

Teaching Peace

Students Exchange Letters with Colman McCarthy

Colman McCarthy

At the Spring Hill College graduation in May 1998, fortune and the kindness of the Jesuit fathers brought me to the school's Mobile, Alabama campus as its commencement speaker. Excessively, the good priests spiced the day with an add-on, an honorary degree. Another recipient was on hand: Harper Lee.

Although it was not a long journey to Spring Hill from Miss Lee's home in nearby Monroeville, it had been decades since she had traveled much at all. She wasn't quite in the J.D Salinger league of eremitic living but it was close. The college, where Flannery O'Connor spoke when I was an undergraduate in the early 1960s, felt blessed by the gods or at least the Holy Spirit to have landed so luminous a literary light as Harper Lee. This was the first time that the iconic author of "To Kill a Mockingbird" had appeared publicly for an honor of any kind.

Before the graduation ceremony, in the wardrobe room where trustees, deans, professors and the rest of us were suiting up in commencement regalia, I suggested to the Spring Hill president that it would be fine with me and definitely better for the graduates if Harper Lee, with true star quality, gave the speech. Not a chance, he said. She had been asked months before but emphatically refused. It took major persuasion to have her there at all for the degree.

Paired with Miss Lee in the procession down the college's Avenue of the Oaks, and with 400 giddy graduates and their families sitting on both sides, we had a few minutes for conversation. Small talk: the luck of a sunny day, her trip from Monroeville, mine from Washington. Then a question, from me: "Are you writing much?" "All the time," she said. "Everyday."

I needed to think. How had I missed her books? What titles? I couldn't remember a review in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Nation, or anywhere. Did I miss her on C-SPAN's Book Notes? Apologetically, I said I'd love to read her latest book. It's title?

There were no books, she said. "I write letters to school children. They write to me about 'Mockingbird' and I send back my thoughts."

I can't remember much of what I offered the graduates that day, and am certain they don't either, But I've never forgotten the serene purity of Harper Lee's line and the grace behind it: "I write letters to school children." How many thousands there must have been over the years. Her full writing life--an outpouring of words--had become one letter at a time, child by child.

The example of Harper Lee's commitment--the seriousness of it, the rarity--was an inspiration. Why don't I do that? In the years I was a columnist for The Washington Post, from 1969 to 1997, letters from children regularly came in. I would answer some, but not all. Diligence in letter-writing had to be saved for what I thought--mistakenly--had a greater command on my time, such as answering readers who agreed with me.

On leaving The Post--editorially the paper was moving to the right and I was heading more and more left--I increased my teaching commitments, one that I took on in 1982 when I began volunteering at an impoverished public high school in downtown Washington. How impoverished? It had no auditorium, no gym, no cafeteria, no lockers, no athletic fields and eventually no safe drinking water. It was certainly the poorest school in Washington, and perhaps

the country, despite the intellectual richness of a faculty that was both caring and zealous. This was the School Without Walls, a metaphorical name that specialized in experiential learning outside the walls. Students interested in politics took internships in Congress. If you liked zoology, hang out at the National Zoo. If it was the performing arts, spring for the Kennedy Center.

Walls had another distinction beyond its poverty: five blocks to the east was the White House. No school was closer. Five blocks directly west was wealth: the Watergate apartments. Despite repeated invitations, no president has been able to travel the five blocks from the White House to visit the neighborhood school. They'll roam the land orating on school reform--No Child Left Untested--but they can't make it five blocks. The students haven't minded. They aren't into big shots, they're into long shots. Seeing the odds against them, they know they better work twice as hard to make it.

As a columnist, I often wrote about the failures of schools and, with crass surety, spelled out punditry solutions. My weekly three hour Wednesday seminar at Walls exposed me to how little I really knew about education. At least now I could write columns with a measure of on-site credibility, rather than depend on clueless reports from the Brookings Institution or the Heritage Foundation on the failures of American education.

My Walls course was called "Alternatives To Violence." We read, discussed and debated the literature of peace, from the essays of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dorothy Day, Tolstoy, Gene Sharp, Emma Goldman, Emily Balch, Barbara Deming, Joan Baez. Daniel Berrigan and a long list of others. Topics, taken off the front pages, included the death penalty, women's rights, animal rights and militarism. After two years at Walls, I put together an anthology of peace essays: "Solutions to Violence." Another collection followed, "Strength Through Peace: the Ideas and People of Nonviolence."

As a journalist as well as a pacifist, I had been reporting, lamenting and damning the world's violence, whether military violence across the ocean or domestic violence across the living room. To move beyond problem-describing to solution-finding, I accepted an invitation in 1984 to teach a peace studies course at American University, the first of its kind. Two years later, I added the University of Maryland and two years after that a course titled "Law, Conscience and Nonviolence" at Georgetown University Law Center. In addition to Walls, I volunteered at Wilson High School and a daily 7:25 a.m. and 8:20 class at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. For a three year stretch, from 2002 to 2005, I added a seventh school—Georgetown University—and an eighth at the Washington Center for Internships. In the Fall semester of 2010 I was teaching eight classes at six schools.

I had the energy, why not use it? By rough count, I've had more than 10,000 students in the past 30 years. A special joy of my teaching is being emotionally replenished by the energy of students as they move on and use the gifts I helped nurture. It began in the classroom when we created that rarest of delights between teachers and students: trust. We did away with the usual block to learning—the Powerful One lecturing the Powerless Many. Scrapping that, we debated,

reflected, wrote, laughed, risked, and way inside where all true spiritual growth occurs if we would only dare it, together we loved to learn and learned to love. With discussion-based, not lecture-based classes, we were able to talk heart to heart even if we didn't see eye to eye. Guest speakers came in: more than 400 over the years, from Nobel Peace Prize winners, exonerated death row inmates, war veterans, public interest lawyers, inner city physicians, dissidents from the Left and Right, parents and grandparents, the scorned and silenced.

At semester's end, and in the waning minutes of the final class, I repeated the line from Woodrow Wilson in his Princeton days, that "the purpose of education is to make the young as unlike their elders as possible." One way to do that is by writing letters, which is what I asked the students to do as we parted--the students to explore the world and decide where their gifts would best be used and me to keep using whatever gifts I had as a teacher committed to peace education.

Although the message is getting out that unless we teach our children peace someone else may teach them violence, no one should be deluded. The day is distant when peace education enjoys the same academic regard as math and science. I know of no American high school, whether public or private, that has a peace studies department on the same funding footing as the math department, social studies department or science department. I'd go further: I have never heard of a school with a peace studies department of any kind. Most seniors in my high school classes had had only one course—mine—that was academically grounded in the literature of peace. Would we ever graduate students after 12 years in elementary, middle and high school with only one math or science course in that time? Yet the young are instructed by assorted shamans and grandees that nothing is more important than peace. Yes, children, let's give peace a chance—but not a place in the curriculum.

Whether in high school, college or law school classes, my students usually divide into two groups. One bonds intellectually, and often quickly, with Gandhi's belief that "nonviolence is the weapon of the strong" and agrees with Hannah Arendt that "violence, like all action, changes the world but the most probably change is to a more violent world. Many have endured violence in their own lives. On leaving class once a student said she was pleased to learn about Gandhi's views on ending war. But what about the war zone she lived in? Her home, and all the years she witnessed her mother and father flay each other verbally, emotionally and sometimes physically. How do I end that war? She asked.

Valid question. Perhaps if we had her parents in schools where nonviolent conflict resolution and conflict management skills were systematically taught, battles on the home front might have been prevented or at least contained before the marriage was wrecked. It was too late for this couple. Shaping a peaceful child is easier than reshaping a violent adult. Is it grandiose to think that if peace courses were in the nation's schools, domestic violence—the leading cause of injury to women—would decrease.

What follow in these pages is a sampling of the correspondence between my former students and me. A few other exchanges have been added, letters from teachers looking to expand beyond the

conventional. The teachers range from a faculty member at Phillips Exeter Academy to a Virginia death row inmate who held seminars on nonviolence while he and others awaited execution.

Many of the students' letters in these pages were handwritten, a few were emailed. With only occasional deletions and minor additions needed for clarification, the letters are unchanged. Some were written from the depths of pain, others sparkled with stories of what they were discovering about life beyond high school and college. Some were seeking advice, ranging from questions about which tailwinds they should catch to be happy in their personal lives to wondering about possible career moves.

Because I was an unsalaried volunteer at the three high schools, and was paid little more than stoop labor wages as an adjunct professor at the universities, I came to see the letters as my real paychecks. It was genuine wealth, the pure gold of a windfall. I was touched by the appreciation many of the students expressed for having taken my classes, a gratitude that I tried to repay by replying with letters that were anything but dashed-off. I can't imagine good Harper Lee ever doing that.

Colman McCarthy

Washington D.C

April 10, 1990

Dear Mr. McCarthy

There are two reasons for this letter. First, I have for some time followed your columns and have develop[ed] quite a respect for your abilities as a writer. That respect recently increased considerably when I opened my newest textbook to find a reproduction of your January 2, 1987 column. I read, instantly copied and almost quickly memorized your list of 10 writing rules, promoted you to "mentor" from "writer-to-admire and resolved to write you a letter gushing with praise and gratitude. I didn't write it because I soon doubted my ability to do so without violating one of more of the rules, and because there wasn't much to say except to announce myself as an amateur/admirer who aspires in her secret dreams to one day do what you do.

Well, that's one day. Today I am a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy, aspiring to the service of my country, and that, combined with a more recent column, is why I am writing now.

Sire, you have some crazy ideas about women and war. Rule #1: "say what you mean." In your January 14 column you said: "War is a male ritual based on a hyper-masculine ethic that violence is rational. Linda Bray in Panama [the U.S. invasion in 1983] was less a victory for female rights than for male wrongs. She bought into traditional masculinism: fists. Guns, armies and killing are sensible solutions to problems."

As far as I can determine, the main thrust of your column is that "war is bad." Sir, I certainly do not disagree. I completely respect your right to be as anti-war and anti-military as you like.

However, as a woman in the military, I take great offense at your using the premise that “war is bad” as a launching pad from which to attack Capt. Bray

for doing her job. I agree that her role in the conflict—and the fact that she performed her job in a combat capacity—has been overplayed. But I would hardly accuse her of “leading the charge up Mt. Equality.” She followed her orders, nothing more.

I cannot speak for Capt. Bray or for all women in the military. I only speak for myself. And you made several assumptions about me that I would like the opportunity correct. By being in the military wearing a uniform and serving my country, I am not “buying into traditional masculinity,” as you put it. I do not believe any more than you that “fists, guns, armies and killing are sensible solutions to problems.” And no, I do not believe that Capt. Bray simply accomplishing her given mission provides eternally irrefutable proof that men and women should be side by side in the trenches forevermore. I am, however, unlike you, very much in support of Rep. Pat Schroeder’s legislative proposal. Her proposed bill would allow a period of testing for combat roles for women. The issue of women in combat is not going to disappear, and Rep. Schroeder’s bill is the first positive step I have seen anyone take toward resolving it.

I don’t know the answers. The arguments you and several others have presented against women in combat are valid ones. But the “license to rape” issue that you mention is a problem of war and not a problem of women in war. The solution you offer in your column is the “abolition” to war, and frankly I’m all for that. However, while you columnists and politicians in Washington are working on that one, as a young woman about to become a military officer, I’d like to see more constructive work toward resolving our continuing problems of integration and less pointless prattle about the inequality of the sexes.

There are countless combat roles that women can do as well as men. I can learn to fly an F-14 as effectively as any of my classmates, but at the same time I am under no illusions about my physical limitations in other roles. I appreciate that my male counterpart can run faster and jump higher with a 20-pound pack on his back, and is therefore much better suited to certain combat roles. I am not asking for that kind of “job equality.” Like most women in the military I would not want a job that physical limitations would prevent me from doing well. On the contrary, I hope that when the times comes, Congress does not prevent me from doing the job I have been trained to do, as Capt. Bray did in Panama. It can no longer be a question whether or not women are capable of firing the guns, flying the planes, driving the ships and leading the troops. The question remaining is whether or not America is ready to accept that equality and begin to take advantage of the full resources of military women.

I’m honestly not sure if this country is ready. I am however more than ready to find out, and so is Rep. Pat Schroeder.

Why aren’t you.

April 15, 1990

Half a ton of thanks for your letter, and a full ton for its impassioned language. When I was in college I dreamed, as you do now, of earning a living as a writer. Plenty of room is available for you in this calling, even if you have to call yourself, which is fine because usually no one will or should.

You're right that the "main thrust" of my column was, in your words, "war is bad." If you agree with that, as you say you do, why are you in a school dedicated to war preparation? The Naval Academy has its portion of quality professors, some of whom I came to know when I was invited occasionally to speak in writing classes. Many of the students have as high ideals as those in the classes I teach at the University of Maryland and Georgetown Law.

None of that alters what you being trained to do: kill people and destroy property if the order is given. "Aspiring to the service of my country" is a pseudo-patriotic slogan. When commissioned, you won't be serving your country, you'll be serving those who run the country. A large difference. In "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Government is an association of men who do violence to the rest of us." Why serve those men. Government-sanctioned slaughter, otherwise known as war, has caused the deaths of eight million people in this century. Some 40,000 are a month in current wars and conflicts. Last December between 1,000 and 4,000 people were killed in the U.S. invasion of Panama. The Pentagon doesn't know or care how many Panamanian civilians were killed, hence the estimates of between 1,000 and 4,000. Instead of a national debate on the morality of sending any U.S. soldier—male or female—to slaughter Panamanians, the triviality of women's role in combat has been the preoccupation.

It's beneath both of us to be sucked into it. What we should be doing, instead, is examining our consciences to be as certain as possible that we are using our time and energy to decrease the violence of war. How is that done? By acting, in our personal and professional lives, on what David Dellinger said on entering prison in 1943: "Very few people choose war. They choose selfishness and the result was war. Each of us, individually and nationally, must choose: total love or total war,"

We are what we choose.* Perhaps my choices are flawed, and someday I will come to my senses and abandon what you call my "crazy ideas." I've been tempted often, except that occasional events affirm theories. Twenty years ago Gene Sharp wrote in "The Politics of Nonviolence": "The essence of power is not in military might. People are ruled by the state to the degree that they cooperate with the state. The state loses its power to the degree that the people withdraw or sever their cooperation."

Yeah, I've been told by the knowledgeable and worldly-wise, try selling that in Eastern Europe. But now that the dictatorships in Poland and Romania have fallen, Gene Sharp is seen to have been right. Such pacifists as Lech Walesa are cheered in Congress while his philosophy is ignored. He said: it is due "to nonviolence that I am where I am now. I am a man who believes in dialogue and agreement. I strongly believe that the 21st century will not be a century of violence. We've already tried and tested every form of violence, and not once in the entire course of

human history has anything good or lasting come from it.”

But we still don't get. American politicians go on with our war preparation economy and arming the world. Weapon sales to Third World governments increased 66 percent in 1988 over the previous year. Yes, some parts of our system are worth fighting for, but how do we fight? Again, choices. There's George Patton: “I want you to remember that no dumb bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other

dumb bastard die for his country.” Or Albert Einstein: “Our schoolbooks glorify war and conceal its horrors. They indoctrinate children with hatred. I would teach peace rather than war, love rather than hate....[People] should continue to fight, but they should fight for things worthwhile, not imaginary geographical lines, racial prejudices and private greed draped in the colors of patriotism. Their arms should be weapons of the spirit, not shrapnel and tanks.”

Thanks for your letter. The Naval Academy is lucky to have you. I wish it served you better by offering courses on nonviolence. But the militarists who run your school, and the military-supporting Congress that lavishly bankrolls it, fear academic freedom and intellectual choices. You'll have to study it on your own, which takes us back to where I began. The study of peace is a calling, and we end up calling ourselves.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

*One of my choices was to invite Tara Lee, then in the spring semester of her third year at the Naval Academy and an English major, to take my course “Law, Conscience and Nonviolence” in the fall semester at Georgetown University Law Center. Come as my guest. Open-minded, adventurous and the owner of a red convertible that she liked to drive, she was able to persuade her commandant to take a weekly leave of absence to cruise over from Annapolis to Washington for my weekly Tuesday afternoon seminar. She received no credit for the course. Her interest was intellectual exploration. The class was small, 24 2Ls and 3Ls. Tara relished the give and take jousts of our debates and discussions, plus the inevitable digressions once law students get going. It wasn't the way, I suspected, that classes at the Academy were run.

Tara, engaging and naturally friendly, easily fit in, even as she dressed in midshipman whites. That was enough for one of the lads in the class. He began dating Tara but, alas, as much as she savored his attentions she feared the relationship wouldn't survive the five year obligation she owed the Navy after graduation. The law student, Merrick Alpert, took it well. After Georgetown Law, he went on to do well in business and in 2010 he ran for an open Senate seat from Connecticut in the Democratic primary. He gave it full effort—walking across the state in a campaign reminiscent of Sen. William Proxmire's re-election hikes across Wisconsin—but he was no match for better known Richard Blumenthal, the state's attorney general who won the primary and then the general election.

Halfway through the semester Tara confided to me that a bit of stereotyping was going on. At the Academy fellow midshipmen saw her as a secret hippie-liberal consorting with the enemy—the

subversive, long-haired Left at Georgetown Law—while at the law school some of her classmates viewed her as sunk in military conservatism. As they always are, the labels were hollow. Both sides had it wrong, Tara said: “I’m just me. s

Tara’s fidelity to the weekly commute was, for me, a touching example of desire-based learning. She was receiving no credit for the course. Her interest was intellectual exploration.

More than once during the semester I wondered where the course and its literature would take Tara, if anywhere. Five years after leaving the Academy—she invited me to her graduation to meet her parents—Tara called. Stationed at a Southern California naval base, she had been going to law school at night and had earned her juris doctor degree from the University of San Diego Law School. She specialized in public interest law and worked at a children’s advocate institute. She won two awards: the Outstanding Future Trial Lawyer and the Outstanding Student in Public Interest Law. While volunteering at a women’s homeless shelter in the law school’s clinic, she represented abused children. “You can leverage change with a law degree,” she said. “Kids are the most undefended people in America.”

In the spring of 2012, Tara Lee, now married with four children and living in the Washington area, is a managing partner in DLA Piper, an international law firm with more than 4,000 attorneys in 43 nations. In 2007, working as a pro bono co-counsel with the Center for Justice and Accountability she made repeated and excessively dangerous trips to Somalia to gather evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by war lords in the 1980s. In the February 2010 *Journal of International Peace Operations*, She wrote: “For a lot of Americans, awareness of Somalia and its violent history begins with “Black Hawk Down” and the humanitarian crisis that followed the fall of the Siad Barre regime—Somalia’s last recognized government—subjected its citizens in the north to an internationally-recognized, well-documented pattern of human rights abuses, arbitrary detentions and extra-judicial killings. Those abuses reached a violent peak in June 1988 when the civilian population of Hargeisa was decimated by a month of indiscriminate aerial bombardment and artillery shelling....During that same month hundreds of civilians in Hargeisa were rounded up and shot, their bodies dumped into mass graves around the cities. Planning to visit and document the mass gravesites, I expected to see mounds of dirt, solemnly marked and reverently kept. But at each site I visited in Hargeisa the only markers were the memories of those who had miraculously survived and the briar bushes locals dragged over to cover the mounds. Every few days they repositioned the briars to help protect the sites from animals that might drag away the human remains. Previously, locals had described to me how the rains washed away layers of dirt each year, exposing and sweeping away bones. I interviewed survivors of the mass executions, men who had somehow avoided death when they were lined up with the friends and brothers and shot in tight groups. Despite these descriptions, I was unprepared for what I saw. Exposed human bones littered the ground of Malko Dur-Duro. Spring rains were especially destructive, deeply churning the soil. All around me white bone fragments jutted out of the dusty earth, through the tire tracks and in the gullies left by rainwater. Many of the bones lay loose and apart, unrecognizable at first as human remains. In some places there were so many, and I was so unsure of what I was seeing that

it was hard not to step on the bones before I realized what they were. And then, 20 feet away, one piece was unmistakable: a human jaw bone half-covered in the dirt, many of its teeth still intact.

Tara's interviews of survivors led to the successful prosecution of Somalia's main war criminal. Under the Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act, she argued and won the case in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, a decision later affirmed 9-0 before the Supreme Court.

In late April 2012 I invited Tara to speak to my "Peace and Social Justice" seminar at American University. As relaxed and engaging as she was 20 years earlier in my law class, she detailed her work in Somalia: tracking down victims of violence in remote villages to gather evidence that would hold up in court.

I had my students write thank-you letters to Tara. One was from Grace Armstrong, a sophomore from California: "Dear Tara Lee: Your visit to our class was the most fortunate thing that has happened to me all year. Your journey and accomplishments are truly inspiring. Having traveled to Africa as a blond, white female I connect with a lot of your trials and tribulations. The work you have done for the Somali people is amazing and gives me encouragement. Listening to your story encouraged me to pursue my passion: law and human rights. I am so glad to have met you and in one afternoon I see you becoming a role model in my life. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you. Thank you.

Grace Armstrong."

Dear Mr. McCarthy,

I have been pondering something quite a bit lately and I was wondering if you could share with me some of your thoughts on the subject. Here I have always chosen to abstain from drinking and doing drugs because I've always known that I don't need intoxicants of that sort to enjoy myself. I also think that the way our society portrays teenage drinking and other drug doing (I remember of course your decision to call it the "alcohol drug") is harmful in that it feels like everyone is telling teenagers "Oh, experimentation of that sort is just a part of being a teenager. It's inevitable." The thing is, I've always thought that it wasn't inevitable. People who are allergic to alcohol manage to find happiness in their lives (and they get through their teen years) and Buddhist monks end up pretty happy, though many never taste alcohol or experiment with drugs of any sort.

Essentially, part of my question is how you feel about intoxication, both of teenagers and adults, and why.

