives about conditions in their lives, neighborhood and the world.

Performers included the Winchester Greens dance troupe, Minds in Motion Team XXL, Albert Hill Middle School step team, RYPP participants, Richmond Youth Slam, and many more.

While focusing on various themes, each piece reflected messages of peace, non-violence and social justice. One powerful spoken word performance expressed the trials of young women and single mothers in urban neighborhoods.

Both the Winchester Green's dance and the University of Richmond Off the Cuff's performance focused on global issues.

A VCU spoken word artist, Vreni Michelini, called on each of us to do our part in addressing issues of injustice and violence in our communities.

An interactive drum and dance finale by partnering sponsor Drums No Guns capped off the inspirational evening and left audience and participants empowered with hope for a more just and peaceful city and world.

Racial Justice Discussion Series

The four-part discussion of racial justice in Richmond concluded on February 17, with participants committing to taking an action step. The group will reconvene in May for additional reflection about the discussion experience. About 20 people participated.

Upcoming Events

Is the Occupation Really Ending? Raed Jarrar on the Future of Iraq April 15 at 7:00 pm

Iraqi political analyst Raed Jarrar will discuss the planned troop withdrawal and the future of Iraq on Wednesday, April 15, at 7 pm, at the Pace Center for Campus Ministries at 700 W. Franklin Street, across from Monroe Park. This community forum is free and open to the public.

Jarrar will describe President Obama's plan for troop withdrawal and discuss the impact of the U.S. occupation on Iraq's future. He will talk about internal challenges and politics in Iraq, and will also discuss the importance of continued advocacy by the U.S. peace movement.

Raed Jarrar is an Iraqi architect, blogger, and political analyst. He moved to the United States in 2005, and is currently working as a consultant to the American Friends Service Committee's Iraq program in Washington, D.C. The event is cosponsored by Richmond Friends Meeting and the Richmond Peace

Education Center. For more information, contact 232-1002 or rpec@rpec.org.

Peace Essay Contest Deadline is April 20; Volunteer Judges Needed

The deadline for entries in the Richmond Peace Education Center (RPEC) Essay Contest is April 20.

This year's prompt asks students to write about an African proverb, "Peace is costly, but it is worth the expense." Students will consider what that proverb means to them, and how it might apply to their lives, and to their community and the world.

Students throughout Virginia, from Kindergarten through grade 12 are eligible to participate. The contest will be judged in four age divisions: primary (K-3), elementary (4-5), middle school (6-8) and high school (9-12.)

Details, rules and entry forms are available in both PDF and Microsoft Word format online at www.rpec.org. Entries must be no longer than 1000 words. Entrants must submit two copies of their essays, along with a completed entry form.

The contest offers a top prize of \$100 for each of the four age groups. Each division also has a second prize of \$50, third prize of \$25, and five \$20 honorable mentions.

Winners will be notified by June 1. Judging of the contest entries is scheduled for the afternoon and evening of Monday, May 11. Anyone who would like to

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Happenings

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volunteer to help read and judge entries should call Paul Fleisher at 795-5326 or email rpec@rpec.org.

2009 Youth Peace Summit Scheduled for April 25

The fifth annual Richmond Youth Peace Summit, will be held on Saturday, April 25 at the Southside Campus of St. Paul's Baptist Church, 700 E. Belt Blvd.

The event is open to young people ages 13-19, free of charge. Lunch will be provided.

The Summit will offer morning and afternoon workshops on a variety of topics of interest to teens, such as conflict resolution, legal rights, racial justice, yoga, multiculturalism, vegetarian cooking, financial management and art. The summit will also feature a midday performance by youth musicians, dancers, singers and spoken-word artists.

The summit will run from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Participants are asked to arrive by 9:30. Participants must register in advance to select their choice of workshop sessions. The event will be limited to the first 150 registrants.

Details, rules and entry forms are available online at www.rpec.org. Teens can also register via U.S. mail (RPEC, 400 W. 32nd St., Richmond VA 23225) or by calling 232-1002.

The Youth Peace Summit is presented by the Richmond Youth Peace Project, an initiative of the Richmond Peace Education Center and local activists Drums No Guns.

AVP

The "AVP Advanced" session that was postponed in the fall is now scheduled for April 17-19. This session will provide community members who have taken the Basic workshop the opportunity to continue and deepen their training. After taking the advanced training, participants will be ready to complete their training with a final "Training for Trainers." Our goal is to bring several more fully trained people on board the AVP team, in order to be able to serve both the Goochland Women's Correctional facility as well as the community. Santa Sorenson is now serving as volunteer chair of the AVP subcommittee of RPEC's conflict resolution program.

