

# VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

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September, 2011

Dear Friends,

On August 21st, we had volunteered the Voices office on Argyle to be a "listening post" for the Global Day of Listening phone call, an international exchange hosted by Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers to include and connect people from numerous countries and varying walks of life. With Kathy moderating a portion of the five-hour call, there were times when we couldn't have our phone muted, and as it happened, during these times U.S. warplanes were breaking the sound barrier directly over our neighborhood.

The Air and Water show was in full gear that day: two million people flocked to Chicago's lakefront to watch war planes maneuver, stabbing up into the heavens and then descending as low as possible, making enough noise to rattle windows, terrify dogs and, no doubt, occasion PTSD reactions on the part of many Chicago residents who had fled from, or fought in, war zones where these weapons had been deployed.

And so listeners on the call, some of them living in war zones now, heard an eerie screech on the line each time a US jet bomber zoomed overhead. In Gaza that day, U.S.-supplied aircraft were actually busy bombing the civilian population, and Afghans in many provinces constantly brace themselves for real life U.S./NATO aerial attacks.

Mary Dean had just returned from Afghanistan where she had visited the "Emergency Surgical Center for Victims of War" in Kabul, which provides free medical care to victims of war. Mary, who is a physical therapist, accompanied the hospital staff on their rounds through wards filled to capacity. "The true reality of the senselessness and grotesqueness of war hit home," said Mary, "after 4 hours of rounds visiting one patient after the next with the largest wounds I have ever seen, triple amputations due to mines hitting children and adults, multiple fractures, spinal cord injuries, head injuries, blindness and lives destroyed."

Toward the end of the day, our friend Sean Reynolds came in fresh from distributing 4,000 of his own Air and Water Show leaflets at the lakefront, which began "ENJOY THE SHOW! ...You've paid a LOT to see it!!!" and concluded: "remember, people somewhere see this show every day, but today is special because: 'They Look a Lot Cooler When They're Not Bombing You!'" Sean reported that crowds responded quite well to the reminder that the U. S. is an out-of-control empire. "That's hopeful," he said.



In this newsletter are reflections and photos from the seven-person Voices delegation which spent four weeks in Kabul over the past summer. Included in the delegation were two young men who had first visited Afghanistan as U.S. soldiers. Now they are working to found a chapter of Afghanistan Veterans for Peace as they visit communities cross-country, often biking between U.S. cities and towns that invite them to give presentations.

There are so many different ways - small ways and big ways, ways we haven't thought of - to enact every day our faith that people can live without war.

**This autumn promises to be full of opportunities to join with others in peacemaking efforts. For instance, please mark your 2011 calendar for the following:**

**September 11 – October 6, 2011** U.S. Veterans of war in Afghanistan will be riding their bikes from the former World Trade Center site in NYC all the way to the Pentagon before joining the October 6 demonstration in D.C.'s Freedom Square. Major media won't be telling your neighbors about their ride, but maybe you will! To show your support (and for more information), contact [a.ride.till.the.end@gmail.com](mailto:a.ride.till.the.end@gmail.com)

**September 21, 2011** For 24 hours starting at 8pm Eastern Time join us in discussing (with those who know what it is like to live in war-torn countries) our wishes, from a precarious setting in Afghanistan to a mock-bombarded Chicago, to live in a world without wars. For more information and to schedule your time visit [www.globaldaysoflistening.org](http://www.globaldaysoflistening.org).

**October 2 – 11, 2011** Voices delegation to Kabul. Please follow us on [www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org). Our struggles are interconnected and we organize in solidarity with each other.

**October 6, 2011** On the 10-year anniversary of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, in Washington, D.C., thousands of people have pledged to nonviolently resist the corporate machine by occupying Freedom Plaza (English, we are reminded, for Tahrir Square), until our national resources are invested democratically in human needs and environmental protection instead of war and exploitation. Contact: October2011 Movement, [october2011.org](http://october2011.org)

**October 9, 2011** Nonviolent direct actions at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS) and at Creech AFB will take place at the culmination of a 3 day Catholic Worker gathering, (contact: [www.lvcw.org](http://www.lvcw.org)) also being coordinated with the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space's annual Keep Space for Peace Week, **October 1 – 8, 2011**.