Also-- and this is something that I hope to figure out before I go to college-- I do not know how best to explain my decision to abstain from these drugs to people who do not. Oftentimes I say nothing at all, but when I am pressured to explain why I won't just have a beer, my explanation comes off sounding condescending. Because of this it often seems like I am offending my friends who I care about. Also, I am often told "Don't knock it til you try it" or "How can you judge all of us when you've never even tried it?" But the thing is, I'm not interested in trying it and additionally, there are plenty of things I know I'm not interested in without experiencing it. I know I do not want to fight in war or become a physicist or a bird watcher. This never seems to be a good argument though, and ideally, I don't want to argue with people I have just met in a collegiate setting.

Thus, the second part of my question is what you think the best way would be to explain sobriety without making it sound condescending or argumentative.

Essentially, I need your help. I have been trying to figure it out on my own for awhile now but to be honest, it is hard to find people my age who understand where I'm coming from. Or anyone for that matter. I think I'm going a little crazy internally and I would love to hear your thoughts.

Thank you thank you thank you,

Dear Hanna:

You may have come across it, that ambiguity-free line from T.S. Eliot: "In a world of fugitives, those one who go in the opposite direction are labeled the mad ones." That's you. By not running with the ruck, when it heads to the parties, bars or refrigerators for a fix of alcohol--or the Rose Garden to slug a beer with Obama, the cop and professor--you're the mad one: daft in the head,

slow to lighten up and assuredly not one to invite to the next kegger.

I'm not surprised you've taken a stand. You were the one student in class last semester intent on making a difference in life--by being different. You were the one student in class who had a eye for seeing through society's guff, including the kind heaved at high school students by the alcohol industry through relentless advertising. The typical teenager will have seen more than 100,000 beer commercials before turning 18. The Georgetown Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth looked at alcohol advertisements in 103 national magazines and their readership during 2001-2002 and found that girls between 12 and 20 were exposed to those ads more than women 21 to 34. The goal of the companies is brand loyalty. Research shows that once a person connects emotionally with a particular brand of beer, that loyalty remains in place for life. The results of advertising are impressive: a recent study revealed that 77 percent of teenagers took up drinking by the end of 12th grade. In the 1960s, 7 percent of 10 to 14-year-old girls used alcohol. By the early 1990s it had risen to 31 percent.

For me, the alcohol industry ranks at the top for loathsomeness. I've wasted plenty of money in my life but not a penny has gone to buy liquor, wine, beer or whatever. I took a vow in high school never to drink, after my closest schoolboy pal, Bobby Trimble, was killed in an alcohol-related car crash. We grew up in Old Brookville, a subdued little New York town through which the Long Island railroad had tracks. At 16 Bobby he was driving home one weekend night after drinking at a party. Evidently he saw the light of the train a half-mile down the tracks heading for the road crossing, and decided to race the train. He did but the train won. It took a day to clear the tracks and find all of Bobby's body parts. I loved Bobby all the years we were in school, and decided in his memory never to drink alcohol.

It's the worst of all the drugs, whether measured in societal or personal costs. I've never known a family that didn't have a life ruined because of drinking, whether a parent, grandparent or going back further. It's a highly addictive drug, which is why I reject the drink-in-moderation argument. It's the same telling children to play moderately with fire or teenagers to drive moderately at 90 miles an hour. Moderation? What does it really mean, especially those for whom the disease of alcoholism runs in the family. Then, too, it's worth asking what is so missing in one's life that the hole must be filled with a drug? Is filling it with alcohol the only way?

So how to explain to others your decision not to drink? You can probably have some fun on that one. Make up a story that you have a \$100,000 book contract on what it's like to be a college non-drinker: "I Was a Nerd. And Worse a Sober Nerd." They'll make it into a movie! Or that you have a rich uncle who has promised you \$1,000,000 if you don't drink before 25. The last is not that bizarre. I recall reading a biography of Joseph Kennedy in which he promised a hefty payoff to his children--eight of them, including Jack, Robert, Teddy, Eunice and the rest--if they laid off drinking until they were 25. I'll have to re-check but I think Eunice was the only one who hung on to collect.

The better way, and not fantasy-driven way, to explain your stand is merely to tell people you don't drink. Your close friends--and most of us, if we are blessed, have two or three people who are truly close friends, with all the rest being acquaintances--will understand and respect you. Others--all those acquaintances who come and go throughout our lives--probably won't understand, much as they are closeminded about people who are even slightly different. Why bother with them. In my colleges classes, including Georgetown Law, I offer students the option of not drinking alcohol for the semester and writing a paper about it. Every year a few do. The papers carry the same theme: how the students came to realize that their social lives were built around alcohol, how they had no true friends but only drinking buddies, how their roommates or housemates thought they were having nervous breakdowns because suddenly they stopped drinking. But then the payoff: large benefits physically and spiritually.

I can almost assure you that the people who truly care about you, or even marginally care, will honor you for being resolute. In my own college years, when I was over-involved in athletics and decidedly uninvolved in academics, I was the only member of my golf team--yes, I know golf is a rich, white Republican, country club game and I should do penance immediately--who didn't drink. On road trips, my teammates took to the bars. I hung back. I took all the abuse, most of it lighthearted but some of it pointed and mean, as if, as you said, I was posing as morally superior to the drinkers. Years later, many years, I ran into one of my former teammates. After updating me--one of the six boys on the team became an alcoholic--he said that he and a couple of the others had secretly admired me for not drinking but they were too immature, or too afraid, to say so.

You can be sure that you have my deepest admiration for your choice. Don't be hard on yourself--"going a little crazy internally"--and certainly don't change. Take pride in your independence, from the corruptions of a society awash in drunkenness and from the predations of the alcohol industry. Seek the intoxications to be found in reading books--and soon enough for you, I suspect, writing books--or taking a year off before college to taste life, which you are doing.

School starts in a few days. I'll have classes at Georgetown Law, American University, the University of Maryland, the Washington Center for Interns, Bethesda-Chevy Chase and Wilson. September marks the beginning of the drinking season. How many parents, I wonder, are bringing their first year daughters and sons at college and leaving them with the words, have fun drinking, get drunk often and take Advil for your hangover. If this school year is like recent ones, some 1,700 parents will be getting a call from a campus, police station or emergency room that their collegian son or daughter has just died from alcohol-related causes. Another 600,000 will be injured. Nearly 100,000 will be victims of alcohol-related assault or date rape. Uncounted numbers will miss class, fail exams, act like jerks and stink up dormitories with puke.

So continue on. Become a drinker, the kind you have been so far--one who drinks deeply of life's simpler joys: friendships, reading and writing, helping your parents, taking risks, and bringing joy to your teachers--which you did for me every time you were in class. Even when you came late because you and Nell were late getting out The Beacon!

Stay special, stay you--

Colman McCarthy

February 21, 2007

Dear Colman:

With the number of students you've taught over the years, the chances of you remembering me from the last Peace Studies class you taught at Catholic University in the spring of '05 are probably pretty slim. Nevertheless, I offer you this letter as an all-too-belated thank you for introducing me to Gandhi, Tolstoy, King, Merton, Day and many of the other authors we read who challenged my notions about the practicality of peace. Since then, these writers have become both staples in my library as well as friends visited and revisited for advice, encouragement or a challenging word.

Even more valuable, however, is the personal commitment to nonviolence I began to cultivate during your class. Although it seemed to make sense, a question many of us asked that semester was "how practical is this?" Luckily, I didn't have to wait very long to find out and, to my surprise, I didn't find the answer in the hypothetical caught-in-a-dark alley scenario that we had all imagined would someday test us.

After graduation, I decided to spend a few months volunteering at a Catholic Worker house of hospitality providing basic services to folks living on the streets in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. Though ostensibly I was there at the service of those who came in needing shade, a shirt, a shower, a phone call or a meal, I found myself repeatedly berated, cursed, spit at, screamed at and on two occasions violently attacked. Although these were perhaps the most personally and spiritually challenging encounters of my life, I never struck back but rather focused on meeting the abuse with love and patience. Sure, little of this is to my credit—I am indebted entirely to the grace of God. These experiences would not have been redeeming or transforming had I not been already familiar with spiritual nonviolence and the philosophies I learned in your class.

Perhaps because of the nature of nonviolence, or because of the atmosphere in which I got to practice it, I came away with the understanding that nonviolence—a service to others itself—is at the heart of all service. It is the most selfless work of mercy, begging us to forget ourselves in favor of the other when it is hardest to: when we have been injured. A heart fully devoted to service must be devoted to nonviolence as well, I think.

I just thought that I would share some of my experiences since I believe you had a hand in shaping it. And maybe you would like to know that at least one of the seeds you planted in our class has taken root. As a side note, I've since returned to Washington and live and work as a fulltime volunteer at the house of St. Francis and Alphonsus providing material and spiritual assistance to families living in project neighborhoods in Southeast DC. It's been a great blessing.

Thanks for everything, Colman.

Peace be with you—

Ryan Hehman

March 18, 2007

How well and fully you are using yours gifts. And how quickly it has happened. Not many leave college and find a place, right away, to put their spirituality to work. From Catholic University to the Catholic Worker. I'd like to think that happened often but I'd need more evidence. From my years of teaching there I found only a few students who had read Dorothy Day or subscribed to The Catholic Worker newspaper. In a moment of giddiness I once suggested to a dean that a course should be offered on Dorothy Day. I might as well have proposed a course on Doris Day for all it mattered.

Perhaps I'm being harsh, because about 20 years some Catholic U students did indeed know about Dorothy Day and put her ideals into action. You'll be both heartened, and surprised, to know that it happened exactly where you are now living, at 939 T NW in Washington. In the mid-1980s Michael Kirwan, the grandson of Congressman Michael (Honest Mike) Kirwan of Youngstown, Ohio, was just beginning his apostolate to the city's hungry and homeless. Dorothy Day often stayed during her travels with the Kirwan family in Michael's boyhood. After The Washington Post wrote about his work, he received a donation, one large enough to buy the residence at 939 T. He called it the Llewellen Scott Catholic House of Hospitality. At times, as many as 30 men and women were given space: alcoholics, drifters, prostitutes all trying to make it back up. Some stayed a night or two, others for long stretches, while Michael lived in a third floor garret no larger than a monk's cell. One year, an architect professor at Catholic University and a believer in experiential learning, inspired his students to renovate the house. For months, they banged, scraped, painted, nailed, disinfected and spruced.

I wrote a column about their toils, one of many involving Michael Kirwan. The final one—his obituary—ran in November 1999. Dozens of times during the 1980s and '90s I brought my students to 939 T Street, to witness the work of Michael. Better to see a sermon than hear one.

That's all I've wanted o achieve as a teacher: offer students a few ideas about increasing peace and decreasing violence, and nudging them to use their moral and intellectual gifts to help make it happen. I'm heartened you have committed yourself to that.

Years, sometimes, decades, must pass before our gifts are used. In the mid-1980s at American University I had a student who seemed the least likely ever to move beyond what looked to be ingrained self-absorption. She came from a family of wealth. The class was large, more than 150. A final semester senior who no doubt had her fill of windy professors, she always took to one of the back rows. She rarely spoke. I'd look at her and ask myself the question that all professors pose when dispensing what we think are grand truths getting grander: is she getting it? Of course she is, I'd con myself. Thirty minutes into the class her eyes would glaze, and I'd say to myself that she wasn't with six hemispheres of "getting it." At semester's end, she graduated. I didn't hear from her until years later. A letter came. A poignant letter, handwritten. She had joined the Peace Corps and was sent to a remote desert village in northern Morocco. Of all the students in that class, she was the last one I'd have picked for the Peace Corps.

In the letter, she told of stopping in the school library after classes one afternoon. The only news from the outside world was an occasional copy of the International Herald Tribune. A villager would sometimes go to Rabat, the capital, and bring back a copy for the school. The teacher paged through and there, by chance, was a column of mine on the op-ed page. So reminded of my class, she wrote to say that she had been a water-treader that last semester of college. Confessionally, she said that as much as she wanted to think about nonviolence, and did try at least a bit, she couldn't connect with it. Her mind was elsewhere. But now that I've been in Morocco these past two years, she wrote, and doing the works of peace in a modest way, it's all coming me: yes, nonviolence does make sense. I remember the letter because the moral of the story is obvious: every flower blooms when it's ready. Some bloom early, some late. My obligation is to teach with passion, and not think about, much less fret, who is or who is not "getting it."

I remember your class at Catholic. It was to be my final one there. No dean or department head explained the reason for not inviting me back. I do have a hunch, though. It was that first moment of the first class. I asked a question about grades: is anyone taking this class for the sole reason of getting an A? If so, you can leave now and I promise to turn in an A at the end of the semester. Just tell me your name on the way to the door. You may remember that one lad, wide-eyed with disbelief but not letting the golden chance of a lifetime pass by, jumped up with noticeable glee. He slung on his backpack, told me his name—repeated it twice, just to be sure—and marched out. I did deliver the promised grade, but by then word had spread throughout the campus that a madcap prof was passing out As like trinkets at Mardi Gras—and no attendance, no papers and no exams required. I did admire the boy for walking out, at least for his honesty. He was a grade-grubber, and when a moment came to grub he did. I was glad he left. The students who stayed were the ones I wanted to be with: for them a grade was secondary to learning.

I imagine that the boy who walk out with his guaranteed A came to college thinking that the more As you piled up the better chance of "making it" in life. If I could find the time, I'd like to check the college transcripts of corporate CEOs who were imprisoned for fraud. No doubt they had plenty of As and , brainy, were well on heir way to success. But now they have Fs for character. For me, grading is the foulest part of teaching. Grading is degrading. The second foulness is answering emails from students wondering, in mild but emphatic indignation, why I gave them a B instead of an A. One came just yesterday, from a Georgetown Law student. Her 6,000 word term paper ran deep with ordinary language, dull footnotes and with not a sprightly metaphor in sight. The paper hovered between listless and lackluster. She missed three classes and was habitually late for class. He message came through: I offended her with a B.

Your letter touched my heart. I'm grateful you took the time to w rite. When I tell my future classes about former students who are truly other-centered, and not self-centered, be sure your story will be told.

In friendship,

October 25, 2005

Dear Colman:

I just arrived back in the US after finishing my two years as an HIV/AIDS Peace Corps volunteer in Mali. I knew that the experience would change my life but I could not have predicted the direction into which it would lead me. For years I was certain that I wanted to work for some nonprofit working in the sphere of international relations and conflict mediation. Seeing the needs of the developing world first-hand has led me to explore another field: medicine.

Superficially, the two fields are very different but I strongly believe they are closely related. Nomadic Peuhls in rural Mali, recent immigrants in the ghettos of DC or New York City and the urban poor of all races and ethnicities all face obstacles in receiving even minimal health care. As you frequently remind your classes, when thousands of children die of hunger or diseases which are easily treated, it is a form of "cold violence" that is too often overlooked.

Looking back at all of my work and volunteer experiences, I realize that each aspect I enjoyed and excelled in can all be found in the medical profession. Volunteering in Mali and working in schools and community health centers I discovered a talent and interest in organizing events promoting healthy behavior, counseling individuals on health topics, and working closely with health care professionals. As a counselor at the GI Rights Hotline, I worked with members of the military to help them discover solutions to bad situations. Whether their problem was medical, family related or an objection of conscience, I helped them to debate options and deal with challenging circumstances.

My undergraduate degree is in International Relations. To apply to medical schools I will first have to return to school to fulfill math and science requirements. I am applying to several post-baccalaureate premedical programs which start in the summer. I was hoping that you would write a recommendation for me. Before I left for the Peace Corps you had said you would but I realize you are very busy.

I have attached a copy of my description of Peace Corps service and a resume so you can review what I have been involved in the last few years. I will also be in DC next week so I may have an opportunity to sit in on one of your classes at American or School Without Walls. I really enjoyed assisting with classes at Walls before I did Peace Corps. So it would be fun to visit again.

Thank you for your help.

Yours in peace,

Jenny Flament

Dear Jenny:

Bless you, which I'm sure our good Lord is doing all the time anyway. What a joy to hear from you, including the heartening news that you'll be giving med school a try. Just yesterday, another

of my students, a girl I had in Stone ridge, a Catholic girls school in Bethesda, and who went on to finish at Duke with a magna cum, called to say she s being interviewed at Georgetown Medical School—and like you in zoning in on poverty medicine.

Sure, a letter is automatic. I said yes two years ago, after all, when I was lucky to have you in my American U class. Don't forget my troublesome little rule: you'll have to bake something for my wife and me. That's how I get all you intellectuals to work on your kitchen skills and ease you out of he library and away from the books for awhile. It's not something I don't do myself, having been a cook during one of the five years I lived in a Trappist monastery after college.

Can't wait to hear your stories about Mali. Like most world-ignorant Americans, I'd be pressed to tell the difference between Mali and Malawi, except that they are in Africa someplace. Get ready to spend the rest of your many days answering the question about Mali, "where's that?"

I must remind you to obey the law: the third part of the original Peace Corps Act, when passed by Congress in 1961 , requires all returning volunteers to educate Americans about their service. You can start with me. And then my students. I have classes at seven schools, so stock up on the stories.

No surprise that your two years in Mali were life-altering. I've seen it up-close for the dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of my former students who were shaken up and woken up by their Peace Corps experiences. Not sure if I ever told you but I came to Washington in the mid-1960s to work for Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps and who hired me off the street when I was a penniless free-lance writer scouring the country for stories that the establishment media were ignoring. Sarge Shriver happened to read one of those stories, about one of his poverty programs in Harlem. If I hadn't written that story and he hadn't read it and called me—I was in the Midwest, having just covered Martin Luther King's campaign to integrate a housing project in Cicero, Illinois—who knows where I'd be today. Sarge Shriver hired me to write speeches, which meant traveling the country with him, revising his lines up to the minute he walked to microphone and then speaking on his own because he definitely didn't need help from me. A friendship grew, and he would become the person I've been closest to outside my family. He is 89 now, physically robust but fading into the early mists of Alzheimers. Last week I had one of his children, Tim, who has been running Special Olympics the past ten years, speak to one of my high school classes.

My other connection with the Peace Corps is Mark Gearan, the agency's director during the second Clinton administration. Mark, who worked on the Clinton presidential campaign in 1991 when few outside of Arkansas knew much about him, was one of my Georgetown Law students in 1989. It was a frenzied semester, what with two rightwing gunslingers in the class hellbent to shoot holes in any arguments I dared make on why nonviolence is superior to violence. It was Mark who calmed down the class when all the brainiacs had a me.. He is now at Hobart-William Smith college, running the place as its president.

I fear that Mark and I are on different sides of a current argument involving the Peace Corps. I wrote a column for The Post a few weeks ago supporting a proposed law that would allow people

in the military to complete their tour of duty with two years in the Peace Corps. Mark thought differently, believing that soldiers should do soldiering and that warmaking and peacemaking are separate. I hated to break ranks by joining conservatives who supported the bill, but if I were a farmer in a Senegal village a hundred miles from Dakar and needed to have a bridge built over a gully washed away by a flood, I think I'd prefer someone who just spent a couple of years in the Army Corps on Engineers rather than an English major from Yale. I'd be interested

in your views about this. I suspect you'll be on the keep-them-separate side.

I'll send the letter. Let's catch up next week.

In friendship,

March 18, 2010

Dear Professor:

Yesterday's class affected me deeply. I've always been a vegetarian and profound lover of animals of all shapes and sizes. After my seminar finished at 10:40 last night, I went straight home and spent an hour playing with our cat, Coco. My three roommates and I give her a lot of attention and love, and we're often exasperated with her because she's barely a year old, ridiculously energetic and fond of raiding our recycling bags in the middle of the night to chase aluminum cans across our hardwood floors. Last week, after she waited behind the couch and leaped out to attack my tights as I was walking by, I jokingly said, "Coco, I'm going to sell you to the Chinese."*

Now I feel terrible about it. I spent a whole hour last night cuddling with her (she gets really affectionate in the late evening when she's tired), holding her, lying on the floor and letting her walk all over me (she loves this for some reason) and playing with her "teaser wand." After watching the abuse and torture of those cats, I wanted to remind at least one that she was loved very much.

After class I called my boyfriend, who eats meat, literally in tears over the cats in China. I've never been a proselytizing vegetarian and always accepted the fact that my boyfriend isn't. But I started asking him if he knew how meat is obtained and processed. When I found out he did know, I asked him how he could eat it and not gag or get depressed. He was uncomfortable and said that during the three years he'd been with me, I'd introduced him to a whole new way of eating and he really didn't crave meat much at all anymore. I pressed him for reasons he was still okay with eating meat if he saw he could love his diet without it, and he just didn't want to talk about it.

Animals have always been a huge part of my life and even though I was raised without meat, I can't ever see myself "rebellious" and wanting to. Now I am a vegetarian for moral, environmental and practical reasons. The only pet I ever had who was really and truly only my buddy (I don't want to say he belonged to me) was a rabbit I got when I was eight. He was a tiny Netherlands dwarf, only two lbs. and for seven years he was a best friend. He was never once

locked in his cage.

My Mom and I gave him the whole “mudroom” to run around in. with a warm bunny condo—a cage that I changed twice a week with fresh cedar shavings, and constant fresh food and water. He had the run of the house when we were home. In the summer we let him roan around the yard. I spent hours sitting in his room, doing homework, reading books and talking to him. He had a real personality and was comfortable with me and almost no one else. Every morning when my Mom was getting ready for work, he would circle her feet, hindering he ability to move at all in the kitchen, until she gave him an apple slice. Whenever we opened the cupboard where the corn chips were kept, he’d come flying in from his favorite hiding spot under the desk, scrabbling across the slippery floor and sometimes running into the cupboards.

When he died, I was devastated. I cried for weeks and weeks and I still keep his picture by my bed. I feel that as children we’re much more capable of loving animals and recognizing them as equals on different levels. Why is that when we’re older we start to think of them as property or objects? I find this subject depressing yet wholly necessary, and I thank you for being the only instructor I have ever had who examines this issue, marks it as important and forces others to look at it as well. I really enjoy learning from you and I’m glad I had the opportunity to be a part of this class.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Merissa McCaw

*In the two classes I devote to animal rights and human wrongs, a staple is the 75 minute HBO documentary “To Love or To Kill: Man vs. Animal.” One scene depicts a restaurant in China where cats and dogs are lifted from their cages to be killed and prepared for dinner. Workers are shown placing a cat into a tank of boiling water. After a minute, the cat is taken out to be skinned and then dropped into cold water. The cat, still alive, moves its jaws as if gasping for breath.