Conflict Resolution Training for Trainers

RPEC will hold a basic Conflict Resolution Training for Trainers on May 30-31. The training is open to community members who wish to learn basic conflict resolution techniques for their own purposes. It is also the first step for community members who wish to join the RPEC conflict resolution team, leading workshops in the community.

The two-day training will be held at the Berryman Center, 400 W. 32nd Street.

To be certified to lead workshops for RPEC, new facilitators must complete an apprenticeship process after taking this basic training. The fee is \$100, including manual. A limited number of

scholarships are available.

E-mail your name, address, phone to rpec@rpec.org to pre-register, then mail a check in advance to RPEC, 400 W. 32nd Street, Richmond, VA 23225, with "T4T" in the memo line.

Workshop on Gandhi and Nonviolence

Former RPEC Director Chris Klug will lead two workshops on nonviolence on June 13 and 14. Each interactive workshop will be 6 hours in length and will focus on how to apply Mahatma Gandhi's principles of nonviolence in one's own life, relationships, and social change work.

Register for either the 13th or the 14th. The suggested donation is \$8, mailed to RPEC in advance.

The June 13 workshop will be 10 am to 4 pm at Richmond Friends Meeting, 4500 Kensington Ave.

The June 14 workshop will be from approximately 1:30 pm to 7:30 pm at Richmond Mennonite Fellowship, 7612 Wanyamala Road.

Also on Sunday the 14th, Chris Klug will be leading a service at Richmond Mennonite Fellowship at 11 am.

Participants and the public are invited to the service. Pre-registration for the workshop is required. Email rpec@rpec.org.

RPEC is cosponsoring the workshops with Pax Christi, Richmond Friends Meeting, and Richmond Mennonite Fellowship.

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Happenings

(Continued from page 5)

Support RPEC

John McCutcheon Concert for Peace May 17

Noted folksinger John McCutcheon will perform a spring concert for peace on the afternoon of Sunday, May 17. The show will be held at 4 p.m., at the VCU Singleton Center for the Performing Arts, 922 Park Ave. The opening act will be acoustic duo Jeni & Billy. Proceeds from the performance will benefit the programs of the Richmond Peace Education Center. Tickets for the concert cost \$20 for adults, \$8 for students, and a maximum of \$50 per family. To purchase or reserve tickets, visit www.rpec.org, email tickets@rpec.org, or call the offices of the Richmond Peace Education Center at 232-1002. Tickets are also available at the door.

Thanks to Ellwood Thompson and Ten Thousand Villages

We thank Ellwood Thompson's Local Market for making RPEC the beneficiary of its "5% Day" program in December. The day produced \$1815.89 to support RPEC programming. We also thank Ten Thousand Villages in Cary Street for its RPEC benefit in November. The evening yielded \$270.

Profiles in Peacemaking

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Q: Is your commitment nonviolence rooted in any particular traditions?

Going to Quaker meeting has deepened my appreciation of nonviolence. But I think that the root of my nonviolence is in violence. I was so appalled and ashamed of my time in Vietnam that I just told myself there has to be a better way. There has to be another way.

Q: How did Vietnam start you on the path that led to this moment?

I was over there, in a conveyance, an artillery unit. Kids would run into a truck. We'd give them candy. One boy just looked in my eyes with so much hatred. He was eight or nine years old. And I thought, "he's going to spend his whole life trying to dig out of this." When I stared into his eyes it opened my eyes. We'd done so much damage so quickly to his heart and soul. And I had been a part of that.

Immediately upon coming home I immersed myself in the peace movement—but ironically, not in very peaceful ways, using drugs and alcohol. When I began to work with young children, later, I began to recapture myself. And when I ran into Marcia and found how much we loved one another, I began to recapture myself. It was those two things that started me on the path to nonviolence.

For years I've worked against the death penalty, and for prisoner's rights, women's rights, gay rights. The longer I became sober, the more I realized that any definition of family had to be global.

Q: You do volunteer work in prisons. Does having some familiarity with prison life help as your prepare for your sentence?

It demystified the TV image of prisons. And I've learned that I know that I can make relationships on the inside. We're not a different species. We're still part of the same family.

Q: How does your work on prisoner's rights relate to either your experience in Vietnam or your work on the SOA?

The prisoners I visit have no family support. We sit in the waiting room. This gives them a chance to see people who aren't in uniform. I relate to that from the army, where almost everything you see is in uniform. Just seeing women and children, families, in the visiting room is important because they don't get exposed to that. It's like being deprived of water.

People who oppress and people who are oppressed become less able to be full human beings. Creating environments that respect people will automatically, whether it's in prisons or foreign countries, lead us to a more peaceful and productive and loving community.

Consumers Corner

Beverages

Alisha Gallini and John Gallini

In this column, we offer some considerations when choosing among beverage options.