**October 9, 2011** March on the U.S. Southern Command, with the intention to close it down and to reclaim the sacred land for the peoples of the Americas SOA Watch South Florida / SouthCom Watch, [SOAW.org/southcom](http://SOAW.org/southcom)

**And in 2012:**

**January 11th, 2012** Be part of massive demonstrations in Washington, D.C. to protest U.S. use of torture and indefinite detention; plan to join the 2012 Witness Against Torture Actions, collaborating with Amnesty International and other organizations. Free bus transportation may be possible for this event. Contact [www.witnesstorture.org](http://www.witnesstorture.org) for more info.

**May 15 – 21, 2012** NATO and the G-8 will hold summit meetings in Chicago. For more information about plans to protest the NATO/G-8 meetings,

email: [NATOG8protest@gmail.com](mailto:NATOG8protest@gmail.com)  
or call: 518-227-6947

Voices for Creative Nonviolence will hold a reunion just before these summits. Delegates who traveled to Iraq, Pakistan, the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Afghanistan will be welcomed, along with their support persons, to join us in Chicago from **May 11 – 13, 2012**. Some of us will form an affinity group, during a day of nonviolence training on **May 14, 2012** to protest the military and economic wars waged, so wantonly, by NATO and the G-8.

### *Voices comings and goings:*

We're fortunate to welcome Sallamah Aliah who has chosen to be an intern with us as part of her study for a Masters Degree in Social Justice and Community Development at Loyola University.

In mid- October, Gerald Paoli will lead a Christian Peacemaker Team to Iraqi Kurdistan. Cathy Breen plans a return to Jordan and, if possible, Syria during the coming months and Kathy Kelly will spend six weeks, (mid-October to the end of November), traveling across Australia on a tour organized by Pace e Bene.

Finally, we eagerly await the arrival of Joshua Brollier's spouse, Jafra Saif, who will soon join us from Syria. They met in Damascus in September of 2010. We're looking forward to Jafra becoming part of our community.

People across the nation and all over the world are taking actions to build a community in which the values of justice, cooperation, and respect for this fragile world are upheld. Almost none of these are actions we'll ever hear about. We've heard the sonic booms over our Chicago office, but that's not where the power is. We're glad for the chance to move forward with you in the faith that all of us, one way or another, will be doing what we can, and that none of our efforts large or small for a better world will have been in vain.

For your efforts, thank you. And, humbly, we acknowledge how dependent we are on your generous contributions.

In solidarity,

Mary Dean, Kathy Kelly, Gerald Paoli, Jerica Arents, Brian Terrell, and Joshua Brollier



## Common Sense in a Coma

Robert C. Koehler

August 25, 2011

“Then there is the issue of how the Afghans will be able to pay for their greatly enlarged police and military, which by some estimates will require \$10 billion a year to sustain come 2014 — 10 times the Afghan government’s annual tax revenues.”

Of all the ironic absurdities and preposterous twists in the war on — I mean the war to promote — terror, this quote from the [New York Times](#) back in April, which I came upon as I was researching something called the Strategic Partnership Declaration between the United States and Afghanistan, felt the most like a mugging.

This is the price of being liberated from the Taliban — a security system costly beyond reckoning, in perpetuity, in order to protect the country from itself. Something’s more than just wrong here. Common sense is in a coma.



Or as [Kathy Kelly](#) put it: “We are startlingly, terrifyingly lost, and we’re getting ever more so.”

We’re lost because we keep strafing and bombing our troubles, along with any people who happen to be in the way, rather than facing them with the least sort of honesty, let alone humanity. We’re lost because our actions churn up problems infinitely worse than the ones we set out to solve. We’re lost because we are so morally compromised we have to keep piling on more of the same — more troops, more missiles, more carnage — in order to avoid facing our consciences.

“...men kill in order to lie to others and themselves on the subject of violence and death,” writes social scientist and philosopher Rene Girard, in *Things*

*Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. “They must kill and continue to kill, strange as it may seem, in order not to know that they are killing.”

The Strategic Partnership Declaration, an agreement soon to be signed between the government of the United States and the government of Afghanistan — two entities usually referred to in geopolitical reportage simply as “the United States” and “Afghanistan,” in order to perpetuate the fiction that the governments and people of a nation are the same thing — bears out Girard’s thesis, as far as I can tell.