March 21, 2010

Dear Merissa:

Bring Coco to class! It’s not so wild a notion. A few years ago a guest in my class at Wilson High was Abigail, a 25 lb. turkey and the only one ever celebrated with a page one profile in The Wall Street Journal. The story told of her being trucked south on I-95 from Pennsylvania to a slaughter house in Maryland, but not arriving because the truck crashed. Over a hundred turkeys were flopping around on the highway. By chance two workers from the Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary were driving by. They had room in their car for a bird. They named it Abigail. I saw the story and invited them and the turkey to my class—a week before Thanksgiving, as it turned out.

In the annals of secondary education, it was an historic moment: a lesson taught by a turkey was more relevant to the students’ lives than anything the teacher, me, could have said even on his best day.

Half the class became vegetarians, suddenly making the connection between the lively and lovely Abigail and the corpses that would be centerpiece on the American table on Thanksgiving.

That's the puzzle about moving someone from a cruelty-based to a cruelty-free diet: arousing empathy. Students in the class could see Abigail poking and pecking around the room, her curiosity about chairs and legs as intense as the students' wonderment about the bird. Empathy came naturally. I asked the students if anyone would like to kill Abigail, perhaps get a gun from one of the cops in the hill and shoot her in the head and then eat her body the next Thursday. The question was greeted with shouts of disgust. Yet I knew that many in the class would soon be eating the body parts of turkey.

That might be where your boyfriend is, locked into a state of mind disconnected from the pleasurable taste of flesh and the unpleasurable way the animal was killed. I am always careful when teaching animal rights not to come on too strongly, knowing that people become defensive when they feel you are accusing them of being cruel to animals. They are used to language that camouflages the reality. It's London Broil, a Chicken McNugget or a Burger King Whopper that's on the plate, not an animal body part.

I probably self-censor too much, knowing that I am in no position to judge anyone. If complicity with violence to animals is the issue, who is really innocent? We dwell in homes or buildings that displaced animals, we pay federal taxes to a government that legalizes the slaughter of animals and subsidizes factory farm corporations that do most of the killing of some 12 millions a day for food. We travel in cars with leather seats. Our highways are unfenced to prevent road kill, we go to schools where biology

students experiment on animals. We take drugs that were tested on animals. We buy newspapers that run ads for dairy, meat, egg and fur industries and we shop in stores that profit from the sale of animal products. We vote for politicians who don't challenge, much less defy, the hunting lobby. We pay the salaries of state and federal judges who interpret a constitution that says nothing about the welfare or rights of animals. We embrace religions that give human dominion over animals and where it's a rare pulpit that a sermon on the sacredness of animals is sounded.

It was, oddly enough, in a sermon by Father Zossima in "The Brother Karamazov" by Feodor Dostoyevsky that the message is stated in a way to open minds and stir hearts, as it did mine: "Love all God's creation and every grain of sand in it...Love animals. God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled. Do not trouble their joy, don't harass them, don't deprive them of their happiness, don't work against God's intent. Man, do not pride yourself on yourself superiority to animals. They are without sin, and you, with your greatness, defile the earth by your appearance on it, and leave traces of your foulness after you. Alas, it is true almost every one of us."

So keep letting Coco walk all over you. Don't be discouraged that your boyfriend isn't with it. I suspect he is, just taking more time than you'd like.

We'll have a memorable class next week. Michael Weber from FARM (Farm Animals Rights Movement) is coming in. He's 25, a vegan, knowledgeable, dogged and a graduate of Evergreen State University which is among the most progressive campuses in the country. By the way, did you know that PETA ranks American U in the top three vegetarian friendly schools, along with Wesleyan and Oberlin. Small wonder you thrived here.

Bless you and Coco—

Colman McCarthy

December 28, 2010

Dear Mr. McCarthy

I am writing from Oberlin to, first of all, than you for an extraordinary class at Wilson last semester and, second, to check in with you to see how you've been and to update you on what I've been up to. I also wanted to reimburse you for the "Solutions to Violence" textbook that I never returned. I hope the loss of it from your class wasn't too much trouble. I have it and will be making full use of the book for myself as a peacemaker.

The Wilson course gave me a chance to learn and become knowledgeable on issues I strongly care about. It also offer information that every person must learn if we are ever to achieve a peaceful existence. Your kind and patient attitude was always appreciated by our class, especially when some students weren't making the most of the class and essentially wasting your time. It is inspiring that you were able to continue teaching and not lose your patience up against so much apathy in the classroom. Many students eventually began to really care a bout the class, even ones who did not seem to care at the beginning of the year. I also really appreciate that you teach at Wilson, because many kids may feel hopeless due to situations at home. They are in desperate need of a class like your that truly educates them about the world we live in. I think that when you trust a student enough to teach them about what's actually going on I our world it makes them feel respected and can inspire them. It definitely felt that way for me.

I am also very thankful that you are committed your causes. Many of your class discussions by you and the guest speakers helped shape my personal morals and philosophy. I am definitely more committed to pacifism now than I was before your class. I have continued to eat vegetarian and try to inform my family and friends what I know about being a peaceful responsible eater.

I do think my favorite guest speaker was Paul Chappell* whose book I read and loved after he gave me a copy. I have remained in contact with Paul and found out that he is coming to Oberlin in May

So far I am really enjoying Oberlin. I had a nice summer before leaving for school, during which I worked at the Friendship Place Community Council for the Homeless. Volunteering there was a great experience. It was good to be able to help solve the problem of homelessness in my community.

But back to Oberlin. This is really a great place for me with so many music and activist opportunities. I am taking Intro to Peace and Conflict Studies. My other notable class is my freshman seminar "Selfishness or Altruism: the Evolution of Sociality in Humans and Other Animals. I'm learning a lot about the nature of human life and life itself. I learned in in Peace and Conflict class that war only began 10,000 years ago, making it evident that humans are not inherently warlike but that something about the way our society is structured can lead to war. I have also gone to a few meetings for the Oberlin Peace Activists League and the Oberlin Animal Rights Group.

Thanks again Mr. McCarthy. You truly are one of my heroes and I really enjoyed being able to learn from you and hope to be able to continue to do so.

Peter Hartman

January 1, 2011

Dear Peter:

What a lovely and lovingly written letter. I was touched by it, of course, in much the appreciative way I so enjoyed having you in class. Sometimes teaching is as easy as breathing, when students like you are there. Other times, it's as hard as gasping for air, as when students like you are not there. If I were more on my game, it shouldn't matter. I'd be able to let the limpers limp, slackers slack and the sleepers sleep and be content that I supplied all the energy I could. When the limping, slacking and sleeping becomes too much, as it came close to doing more than once in your class when it was your ill luck and mine to be stuck with students dumped onto us by clueless and time-serving counselors, I'd remember the line from good Pope John XXIII, "See everything, overlook much, improve a little."

John, a northern Italian from the small Lombardy city of Bergamo whose birth name was Angelo Roncalli, held the papacy for only five years: 1958-63.. But what a five years they were, as he put through reforms at the Second Vatican Council that made the Church less judgmental and more human, less secretive and more collegial. It could be argued that he went way beyond improving things only a little, but progress, or least the kind that lasts and doesn't stumble, is almost always a matter of pushing forward little by little. And then there's that story about the day John's brother, an illiterate farmer, came to the Vatican and the pope was showing him around the place. He asked John, "how many people work here?" "About half," the pope said.

My current Wilson class, freshman to seniors, is a joy: six international students (Colombia, El Salvador, China, Germany, Eritrea and England), four or five whose parents went to the Ivies, a dozen from African American families, five athletes, a couple of musicians and a Latino boy who every class hands me a document from the D.C. Superior Court and wordlessly points where to sign my name and where to write the date to show he is here.

For guest speakers, we've had a bracing mix: Eddie Ellis, the former prisoner who came to your class, an Episcopalian priest who now getting a masters in conflict resolution from Eastern Mennonite University, an organizer from the Farm Animal Rights Movement, Steve Mowbray

(remember him? The former businessman from Kansas who has chosen voluntary poverty and has no house, no car, no job, no money, no insurance, no credit card and NO WORRIES), a Buddhist monk from Oregon, a Muslim who converted to Catholicism, a former Peace Corps volunteer who did health work in the interior of Ecuador and a lad named Zaccai Free who went to Maret, was accepted at Brown but turned it down for North Carolina A&T, one of the historically black colleges where he thrived but then spent four years living in Belize trying to sort out the big questions. Now he works for Code Pink, the antiwar sisterhood Medea Benjamin founded ten years ago. I had Medea speak to my Georgetown Law class in October when we were having a couple of classes on civil disobedience. She has a sparkling arrest record, from disrupting congressional hearings on the military budget to standing a bit too long holding signs in front of the Bush White House against Secret Service orders to move on.

One of the law students who savored Medea and her stories was a 2L, Charity Ryerson. She went to a Jesuit high school in Indianapolis and then a Jesuit university in Illinois. Along the way she was swayed by the writings of Daniel Berrigan, the Jesuit priest whose ministry included defying the militarism of the American Empire. Charity's own defiance came in the Fall of 2003 at Ft. Benning, a massive Army base near Columbus, Georgia. She was arrested, along with scores of others, in a nonviolent protest against what the Army called "the School of the Americas" but which is more accurately known as the School of the Assassins. During the 1970s and '80s, it trained the soldiers of dictators who would return to countries like El Salvador, Columbia, Honduras and Nicaragua to murder, torture and abduct nuns, priests, labor organizers and others who sided with the poor. It was the era of death squads. On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down by killers trained at Ft. Benning. Later that year four American women—three nuns and a social worker—were killed by SOA graduates.

Every third weekend in November, protestors show up at the gates of the base. In 2003 Charity was arrested for crossing the line. A trespasser on federal property, she was sentenced to six months in federal prison. The main requirement for my Georgetown Law class in a 6,000 word paper. I encouraged Charity to write about her crimes against the state. Evidently she didn't learn her lesson. Six weeks ago she was back at Ft. Benning—to be arrested again, with a pending trial in March. I probably push it too far

but I keep telling my law students to write papers about their own experiences with law,

Conscience and nonviolence—which happens to be the title of the course. If Charity writes with only a touch of literate language, she is in for the coveted A, although I think she deserves blessings far more meaningful than a letter or a transcript.

Large numbers of the protestors are from U.S. colleges. I know that for many years Oberlin students piled into vans and headed south to the base. Check with one of the chaplains if groups still go.

It's a delight to know that you are getting your collar's worth at Oberlin. From my two visits as a guest speaker, I had the feeling it has a caring faculty that focuses on classroom teaching, as against a research-driven faculty that looks on interaction with students as a bothersome

distraction. Alas, Oberlin does not yet offer a degree in Peace Studies. You'd think it would, wouldn't you, given its past agitations in the civil rights movement. I was heartened that after my visit four years ago a couple of professors—Steven Crowley and Stephen Mayer—are teaching the Intro course you are taking and are using “Solutions to Violence.”

Speaking of that, thanks for the check. You're in luck. It comes at the right moment: It's buy-one-get-two-free-week at the Center for Teaching Peace. I'm sending you “We Who Dared Say No To War,” a collection of essays by and about conscientious objectors to America's wars, from 1812 to Afghanistan., and “The Mind of Mahatmas Gandhi.”

The first one comes to you by way of Ralph Nader, the man of passion who I've known and supported since the 1960s. He called from his office near 16th and P Sts some months back to say that he had 1200 copies of “We Who Dared Say No To War” and could I use them. Ralph keep track of remaindered books, ones that are left over from the first or second printings and which publishers unload—harsh word, considering the sensibilities of authors—at steep discounts to free up space at the warehouses. Send them on, I said gratefully. Ralph paid for the shipping from a plant near Knoxville. I give the books as gifts to all my students, and I imagine there will be enough for a few years. It tells you something about the disinterestedness of the American media that an antiwar book like this could be published and receive so few reviews that the public knew little about it.

The Gandhi book is traceable to James Otis. In the mid-1980s he was in my Honors course at the University of Maryland. He was leaving class one day, after we had discussed the life and thinking of Gandhi. Gandhi was noticeably eager to learn more. I took him aside and suggested a few titles of books he might read, including Erik Erikson's “Gandhi's Truth.” It wasn't something I remembered more than a few minutes after. Fifteen years later. James Otis phoned. “You told me to read some Gandhi on my own,” he said, recalling the lass. “I took the advice and it's time I thanked you. I have a gift and will send it.” The next morning a Fed-Ex truck is at my door, with the driver unloading ten large boxes weighing over 40 lbs each and haling them inside on a dolly.

I checked the sender's name and address: James Otis, Beverley Hills, California 90210. Inside the boxes, which were now in my living room with space for little else, were the collected works of Gandhi: 95 thick volumes in all. The Mahatma wrote more than 500 words a day after finishing law school in London. The Navajivan Publishing House in Ahmedabad, India, gathered them up in 95 books. I asked the Fed-x driver what the overnight pre-noon delivery cost: “At least a couple thousand dollars.”

I called James to thank him. It turns out he has done well as a documentary film maker, specializing in topic of nonviolence. One of the residuals of teaching is that students occasionally do send gifts after taking the course. James, let it be noted, is at the top of the leader board with the 95 Gandhi books. Where are they now? I wanted to build bookshelves on the walls of our living room, there to read through them one by one. My wife, who once hosted a dinner at our home for Arun Gandhi who is the second son of Gandhi's second son, was somewhat less carried

away than I: a wide audience should benefit. She prevailed. We donated the books, in James Otis's name, to the library at American University.

To make a long story longer—sorry—James has another distinction among my former students: he's the only one ever to make the front page of *The New York Times*, with a picture and a 1200 word story. It seems that his interest in Gandhi ran deep, well beyond books. Over the years and many, many trips to India, he collected a trove of Gandhi belongings: his eyeglasses, walking stick, sandals, soup bowl, clock, notebooks. James decided to sell the collection at a New York auction house, with the money not for himself but, as the *Times* story noted, as “a means to promote pacifist causes.” The winning bid was \$1.8 million, put up by an Indian millionaire who promised to put the items in display in India. The *Times* story, by the way, ran on March 6, 2009 if you want the details.

Last week, more books came from James: this time, six boxes of Gandhi biographies and collections of essays. This time the U.S. Postal Service did the lifting, at about \$30 a box. James is economizing.

Enjoy both Ralph and James's books, if you ever have time for reading for pleasure, which few collegians do. Speaking of reading, special thanks for taking a look at my column the other day in *The Post* on ROTC at U.S. campuses. You're a pal for pumping it on Facebook. I was told it drew more than a thousand comments on *The Post*'s web, with only 20 favorable and the rest scolding, damning, fuming and venting. Not an assault I'm not used to.

You and I have been blessed by the gods to know Hanna Mahon. I remember when she introduced me to you at the Wilson High graduation, and thinking “well at least there something right in the world, that the paths of these two loveable and idealistic children have crossed.” Hanna, who is now at Middlebury, is arranging for me to speak there in the Spring.

You have three years to shake up Oberlin and get a peace studies program in places, one that's as well-funded and staffed at the music department. If the administrators give you the brush-off—odds on they will—remember the fundamental of social reform: when the other side doesn't see the light, make 'em feel the heat. Start a sit in in the president's office, then the provost's, and then—now it gets nasty—lie down and block the faculty parking lot.

Peace and a little extra,

Colman McCarthy

P.S. Some sad news. My trusty Raleigh 3-speed, after more than 30,000 miles in weather from 20 below freezing to the scorchers of July and August, has expired. Death came on the operating table at Big Wheel Bikes in Bethesda. It was down to a single gear, which I was holding together with two rubber bands, not far from the Scotch tape which kept the two rear baskets from falling off. The gear gave out when the lad in the store took off the rubber bands and tried to stretch the wire to reach the rear hub. It snapped.

If you know of anyone who a Raleigh—the British-made vintage kind that the Bobbies used to ride with three speeds, not one of those contraptions with 18 gears, I'm in the market.

January 6, 2006

Dear Colman:

Let me introduce myself. My name is Joe Wolfson and I teach mathematics at Phillips Exeter. As it turned out, Ryan Morgan was in my class last term (and a wonderful class it was), so it was with appreciative surprise that I realized he was the one who brought you to campus.

In any case, I wanted to ask you a few questions about some thoughts you offered during Assembly.. Specifically, you talked about homework, tests and grades as being violent toward students. For many years now (15?) I have returned papers without grades and without thinking about them. I came to the conclusion that grades interfered with learning. Unfortunately Exeter demands grades at term's end, so I ask students what grade I should enter for them, and occasionally negotiate, though usually agree with them or raise them a bit higher. I also give tests infrequently, mostly because I think they are, at best, crude instruments and, at worst, invoke fear and other emotions that preclude learning. I haven't given them up altogether, although I do tell students that they are no more than one day's work, weighed no more heavily than any other day in my thoughts about their work. I also give partner tests and group tests: fun activities in that they encourage communication. However, I do see that tests can be used (and I often have to fight against this myself) as a way for the teacher to assert his/her superiority. SO although I'm not sure I'd use the word "violent" to describe tests and grades, I certainly see that their use in general is counterproductive to learning and can be damaging.

Then there's the matter of homework. Now I can see that assignments can be used to punish or to exercise control, but I do not clearly see how my assigning problems 3-10 on page 72 does either of these things (never mind be violent) given the following stipulations which I attach to all assignments:

--these problems will be at the heart of tomorrow's conversations.

--you don't owe it to me or your classmates or yourself to spend more than an hour and fifteen minutes on them.

--we will go over all the problems tomorrow so that any uncertainties can be resolved, whether or not you've found solutions.

I am curious about your thoughts on these issues.

Having spend the years 1972-197 (the pre-Exeter years) in Washington, and having read The Post for my daily news fix, I am familiar with your writing, and being an old lefty myself (or at least the son of an old lefty, who praised the likes of Lenin and Martin Luther King around the house when I was growing up), I typically agree with what you have to say. SO it was good to see you on the Exeter stage, better yet to have invited you and praised by a student who I don't think is naturally inclined to the political left. Do come again.

Joe Wolfson

March 8, 2006

Some loose moments, finally. Thanks for your patience.

It was a special moment to be visiting Exeter, my second time to speak at the school. Too bad we didn't catch up on either visit.

My first question for you would have been on longevity. How have you last so long at the academy, rebelling as you do against grading and testing. I can see you fitting in well at Simon's Rock or some other liberated haven, but Exeter? Maybe they can't find a math teacher to replace you? Maybe you gave a million bucks last year? Or you've been lucky that your students don't snitch to the headmaster that you believe "grades interfere with learning."

We're on the same ball field on this one, although I imagine the risks for you are far greater than mine. At two of the three high schools where I teach, I'm a volunteer. I can't be fired because I haven't been hired. At one school, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, which Time magazine once called the best public high school in America, I give no homework, no tests or exams, and student know coming in that they'll be getting a A at the end of the course. Five principals have come and gone since I started in 1988. None has ever raised a negative eyebrow about this, especially not to demand that I stop flouting the school's academic standards.

This semester I have two classes, one at 7:25 am, the next at 8:20: about 40 students in each, all seniors. On the no testing, no homework and all A's, my head is neither in the sand nor the clouds. I'm aware that some students blow off the course and that others see it as the mother of all gut courses. No so fast, I tell them the first day of class: tis will be the most difficult course you've ever taken. You'll need to make genuine demands on yourself rather than respond to artificial demands from your teacher. Self-made people tend to be self-demanding people.

Scotching homework, tests and grades decreases, as you suggested, fear-based learning and replaces it with desire-based learning. Most students learn quickly, starting even in pre-school, that the teacher has power over them and that pleasing authority is the way to get ahead in both the classroom and beyond. Grade mongering soon sets in. Schools might as well become factories processing students as if they were slabs of cheese going to Velveeta High and onto Mozzarella U and Cheddar grad school. Midway through my talk Assembly, if I recall, I asked if anyone in the hall call raise his or her hand and tell everyone, in totally honesty, "I have never cheated in school." Only a few hands rose, out of 350 students.

Dishonesty becomes a coping school. It's the same at every school where I'm invited to speak. A study was done a few years back on what students talk about when the conversation turns to teachers. More than 75 percent of it is on how a teacher grades: not on what the teacher's politics might be, the availability of the teachers, his or her academic background or classroom skills. It's mostly about power, which is what students link grades with. How does this person, the teacher, have power over me. Quality teachers don't want power over, they want power with. For what? To bring about a more just and peaceful society, which I is why teach and, I imagine, why any

conscientious teacher teaches.

Students who play it safe get to play again. Break ranks and risk being broken. Had I more time in my talk, I would have done my counting cars experiment, the one I did this morning in my Bethesda high school. In an earnest tone of voice, I asked the students to leave the room and go to the parking lot. Stand there for five minutes and count as best they can all the red cars they see and all the green cars. Come back and I'll have two questions for you. Dutifully, even happily, they marched out. Five minutes and they were back. Question one: did anyone think it was stupid? Plenty of yeses on that. Question

Two: if you thought it was stupid, why'd you go count the cars? Few brains cells were needed to figure out the point of the experiment: when power tells you to do something obviously and insultingly stupid, don't do it. When it tells you to believe in wars as the way to create peace, don't count the cars. When it tells you that death row executions help solves the crime problem, don't count the cars.

I understand your feelings about homework, that it can be useful. It probably would be if other teachers weren't also demanding it the same nights. If it were just for one class and for one teacher it might be helpful. But for five or six classes? How can students not see it as anything more than busywork, a chore to push through and not an intellectual exercise to be enjoyed. If teachers do a worthy job in class, student's won't need homework. They engage in home-thinking. Mark Twain had it right: work is what you don when you'd rather be doing something else. It's a magic moment, and I'm sure you have had them, when teachers runs into the parents of a student and the Mom or Dad give the ultimate complement: "we often talk about your class during dinner."