Water— When choosing a source of drinking water, there seem to be three major options: tap water, untreated; tap water, filtered; and bottled water. Since most people in the Richmond have access to tap water that is distributed by the city or one of the surrounding counties which is essentially free and meets all EPA standards, that would seem to be the logical choice. But Americans drank 8 billion gallons of bottled water in 2008 – and that’s a lot of water!

The considerations would include (in addition to cost) perceived quality, including taste, convenience, and impact on the environment. With regard to quality, there is no evidence that bottled water has higher “quality” in terms of impurities, unless one objects to the fluorine purposefully added to city water to improve dental health. Some have argued that bottled water has a lower lead “Maximum Contami-

nant Level” specification, but Richmond’s water tests well below either specification. There have been a few (less than 5 that I remember) occasions in the past 38 years, when Richmond’s water had a rusty color and poor taste. Bottled water might be an appropriate choice then, but not during the rest of the time.

There would also seem to be little incentive to install a home filtering system in Richmond.

From an environmental perspective, a full life-cycle analysis indicates that tap water has less than 1 percent of the impact that bottled water does. That includes the energy and petroleum required to manufacture the bottles, shipping costs, etc. – not to mention the problem of disposing of the bottles.

For those whose source for water is a well, a home filtering or purification system may be appropriate.

Juice— Fruit and vegetable juices, if they are not doctored with too much sugar and additives, can be an

attractive beverage. The one fruit juice that is readily available locally is apple juice. Murray’s apple juice (near Roanoke) is available at Good Foods Grocery. And there are a number of other choices. One would think there would be a local source of tomato juice, but the only source we have found is to make it ourselves as a byproduct from canning tomatoes.

One obvious ecological consideration is to avoid juice boxes, which leave behind large quantities of packaging that cannot be recycled.

Soda—Soda is such a bad choice from a nutritional standpoint that it would be hard to recommend it even if there were good local or environmental options. Since there are no good local or environmental options, just skip the soda. Choose locally produced milk or juice in recyclable containers, or tap water, and gradually eliminate soda from your routine. It is not as hard as you think.

Market Roundup

The following are farmers markets in the Richmond area. Most operate from spring or early summer through the fall.

17th Street Farmers' Market , 17th and East Main Streets, Thurs, Sat and Sun

Ashland Farmers' Market , Duncan Street in Ashland, Sat

Byrd House Market , 224 S. Cherry St. in Richmond, Tues

Chester Farmer's Market , Village Green in Chester, Sat

Crossroads Market , inside the Crossroads Art Center in Henrico County, Thurs

Goochland Farmers Market , 2955 River Road West in Goochland County, Sat

Lakeside Farmers' Market , Lakeside Town Center in Henrico, Wed and Sat

Market Emporium at Bryan Park , in Richmond, Tues

Petersburg Farmers' Market , Old and North Sycamore Streets in Petersburg, Sat

South of the James Market , Forest Hill Park in Richmond, Sat

West End Farmers Market , Gayton Road at Ridgefield Parkway in Henrico, Wednesday and Saturday

This information is from the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 3/16/09

CALENDAR

- April 5** **National Coalition to End the Death Penalty**—Beth Panilaitis, new executive director of Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. Richmond Friends Meeting, 4500 Kensington Avenue, Sunday at 12:30. Information, call M. Dickinson, 355-0936.
- April 15** **Is the Occupation Really Ending? Raed Jarrar on the Future of Iraq**—See p. 4 for details.
- April 17-19** **“AVP Advanced” session**—7 pm at the Pace Center, 700 West Franklin St. Free. See p. 5 for details.
- April 25** **The Fifth Annual Richmond Youth Peace Summit**, will be held on Saturday, April 25 at the Southside Campus of St. Paul’s Baptist Church, 700 E. Belt Blvd. Pre-register at rypp@rpec.org.
- April 26** **Peacemaker and Youth Organizer Getry Agizah** will speak on Grassroots Peacemaking in Kenya after the Post-Election Violence in 2008. Sunday, 1:00—2:30 pm. Richmond Friends Meeting, 4500 Kensington Avenue. Child care available upon request (contact bmyers@vcu.edu)
- May 17** **John McCutcheon Concert for Peace** —4 pm at VCU Singleton Center for the Performing Arts.
- May 30-31** **RPEC Conflict Resolution Training For Trainers.** Call 232-1002.
- June 13-14** **Workshop on Gandhi and Nonviolence**—See p. 5 for information.



Ukrop's is pleased to offer Golden Gift 2009. You can help RPEC earn a portion of this year's \$200,000 payout! You will earn points for purchases during most of March, 2009. In May, Ukrop's will mail you a Golden Gift Certificate. Please contribute your Certificate to RPEC by sending it to us at 400 W. 32nd St., Richmond, 23225. For more details about this program, please visit: <http://www.ukrops.com> .



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