The current relationship between the two governments is set to end in 2014: You know, troop withdrawal, mission accomplished, see ya later. But of course it can’t be that simple. The nation-wrecking we’ve accomplished in the last decade is so extensive, we have to do something to repair the damage and restore stability.

Enter the Strategic Partnership Declaration, the main point of which is to entrench the U.S. presence in Afghanistan well into the foreseeable future. It would, among other things, establish a number of permanent U.S. military bases in the country — or “long-term” bases, as U.S. officials put it, meaning two or three decades and then we’ll talk about it some more.

The “partnership” part of the deal is that we’d keep the cash flow open to the makeshift Afghan governments we install so that, lacking actual legitimacy or popular acceptance, they could stay propped up militarily. The war, in other words, wouldn’t end. We’d never have to admit defeat and therefore a backwash of public soul-searching wouldn’t flood the media, paralyzing the country, and its military-industrial economy, with conscience.

Of course, the agreement also gives the U.S. government a permanent, “enduring” military presence in Central Asia — a dominant position in what has been called Great Game 3.0 — and, oh yeah, one other thing: It would likely so enrage the Taliban that they wouldn’t come to the negotiating table, keeping the pretext for war — and the Afghan government’s economically catastrophic security needs — alive in perpetuity.

“The U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Declaration will perpetuate terrorism and bring it to everyone’s doorsteps,” reads a statement issued by a group called the [Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers](#).

“The ‘partnership,’” the statement continues, “will allow permanent joint U.S.-Afghanistan military bases to launch and project hard power. The ‘extreme’ Taliban would conveniently use these bases as a stand-alone reason for their ‘holy jihad.’ We cannot forget that one of Osama bin Laden’s reasons for attacking the U.S. on Sept. 11 was the presence of U.S. military

bases in Saudi Arabia.”

This small organization is not, of course, the sort that has a voice in important and weighty geopolitical matters, or most mainstream coverage of same — but, my God, such voices must be heard. If they aren't, our future is about nothing but large, impersonal “interests,” not human needs or the human soul.

“No Power today represents the people,” the statement cries. “Today, ordinary Afghans are denied the basic human dignities, living in a country that Save the Children said was the most dangerous place on earth for mothers, and that UNICEF said was [the worst place on earth](#) to be born in, and to be a child.”

How can this matter so little? And what are the implications? In how many spots on the planet does dominant political power represent anything but itself, in tandem with the worst of our instincts, our fear and our rage? It's time to declare the Strategic Partnership Declaration, the covenant of permanent war, null and void everywhere.

*Robert Koehler is an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist, contributor to One World, Many Peaces and nationally syndicated writer. His new book, **Courage Grows Strong at the Wound** (Xenos Press) is now available. Contact him at [koehlercw@gmail.com](mailto:koehlercw@gmail.com) or visit his website at [commonwonders.com](http://commonwonders.com).*

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## THIRTY DAYS IN KABUL...OR AFGHANISTAN SEEN THROUGH A KEYHOLE

Ed Kinane

This summer our Voices for Creative Nonviolence delegation spent 30 days in Afghanistan. Or more precisely, we spent 30 days in Kabul. To understand Afghanistan you must spend time in that teeming capital. But surely Kabul provides only an incomplete and, indeed, distorted picture of the country as a whole.

“Everyone” told us it would be too dangerous for westerners to go beyond the city, beyond whatever security Kabul provides. Given how tense and militarized the city itself was, we chose to heed such warnings. But such constraints brought home how skimpy any U.S. military gains have been over the past ten years —despite all the hundreds of billions of dollars squandered. Not to mention all the orphans made and the thousands of limbs and lives lost....



Although we barely got into the Afghan countryside, it's clear that Kabul is untypical of the hinterland. One might as well try to imagine an elephant having only seen its trunk. Or one might as well seek to understand the U.S. by visiting only Washington, DC or New York City...or, for that matter, only Syracuse, my hometown.