I should tell you that Ryan Morgan was a joy to have in class last summer at Georgetown. He was one of two high school students in the class, the other a girl from Venezuela. The two usually sat together. The class of 18 included a girl from Poland, two recovering alcoholics, a girl from the royal family of Abu Dhabi and the granddaughter of the emir. The topics of the course—it was called "The Literature of Peace"—were new to Ryan, ranging from capital punishment to animal rights, with Gandhi, Tolstoy, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and others kin between. For papers, I asked the students to stay clear of the library: get off campus and explore and issue you never look at before Ryan did that, heading into one of the city parks well away from Georgetown to interview some homeless people and writing about the experience movingly.

Thanks for sending your thoughts.

Kind regards,

Colman McCarthy

November 5, 2009

Dear Mr. McCarthy

I want to begin by saying how much I enjoy your class and admire you as a person, as a teacher, as a pacifist and as an activist. Your class has profoundly affected me. Ever since I began reading the sections you assigned us regarding animal rights, I have promised myself that I am going to be a vegetarian from Sunday, November 1st, on. I have tried several times before to become a vegetarian by gradually not eating meat, but that hasn't worked. I have cut meat out of my diet entirely and will never go back, After class yesterday, not only do I have the intellectual argument supporting my decision but now I have those horrid images from the films*

On a slightly different topic, I have finally come up with a very strong paper concept. It is going to be about a conflict that I have internalized all my life, and though I have made slight mention of it to others, I have never expressed how it has affected me in words. I have already started this paper, which is quite difficult to do, but I keep questioning whether or not I am going to turn it in.

I am not comfortable giving this paper to a professor who, in my opinion, doesn't know my name. If am wrong in this belief, Mr. McCarthy, I am so truly and unbelievably sorry. I feel as though even though I have met with you one-on-one to discuss my paper and even though I haven't missed a single class of yours, you still cannot recognize who I am or at the very least put my name to my face. I have noticed as class has progressed that you continue to learn more and more of the students' names, which I find noble. As of last evening, I feel as if you have learned everyone else's name but mine. I feel this way because when I raise my hand, even when I am the only students whose hand is raised, you never call on me. You also have never randomly called on me to express my opinions to the class, and when you take attendance, calling my name out loud you look around the room several times before you see that my hand is raised to signal you my presence. Yesterday in particular when you asked if anybody had a female dog and I raised my hand, you called on Daniel, the student sitting next to me whose hand was not raised and a bout whose dog, named Tipper, you had already learned.

The only reason this affects me so is that I have never shared the conflict that I am writing about with anyone, not even my parents, and through writing it feel some amount of relief and closure. Despite the relief I feel, I am entirely uncomfortable with sharing this paper with anyone who, first, doesn't have any idea of the kind of person I am, and second, doesn't even know my name.

Once again, if you do in fact remember my name, I am deeply sorry for having sent this letter. I wish I had come to speak to you about this issue yesterday, as I believe that expressing one's grievance by mail is extremely passive and, on some level, pathetic. By writing I do not mean to disrespect you in any way, and if at any point I have done so, I give my most heartfelt and sincerely apology. If by some chance I was right that you don't remember who I am, which is not at all your intention and therefore I would never hold you in contempt if you were to forget, it is simply something that has occurred. I sit at one of the corner seats on the rectangle of desks I the room. I have brown curly hair but I usually wear if straight to class, and I am fairly short.

Thank you so much for your time, patience and understanding.

Most sincerely,

Lauren Oppenheimer

*The animal rights films include “Meet Your Meat,” “From Farm to Fridge” and “To Love or To Kill: Man vs. Animal.”

Dear Lauren:

Largest of thanks for your letter. Please go ahead with the paper you planned. I’m sure it will be memorable. In addition to you, David, Max, Kia, Magnus, Blair, Judson, Charles, Josephine, Shoshanna, Ian, Evan, Luis, Philip, Stephanie, Jamilah, Maria, Kelsey, Isadora, David, Elliott, Owyn, Jeremy, Ian, Elvis, Paul, Christopher, Teckla, Shayne, Jennifer, Susana, Daniel, Leah, Alison, Ivana, Taylor, George, Alexander, Kofi, Julius, Langston, Maya, Catherine, Kelly, Lia, Tyler, Gregory, Jonathan, Cecelia, Khircelle, Evan, Nakissa, Filip, Gregory, Ilyah, Jack, Damon, Carly, Zubaydah, Sarah, James, Patrick, Nazret, Margaret, Miroslava, Gabriela, David, Josephina, William, Travis, Kajal, Scuyler, Grady, Emily, Lauriane, Mason, Emily, Brad, Hanna, Brandon, Peter, Zachary, Lindsay, Derrick, Krista, Megan, Meghan, Sara, Lauren, Nina, Amanda, Yang, Kristina, Eugene, Ashley, Ryo, Ari, William, Trevor, Natalie, Any, Timothy, Zachary, Rachel, Natalie, Amy, Alison, Jenna, Laura, Ian, Sarah, Marie, Eric, Ferda, Rachel, Anna, Ashley, Elizabeth, Francisco, Elizabeth, Kelsey, Shelley, Hosam, Kevin, Samantha, Emily, Chika, Brianna, Erin, Jessica, Valerie, Christopher, Pratik, Scoti, Philip, Rebecca, Andrea, Alicia, Nora, Elizabeth, Rutvij, Daniel, Mark, Rachel, Eric, Samantha, Najeff, Hilary, Ben, Erick, Jeffrey, Destiny, Michele Ann, Michah, Carrie, Kevin, Benjamin, Ryan, Kimberly, Sean, Amanda, Matthew, Tionna, Theresa, Carriane, Alyssa, Lea, Emma, Adeolu, Meghan, Kimberley, Leandra, Georgia, Eli, Billy, Dakota, Nick, Driss, Jing Jing, Riyong, Menquin and Niall are my students this semester in the eight classes I’m teaching at two high schools, three universities and one law school.

Sometimes I slip up and falter when attempting to correctly place 170 names with 170 faces. My apologies to you.

If you need more time with your paper, do take it. Deadlines aren’t sacred. So glad you are back on a cruelty-free diet.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

December 17, 2010

Dear Mr. McCarthy

You are very cool. I am Sophie. I am nine years old and love to write. I am in Roots and Shoots, and one of our activities is an ongoing peace class. We have learned about various people including Mahatma Gandhi, Riane Eisler, Henry David Thoreau, Bruno Husar, Dalai Lama, Thich Naht Hanh and many more. We also learned about you. I like how you teach peace to everyone. Here is a poem that I wrote about you. I hope you like it.

To Reach Peace Is To Live Peace

To teach peace is to live peace

To live peace is to love peace

To love peace is to teach peace.

Round in a circle

The words spin together,

Living and laughing

We all sing together.

To live peace is to love peace

The dove coos from the branch.

To love peace is to teach peace

From the ant upon the sand.

To teach peace is to live peace

They merrily agree

When they finish speaking

They gently come to me.

Peace changes my life

Says the quietly sitting cat.

Peace changes your life

Says the wet and shivering rat.

From our friend McCarthy

Teach peace at an early age.

Says the prisoner

Tis much better than a life trapped in a cage

And their voices blend together

As they read a peaceful page.

Peace is the answer

Cries the brightly blushing tree.

Quoth the vet.

If there was peace I might still have knee.

And their tears run together

As they read of dear Gandhi.

All around the world

Even in your hometown

There are problems to discover.

There are tasks to be found

All over the country

And in your home town

The story of Colman McCarthy's unwound

The tale of peace

And the calling he found.

To teach peace is to live peace

To live peace is to love peace

To love peace is to teach peace

Round in a circle

The words spin together

Living and laughing

We all sing together.

Sophia Ellis-Young

December 22, 2010

Dear Friend Sophie

It isn't often that a handwritten letter comes saying in the opening line that I am "very cool." It's never happened before, whether in the first line of the letter, or the second or third or last line. But here's the astonishment: it's true that I am cool. The current weather in Washington has ranged between 10 and 25 degrees below freezing. Every weekday morning at 6:45 I ride my Raleigh 3-speed bicycle five miles to Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School to teach two Peace Studies classes to 70 students. On arrival I am assuredly cool. After the second class, which ends at 9:10, which is long enough to benefit from if not global warming then at least schoolhouse

warming, I ride to the next school, Wilson High, four miles away. I'm a cool guy again—or as one of my students from the hood puts it, “You a cool cat, bro.”

It isn't often either that a letter arrives from some who is nine, who loves to write, who is in *Roots and Shoots* and who is up on Gandhi, Thoreau and the other north stars that help us navigate to peace. What do you owe it to—winning the birth lottery, lucking out in having a teacher who values peace education?—that you are in a progressive program like *Roots and Shoots*.

You'll be delighted to know that I have a 28 minute film titled “New Shoots For Peace” which I play for all my high school, college and law classes. There's a story behind the film. In the mid-1980s I had a student at American University who was a second semester senior limping to the finish line of graduation. His grades were wretched, borderline flunking out. Three credits behind, and trembling in fear that he wouldn't graduate, he asked after class one day if I could cook up a work-study project that would supply the three credits. I knew the lad was a gifted photographer. His passion was cameras. He would cut classes to go on shoots, which likely explained the three-credit deficit and low grades. I suggested that he make a slide show about peace education: take some pictures, write a script and find some music for the background.

Can you do it?, I asked. Give me two weeks, he announced, clasping my hand like a drowning man about to sink. Before bounding off, he asked about the music. Get some folk songs from the 1960s, I said: Baez, Seeger, Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary. “Do you know about the 60s,” I asked. “Sure,” he replied. “We've been studying it in my ancient history class, it's right between the Pleistocene and Neanderthal era.” Smart boy.

The film came back: stunning pictures, striking scene, quotes from Dorothy Day, Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, Jeannette Rankin, Maria Montessori, a workable script that needed only a second or third draft for polishing. For songs: Joan Baez opening with

“Where Have All the Flowers Gone” and “Forever Young” for the closing. In between was “Shenandoah” and Eric Bogel's anti-war song, “The Green Fields of France.”

I've shown it hundreds of times, before audiences from Cyprus to Seattle. Three years ago, one of my former teaching assistants, Katherine Hessler and her husband John, converted the slide show to a DVD which I can send you sometime if you'd like.

So what happened to the boy who made the film? I gave him three credits—he deserved 30—and he did graduate, much to the relief of his parents. The last I heard, he left the East for the West Coast and the mandatory mid-20s San Francisco phase. He settled down, went to graduate school and is now a philosophy professor.

I loved your poem. My wife, Mavourneen, did too—reading it aloud when the mail came yesterday, right after we played Scrabble. She had two seven letter words and her score was 542. I was way behind, not even above 400.

You must tell me when and where you discovered that you had a gift for language. All writers carry the memory of that time and place within themselves, the moment that brightened like a double rainbow in the sky of opportunity.

I'd also like to know about your teacher who runs Roots and Shoots. A story is there. I'm sure you can tell it well.

If you ever come to Washington with your parents or teachers, please come to my classes. Don't travel right now. It's freezing. Or maybe you'd like to come, if you want be "very cool."

All the best and be the best of all—

Colman McCarthy

January 5, 2011

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

You are cooler than I thought. Wow! You might say that I am cool, too, because I ride my bike everyday except Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I think you might be interested to know that I am having one of my stories published in a magazine!! Here is a copy of it.

Your book is great. A++. May I please have a copy of "New Shoots For Peace"? I would like to share it with the other Roots and Shoots kids. My R&S teacher, Miss Julie, is very interesting, although I do not know her story. I will ask her, though, and write to ou about her soon. I am taking a peace class with her called "Great Peacemakers." When we read about you, we made a book about teaching peace. You are amazing! You are great! You are A+. You are wonderful!

Sophie Ellis-Young

P.S. Thank you for your book.

P.P.S. All I know is that I was talking in paragraphs when I was two.

February 26, 2012

Dear Friend Sophie:

If I'm so amazing, great, A+ and wonderful, how come I'm a year late in answering your letter. Instead of amazing, let's try lazy. Instead of great, let's try graceless. Instead of A+, how about an F? Instead of wonderful, woebegone.

Please accept my apologies for taking so long. At the same time, please accept my praise and gratitude for sending your story, "A Fair Day." I love it. What a clever title, followed by the narrative of your day at the New Mexico State Fair and your showing of Dooley, your alpaca. Congratulations on placing third, not at all bad for your first time at the fair.

For me, you earn first place for pushing ahead and getting your story published. I treasure the booklet you made of it, complete with 34 color photographs. You can be sure that I have been

showing it to my peace classes when we take up animal rights and human wrongs.

Now that you are a published writer, what's next? Easy question: get published again. Bringing that about is the trick. I taught a writing course a few years ago, and offered the class 10 suggestions for improvement. As a teacher, I can no more define quality writing than a horse can define a beautiful meadow. I can sense it, and like the horse before the grassland, I want to bound through a piece of fine writing for the exhilaration it promises. Scrubland we both avoid.

Write in a location safe from noise and interruption.

Begin with a definite goal of how long your writing period will last. If five minutes, fine. If five hours, fine. Just know. Then regularize. Gandhi, who wrote more than 10 million words in his life, put down at least 500 words a day for 50 years. He regularized.

Learn new words. Have a vocabulary program. Add a new word a day, a week, a month, whatever. Keep adding, that's all. Master the one and two-syllable words. Five and six-syllable Latin-Greek derivatives are for showoffs. Study idioms, metaphors and similes, which are the rainbows coloring the prose landscape.

Spray disinfectants on clichés, bromides, Eliminates weak words: very, nice, quite, rather, presently, brilliant. Go over each story word by word and cut each that doesn't work. Otherwise readers are narcotized.

Never begin a piece of writing with "the." Writers who do so are yawning in print, at you.

If you are not in the mood to write, write anyway. Writing is often more sweat than sweetness, more fidelity than feelings. If you need to be in the mood to write, the only topic you'll ever master is moods.

When not writing, don't bore people by quoting yourself. Don't boast or preen, even covertly, about where you've just been published. And don't quiz friends on whether they have (a) read your latest literary effort, (b) caught its "full meaning," (c) taped it on the refrigerator door.

Comfort other writers. Read their latest effort, strive to catch its "full meaning," and make room among the recipes and kids drawings on the refrigerator door.

Spend as much time reading and writing but read only writers who heed Samuel Johnson's edict: "What is written without effort is read without pleasure."

Be a fanatical reviser. When I was visiting the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, I asked Paul Engle, the director, for his definition of good writing: "Writing is rewriting what you have rewritten." Never trust a first draft. Never be satisfied with a second. Never think that a third is your best. Tolstoy wrote seven drafts of "War and Peace." Ernest Hemingway once spent all morning putting in a coma and all afternoon taking it out.

Maybe you have your own rules for writing. If so, send them along.

Here is a copy of my newest book, "Peace Is Possible." I wish it could have been titled "Peace Is Probable," but we'll have to wait for that one.

My best wishes to your mother and father and, of course, to Dooley.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

October 29, 2005

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

Hello from Disney World and the Sunshine State. I am in Orlando, Florida for the Walt Disney College Program for five months. I am cast member working in Animal Kingdom. Basically, Animal Kingdom is a zoo in disguise. Guests see animals in their "natural habitats" during the day. When the park is closes, they are enclosed in pens and cages. I was working in attractions in the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail. It is a self-guided trail that takes you through the forest and savannah. You see different animals like the gorillas, hippos, meerkats, monkeys and naked mole-rats.

I discussed with my manager that working so closely with the enclosed animals made me uncomfortable because I don't feel that it is ethically correct. He told me that he completely understood and he wanted me to give the job two more weeks to see if it would grow on me.

After two weeks I felt the same. I told him how I was feeling and he thought it would be beneficial for me to meet with Jackie Ogden, the head of animal programs. I enjoyed meeting with her and I learned that when the park first opened the animal rights groups were extremely against it. Therefore, she was well aware that people don't ethically agree with Animal Kingdom. However after our meeting my thoughts were still the same. I felt like I was in a pickle. The managers were so busy that I was the last of their priorities. My Mom made the point that the people came to the parks because it is likely they won't have an opportunity to go to Africa and see them in the wild. She had a good point. I decided to give my manager a try one more time.

I had done everything he had asked and at this point I was dreading coming to work everyday and my program was half over. Last week I finally heard good news. There was an opening in the Dino Land part of the park. Phew! What a relief. I was about to give up hope. I had my first day of training yesterday. I think I am going to be a lot more content

In Dino Land.

Last week I applied to American University. The essay that I wrote for my application was about experience in Peace Studies and how it (and you) changed me as a person. Hopefully they will like it and I will be able to take your courses at AU as well.

I completely understand how busy you are, but if you could recommend me to admissions, I think it would help me a great deal. Thank you so much for everything.

Hallie Anoff

December 27, 2005

Dear Hallie:

Glad—heartened really--that you took so principled a stand at Animal Kingdom. It was a growth moment for you. All kinds of justifications can be made for how humans mistreat animals but it always comes down to the Golden Rule questions: would I want to be treated that way? You wouldn't want to be confined to Animal Kingdom, I wouldn't, the Disney board of directors wouldn't, the shareholders wouldn't and the trapped animals, if they could speak, wouldn't want to either.

But because humans are the dominating species—so we think—we keep eating, hunting, riding, testing and imprisoning animals. Almost always it's for money.

You must have been listening well all those classes at B-CC when we were debating and discussing animals rights and human wrongs—and then deciding for yourself where you stand.

Let me know about American University. You will fit right in. It's an activist campus, with a strong community service program, a student-centered faculty, a growing Peace Studies department and students going off in spring break to places like Burma, Cuba, Dubai and Vietnam.

At B-CC our weekly Friday morning anti-war protests continue. A few teachers, though, have been whining about the noise from horn-blowers as they drive by responding to our "Honk for Peace" signs. The tattler has taken up the cause: horn blowing being protected speech under the First Amendment. No doubt, some of the whining teachers—the noise disrupts classroom serenity, they claim—are at the blackboard in a government class explaining the glories of the Bill of Rights, while we're outside on the pavement practicing them. The whole school should be there, not just the Peace Studies classes.

I read your letter with much joy. My best wishes to your parents.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

March 10, 2006

Dear Colman:

I'm an English teacher at Niles West High School in Skokie, a suburb just north of Chicago. I'm writing to let you know that our district, some miraculously, approved a peace studies course. Here is the full story.

I have had a lifelong interest in peace studies and peace education, most likely due to my father who is a World War II veteran and retired English professor. He is a lifelong liberal in the

Howard Zinn and Jonathan Kozol mold. To what my father gave me, I added an interest in liberation theology (I am Roman Catholic) and Buddhism.

From that, I was driven to learn about human rights violations in Central America and elsewhere. Buddhism has taught me to focus on inner peace. In Chicago I have had the privilege of knowing Kathy Kelly of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and I have brought her to my school several times. For years I was the faculty moderator of a student peace group, which has become a student chapter of Amnesty International.

Due to your book, "I'd Rather Teach Peace," I had the idea of starting a peace course in our district. I ordered your two collections of peace essays several years ago. You wrote back an encouraging letter.

It takes a long time to get a course started here, with many institutional hoops to jump through. Two other teachers and I put a proposal together which at first was rejected. It was too "social studies" oriented. We are all, incidentally, English teachers. Our second proposal, titled "The Literature of Peace," was accepted by the school board. This was the miraculous part. Because the course is part of the English curriculum, we will be teaching more literature—poetry, short stories, drama—than you would in yours.

We begin teaching the course this Fall. With two high schools in our district, we will

have one course in each. I would love to keep in touch with you as we go through this process. The three of us are new at this and we want to do the best we can to make sure the courses become popular and continue. I would love to see it blossom into a school-wide peace studies program involving our entire curriculum. We are at the first step.

In closing, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your work, because your writing inspired me to get this course going.

March 15, 2006

Until I check the AAU indoor record book for the fastest time anyone has created a peace studies course, I'm guessing you are close to medaling. It's usually years and years between a proposal and the day students walk into class. I needed seven years to win approval of my book "Solutions to Violence" for use in Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

Not to get carried away with anything grandiose, but in a rational world schools would be putting peace courses into classes at all levels. Yet here we are in the U.S. where only a few of the nation's 78,000 elementary schools, 31,000 high schools and 4,000 colleges and universities offer courses in alternatives to violence.

You've done well in Skokie. But watch out. The trouble with a good idea is that it soon degenerates into hard work. Enjoy your degeneracy.

Colman McCarthy

July 7, 2004

Dear Colman:

I don't know if you remember me so I'll start with an introduction. My name is Beth Blacklow and I took your Peace Studies class at B-CC six years ago. It was you who first put I my head the idea of volunteering for the Peace Corps.

That's exactly what I did after graduating from Barnard College. I've been living in Ecuador for two years and I'll be returning home in a month. Although the first months

In my town here were some of the most difficult, lonely and depressed points in my life, the following year and a half has more than made up for that. I'm working in the health program promoting basic hygiene nutrition, family planning, alcohol awareness and other subjects. I've made some close friends in my town and always have a group of children playing in my house. I feel I've been able to help the community or some individuals with small changes. I still want to be a teacher and I'm now considering bilingual education so I can put my Spanish to use and I can work with immigrants.

This letter is to thank you for the time you put into my high school peace studies class. Your own dedication has inspired me to change my life and still affects me. I've been a vegetarian for six years. You may not hear from your past students frequently but you are one of the great teachers we never forget.

Thanks again,

August 2, 2004

Much praise to you for digging in and persevering through the rough early months.

We never know what our principles are until they are tested. You passed the test.

Of course I remember you. Although it was a large class, I had no trouble sensing that you had a caring heart and gentle spirit—the gifts that brought you to the Peace Corps and ones you shared with the local people. I've been close to the Peace Corps all these years, coming to Washington to work for Sargent Shriver, the first director. Every year at B-CC I push the program, half-hoping that maybe a few will remember it during their college years and join after graduation. I was moved to receive your letter. Assuredly it will encourage me to keep promoting the Peace Corps. That's where you come in. Please come speak to my classes this Fall when you return to Bethesda. Indeed, you are legally required. The third section of the 1961 legislation creating the Peace Corps states that returning volunteers must educate Americans about the people they served.

You may remember Claire Moody, a year ahead of you at B-CC. She spoke to my classes in April, spiritedly telling of her Peace Corps work in Benin, West Africa. The liveliness of her stories reminded me of Sargent Shriver's belief of how volunteers are affected by the land in which they serve. Those who went to Asian countries return as mystics. Those sent to Africa come home singing and dancing. Those from Latin America become revolutionaries.

