

Death of International peacemaker, Marshall Rosenberg, originator of Nonviolent Communication

By Daren DeWitt

International peacemaker, founder of the Centre for Nonviolent Communication, Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg passed away peacefully, aged 80, of cancer, on February 7th, 2015. His process of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), now adopted by thousands in more than 100 countries, has helped parents communicate with children; couples with each other; staff with bosses; teachers with students; police with rioters; activists with authorities, and victims with perpetrators.

Born in Ohio in 1934 and raised in Detroit, Rosenberg's life and the development of his NVC process were significantly influenced by being beaten when young because of his Jewish surname. It wasn't the beatings that hurt so much, he later conveyed, as the smiles on the faces of the onlookers. Rosenberg's later exploration into the causes of violence and ways of reducing it evolved into NVC, a process that facilitates stronger interpersonal communication, greater compassion and peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as an enrichment of already harmonious relationships.

In 1961 Rosenberg received a PhD in Clinical Psychology from University of Wisconsin. There he met his mentor, psychologist Carl Rogers. Rosenberg credits Rogers with alerting him to the skill and value of empathic listening, and of smoothly integrating our thoughts, emotions, values, and spoken words.

Mahatma Gandhi also influenced Rosenberg; Rosenberg developed NVC in part as a simple practical process - a "how-to" for manifesting Gandhi's philosophy of "ahimsa" (sometimes translated as "the overflowing love that arises when all ill-will, anger, and hate have subsided from the heart") into everyday words, actions, and thoughts.

In the 1960's Rosenberg worked closely with USA civil rights activists, mediating between rioting students and college administrators and working to peacefully desegregate public schools. A dedicated teacher, peacemaker and charismatic visionary with a wonderful

sense of humour, over his lifetime Rosenberg led NVC workshops and intensive trainings for thousands of people in over 60 countries, including war-torn areas and economically disadvantaged countries.

One memorable encounter occurred when Rosenberg mediated between chieftains of warring Christian and Muslim tribes in Northern Nigeria in the early 1990s. Before commencing, Rosenberg was advised that some of the chieftains in the room knew that others in the room had killed their children. Rosenberg applied his process of NVC to help the chieftains hear and understand each other. Eventually one chieftain jumped up, talking excitedly. Rosenberg's translator told him the chieftain was saying "if we knew how to speak to each other this way we wouldn't have to kill each other." A similar sentiment was expressed by a prisoner during a NVC training in a USA jail, who said with deep sadness that if he had known how to communicate the way Rosenberg demonstrated, he wouldn't have killed his best friend.

NVC has transcended its original function as a peacemaking tool, and today is valued as a process to support both inner personal growth and outer social change. Rosenberg's legacy continues through the Center for Nonviolent Communication, incorporated in 1984. A network of certified trainers and thousands of NVC supporters in over 100 countries around the world engage in a range of activities, including prison projects, restorative justice projects with street children, schools programmes, and training for the general public and organizations. For more information visit www.cnvc.org