Swollen with internal refugees, Kabul is said to now have about a fifth of Afghanistan's population. In a region of vast valleys and lofty mountains, Kabul's congestion could wither the spirit. Kabul's power structures are not those of the countryside. Nor do urban agendas and interests — or security issues — reflect those of the rural areas.



I belabor this point because, quite frankly, I was taken aback by how many of those we met there in the capital favor an ongoing U.S. military presence. Some

fear chaos if the U.S. leaves and its corrupt puppet government dissolves. They fear the ensuing civil war – as if for years the invaders hadn't been supporting warlords, fostering corruption, inciting terrorism, promoting ethnic hatred and stoking civil war.

Some, especially among the NGO strata, have a stake in the status quo – a status quo which seems to work well for those with international connections and internationally-derived incomes and security systems. These they fear, absent the invader, would be swept away. But I keep wondering how rural Afghans – without such perks and protections and who are already shrouded in the dark side of civil war and occupation – would see things. Confined to Kabul, how are we to know? (Fortunately our delegation was accompanied by several of the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers from Bamiyan province. These engaging guys helped broaden our view of Afghan realities.)



###

I joined this Voices delegation for several reasons. One was that I had hoped to hear the Afghan perspective on the Reaper drone. Besides its role in extrajudicial executions and other civilian killing, my particular interest in the drone is that Syracuse hosts Hancock air base. Hancock is the national maintenance center for the Reaper; it also trains Reaper personnel and from there some of the robotic hunter/killer Reapers are piloted over Afghanistan.

Thus the air war in Afghanistan in part operates from my back yard. In early November I'll be one of over 30 perps (along with VCNV coordinators Brian Terrell and Kathy Kelly) prosecuted for having protested the drone by "dying-in" last April at Hancock's main gate.

So I thought I could go to Afghanistan and meet with drone survivors or certainly talk with those familiar with the drone. Well, again, that didn't work out. At Kabul's Emergency Hospital (specializing in war wounds) we were told that that facility rarely served

drone victims – they would be cared for elsewhere, if at all, closer to where drones prey.

Few of our contacts in Kabul seemed interested in drones. One human rights NGO staffer allowed that, yes, drones kill civilians, but – saving grace! – they destroy *madrassas* too. I wince at this functionary's equanimity: Afghans elsewhere may be rather less cavalier about such aerial terrorism.

Here I've focused on the limitations of my Afghanistan experience. But in closing I must encourage anti-war activists to face what U.S. militarism has wrought. As the U.S. war on Afghanistan now enters its eleventh year, few of us have firsthand knowledge of that hapless land. How long will we keep averting our eyes?

*In 2003 Ed spent five months in Iraq with the Voices Peace Team. Some of his articles can be found at <http://vcnv.org/category/writings-by-ed-kinane>. Reach him at [edkinane@verizon.net](mailto:edkinane@verizon.net).*





## **Swedish activist Martin Smedjeback interviewed Kathy Kelly about the Freedom Flotilla II – Stay Human voyage, an effort launched in the summer of 2011 and intended to break the blockade of Gaza**

### **MS: What was special with the Freedom flotilla compared to other nonviolent actions and campaigns in terms of the method?**

KK: When unarmed peace teams enter zones of conflict to help reduce violence, protect human rights, or amplify voices of civilians bearing the brunt of wars, their efforts seldom create headlines in the mainstream media. The Freedom Flotilla was different. Several mainstream media groups sent crews and correspondents to cover the project, and even though the Israeli and Greek governments successfully prevented ships docked in Greece from sailing, the story of efforts to break the blockade of Gaza remained in the news for several weeks.

Organizers had correctly anticipated that Israel's attack on the Turkish ship, the Mavi Marmara, the previous year, - an attack which cost the lives of nine Turkish peace activists aboard the boat, - would occasion strong media interest in this year's flotilla effort. "Climb aboard" was the general response to members of the press covering the project, and credible efforts were made to arrange regular press briefings while also taking advantage of opportunities to publicize the flotilla through alternative and social media.

### **MS: Historically what parallels would you draw to other nonviolent campaigns/actions? Please give examples.**

KK: An interesting parallel can be drawn between the Freedom Flotilla and international efforts to end economic sanctions against Iraq. First imposed in August of 1990, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the blockade of Iraq wasn't ended until after the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003. For 13 years, Iraqi civilians were brutally and lethally punished by the most comprehensive state of siege ever imposed in modern history. Activists challenging the embargo of Iraq and now the blockade of Gaza have emphasized the wrongfulness of imposing collective punishment on civilians, including little children, because they haven't changed their government.