So read up on liberation theology, Paulo Freire, Dom Helder Camara and Oscar Romero and keep the revolution blazing.

Many blessings to you, not that you are running short.

May 11, 2007

Dear Professor McCarthy:

My name is Casey and I was in your Principles and Practices of Peace class this past semester. I was just writing to ask about my grade. I was quite shocked and slightly offended that I received a B+. I came to every class, read every assignment, helped with videos, joined discussions where I could, and even gave up a crucial part of my former diet for this class. I am still not eating meat. For a class that I have learned so much from, I did not expect a B+. Also, I was not aware that the grade for my second paper would be put down so low. We were never made aware of that lateness policy. I know you don't think I should be worrying about my grades but until my parents put B's on the same level as A's, I will be. Thank you very much for your time and for an extremely rewarding semester.

May 12, 2007

Dear Casey:

Thanks for your inquiry. It isn't often that students tell me that they are "quite shocked and slightly offended" about a B+, especially when I am told—by friends and critics—that I am an overly generous grader. If I were as strict as many other professors routinely are when it comes to grading essays—and which I could be because I am a writer by trade—C's, and rarely A's and only a few B's—would be given.

Your B+ was generous. The first paper was an A-. The second was a B. It was a late paper, which means it would have been an A if turned in on time. You say that "we were never made aware of that lateness policy." Check the syllabus, where it says: "grade deduction for late papers." You said you couldn't find your syllabus, a problem I don't know how to solve. Some professors won't accept late papers. In our class, about 10 students were late for the second paper. I accepted them all. On the exam, your grade was a B-, the result of four incorrect answers. Put together, the A-, B and B- comes to a B. I raised it to a B+. And now you are shocked and offended.

Grading students is the worst part of teaching. Worrying about grades is what's worst for students. Everyone is demeaned. Parents get caught up in it as well. I prefer a pass/fail system which I how I teach one of my classes at the University of Maryland, but at American few students would opt for pass/fail courses. At one of my high schools, there is no homework, no exams and another teacher assigns grades. That's about as pure as it gets. Universities are nowhere near that. Too often, artificial learning prevails.

I care deeply about my students, especially someone like you who took the class seriously, was appreciative of the material and discussions, and took to heart—and to the dinner table—some of

the idea in the readings. I'm enormously grateful for your thoughtful and kind comments in the evaluations, and I think you know how delighted I was to have you in class. I wish it had been smaller so I could have gotten to know you and your thinking a bit better.

If it would help matters at home, I'd be glad to write a letter to your parents—to tell them what an exemplary student you are.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

August 4, 2008

Dear Professor McCarthy

I cannot emphasize how much meeting you has impacted my Washington DC experience but also my life. You taught me so much and I will never forget your class. You are really living your passion. It shows every day.

Sociology is my passion and yet none of my professors answer the problems we face as a society. So many times I have felt overwhelmed by the social inequality we face. You gave me hope. You gave me a tool to make change. The most important thing you have taught me is the power of individual choice. Now I feel like I have millions of choices to make every day. Second, you taught me about animal violence. I no longer eat meat. Third, I believe you changed my career path and educational aspirations. Now I want to be a peacemaker. I believe this has been a calling. I hope we keep in touch and I would love to have you speak at Hiram College.

Sara Thomas

September 28, 2008

I think you know how much I enjoyed having you in class, and your diligence in carrying out your official duties as Chief Digression stopper. Add that to your resume when sending in the grad school applications!

These are a few thoughts stirred by the questions you raised in your parting letter and essay, both of which touched me deeply for the innocence and honesty.

Of all those who enjoy peace of mind, it would be assumed that peacemakers come by it automatically as part of the package. They have peace of mind because they have minds for peace.

If only that were true. Consider some of the great. Gandhi of India was a domineering husband and a vindictive father. His oldest son, embittered that his father paid large attention to the masses and almost none to him, took to dissolution. He became a prostitute and an alcoholic. Gandhi all but disowned him. Tolstoy was emotionally cruel to his wife, as was Martin Luther King, Jr. Albert Einstein, who wrote lyrically about nonviolence—"I would teach peace rather than war, love rather than hate"—was coldhearted to both of his wives. In their personal

relationships, these acclaimed visionaries had minds more in turmoil than at peace.

Based on several decades of observations and interviews, culling for truth in sites ranging from hospital burn wards where nurses and doctors were saving lives to death row cell blocks where wardens and guards were paid to take lives, I've met peacemakers who assuredly had achieved peace of mind. They traveled one of four paths.

--Harmony between mind, body and spirit. With lifestyles that low on exercise and diets high on food that come out of factories and not out of the ground—refined starches, processed meat, sugars, fried foods, fat and alcohol—bodies become war zones with organs, bones and cells the casualties: inflamed, pained or diseased. Peace of mind

can co-exist with illnesses but it is less likely when the illnesses are self-caused.

A model for harmony is Paul Shapiro. An investigator for the Human Society of the United States, he earned a Peace Studies degree from George Washington University. I had Paul in one of my high school classes and later in college. He became a vegan, founded his own on-profit—Compassion Over Killing—and has stayed firm in his belief that human rights and animal rights are equivalent. In “Strength Through Peace,” he wrote: “The only morally relevant characteristic that is need to warrant the granting of rights is the capacity to feel pain and suffering.”

----Hitting bottom doesn't mean bottoming out. Who hasn't been bruised by life? Who hasn't been stuffed into a crawl space? Who hasn't fallen while racing—or diving, jumping or lifting—for the gold medals? Those who have sunk to the depths and slowly climbed up—call them lazarists, comeback kids, odds-defiers—find peace of mind a measure beyond description. They let go of competition and move toward cooperation, starting with cooperating with their own gifts.

March 6, 2012

Dear Professor:

Hello, it's Sam Roberts from our Wednesday Peace and Social Justice class. I spoke to you last week about losing my book and asking if I could borrow one from you for the rest of the semester. I am writing you now at a very late hour, both literally and in the context of my message because I have some questions and am also looking for your input.

Not to make any excuses but just to give a little information from my perspective, I am a senior this year hopefully graduating in May. To do so I am having to take 19 credits this semester (six classes) and all but one of hem block SIS classes. I severely underestimated the difficulty of this and have been really struggling just to keep up with all my classes and just the volume of their assigned readings and workloads. For some reason, even though it says March 7th on the syllabus [for the first paper due date] I thought this was the end of the semester final paper and as a result I was not prepared for it.

I realize this is late to be bringing all this up, but all this week I have at least one paper or exam (sometimes both) on every day. Last week was more of the usual, trying to keep up and do all the readings for all my classes. Please do not think that I do not consider your class when I say that your class is very light on the readings and a joy to relax and have discussion-based lectures in class.

As it stands, it's the truth. I have to accept it and was not able to prepare a paper. This saddens me because when {the syllabus} suggested kind the papers we might want to write* you gave many interesting and cool ideas on what previous students had written and now I simply do not have the time to conduct the type of experiments with my own life that some of your past students did. I have to admit that I am very bad when it comes to open-ended papers like this, and the idea of no sources and just writing about ourselves is definitely a first for me and I am quite nervous. Perhaps this is because, as you said in class, we are taught time and time again to crank out the standard research paper with sources and such that now I am terrible at choosing my own topics when I am given complete freedom to write something.

I'm not trying to make an excuse . I just want to touch base with you and I am trying to write my paper about my personal life and the effects/experience of violence in it. I am truly not a slacker or not taking the class seriously, but I am really struggling right now and since its gotten so late [1:50 am] I felt like I don't really have many options and since I'm pretty bad at this type of paper I would go with something that's a large part of my life. I will be honest with you and say that I want to try to write my paper about my parents and their divorce, which was a pretty intense and emotional experience for me. It was a violent experience and I think it has definitely affected and shaped the type of person I've grown to be.

I know the paper only has to be 1,000 words or more but as I said I'm pretty nervous about this kind of paper because I am not good at them and I'm not sure if this topic is "creative" enough and that I can produce something of great quality. Also I was hoping to write some of this in a very unconventional sense almost as if in a visual narrative way like a story bring told. I will of course include a more "standard" essay in which I explain and discuss the effects on me to this day but I was not sure if my first idea would be OK with you? Because I'm not confident in this type of paper I don't know what's OK and what you're expecting. I know you said you want a paper that's "unique" and "unconventional, but I just want to check. It's a pretty personal topic for me so I want to be sure everything is OK before I actually put it all out there.

I apologize for the length and repetitiveness of this. I know it is a huge mouthful all at once but I wanted to touch base with you. Regardless, I appreciate your time and any response. I will try my best for this paper and hopefully it all works out. Thank you very much.

March 7, 2012

No need to be nervous, especially if it comes from wondering whether your proposed paper meets my expectation. It will if you can rise to the occasion and move away from the conventional research paper based on scouring books, the internet, archives. Instead research your own life. I'm aware that students may see this kind of paper as a mountain to steep to scale,

having been trained by too many high school teachers and college professors to remain safely below in the flatlands of ordinary prose girded with footnotes and end notes. Of course you are “terrible at choosing my own topics when I am given complete freedom to write something.” It doesn’t say much for American education when you are nearing the finish line—16 years of inching to it, eight in elementary and middle school, four in high school and four in college—and only now you are being offered the chance to be freed up and write from your heart and emotions.

As I mention in the opening class of the semester, when suggesting possible paper topics, I suffer from a serious and often life-threatening illness: MEGO, My Eyes Glaze Over. It infects me when I read conventional college papers. If after reading a half-dozen and I leave the house for an errand, my glazed eyes put me at risk of falling off bridges, walking into high-speed traffic, tumbling down stairs. So far, I’ve survived all the close calls, luckily so because my health insurance doesn’t cover MEGO injuries. The cure is MEOW: My Eyes Open Wide. These are papers that shine with self-reflection, often fearless with probings into the inner life.

I’m expecting a MEOW paper from you. Do indeed write about what you call the “violent experience” of your parent’s divorce. Try to see the writing of it as a growth opportunity, not merely pounding out words to fulfill a course requirement. And please, no footnotes.

Colman McCarthy

July 25, 2005

Dear Professor:

I’m writing to you because I have a question about class tomorrow night. Some Washington Center students have been invited to attend a speech made by the White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card on Monday. I want to attend this but it starts at 6 p.m. Monday night and that interferes with class. I don’t want to miss class either so I’m kind of in a bind and I was wondering what you think I should do. I won’t attend this event unless I get your okay. Let me know what you think if you get a chance.

July 25, 2005

Dear Meredith:

If you want to subject yourself to a governmental functionary working for a president who believes that violence is necessary and moral—the invasion of Iraq, executing people on death row, weakening environmental regulations—and who is likely to give a canned speech with a high boredom quotient, then go hear Andrew Card. I’d bet that halfway through his gab, you’ll ask yourself, “why am I wasting my time here.” Call me

on your cell phone and I’ll tell you: because you’re an impressionable college student not yet knowing enough to resist the lures of getting close to Washington Big-Shotdom..

I'm hoping you are not impressionable, though this is one of a thousand hopes I have for my college students.

Can't guarantee but I expect tomorrow's class will be worth your time: male-female relations and the interplay of violence and nonviolence. Plus a documentary about women who freed themselves from violent husbands. I'm expecting a lively discussion, to which you could add a lot.

I think you know how much I've enjoyed having in class. You take the course seriously, and I'm always delighted when you speak—last week being no exception, on the abortion issue.

Kind regards,

Colman McCarthy

July 26, 2005

Dear Professor:

I'm coming to class. You reminded me of exactly what I don't want to subject myself to. Your class has changed me and thank you for your insight and suggestions. I just wish that all the students that made me feel as I was missing out if I skipped Card's speech could take you class I enjoy it so much and I'm interested to see how the males in the class react/contribute to the discussion tonight. See you at 5:30.

July 26, 2005

Dear Meredith:

So glad you came to class. See what an impact you had: inducing one of your classmates to write a paper about your questions to her. You helped make it one of our best classes this summer.

Colman McCarthy

November 10, 2008

Dear Colman:

I've been thinking lot about you lately, especially with all my new classes. I am really happy in Colorado for the most part. It is simply spectacular here and I am trying to get in as much skiing as possible. I feel privileged to be in such a beautiful and interesting place.

I think often about everything I learned in your class. Today in my philosophy and society class we discussed our government and my teacher posed a few different philosophical questions. What is just? Hat is a just government? Who should support the poor? I felt frustration because I feel that all of my supposed answers could so easily be argued down. Oh well. What really got me thinking about you was when my teacher asked how many of us voted. She proceeded to imply that those who didn't vote gave away their power and wasted that opportunity. I wanted to tell her that some people don't vote, not because the are lazy or don't care but because they don't

want to just “choose the lesser of two evils.” But then by not voting, are we not choosing an even worse evil, compliance? I am not sure. I voted this year but I wasn’t initially planning on it. I eventually gave in and voted because I guess I thought maybe my vote could change things and I should not throw away the opportunity.

Did you vote, if you don’t mind me asking. I don’t think you did because you don’t believe in voting. I remember this distinctly because I was at first outraged when you said this in class and then after hearing you support your beliefs, my views changed 180 degrees.

I find myself very confused at school. And very confused often. I suppose this is good. It means I am not too stubborn in my views and I am thinking. But it is also exhausting, never really knowing where I stand because there are so many different points of view and so many conflicting arguments for every conceivable topic.

Anyway, I won’t write any more because I know how many emails you get daily and how many you respond to. I really miss your class think about all that I learned. I loved your class. I wish you would come to Boulder and speak. I think you would be a hit.

Olivia Katz (I hope you remember me?)

Dear Olivia:

You hope I remember you? First off, save your hope and use it elsewhere. I can’t see ever not remembering you, and for all the reasons that you well know. You came to my 8 p.m. college class at American University after being in your high school classes all day. You came not to get credits but because you had an open mind. You came out of pure desire. And, after all that, you fit in as if this was the most natural place for you to be. It was, especially the evening that you spoke up and gently suggested to one of your classmates—a second semester senior, no less—that she rethink her views on the death penalty.

You’ll always be remember, too, for that that supportive letter-to-the-editor you wrote to The Post—returning some needed fire when I was taking a hit*

Your professor who urged her students to vote is keeping alive the illusion that voting can improve things. You have to wonder, then, when is all this betterment going to happen? Two days ago, the Bush administration proposed a military budget over \$700 budget—a 60% increase when from 2001 when he was elected by Supreme Court, 5 to 4. I’ve seen no evidence that voting that has done much to help the 40,000 people around the world who die everyday from hunger lack of preventive medicines. I’ve seen no evidence that voting makes the voter a kinder person or improves the character of the elected.

Those are the minor reasons I don’t vote. The major one is constitutional. Every president, vice-president and member of Congress is sworn into office to uphold, defend and protect the constitution,. A noble and stirring though, except that the constitution sanctions violence: Article one Section Eight empowers Congress to raise money for the military. Article -----says the president is the command-in-chief of the military. The constitution calls for the elected to solve

conflicts with violence. And the elected—every president since Commander-in-Chief George Washington, every Congress since the first one in Philadelphia—have been reaching for the gun and the bomb.

I wish I could vote. I've heard it gives a tingle to the heart when the levers are pulled. People who vote are placing their faith in politicians who believe in violent solutions to conflicts. As a pacifist, it's only in political elections that I decline to vote. I vote everyday to get up at 6 a.m. to teach my high school classes, I vote everyday to buy healthy and cruelty-free food. I vote everyday to commute by bicycle. I vote everyday to spend time with my family. I vote everyday to buy products that do no harm to the environment. To my mind, that's true voting power—occurring everyday that has nothing to do with electoral politics that involves passively pulling a lever once every four years.

I know that my non-voting views put me in the same holding pen reserved to heretics and eccentrics, but the heresy and eccentricity we should be wary of is the belief that no alternatives to violence exist. It's also a matter of conscience. Every member of Congress, even those of the redoubtable Left, still believe in having a military. Pacifists reject that, even while knowing that large members of Congress are idealistic and altruistic. One of my former students, Jim McGovern, is certainly one of those. I think of members like Barbara Lee of Oakland, California, who was the only member to vote against the invasion of Afghanistan on September 14, 2001. Or good Jeanette Rankin who voted against both world wars and uttered the pure line, "you can no more win a war than win an earthquake."

Don't be timid about speaking up in class. Do the opposite and speak as much as you can. Professors like it, at least the spirited ones. My favorite student last year was Jacob Cohen, a senior at Bethesda-Chevy Chase. Every class, he'd have his hand up—questioning, commenting, disagreeing, wondering, telling stories. He's often skip his second period class to walk me to the parking lot and my bicycle, and we'd stay there for another hour talking.

No need to worry about where you stand on the issues. That's what college should be about: four or five years of shopping for ideas and ideals that help us make a difference by being different. And testing ourselves to do it.

This past semester I had a boy in one of my high school classes locked into self-testing. I asked the students to write a paper answering the most basic questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I get there? If I get there, what do I do?

The boy reached deep into himself. He wrote: "I am 16 and a junior in high school. Right now my mind is in a world of confusion. It is almost as if I have a devil and an angel on my shoulders but the devil seems to be more persuasive these days. My grades are poor, my attention deficit disorder is at its highest peak, and I struggle to make good choices about grades, drug and alcohol.

"The amount of stress I endure every single day is unhealthy and overwhelming. I turn to nicotine to relieve my stress but all it really does is hurt me more. If I could just get my head on

track, maybe, just maybe, I will be able to meet my parent's standard. Some days I just sit around all day, thinking how much better life is without work. And then reality strikes.

"At the beginning of every semester I tell myself you can do it, this is your time, but it never happens. I honestly believe I am mentally ill. I have the right intentions but I cannot get anything done.. My priorities are all out of whack, and I am hanging on for dear life as I ride the rollercoaster of life. I have the work ethic and attention span of a goldfish.

" My relationship with God is probably my most confusing. I have always gone to church almost every Sunday since I was little. Yet I find it hard to get in touch with God....I try hard to talk to God but I never feel his presence around me. I'm still waiting for that sign, that feeling when you know the Lord is watching over you. In my current situation I sure could use God's advice.

"Lately I haven't been to church that often, and when I do go, I don't really pay attention. I look around at my fellow parishioners and envy every last one of them. There could be an ugly, blind, deaf and autistic person, and I would envy them, just because they are one with the Holy Spirit. All I want is to be a person of faith, and right now I am lost in the world of Christianity.

"Even though I do a lot of lying around and doing nothing, I have never really thought too hard about what I want to be when I grow up. Partly because I need to get into college before I will be able to do the things I want to do. Hopefully I will mature enough in college so I will actually do some work, I intend on graduating from a four year university, and then see what happens after that. This may sound strange and kind of random but I am really interested in movies, the person who picks out the songs for different scenes. I don't know why but that job seems so awesome.

"Some other field I am thinking about pursuing are real estate and architecture. Buildings and homes are so intriguing to me. I love watching the home and garden channel on TV. Being an architect would be amazing, but then again I don't really think I have the artistic ability to do well in that job. When I was little I always designed my fantasy house with little trap doors and cool staircases. I will hopefully choose a job that I love and that I feel called to, but money is also a factor. My family is upper middle class, and I want the same for my children. I want them never to go hungry.

" Hopefully when I grow old I will be able to relax and ride my bike a round town. I will play four games of golf every week, and sit and relax in my cozy Outer Banks cottage. At that point I will realize why we work so hard in life. We live life so we can get old, and ride our bicycles around town, like Mr. Colman McCarthy."

Not many high school papers like that come in. I read it several times, wondering whether this was another Holden Caulfield given over to excessive introspection or a cry from the heart for help. Four of my students in recent years have committed suicide, including a girls last year at Georgetown Law and a boy at B-CC who had been voted king for the homecoming dance. So when a student says he thinks he is mentally ill or is "hanging on for dear life," I take notice. I phoned his father and let him know about the paper. The father, who is well known in the community for his good works, said tht he and his wife were doing all they could to offer

emotional support for their child but were not sure if it were best to give the boy some space and distance or hover over him more closely.

So glad you like Boulder and the university. I haven't spoken there but was at Colorado College and Colorado State.. I'm off to Oberlin next week, where students are pushing for a peace studies degree program, and school in Missouri, Indiana and Ohio after that. If I remember, the University of Colorado has a peace studies major, though I'm not sure how well-funded it is or how many students enroll.

Do a favor for someone today. Tell someone you love them. And if you find anyone, look a little harder. I'm sure you are doing that all the time anyway. Otherwise you wouldn't be the special person you are.

January 17, 2010

Dear Colman:

This is not a letter that I anticipated having to write. I actually had the audacity to believe that [Virginia Governor] Tim Kaine would do the right thing, and envisioned a different outcome. By now you will have heard that Kaine—to the disappointment and dismay of many, including his chief counsel, Mark Rubin—slid out the door without taking any action*. He simply left our petition for the next governor to deal with.

I received the news from [my lawyer] Steve Northrup on January 14 at 2:30 pm on the phone. The signs were so good that all was well that Tony Gray was in Brittol with plans to come pick me up.

Don't know what next moves, if any, will be made at this point. I expect that the lawyers will get back with me soon. I hope....This really knocked the wind out of me. I'm still reeling. Haven't slept, eaten or spoken, or left my cell since I received the call. I don't know how or, if, I'll bounce back. Don't know if I can muster the strength, will, courage, or discipline to do so. More frightening at this point is that I'm not sure that I even care to. It is truly madness. I'm alive but I don't have a clue as to where I stand in life, or any idea what life expects of me.

In truth/reality, injustice/evil cannot be redeemed. In a profound sense, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, we are all—each one of us—responsible for the injustice in our world. Nonetheless, each one of us, without exception, is essentially a worthy being with a capacity for heroic action. Due to that, even though injustice can't be redeemed, we human beings can be. We may not be able to overthrow the injustice/evil but each one of us can—must—refuse to cooperate with it. We must rebel against it, shout “no” to it.

....Time Kaine was confronted with a real injustice. He supported my cause in the late 1980s, and cheered the sparing of my life and recommendation for a new trial of my case by former Governor Doug Wilder in 1991. He cannot claim ignorance. He cannot claim that he did not possess the power to alleviate it. Nor can he claim that the injustice was not, is not—in fact and reality—a true injustice. For reasons that only he knows he simply passed on doing the right

thing.

That failure of heart lies with him, and not with us. That is sad. And in doing so, Kaine, by his inaction, only compounds the injustice. For no legitimate reason or purpose, he has left me consigned to a completely totalitarian environment. An environment that he full well knows to be actively and progressively dehumanizing, an environment populated with broken, dysfunctional, mostly underdeveloped amoral souls (prisoners and guards alike) who are essentially left to fend for themselves; an environment that incubates, stimulates, breeds and distills mental dysfunction, amorality, immorality, dehumanization and predatory behavior.; an environment that is measurably and verifiably detrimental to all of us (inside and outside); an environment that is self-defeating and self-destructive; an environment tat is without redeeming value and one that only perpetuates the cycle of dehumanization and victimization. It's an environment

that boasts of superficial orderliness but, in reality. It's nothing more than rationalized insanity.

It is an environment that I openly oppose and am at direct odds with; and it gives me no quarter. My rebellion against the negative status quo, my refusal to go along with the negative flow, my refusal to turn a blind eye to the injustice I see around me, my insistence on recognizing the innate humanity, dignity and subjective worthiness in all who surround me puts me at odds with the majority (though not all) I am confined with: and that places a target on my back. It makes my existence extremely complicated, often insane, and always dangerous. It surrounds me, constantly, mentally, spiritually and sometimes physically. It often leaves me feeling helpless, hopeless, alone, isolated and lost. The sum of it all that is constant and unremitting.

That is what Tim Kaine's inaction—his failure of heart—has wrought. Right now it is taking every ounce of energy, will and discipline I can muster to keep from among apart at the seams. Right now, all is darkness and madness for me. The constant urge for me is not simply to go on living but to grow, develop, to work out the meaning and purpose of my existence in this life; and to continue to seek out my own redemption.

The environment Kaine has left me consigned to actively seeks to drown that urge, to stamp the life out of it, to drown it of its vital force. Once again, it is men and the Darkness. I am neither saint nor devil. I am just a man, a fallible and bone weary man. Juzt me and the Darkness and, this time, I truly do not know which will prevail.

Kaine really knocked he wind out of me, old friend. I'm not in a good place right now, but am struggling with it. Thanks for being there. For being a friend and mentor. You remain one of my heroes. Thanks for caring.

I'll try to write more. The gods are shooting craps for my soul.

Much love and peace,

January 22, 2010

Don't give up. Don't give up. Don't give up.

Yes, it's cruel what Kaine did to you. Yes, it's cruel what the state does to you every day. Yes, it's cruel that this is a nation of laws but not a nation of justice. But despite all those yesses, as emotionally violent and as dispiriting as they are, the yes that you have been affirming all these years has moral force—a superior force—that has kept you unbroken and saying: yes, I refuse to be defeated, yes I am keeping faith with all my supporters, yes my life has a purpose.

Please draw strength from that. It's natural to feel wiped out by the hope-dashing reality of what just happened. And natural, too, to feel enraged and bitter. Who wouldn't

Be, when the prospect for your release seemed so favorable. Just try to stay afloat for now, getting through the next few days and weeks however you can. Your strength will return.

You may have had some letters from Joanne Kim. She is one of my students, not a conventional one. She is a Hawaiian, in her mid-50s, a former official in a national security agency and has been coming to my classes for the past few years—not to get credit but just to keep learning and be aware that you don't know much until you know how much you don't know. When she heard the news about the turn-down, she phoned—speaking through her tears at the absurdity of it the denial.

You know how I appreciate all you have done for my students—going back to our visits with you on death row in Mecklenburg, then the seminars at Augusta, and all the letters you have written to the classes. A new semester begins this week, and once more you will be part of the course—and has almost often happens, the part that touches them the most.

Peace, in the midst of it all—

*In early February 1991 I traveled to Richmond, Virginia, to say goodbye to a friend and watch him die. Joseph Giarratano, then 34, was scheduled to be killed in the state's electric chair in the Spring Street prison built by Thomas Jefferson in 1800. Days before, Joe was transported from Mecklenburg State Prison, a facility near the North Carolina border and where he had been caged on death row for 13 years after a capital conviction for a double murder in Norfolk in 1978.

Earlier, Joe was the prison's only inmate. All others had been moved out, the state having sold the downtown property to a real estate company that envisioned a gold mine in developing so prime and well-located a hunk of land. In mid-afternoon, and with the execution scheduled the next morning at dawn, we met in the cooling room where prisoner's bodies are placed on a metal gurney to cool off after coming out of the chair. We talked for about an hour speculating on whether or not the governor, L. Douglas Wilder, would commute the sentence. Joe's case was internationally and nationally known. The European Parliament, the Vatican, Amnesty International and more than a dozen members of Congress had examined the weak, discredited and conflicting evidence, plus coerced and inconsistent confessions that led to a trial that lasted less than a day, and argued persuasively that an innocent man would be executed.

Hours before the electrocution, Wilder, once an opponent of the death penalty but now an advocate, issued a commutation. The decision, he said was "complex but not difficult." Wilder's commutation turned out to be semi-justice, a half-measure that dodged the obvious question: if

the claims of innocence were strong enough to stop an execution, why were they too weak to justify an exoneration. Legally, the governor lacked the power to grant a new trial. Only the state's attorney general had the authority. That was Mary Sue Terry, a Democrat then running for the governorship. She stayed clear, saying that Joe was guilty and that was that. Why allow a new trial and risk appearing as a soft-on-crime liberal while campaigning. In the end it didn't matter. She lost anyway—to George Allen.

Had all this happened in another state, it might have been different. Virginia has the 21-day rule: if death row inmates and their lawyers have proof of innocence, bring it to the court within 21 days of conviction. After that, don't bother. You could have proof that you were at the South Pole playing with penguins on the day of the crime in Virginia: 21 days or else. Other states have windows of three years. Many have no time limits. Nearly 140 men have been freed from death row since 1977. New evidence, recantings, prosecutorial misconduct and false confessions are among the reasons.

My friendship with Joe dates to 1988. Marie Deans, known as the Angel of Death Row and the director of a public interest group that investigates wrongful and malicious convictions, asked me to interview Joe and possibly write about the case. In time, I would write several columns for The Washington Post. After my first visit, I began taking my high school, college and law students to Mecklenburg to have seminars by Joe. The warden had a humane side and welcomed my classes anytime. He arranged lunches for students and inmates. I came to know the warden a bit. He told me once, in a moment of candor, that he had no taste for overseeing death row and was well aware that he was doing society's dirty work. But it was a job and it meant a paycheck. In sanctioning the seminars the warden knew that Joe Giarratano was well-qualified. He had written both an article for The Yale Law Review and a brief that was argued before the Supreme Court, *Giarratano v. Murray*. An eighth-grade dropout, he was self-educated.

From Richmond, Joe was dispatched west to a state prison in Augusta County, about three hours south of Washington. My visits with students continued. For years I had been bringing Joe books on nonviolence, from Gandhi's autobiography to Dorothy Day's essays. I suggested to the warden that Joe be allowed to teach an academic course to fellow inmates on the literature of peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. I gave \$5,000 to buy books to get the course started. Joe applied for, and received, IRS tax-exemption for

the program. For the first class, 18 inmates were enrolled, none of them getting parole points. I asked Joe who he invited to take the course. The meanest of the mean, he said, men with three life sentences, 110 year sentences. On asking how he lined up the hard-core set, he explained that in the prison population he was seen as a demi-god: one of the rare few who walked out of death row alive. To be selected to take a course from someone like that wasn't to be refused.

Each course ran for 16 weeks, ending with graduation ceremonies. Its success—a marked decrease in the prison's violence and a waiting list of 300 to take the course—was widely reported, from stories in Virginia newspapers and Corrections Magazine. In 1995, Brian Williams of NBC Nightly News sent Bob Abernethy to report the story. When handing diplomas

to the graduates during the ceremony I asked them to say a few words about the course and what it meant to them. Almost all had the same thought: if I had known about the ideas of nonviolence and the practice of nonviolence when I was young, I might not be in prison today.

Marie Deans, who did much of the research that led to the Wilder commutation, came to the graduations. In “Strength Through Peace,” one of the texts for the course, she wrote: “I have yet to find a case where there hasn’t been a red flag thrown up years ago—in grammar school or somewhere—where a kid said, ‘I’m in trouble, help me.’ He gave us the message loud and clear and we didn’t pay any attention. And he ended up, years later, going down and down and killing someone. Let me tell you something. I resent the hell out of that as a member of a murder victim’s family. These governors, these prosecutors, Ronald Reagan and George Bush all getting up and saying, ‘I care about victims, I want the death penalty.’ If they care about victims, they would have taken care of that victimized kid when he was six years old and prevented a homicide later.”

The course lasted three years. Someone in the state’s Department of Corrections saw the NBC News story and ordered the Augusta warden to stop the program. The warden’s objections—that the course was reducing violence—were overruled. It was seen as coddling inmates. You’re running a prison, the warden was told, not a school.

Some time after, Joe was shipped to a prison in Utah. States have exchange programs: if you have a troublemaker in your system and we have one in ours, let’s swap and get them out of their environment. Joe was troublesome in a different way. He was seen as a celebrity prisoner: getting on television (a 20 minute Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters interview on ABC in 1991), filling suits on behalf of other inmates and winning many of them, writing articles for law reviews and op-ed pages, working with human rights groups to expose violations in the state’s prisons. Joe last less than a year in Utah. He went on a hunger strike to get publicity for reforms, he roused the state’s ACLU to take action about prison conditions. He organized inmates. Utah packed him off to Illinois, the Joliet State Prison. I visited him there in 1997. We talked about setting up another peace studies course, which the chaplain thought well of. The warden said no. Months later, Joe was back to Virginia—this time to Red Onion, a supermax hellhole touted as fit for the worst of the worst.

In the mid-1990s, he was transferred to Wallens Ridge State Prison in Big Stone Gap, near the Tennessee-Kentucky border in far Southwest Virginia. At the time of the 1991 commutation, Governor Wilder said that Joe would be eligible for parole after 25 years of his sentence. He came up in 2004 and was denied. In 2007 he was denied. The next chance was 2010. Prospects were bright. The governor was Tim Kaine. Marie Deans had organized a coalition of politicians, judges and former judges, psychiatrists, a Roman Catholic bishop and a Washington law firm to make the case for clemency. He had been promised a job as a paralegal in a Charlottesville firm. If anyone would be open to the appeals, it was Kaine. In 1991 as a young lawyer who had been a defense lawyer in two capital cases, he was resolutely opposed to capital punishment. While running for governor in the fall of 2005, Kaine, a Roman Catholic who once volunteered with a church mission in Honduras, told voters “My faith teaches that life is sacred. That’s why I

oppose the death penalty.” In 1987, while awaiting the execution of a client, he told The Washington Post that “murder is wrong in the gulag, in Afghanistan, in Soweto, in the mountains of Guatemala, in Fairfax County...and even in the Spring Street prison.”

It couldn't have looked better for Joe Giarratano. By law, Virginia governors serve only one term. Kaine ran no risk of running for re-election as a turn-em-loose governor. Kaine waiting until his final day in office. His decision was to not to make a decision: he would leave the appeal to the next governor. It turned out to be a Republican, a Roman Catholic pro-lifer who opposes the execution of fetuses but favors it for convicts.

February 1, 2012

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

I am sitting in second period watching an extremely boring video about what defines a recession knowing that just a few classrooms down the hall real learning is taking place. When I asked my second period teacher if I could come hear the guest speaker in Peace Studies, he responded “Are you kidding? Of course NOT.” So instead of listening to someone who addressing a pressing issue facing us, the closing of the School of the Americas, I sit in the back of a classroom, not paying attention to something I really don't care about. There is something seriously wrong with our education system and I am seeing it more and more everyday. I miss your class so much! Maybe my first period teacher will be more understanding [than my second period teacher] and I can come to your class for the next speaker. Hope to see you soon.

Hanna Levin

February 4, 2012

Dear Hanna:

So what prompted the teacher's denial? I'd guess fear. If your ticket was punched and the response was, “Sure, go ahead, enjoy it,” and you left, you might be missing something about the recession that could have been worth 25 points on the final exam. You'd get a low grade, the teacher a poor evaluation and Bethesda-Chase High School might not be winning President Obama's “Race To The Top”—the current educational solution to get America's children to keep up with all those Chinese and Japanese whizzes.

What prompted you to obey the teacher's order and stay put? I'm guessing fear again. If you did leave, extra homework might be dumped on you, your parents might be called about your disobedience, you might be dispatched to the principle's office, a recommendation letter for college might not be written—which you don't need because you've won early acceptance at Williams College.

You're right, something is seriously wrong with American education. It's fear, from the bottom up. Students who stray from the accepted way fret a bout the teacher's reaction. Teachers who deviate from academic probity—as in letting you take in the Peace Studies class a few rooms away—fear the principle's response. School boards don't get out of line because they fear having

funds cut off by the politicians. And politicians behave themselves in fear of the voters.

Everyone fears the powerful one just above them. Conformity reigns. Like unruly puppies, students are being trained in obedience schools and after enough yanks on the leash know when and how to heel.

Grading, testing and homework represent teaching by fear. Scare children into learning. Score well on tests, goes the meritocratic message, and pathways to success widen. Do poorly and they narrow. Bow to a teacher's demand for test preparation, no matter how rote the drilling, or spend hours writing irrelevant papers, and the slavishness will pay off. So it is claimed. At the end of the course parents can ask their child, if they ask at all, not what did you learn but "what did you get on the final exam.?"

Maria Montessori, who opened her elementary school in a Roman slum in 1907, never inflicted her *bambinos* with tests or homework. Nor do Montessori schools today. Socrates never demeaned his agora students with those assaults. Two of history's supreme teachers believed in desire-based, not fear-based, learning. Evidently the grandees of American education are wiser.

A B-CC parent phoned a few years ago, wanting to know how her daughter was doing in my class. "How would I know," I answered, "I'm her teacher."

"What did you say?"

"I'm your daughter's teacher, I have no idea how she's doing."

"What's her grade?"

"I don't know, I'm a teacher not a grader. Grades are unimportant."

"I want her to get into a good college, so grades are important. Once more, how is my daughter doing in your class?"

"Once more, dear sister, I don't know. But I have an easy way for you to find out: ask your daughter. She'll tell you."

In fact, the student was a joy to have in class. She had an open mind, strong ideals and relished the give-and-take of our class debates—none of which had a thing to do with grades or getting to the Ivies.

The illusion of grade-based excellence remains, reinforced by fear-based leaning and fake academic rigor. In more than 30 years of teaching, I have seen no evidence that acing tests improves a student's character, leads them to be kinder or more loving or strengthens them to stand up against abusive power. A while back, *The Post* asked me to review a book by Noam Chomsky titled "Chomsky on Miseducation." It was a collection of essays and interviews, stitched together by Chomsky's belief that education should be about freeing minds, not controlling them. "A good teacher," he argued, "knows that the best way to help students learn is

to let them find the truth by themselves. Students don't learn by a mere transfer of knowledge, consumed through rote memorization and later regurgitated. True learning comes about through the discovery of truth. Not the imposition of an official truth. That never leads to the development of independent and critical thought. It is the obligation of any teacher to help students discover the truth and not to suppress information and insights that may be embarrassing to the wealthy and powerful people who create, design and make policies about schools."

Ten years ago, when B-CC was being renovated and students were sent to a building too far away for me to commute by my Raleigh 3-speed, I was invited to teach at the Stone Ridge School for Girls in Bethesda. My initial and main challenge was to help each girl to relax. Some of them came to school hauling 30-lb backpacks crammed with science book, math books, English books, note books. Thirty lbs. of books. All in the name of homework. Most of the girls weighed less than 120 lbs. They were packing one-fourth their body weight.

To minimize back strain, I used no textbook for the course. Instead, I copied an essay by Gandhi or Tolstoy or Dorothy Day and get the discussion started by having a student read it aloud, paragraph by paragraph, stopping to get the class's reaction. One of the liveliest moments came when we went over a few lines from Carol Rinzler's book, "Your Adolescent: an Owner's Manual.": "Little Kimberly asks her parents, 'If they tell you in nursery school that you have to work hard so you'll do well in kindergarten, and if they tell in kindergarten that you have to work hard so you'll do well in high school, and if they tell you to work hard in high school so you'll get into a good college and assuming that they tell you in college that you have to work hard so you'll get into a good graduate school, what do they tell you in graduate school that you have to work hard for?' Kimberly's parents answer, 'To get a job so you can make enough money to send your children to a good nursery school.'"

That morning you were a bored captive learning nothing useful about recessions, my guest speakers were two dissidents making the case for closing for closing the School of the Americas, aka the School of the Assassins. Run by the U.S. Army at Ft. Benning, Georgia for more than three decades, it trained soldiers from Latin American countries—El Salvador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama—who return to obey thuggish government to kill or torture priests, nuns, trade unionists, journalists and others seen as threats to law and order, as defined by dictators and U.S. companies selling them weapons. SOA graduates were responsible for the killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero as he said mass the morning of March 24, 1980. Not long after they killed six Jesuits priests, their housekeeper and daughter. They hacked to death four Catholic churchwomen. They directed the massacre of nearly the whole town of 800 in El Salvador's El Mozote.

My two speakers, both recent college graduates and knowledgeable with facts that twinned with their passions for justice, lobby Congress to cut off funding for the school. No student in either my first or second period class were aware that the Army had been training assassins and not aware, either, that a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, has been protesting for 25 years at the gates of Ft. Benning. They are aware now.

Thanks for your letter. I think you know how grateful I was to have you in class last semester. Your gentle ways of speaking your truth, of disagreeing with me when that was definitely needed and your open-mindedness were gifts that I treasured. I spoke at Williams College two years ago and will pass on the names of a couple of professors whose courses you might want to take. If so, they'll be lucky to have you, as I was.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

P.S. If you want to learn about the recession, you might start to read the twice weekly columns of Paul Krugman in The New York Times. He won the Nobel Prize for Economics three years ago. I'd suggest, too, "Small Is Beautiful," the enduring book by E. F. Schumacher which offers solutions on the just distribution of wealth. Try it for summer reading.

June 4, 2009

Dear Professor:

How are you doing? Do you teach summer classes or do you get a chance to take a break? I hope you do.

I have a bit of a situation with a friend and I was wondering if I could ask you for some advice. I promised I wouldn't tell anyone about this but I also can't in good conscience be myself and not at least look for a way to help him. A good friend, who I have been dating on and off, recently told me that he can't see me anymore because he deals with intense depression that has been with him for the past four years. He said he thinks about killing himself everyday, sometimes more than once in a day. He seems to have given up on any sort of therapy and refuses completely to go medication. He admitted that while a few people know that he has struggled with this, no one knows that he isn't cured. Except for me. Meaning he has been really good at hiding it. Besides the initial shock of realizing how ignorant I was to his feelings and thoughts, I'm not really sure what my role in this is supposed to be. I stressed how he should really start talking to someone again, and he said I don't need to be too concerned. But I also know that I can't handle the responsibility of being the only one who knows he feels this way. How long is he able to hide this before something happens? Don't I hold a certain responsibility as one of his friends who knows he is struggling with this? He is an extremely intelligent and sensitive guy. I feel like he could be so happy but he just can't see that right now. He seems to be functioning on a daily basis just fine, and I feel like his logic in the end will prevent him from doing anything too rash anytime soon. Do you have any advice as to how I take this information?

He told me because he care about me and he said I deserved to know why he couldn't be with me anymore, and while I know he isn't expecting anything else from, I just really don't know what I am supposed to do now. He relates his situation best to David Foster Wallace, who wrote "Infinite Jest." Maybe you're read it.

I thought you might have some insight as to what I should do. I appreciate your help, guidance and sensitivity in always offering to help your students.

Hope all is well with you,

June 5, 2009

Dear Ariel:

You're right to be concerned about your friend, and right, too, to be perplexed on your role in his life now that he prefers that you don't have a role.

To start, I'd guess that his wish to not see you again is a symptom of the pain he is in.; The intensity of the pain is the mystery you don't know, and can't know, at least experientially. My understanding of suicide is limited to the relationships I've had with students who took their lives: two in high school, two in college one in law school. Each loss left me wondering whether I should have been alert to the signs of desperation. It's a hard call to make, not having a trained eye or ear to note the difference between a reactive depression—as in reacting to a negative experience that sends you stumbling but from which can regain your balance after a bit of time passes—or a clinical depression which is intense in its pain and despairing in its seeming hopelessness.

If your friend is rejecting talk therapy or medication therapy, or a combination of the two, it does leave you few merciful options that might help. If only for your own peace of mind, which you have a right to, I'd suggest sending a handwritten letter that offer him information. About what? Your feelings, whatever those might be. Will it help him, and by help I mean will it cure his illness. It's doubtful. But not totally so. Will it comfort you? Odds on, yes. Should he take his life, you will have known that you weren't passive when he was moving in that direction.

In recall in class one evening speaking about suicide, making the point that if we know a friend who is in emotional we can take two action: tell them to call someone for help and, second, to realize that however deep the suffering there is someone else who felt the same way and pulled through. Comebacks are possible. More happens than we realize. I have no empirical research on the effectiveness of those approaches but I don't know that any kind of research is available to guide the lay untrained non-psychiatric community.

The recent suicide of David Foster Wallace left much of the public, or at least the literate parts of it, baffled and saddened. It isn't an uplifting thought that your friend relates to Wallace's life and his choice to end it.

Right now I'd suggest you try a handwritten letter. In it, tell him you are a phone call away. Make it clear that you aren't trying to keep the relationship going. Say, too, that you are grateful for his honesty in explaining why he wanted to end it. I'm assuming

when the off came in the off and on relationship that it was not a nasty screaming final scene but one that meant you would still be connected but in a different way.