The Freedom Flotilla carried humanitarian aid intended for Gaza, but always emphasized that the mission was not simply a charitable effort. Rather we wanted to expose the blockade by challenging it and were determined to reach Gazan shores with our cargo. In the case of the US Boat to Gaza, it consisted of 3000 letters written to Gazans.

Passengers on the USA Boat to Gaza were keenly aware of the courage shown fifty years earlier by "The Freedom Riders," a civil rights campaign begun in May of 1961 to challenge and defy segregation laws and customs practiced in the deep south of the United States that forbade blacks and whites to sit side by side on public transportation. The freedom riders, black and white civil rights activists, boarded buses and trains headed into southern states and sat next to each other. In mid-May on an interstate highway in Alabama, a mob firebombed a bus carrying freedom riders and viciously beat the riders as they fled the burning bus. That same day, Ku Klux Klansmen boarded a second bus and beat the Freedom Riders, leaving them semi-conscious in the back of the bus. When this bus arrived in Birmingham, AL, the riders were mercilessly beaten by a mob with baseball bats, iron pipes and bicycle chains.

In spite of these beatings, the Freedom Rides continued, designating Jackson, Mississippi as their destination and using a strategy of trying to fill the jails as riders were arrested and imprisoned upon arrival in Jackson.

Throughout the summer of 1961, Freedom Riders also campaigned against other forms of racial discrimination, sitting together in segregated restaurants, lunch counters and hotels. Their movement and influence grew, and on November 1, 1961, new rules were put into place by the Interstate Commerce Commission permitting all passengers to sit wherever they pleased on interstate buses and trains.

One reason The Freedom Rides succeeded was that participants had been willing to suffer grave injuries, allowing for the violent reality of Jim Crow to be broadcast in images throughout the United States.

Passengers who planned to ride on the Freedom Flotilla were willing to suffer injuries and had prepared themselves during nonviolence trainings to be attacked by water cannons, tasers, stun guns, attack dogs and snipers. Had this happened, reports would possibly have been broadcast via the media on board the ships. Anxious to prevent this possibility, the Israeli government leaned hard on the Greek and Turkish governments to help prevent the ships from

sailing. We remain inspired by the Freedom Riders and by our challenge to be part of the further invention of nonviolence as we look toward next steps.

**MS: On the t-shirts and caps of you American passengers on the Freedom flotilla it said “Stay human”. What does this mean to you in this campaign?**

KK: We wore caps and t-shirts that said, “Stay human,” in remembrance of a line favored by an Italian justice activist, Vittorio Arrigoni, or Vik, who was reportedly murdered by a fundamentalist group in Gaza a few hours after he was kidnapped on Thursday, April 14, 2011. At his funeral in Gaza, crowds chanted, “Viktor is with the fisherman, Viktor is with the farmers.” “Vittorio is still with the people of Gaza,” says a post on the International Solidarity Movement website, noting that he has been honored with a football tournament in Rafah, a street in Gaza, a school in the Jordan Valley, and the Stay Human summer camp in Beit Hanoun. The day after he was slain, the steering committee of the second Freedom Flotilla announced that in honor of Vik, they were naming the next voyage: FREEDOM FLOTILLA – STAY HUMAN.

As humans, we can practice reverence for life and recognize the equality of life. We can dedicate ourselves to recognizing and resisting policies that treat some lives as though they don’t matter or don’t count. One way of doing this is to steadily build and celebrate relationships between ourselves and other beings, not only human beings but also animals. We can attempt to expose policies and practices that get away with inflicting great harm and even murder because the victims aren’t recognized as beings with desires to live and to meet their basic needs.