Much praise to you for asking the right questions about you might do next. You might read William Styron, the American novelist best known for "Sophie's Choice" and "The Confessions of Nat Turner." In 1990 he wrote "Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness," a work considered a classic in the literature of suicidal depression. He did survive the darkness.

Yes I am teaching this summer: one at the Washington Center, the other a six-week seminar at a Buddhist temple in town. I should take a break. Maybe it is, considering I have seven schools in the Fall and six in the Spring. Summer it's cruising speed.

Colman McCarthy

June 6, 2009

Dear Professor:

Thank you so much for your quick response. Your kind and understanding words mean a lot to me, and I appreciate you taking the time to write back and give me advice. I also talk to my high school guidance counselor, who I am still very close with, about this issue. She encouraged me to try and get in touch with one of his friends, which I have done and we have been communicating about what to do next. It isn't anything directly helping my friend at the moment but I not the only one who knows now (a little less pressure off of me), and now someone who knows him better or just as well has also been alerted.

I am definitely going to look into writing him a letter, though in this situation I feel like finding the right words will take some time. I also hesitate to write anytime soon because, while I see the reasons I should make it clear that I'm no longer trying to pursue a romantic relationship with him, I don't know if I can fake that right now. Or that I should try to take it all. I understand and respect his reasons for wanting to be with me when he has this psychological issue. Obviously he doesn't want me to get involved in it. But on the other hand, why would he honestly tell me if he didn't want some sort of help? To an extent he knows my character and that something like this would put me into full alert mode....With time maybe we could be just friends, but the fact that my heart is so closely attached to him is making the situation difficult for me. I'm trying to view it as helping anyone who I have a valuable and meaningful friendship with, and I'm taking steps as I would do for any friend I care about. I also feel at this point my words to him couldn't be said or written without an underlying feeling of wanting to continue a relationship. My guidance counselor has also urged me to focus on removing my romantic feelings for him, so it looks like I will have to figure that out.

I appreciate your messages of hope, and I do wish that my friend can see a light at the end of the tunnel one day. I will look into the author you suggested. I think reading up on this will give me a peace of mind or at least some more insight as to what through one's head in this situation.

Again, thank so much for your response, it means so much to me. I will be in touch.

Love always,

March 15, 2012

Dear Professor McCarthy:

I'm the Japanese Canisius College student whom you met at Dr. DiCicco's class on March 8. There were two Japanese students, and I'm the one who wore black glasses and sat in the front. My name is Yurina Osumi.

I'm sorry that I could not respond to you when you politely apologized to all Japanese people. I was surprised and could not say how I thought and felt. Please let me speak about my thoughts and feelings now.

First of all, I would like to apologize to all Americans who died in the war and lost their family members at the war. As Americans killed many Japanese, Japanese killed many Americans. As a result, I'm not going to criticize the killings by Americans. Killing each other is war. Also I'm not going to criticize Americans because of the atomic bombs during World War II. Of course, an atomic bomb is an inhuman weapon. I feel really sad when I think about people who suffered and died with unimaginable pain. My mother and her parents are from Hiroshima, and I was born in Hiroshima. My grandparents were luckily away from the hypo center and were not affected by the bomb, but my mother was discriminated against when she tried to marry through an arranged marriage.

This is because the image of Hiroshima is being affected by radiation. But she met my father and gave birth to me, so my family's sufferings because of the atomic bomb was not as harsh as the other Hiroshima or Nagasaki citizens.

As I said above, an atomic bomb is an inhuman weapon. But there are two reasons that I'm not angry about the United States. First, all wars are inhuman. There is no lawful, correct war. We don't need to focus on the use of nuclear weapons too much. All killings in war are wrong and brutal but that is what the Japanese also did during the war. Second, putting responsibilities on each other prevents future progress and learning from the past. It is impossible to revive nuclear bomb victims and people who died in the war. If so, what we should do is talk about the future, not blaming each other regarding what already happened.

There is one thing that I really want not only for Americans but for every nuclear weapons holder: never use them again. There is a sentence on the memorial stone at the hypo center at Hiroshima: "Are not going to make the mistake." It is quite common in the Japanese language to leaving out a subject because the Japanese have a "gussing culture." Who should be put on this sentence as the subject? Right after the war, some Japanese insisted that the subject should be Americans. But I do not think so. The subject should be "We." We should learn that all wars and inhuman killings are unacceptable.

That's why I do not have any anger on Americans. I will only criticize those who think it is acceptable to begin wars and kill others. I hope that Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be the last places that were bombed by atomic weapons.

Thank you for your time. Have a good day!

Yurina Osumi

Dear Yurina:

You are generous to take time from your studies to share your thoughts. I was delighted to visit your class at Canisius before my lecture in the evening. For as long as I can remember whenever I meet a Japanese citizen, I apologize for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 by the United State government. It was indiscriminate killing of men, women and children, few of whom had anything to do with the military policies of Japan's leaders. Harry Truman, the American president who ordered the bombings, lied when he said: "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians." Hiroshima was a city, not a military base. An estimated 140,000 died. Even after August 6 and 9, the American military had plans to drop more atomic bombs on Japan. The historian Howard Zinn, who I am sure you have read, wrote in "Declarations of Independence": "The terrible momentum of was continued even after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The end of the war was a few days away, yet B-29s continued their missions. On August 14, five after the Nagasaki bombing and the day before the actual acceptance of surrender terms, 440 B-29s went out from the Marianas for a daylight strike and 372 more went out that night. Altogether, more than 1,000 planes were sent to bomb Japanese cities. There were no American losses."

In the years after the war, United States policy-makers, seeking to build more destructive bombs that could kill greater numbers of people, began testing atomic weapons in the Marshall and Bikini islands in the Pacific Ocean. In time, the United States would stockpile thousands of nuclear weapons that are equal to a million Hiroshima-type bombs.

On November 1, 2007 Paul Tibbets, Jr., died. He was the pilot of the Anola Gay, the plane that carried to bomb to Hiroshima. Tibbets was exceptionally proud of his killing so many Japanese and had no regret. It was the opposite. He blustered to Studs Terkel, another American historian, that he would have no qualms about using nuclear bombs again against America's enemies: "I'd wipe 'em out. You're gonna kill innocent people at the same time, but we're never fought a damn war anywhere in the world where they didn't kill innocent people. If the newspapers would just cut out the [vulgar word], 'you've killed so many civilians.' That's their tough luck for being there.

You are correct that "there is no lawful, correct war. And that the Japanese government was also a killing machine. You are right to apologize to Americans. My own apologizing began in the mid-1980s when I met four Japanese survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on their visit to Washington. They are called, as you probably know, hibakushas. I invited them to speak in one of my classes, including Tsutomu Yamaguchi who was a niju hibakusha—a survivor of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While in Washington they asked to speak to President Ronald Reagan in the White House They were told no, he was too busy. The next day a newspaper picture showed Reagan in the White House hosting Japanese sumo wrestlers.

One person the hibakushas did meet was Concepcion Picciotto. She is the Spanish-born peacemaker who has decamped across the street from the north side of the White House since June 1981. She has been there in snow blizzards, heat waves, rainstorms, lightning bolts. She has been arrested dozens of times by federal and local police, plus enduring denunciations by politicians and passersby. She usually sits in a folding chair surrounded by signs: “Ban All Nuclear Weapons or Have a Nice Doomsday.” And: “Live By the Bomb, Die By the Bomb.” Her site is known as the Peace Park Anti-Nuclear Vigil.” I have taken my classes many times to visit Concepcion to learn from her. Many people in Washington, from media sophists to think-tank wheel-spinners, dismiss her as a crazy lady. Tourists see her as a curiosity. But not all tourists. The one group that most appreciates her, even to the point of calling her a saint and a prophet, are the Japanese. I have met many of them at the Vigil. And of course, I do my apologizing.

If you are ever in Washington, take time to meet Concepcion. She’s right there at 1601 Pennsylvania Avenue, with President Obama at 1600 Pennsylvania. Five presidents have lived in the White House since Concepcion arrived but not one has had the neighborliness to walk over to say hello, much less had the grace to invite her one of the endless White House parties.

If you do come to Washington, I’d like you to meet my son John. He is a teacher and a baseball coach. He played baseball professionally, in the Baltimore Orioles organization, and two years ago went to Japan to visit Bobby Valentine, for six years the manager of the Chiba Marlins, one of the country’s best teams. He is back in the United States now, managing the Boston Red Sox. Bobby Valentine was enormously popular in Japan, not only because of his managerial skills but because he disciplined himself to learn to speak and write in Japanese. Not many Americans do that, regrettably.

It’s springtime in Washington, which means the city is awash in the beauty of the hundreds and hundreds of Japanese cherry blossom trees—gifts from your country to ours long before we were enemies. During World War II, talk was heard that the trees should be chopped down. Calmer minds prevailed, for once.

I deeply appreciate your letter and the thoughtfulness behind it. Your English is excellent. I will show it to my students. They have much to learn from it.

My best to Professor DiCicco. I’m sure you are teaching him a lot, as you have me.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

March 19, 2012

Dear Professor McCarthy:

Thanks you very much for your response. I think all history classes all over the world are biased. A history class is not the only source of people’s knowledge and feelings toward others. The media, opinions of parents, friends, politicians and neighbors are also important sources. In this

situation, it is quite normal to believe “my country is great and correct.” I personally think we should remember that the other people also have their beliefs and believe they are right. We have to remember that what we are believing may not be correct from a different view.

From this, I may understand the feelings of Paul Tibbets, Jr. Of course, “understand” does not mean “agree.” If I were him I would have refused to drop the bomb. I would refuse to go to the war. But I believe that without understanding, it is impossible that two different people can learn from the past, agree on something and cooperate with each other. Mother Teresa said, “the opposite of love is not hatred but ignorance.” I agree that ignorance is cruel and dangerous for our safety. You may wonder why I do not include myself with “the people.” This is because I realized the ignorance in my heart and the realization it is still motivating me. When I was a child, I saw a TV program of African who were dying of extreme poverty. I felt sad, really sad, but I watched a funny movie the same day. I left food uneaten at dinner. At the time I realized my ignorance in my heart in my heart. It was quite easy to go back to my life by forgetting them or by making an excuse that I cannot do anything for them. After I realized my ignorance, I had my dream of becoming an aid worker and working for underprivileged people. It is easy to forget, so I always want to think about them by working for them.

As a result, I applied to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to get a job. I wait to hear from them. JICA is an independent administrative agency. If I stay in until their 2nd step of the selection process, I will come to Washington for an interview at the beginning of April. If so I would like to meet you, your son and Ms. Picciotto. And the cherry blossom trees!

Thank you for your comments about my writing. I’m very glad to hear that.

Have a good day.

March 22, 2012

Dear Yurina:

You are right about bias in the world’s history classes. Several years ago, Howard Zinn, the author of “The People’s History of the United States” and a long-time professor

of history at Spelman College and Boston University, came to one of my high school classes to speak. During the question and answer period a student asked Professor Zinn for his definition of history. He answered, “History is the winner’s version of what happened.”

During his talk, Professor Zinn spoke of enlisting in the U.S. Air Force in World War II at 21. He was assigned to a crew whose mission was to fly from bases in England to bomb cities and towns in Germany. The young soldier believed, as did most Americans, that this was “a war of high principle” and “each was a mission of high principle.”

Returning home from the war, and unable to suppress memories of saturation bombing, Howard Zinn began to have second thoughts. He writes in “Declarations,” published in 1990: “My doubts grew. I was reading history. Had the United States fought in World War II for the rights of nations to independence and self-determination? What of its own history of expansion through

war and conquest? It had waged a hundred year war against the native Americans, driving them off their ancestral lands. The United States had instigated a war with Mexico and taken almost all its land, had sent Marines at least 20 times into the countries of the Caribbean for power and profit, had seized Hawaii, had fought a brutal war to subjugate the Filipinos, and had sent 5,000 Marines to Nicaragua in 1926. Our nation could hardly claim it believed in the right of self-determination, unless it believed in selectivity.”

This double standard was not limited to the war in Europe. Professor Zinn writes about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor: “The sudden indignation against Japan contained a good deal of hypocrisy. The United States, along with Japan and the great European posers, had participated in the exploitation of China. Our Open Door Policy of 1901 accepted that ganging up on the great powers of China. The United States had exchanged notes with Japan in 1917 saying the government of the United States recognizes that Japan had special interests in China and in 1028 American consuls in China supported the coming of Japanese troops.”

With a few worthy exceptions now and again, most history teachers I know regard Howard Zinn as a rebel. For me, he is an icon—a pillar of honesty, a writer whose blade of mind cuts through guff and cant. He analyzed history from the victim’s point of view, not the winner’s. And what exactly does winning a war mean? In your class the morning I was at Canisius, I mentioned the line of Jeannette Rankin, the member of Congress from Montana and the only person to vote against both the first and second world wars: “You can no more win a war than win an earthquake.”

We all have our own beliefs, as you say. Real intellectual courage is to move beyond defending our beliefs to questioning them, and keeping the ones that are firm—and discarding ones that are flab.

I hope you are hired by the JICA. If the directors are wise, they will do so. And give you a big salary. Should you come to Washington for the Interview, please call. I would like to invite you to speak in my high school classes. Perhaps we can take a field trip to visit Concepcion Picciotto.

Your letter combines both self-reflection and open-mindedness. You write clear and creative English, better than some of my American students.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

April 3, 2011

Dear Mr. McCarthy

I hope everything is going well. I’m sorry I never had a chance to visit a class of yours when I was home for winter break.

I have a couple more months of freshman year at Oberlin and am searching for a job in D.C. for the summer. I was wondering, do you know of any jobs or paid internships that I might be right

for? I would be happy to write articles, do research for an organization, work at a restaurant, or even be a bike messenger. Almost anything. I know you've lived in D.C. for awhile and know a lot of people, so if there are any opportunities or if there's info you can give me that might help me out, that would be great. Maybe the Center for Teaching Peace has a summer internship? Let me know.

Also I would love to bring you out to Oberlin to speak, either for the end of this year or next fall. If you are interested, I will get working to try to set things up.

April 9, 2011

Dear Peter:

As you don't need to be told, Washington is packed every summer with interns. And as you DO need to be told, the word intern has French origins—meaning “slave.” Internment camps.

I'd advise staying clear of a summer of slavery. But I do know of some well-paying jobs: outdoors, four or five hours a day, plenty of socializing, plus physical exercise. What job? Caddying.

Where? The top choices are the Chevy Chase Club, which is closest to your home, and a bit further away, Columbia Country Club, Burning Tree Golf Club and Congressional Country Club. The current rates for carrying two bags is around \$80—in cash which means no taxes taken out, unless you want to be taxed to oil America's war machine. In caddying, sometimes you aren't even lugging clubs because the foursomes ride in golf carts that carry them. You just have to keep an eye on the ball—or balls as each player swings away. After that, it's mostly a matter of holding the pin on the green, raking the sand traps, replacing divots, keeping quiet on backswing and calling out “great shot” when the duffers hit it anywhere straight or anywhere remotely close to the hole.

I know the pro at Chevy Chase, Jim Fitzgerald. He's friendly and is as gracious to caddies as he is to members. I had his daughter in class at B-CC where she was a star on the golf team: all boys except her. Of the four clubs, Chevy Chase would be the easiest on your legs and back. The course is fairly flat and, with only two par fives, not long. Not to stereotype memberships at the clubs, or at least keep it somewhat under control for the moment, Chevy Chase is Old Wasp Money, Columbia is middle-class Catholic, Burning Tree is Old Boy Republicans and Congressional reeks with New Money. If you are going to join the servant class, you'd be better treated at Chevy Chase. The membership is sedate, mannered and accustomed to being civil toward the help. It's the opposite of Congressional. With upwards to a thousand members clawing to get tee times, it might as well be a public course. Lobbyists and assorted deal-makers invite members of Congress to freeload. Tip O'Neill, Dan Quayle, Sam Nunn, Dan Rostenkowski, Marty Russo and Tom Delay were among the politicians who did the public's business at Congressional. In the 1990s Bill Clinton brought in his entourage so often that the club finally told him no more. Before he teed off, the course had to be cased by the Secret Service. Adjoining fairways had to be cleared of players and the woods searched for possible

snipers. Burning Tree, where women are not allowed on the property except once a year at Christmas time when they can buy presents in the pro shop for their husbands, is where 16-year-old Pat Buchanan caddied for Richard Nixon in the 1950s. Like Nixon, few Burning Tree members play well. The high-handicappers dotter around the course and stagger into the grill for a 19th hole of gin rummy and shots of Johnny Walker.

Looping at Chevy Chase would expose you to two worlds: the one of WASP high-breds and the one of non-pedigrees where caddies orbit, spinning around suns and moons of their own making: some as down-and-outs, a few as drifters who can't or won't hold regular jobs. Listen and learn from them. It will be far more than what you'd pick up shuffling papers with interns on K Street.. You could ask Oberlin to give you three credits for your summer course in Advanced Sociology.

Give it a try. I'd be glad to say a word for you with Jim Fitzgerald.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

P.S. It's not well-known, but one of the Chevy Chase members is Chief Justice John Roberts. Who knows--you might get to caddy for him. When handing him his putter, you can suggest that he stop supporting the death penalty. Another member is Alan Greenspan, who may get "irrationally exuberant" when he makes two pars in a row. Ask him if he has any regrets about all the mistakes he made as chairman of the Federal Reserve.

June 16, 2011

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

I'm reporting back from my first day of caddying. One bag for 18 holes wasn't too bad, and I was paid well. I jus have to keep getting there at 6:30 a.m., and I can expect to go out once or twice a day.

The exposure to the two very different worlds within our society is going to make the job a lot more interesting and eye opening than I cold have known. I'm not really a part of either of the worlds but it's remarkable to realize that I am more familiar with the culture of he older black caddies than of the rich white men who send their sons to Georgetown Prep.

Those sociology credits would be useful considering I may major in that department.

There's a poster in the caddy shack: if a duffer asks you if you like his game, you answer "I like it alright but I prefer golf."

June 20, 2011

Dear Peter:

Heart-tingling moment, isn't it, walking up that long uphill 18th hole to finish the round. It's never been officially sanctioned but caddies do have an anthem of their own—sort of.

It's "Carry It On." Joan Baez sings it best. It's not about golf but some of the lyrics do fit, eerily.

Keep me posted. Don't hesitate to strike up conversations with your players. Harmless queries to get them talking, like when they took up the game. Do they take lessons. Inquire, too, about their working lives—discreetly of course. You might have a trust-funder on your hands, not overly eager to reveal that money works for him rather than he works for money. You'll know the trust-fund set by their names, ones like Scuffington Griswold III or Cadwallader Buckinghamman Smith IV. As for the ladies of high lineage, nicknames prevail: Flossy, Pinky, Chessie, Hoopsie, Boopsie.

Here's hoping the summer works out for you. I'd imagine the truths that prevailed in my caddying days remain so in yours. The worse the golfer, the heavier the bag. Golfers who stand paralyzed over the ball before hitting it score higher than those who miss it quick. The richer the golfer, the madder they get when losing a ball. The problem with most golfers is that they stand too close to the ball—after they hit it. If a player ever asks you for advice, like after four-putting for an 11, pass along the advice Sam Snead once imparted to a hopeless case: take three weeks off and then quit altogether.

Colman McCarthy

April 4, 2012

Dear Professor:

First, I wish to say thank you for helping me remember that I am a living human being, and that showing emotion is not a sign of weakness but of life. It has been many years since anyone has asked me to write something about my life, much less to write sincerely and from the heart. In college "writing from the heart" is considered unsubstantial and therefore unacceptable and utterly irrelevant. The American education system might be one of the best in the world when it comes to gaining skills like critical thinking, analysis, research or math. We can all do math and write an analysis of United States foreign policy. What we seem to have forgotten is how to write from our hearts. Research our own lives. It took more effort for me to write this kind of paper than any assignment I had to complete over the course of my college career. This is a sad fact, yet very much true. Somewhere over the course of my education, I forgot how to speak of emotions and learned to instead always search for facts.

I have found that humans are never really equipped to deal with difficult situations, no matter how well we think we prepare for life's unpredictable ways. It is within our nature to always assume that bad things will not happen to us. However, once they do, regardless of how difficult the task ahead of us may be, most of us find the strength within ourselves, strength we often did not even know we had, to face the pain, the fear, the hurt.

It was fall of 2008. Our relationship was just beginning to take shape and neither

One of us knew exactly how we felt about each other, and even if we did, we did not know how to put it into words nor was it necessary to do so. For a few months we let ourselves be naïve and

lost in our own little world of blissfulness, knowing full well that it will not last as such. There was a war in Iraq and he had to go “spread democracy” and teach Iraqis how to lie their lives—for the third time. It was a first for me, though. First love, first war, first real pain of life. And just like that I went from being a self-involved, immature high school kid to an adult whose loved one was fighting a nasty, and in my strong opinion, unnecessary war. I grew up that winter.

I am not going to tell you about all the horrors that the loved ones of those in combat go through on a daily basis. It has been told many times, and I am no different or more special than a mother of two struggling to make ends meet and praying that her children’s father comes home alive and in one piece, or the mother of a young soldier who just finished high school and left the family nest for the first time to go fight for his country. We all struggle, and it is never easy. Some of us get to see the moment when they come home, others are not so lucky.

Since Iraq, my Marine has served in Serbia, Jordan and Turkey while I have been studying at American University. It has been four long years of online conversations, long distance calls, emails, Christmas cards, Valentine’s Day flowers, and occasional visits. He was supposed to be discharged four times now due to having three surgeries for injuries sustained while in the service. Every time we let ourselves believe that this will be the time he finally comes home, the Marine Corps has come up with new rules, procedures or bureaucracy barriers that would delay his discharge date. So the original two years test to our relationship has turned into three, and now four years. It took a long time for me to be able to discuss our situation without bursting into tears and feeling like my heart will break. But people get accustomed to anything, given enough time and effort. Such is life.

The main barrier to our relationship over the last few years was finally broken down, thanks to your class. Ever since he came back from Iraq the last time, he has never been the same. Whatever horrendous things he had done and seen had left a scar on him, one that was only visible to those who love him. I spend many nights trying to understand how to help him and what it is that has happened, that could forever change the man I love into a mere shadow of the person he used to be. It was not until I came to your class and we had a session on military members that I was given a better perspective of his situation. For the first time I understood the pain, the inability to cope, the feelings of guilt and shame. That you for that too. While his service is still ongoing, just yesterday he was informed that his new release date is June 16, 2012.