The Freedom Flotilla – Stay Human voyage aimed to reach people in Gaza and to show solidarity with them. In January, 2009, a day after Israel’s vicious Operation Cast Lead had ended, I visited Gaza’s Al-Shifa hospital. The Israeli assault killed 1,389 Palestinians in Gaza. Of those, 344 were children. Of the 13 Israelis who died, four were soldiers killed by friendly fire. Homes, mosques, roads, schools and infrastructure had been reduced to rubble. Dr. Nafez Abu Shaban, head of the burn unit, described some of the human suffering endured by people whose bodies had been scorched, broken, and severely wounded by day after day of aerial bombardment. “The world watched,” he said, putting his head in his hands. “For 22 days, no country did anything to stop it.” The Freedom Flotillas represent civil society groups from around the world that refuse to watch passively while Israel’s blockade traps Gazans, who are always vulnerable to renewed aerial assaults, into miserable conditions.

To me, part of staying human is the recognition that we are all part of one another. When we do our best to respect life and to seek fair and equitable sharing of resources, we are moving toward the goal of designing societies where we can live together without killing one another.

Portions of this interview were initially published in “North Avenue,” an online zine. <http://northavenuemagazine.com/2011/07/staying-human/>



**EMERGENCY USA**  
LIFE SUPPORT FOR CIVILIAN  
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The Emergency Center for Civilian Victims of War is one of a network of hospitals worldwide maintained by the Italian based relief group called “Emergency.” Since 1999, the Emergency hospitals have treated 3 ½ million patients in Afghanistan. They educate their supporters to understand that the best means to prevent the afflictions their patients suffer is to eliminate weapons. Eric Talbert, their development director in the U.S., told us that his primary focus now is volunteer recruitment. To contact Eric, write [Eric.talbert@emergencyusa.org](mailto:Eric.talbert@emergencyusa.org). Their website lists the health care professionals they are seeking.

# VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

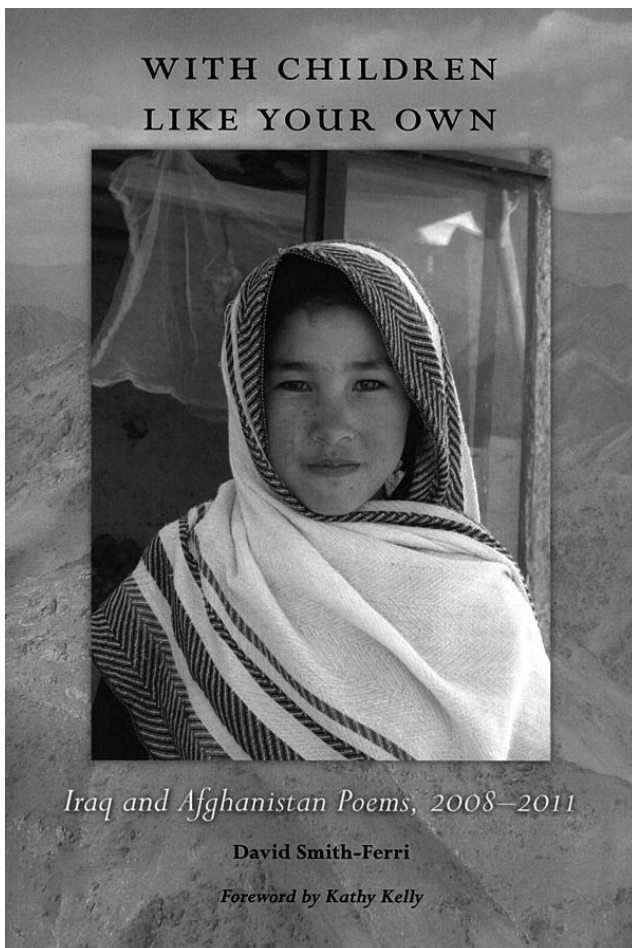
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“It is not possible to read these poems and remain unmoved. They link us with our brothers and sisters who have suffered and still suffer. *With Children Like Your Own* calls us to envision a world where people everywhere enter the metaphorical listening tent to answer invitations to talk and hear, thus to find their way out of a violent present into a peaceful future, through the darkness into the dawn.”

From the forward by Kathy Kelly

To request a book please send a check for \$15.95 made payable to Voices for Creative Nonviolence and send to:

Voices for Creative Nonviolence  
1249 West Argyle Street,  
Chicago, IL 60640

Due to the generosity of David Smith-Ferri all proceeds will be donated to Voices for Creative Nonviolence.