April 7, 2012

So glad you broke free, to find strength in your emotions. All of us lead two lives, outer and inner, exterior and interior. I’ve been reading T.S. Eliot’s “The Confidential Clerk” about a musician who is changing careers. A friend told him:

It’s only the outer world that you’ve lost.

You’ve still got your inner world—a world that’s more real.

That’s why you’re different from the rest of us.

You have your secret garden, to which you can retire

And lock the gate behind you.

Garden is a perfect metaphor. Growth is implied. We tend to think, mistakenly, that the person who leads a full life is forever bustling and opening doors to personal enrichment—rushing in, organizing, making progress or making waves, so it's thought. Activity has come to mean fullness. Inwardness involves the opposite—moving into the secret garden, tied to no plans, expectations or other baggage except the fragile notion of connecting with one's private self, not the public one. The interior life is not about results and even less about production. What can happen is a feeling of contentment, one that might lead to self acceptance. We hear about people, wearied by life's demands, who bolt for the hills "to find myself," but often enough they know fully who they are. They just can't stand it.

Fidelity to the interior life often has the ring of mysticism to it, of opening bottles of Zen and breathing in the ether of otherworldiness. This is why I ask my students to keep journals throughout the semester. Writing is a fruitful discipline, a quiet time cloistered from the noises of dailyness. A journal can become a haven, with the writing—even if only the jotting of a few paragraphs—being the places where or solitude is tended. Or as you said: "What we seem to have forgotten how to do is write from our hearts." It's likely fear-driven, a fear of standing exposed. An expression of this came from Florida Scott-Maxwell in "The Measure of My Days," a book I've relied on for years "The ordeal of being true to your own inner way must stand high in the list of ordeals. It is like being in the power of someone you cannot reach, or know more, but who never lets you go, who both insists that you accept yourself and who seems to know who you are. It is awful to have to be yourself. If you do reach this stage of life you are to some extent free from your fellows. Many do have to endure a minute degree of uniqueness, just enough to make them slightly immune from the infection of the crowd, but natural people avoid it. They obey for comfort's sake the instinct that warns, 'Say yes, don't differ, it's not safe.' It's not easy to be sure that being yourself is worth the trouble but we do know it is our sacred duty."

If the Marine commanders are telling the truth to you and your boyfriend—as they haven't in the past—he will be released, as you say, in mid-June. There is no way of predicting how your relationship will be affected either by the negatives he has gone through as a soldier or the positives you've been through as a student. Safe to say, each of you is much different than when you first decided to share yourselves with each other. How different, is the question. I have known soldiers who returned from war zones, whether in Germany, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan or other lands where presidents and congressional warlords believe they must dispatch the young to preserve the American Empire, and they adjust to civilian life with little or not friction and much the better for having been in the military. Others come home with wounds to their bodies and spirits so severe that no healing can help, even assuming that healing is available which too often it isn't. No drugs, no medicines, no therapies and no comforting from loved ones can effectively restore what has been destroyed by the violence of war.

The Washington Post ran a column, “The Last Thing We Need Is A Parade,” on February 12, 2012 by an Army infantryman, Colby Buzzell who was in Iraq from 2003-04. He wrote that “veterans are struggling. In this country an average of 18 veterans commit suicide everyday. The jobless rate for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is as high as 15 percent. They’re trying to find work despite having been labeled ticking time bombs, unable to assimilate back into society, plagued with post-traumatic stress.” On April 8, The Post ran another column, by George Masters, a veteran, titled “Just Bring Them Home.” He wrote: “While the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq kills and maims, I think how they are shaping the future of returning veterans. Many of these men and women will come home and go missing, and you won’t even know it. Returning from a war is more than getting off an airplane and putting on civvies. Combat changes a person. It changed me....If you’ve never hunted a human, if you’ve never been hunted, if you haven’t been shot at on a regular basis, just try to appreciate what this person has been through. Then get down on your knees and thank your lucky stars it wasn’t you.”

Curious, isn’t it, that these two columns ran in The Post. For more than 20 years, beginning with the first invasion of Iraq in 1991, both its war-whooping editorial page and op-ed page were platforms for the Bush-Clinton-Bush-Obama militarized foreign policies. Self-duped and rabid, The Post was all but a secretarial service to the Pentagon and its pliant patrons in the Congress and the White House who expressed no reservations about sending our young to kill and be killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now that it’s clear that these have been wars that couldn’t be won, couldn’t be explained and couldn’t be afforded, The Post is perhaps now compensating by opening its pages to soldiers who did the dirty work that the paper once fantasized, as did Congress, as spreading democracy. What’s needed from The Post and the rest of the war-cheering media, and likely never to happen, is a full apology to all the victims of the war: the hundreds of thousands, perhaps uncounted millions, of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan and the American soldiers—the less than two percent of the population who risked their lives and sanity. And all for nothing.

With your boyfriend—“my Marine”—take whatever time you need to make a decision. Stable love needs three forces, the Three A’s: adjustment, acceptance and appreciation. Take time to judge whether adjustment to your new selves is possible. A few weeks, a few months. That should do it for clarity to set in. On acceptance, a question worth asking yourself is whether you are a better person—and is he a better person—when you are with each other. Accepting someone, as in the “for better, for worse, in sickness and in health” line in the wedding vows, demands a kind of maturity that comes with practice. Appreciation. Take a look at “Everyday Love,” the Sidney Harris essay in “Strength Through Peace,” one of our course texts. The first line: “What we commonly call ‘love’ is a lot of little things rather than one big thing. He big thing may bowl us over at first but it is the repetitive regularity of the little things that keeps love alive and afloat. Love begins as an emotion but unless it is steadily ratified by acts of the will, it becomes a dead letter as soon as the emotion subsides. This is why the great romantics often have the most tragic, disillusion or unfulfilled love lives, marked by the heroic gesture but deficient in the human touch.”

I've enjoyed having you in the class. With your Serbian background and experiences, you've seen how raw life can be. Your presence in class has added depth to our many discussions.

In friendship,

Colman McCarthy

April 9, 2012

Dear Professor McCarthy:

I'm writing to tell you that I've left the Army ROTC program at the University of Maryland. As such, it's been a momentarily stressful week. I've been called a hippie by an officer, told that my morals were "too high" by my parents, and still have to suffer through financial disownment. And still I cannot escape this military burden. I will either owe \$80,000 to the government or be forcibly enlisted for three years. Though I hope to influence it, the choice is theirs. And though my decision is made, the dye is cast. Those around me plead that I uncross this river, that I make some compromise for an easier life—a life of "honor." I've been offered alternative methods: a car upon graduation, a two week trip to Europe. I've even been promised acceptance of my decision, should I attend further training. But it's all for naught, as my choice is simple, honest and true.

As a priest I recently spoke to reinforced, one must follow his heart. And though, as he in sighing admitted, some may live a disinterested lie of a life of "quiet desperation,"

as Thoreau said. I cannot.

For this reason, compounding all of my others, ranging from disagreement to the simple questions of what is right and how I want to spend my life, I had to cease to talk the path I so recently tread.

I'm sending this letter to tell you this, and to thank you for the constant enlightenment I've found in your class. The simple and said truth, however, is that the wisdom with which you teach is considered such lofty knowledge, reserved for the vain and excessively moral. This, however, is the fallacy of the dimwitted and depraved. But beyond this it isa fallacy that perpetuates all society. I only hope that one day the wisdom of your lessons might be common sense, and the brilliant men and women I know whose chosen to see with blinders in choosing their beliefs, might opoen their eyes to the greatness of the world, the atrocity of man's machinations, and the simple integrity which so plainly divide the two.

Again, thank you for everything. Also, if you have any extra credit opportunities, any opportunities to volunteer at the CENTER FOR teaching Peace, or know of any job opportunities, I'd be more than happy to apply myself. Thanks again for being a true steward of simple goodness.

April 19, 2012

First of all, be assured of my full admiration for getting off the military conveyor belt, even as it spins fast than ever now that the academic senates at Harvard, Yale and a couple other Ivies have welcomed ROTC back in post don't-ask'don't-tell glee. Expect to be roughed up because of your decision, as plenty of others before you have been treated like bricks in rucksacks when they chose conscience and conformity. Counsel is available from groups like the Center for Conscience and War in Washington and the Wart Resisters League in New York.

Counsel of another kind can be found in the literature of dissidence. There's the story of the Buddhist spiritual master who went to the village square everyday. From sunrise to sunset he cried out against war and injustice. It went on for years. His disciples began worrying about their master. Taking action, they went to the village square to tell him he was having no effect. None. No one in the village was listening, much less heeding. Everyone's insane, they told him. It's time to stop. No, said the master, I will keep crying out against war and injustice so I won't go insane.

State schools like the University of Maryland are natural allies of the ROTC. Research money has long flowed from the Pentagon to the giant state schools in research for weapons contracts. So why not funds to train soldiers to use the weapons. The cozy academic-military alliance is perfumed with patriotic cant, a seductive scent that entices students to believe recruiters that ROTC is a good deal.

One of my allies at Georgetown University was Fr. Richard McSorely who before his death in 1998 ran the peace studies program even though administrators never seriously funded it. With the Pentagon less than three miles from the Georgetown campus, the school's ROTC program goes back to the 1920s. Like the Buddhist spiritual master, Fr. McSorely fiercely opposed war. A pacifist and a survivor of the Bataan Death March when he was Jesuit seminarian in the early 1940s, he believed the functional purpose of a military is to kill, maim and destroy in the name of peace. At Georgetown, he was the sane man on campus. He tells a story of a student who couldn't understand the priest's opposition to ROTC: no one is forced to join, so what's the problem?

Fr. McSorely, who is in the Daniel Berrigan, Horace McKenna, John Dear and Steve Kelly prophetic wing of the Jesuit order, tried to explain with a parable: "A international prostitution ring has offered me \$500,000 to help set up a Department of Prostitution at Georgetown. All the professors would be chosen by the International Prostitution Rings. Courses would be controlled by the Ring. Courses of academic excellence would be taught, such as 'The Psychology of Solicitation,' 'Comparative Prostitution and Its Relationship to Other Cultures,' 'Leadership in Prostitution.' These courses would be taught by duly certified national and international pimps. And what would you think of me if I chose that as a course offering for students on the grounds that Georgetown needed the money and, after all, no one was forced to take it."

The student replied, "Oh, you consider it a moral question, don't you?" "I consider it both a moral and an academic question," the priest answered. "And if anyone thinks it is unfair to to the military to compare it with prostitution, I reply that it may be unfair to prostitutes. Prostitution

doesn't threaten the survival of the world. Prostitution isn't supported by taxpayer's money and the power of the Pentagon."

At Fr. McSorely's funeral at Georgetown's campus chapel, eulogists hailed him as a saint. Now that he was safely departed, let's haul out the finest of adjectives.

I have nothing against students who join ROTC. It's a way of getting through college debt-free, plus get a monthly stipend as well as a guaranteed job after graduation. One of the nation's largest ROTC programs is at Notre Dame, the flagship of Catholic universities. When I interviewed its president, Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, in the late 1980s on how he reconciled the presence of ROTC on the campus of a school named after the mother of Jesus Christ—a supreme teacher of nonviolence—he replied that his goal was to "Christianize the military." I asked if he believed there was a Christian way to slaughter people? It was a brief interview after that one.

One of Washington's flourishing ROTC programs is based at Wilson High School where I've been teaching since the mid-1980s. Nearly all the students in Junior ROTC are from low income African American or Hispanic families. At least five elite private high schools are within three miles of Wilson: Sidwell Friends, Georgetown Day, St. Albans, Maret and Edmund Burke. None have JROTC. When leaving the Joint Chiefs of Staff as its head, General Colin Powell boasted that he had helped place JROTC into more than 300 high schools. The militarizing of 14-year-olds is in the poverty schools, not the Choates, Grotons or Andovers.

You might take a look at "Hell, Healing and Resisting: Veterans Speak," a compelling book by Daniel Hallock, a Cornell Navy ROTC graduate. His 1998 work is part oral history and part reporting. He tells of Jim Murphy who was a founder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and became dean of students at West Side High School in New York City, an alternative school of low-income children. "The kids I work with," Murphy told Hallock, "tend to come from the poorest neighborhoods in the city. So they're the easiest for [military] recruiters. I try to help them see what their options are, to help them understand that you don't have to sign up for four years and \$40,000, that you don't have to give away four years of your life."

Some were disbelieving. Murphy recalled "a young man, Muslim, who was in the Persian Gulf War. He joined to get money for college, and he was sent to a Muslim country to kill Muslims. He says that 'they just blew people away. The Iraqis tried to give themselves up, but we just ran them down. There was no time to take prisoners on the front. So we killed them, ran them down, bulldozed them, buried them alive.' That was his 'be all you can be' story."

As I'm sure you know, I'm more than pleased you are in my class again this semester. I appreciate your generous words, but it was much, much more the course readings that affected you than me. And now you are putting the ideas of nonviolence into risk-taking action. More than once I've found myself thinking, if only all my students were like Joe. I was heartened that you traveled the other Wednesday from College Park to American U when Peter Yarrow spoke and sang in our class. I'll be keeping for a long time the picture I took of you and Peter. Show it to your ROTC commandant on the way out, like sticking a flower in a gun barrel.

Take a look at World Learning, a D.C. non-profit. It has paid internships. My center is a small operation—just my wife and me really—so the job opportunities are nil. If you need any legal help uncoupling from the ROTC, let me know. I can make some calls.

With large respect—

Colman McCarthy

May 1, 2006

Dear Mr. McCarthy

I'm sorry it's been a while since I wrote last. So much has happened and it's only now that I feel things are finally settling down I'm almost done with school this years. Well, one paper and four exams away from being done, but close nonetheless.

I've had a wonderful semester here at Clark, probably the best so far. I think it's a combination if knowing which classes to take and finally feeling like I know this school inside and out. I took a great course on World Order and Globalization this semester which taught me about the pros (yes, there are pros, I found out) to globalization, as well as learning the usual cons. I found that this course was really interesting to me after my semester abroad in Namibia.

Namibia was AMAZING! I learned so much from being there, which was difficult to completely absorb at the time but now I realize how much it has changed me. First of all, I now realize that I can never be in the Peace Corps. Homestays for two week in Inkatatura (the black neighborhood of the capital city) were lonely enough. And I now know that I'm not going to save the world. I will be lucky if I touch one life in a positive way. And I realized that I don't have to go all the way to Africa. Many of the problems Namibia is facing can be found in the U.S. (well maybe not in Bethesda).

I'll be working at the same summer camp I worked at last year in Darnestown, Md.

I would love to come to speak to your B-CC class some time in May. I can't wait to see you.

All the best,

October 10, 2006

If you are still the cheerful, patient and generous friend that you have always been, now's the time to rally all those graces to forgive me for being so far behind. I cherished your letter from last May, brimming as it was with your account of Namibia. Your line, "I will be lucky if I touch one life in a positive way" is what I've told the B-CC classes over and over. When I interviewed Mother Teresa, the saint of Calcutta and who by the way opened a house for girls only two miles from the high school at Chevy Chase Circle, she said at the end of our conversation that few us will ever be called to do great things but all of us can do small things in a great way.

Yes, please come to B-CC. Forty students are in each class, the first one at 7:25 a.m., the ghastliest of hours. Ever wonder how you managed to do that for four years? It was

self-discipline. You have plenty to tell the class: about Namibia, your studies at Clark and how you were one of the most passionate agitators at B-CC. If I didn't tell you then let me tell you now: took delight in your fiery kind of idealism. You were something of an impatient colt, straining to break free and get running. Sure enough, you did.

If you are in town, let's talk and we can settle on a morning. I have classes at two other high schools, so you may have encores.

One recent visitor to B-CC was Vicki Schieber who spoke on the death penalty. She is an ardent opponent. Nothing noteworthy about that, except that her daughter Shannon—B-CC '92 and class president—was raped and murdered in her apartment in Philadelphia in May 1998 when she was in graduate school at Penn. I've brought Mrs. Schieber often to my classes, at B-CC and my other schools. She opens minds and stirs hearts. This is what one of my University of Maryland students wrote in a reflection paper: "I left class last week in a haze. I walked up the stairs mumbling things like 'oh my God' and 'that was moving,' but I felt a distinct emptiness in my laconic exchanges with my peers. I didn't really know how I felt. Vicki Schieber was, as many have called her, a saint. She was beautiful. When she spoke, my heart felt detached from other bodily sensations I never gave much thought to the death penalty before I heard her story. The last time I ever considered it was in some nonsensical 5th grade social studies project. We had to debate one another. I was arbitrarily placed on the 'pro' side. No choice. Just assigned a position and told to support it. I am truly grateful that even at the age of 10, I already knew that most school related assignments were bullshit. Had I not, I probably would have been pro-death penalty today. Vicki Schieber moved me more than I can convey in words."*

I pass this along—dashed off at the beginning of class when I asked for everyone's reaction—because, first, Mrs. Schieber is part of the B-CC family, as you and I are, and, second, because the passion in the Maryland student's piece is much the same as you displayed in our class when you spoke up, debated, questioned, doubted and probed as if everything was riding on it.

And it was. Do try to come in some morning. My best to your family I'm sure they are proud of you, as am I.

Peace, and lots of it--

Colman McCarthy

*After graduating from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in 1992, Shannon Schieber studied at Duke University. An academic rarity, she triple majored in math, economics and philosophy. She graduated magna cum laude in three years while captaining the equestrian team. On May 7, 1998, while pursuing a doctorate at the Wharton School of Business in Philadelphia, Shannon, 23, was murdered by a serial rapist who pried open a balcony door on her second floor apartment. It would take nearly four years of police bungling before the killer was captured and sentenced to prison for life without parole.

In the spring of 2006 Vicki Schieber testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Saying that both she and her husband were “raised in households where hatred was never condoned,” she dispelled a prevailing myth “that families who suffered this kind of loss will support the death penalty. That assumption is so widespread and so unquestioned that a prosecutor will say to a grieving family, ‘We will seek the death penalty in order to seek justice for your family.’”

As if it hadn’t suffered enough already, the Schiebers were publicly criticized by a Philadelphia district attorney for daring to oppose the death penalty for their daughter’s murderer. “Responding to one killing with another does not honor my daughter.” Vicki Schieber told the Senate, “nor does it help create the kind of society I want to live in, where human life and human rights are valued. I know that an execution creates another grieving family, and causing pain to another family does not lessen my own pain.

Her expression of mercy and logic echoes the thought of Kerry Kennedy, a child of eight when her father, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, was killed in June 1968: “I saw nothing that could be accomplished in the loss of one life being answered with the loss of another. And I knew, far too vividly, the anguish that would spread through another family—another set of parents, children, brothers and sisters thrown into grief.”

At about the time she testified before the Senate, which was only one of many legislatures she attempted to educate, Vicki Schieber left her job as an executive director of a trade association to volunteer full-time for the non-profit Murder Victims Families for Human Rights. She is regularly invited to speak to civic, religious, political and academic groups on capital punishment. As a Roman Catholic, she is aware that large numbers within her church are pro-death penalty and that it was only in recent decades that the hierarchy—from local bishops to the papacy—began inching away from its centuries-long endorsement of executions. Often ardently, the church went along with the thinking of Thomas Aquinas: “If any man is dangerous to the community and is subverting it by some sin,” he wrote in the “Summa Theologiae,” the “treatment to be commended is his execution in order to preserve the common good.

In 1994, 11 years after a majority of Catholic bishops opposed the death penalty—“precisely because life is sacred,” as stated in the pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace,” Cardinal Joseph Bernardin told writer James Megivern, author of “The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey”: “We do not have a large percentage of our people with us. If it really is the case that 75 percent of our people do not agree, well then, that means we really have a job ahead of us to explain to them why we take this position.”

August 2, 2007

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

My name is Melissa Smalley. Last week I had the pleasure of hearing you speak when you came to American University to talk my friends and I participating in the National Student Leadership Conference’s International Diplomacy program. Hearing you speak was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the program for me. I had become so used to people talking about corrupt

politicians and proper political procedure that I had started to lose sight of why I am interested in international relations at all: to help people. I've always wanted to help others, not because it would benefit America or make me famous but because it was the right thing to do. To hear you talk about peace and morality was so refreshing. I wanted to write and say thank you for taking the time to visit with my group, and for signing the copy of your book that I purchased. I haven't started to read it yet, but it will be interesting to hear different world leaders thoughts on peace and human rights.

My mother also has an interest in peace studies and conflict resolution. After talking to you on the phone yesterday (which totally took her by surprise!), we started discussing your lecture. It was amazing to find that cold both relate to the ideal of peace studies despite the differences in or age and opinions.

Throughout your speech, you urged my fellow students and I to try and get our schools to create a peace studies and conflict resolution curriculum. I think it would be wonderful to have classes that teach students the peaceful history of the world and plan on taking to the head of the Social Studies department when I return to school. Any suggestions as to how I can approach her get this started for Manalapan High School would be greatly appreciated.

My mother told me that you had an extended to sit in on your class at American. The University is currently my first (and only) choice and I hope that I will be attending our classes as an incoming freshman in 2008. Do you think you will still have the \$100 bill by then?

Yours truly,

Melissa Smalley

August 19, 2007

Dear Melissa:

How strong are your nuisance skills? Your nagging skills? Your hanging in skills? If you want to get peace studies courses in Manalapan High, making a nuisance of yourself, plus being a world-class nag, plus refusing to get lost when you are told to get lost by everyone from the know-it-alls on the school board to know-nothing politicians: all of that is the kind of grittiness you'll need. Just to get one course in place for 25 or 30 students a semester. And not for this coming school years but the next year, if we hurry.

The touchiest problem is all this is the reality that Manalapan High, like all public schools, is a government-run and government-funded funded school operated by government workers we call teachers. Governments tend to resist innovations, otherwise we would have had peace studies departments in every one of the nation's schools by now. It doesn't help that the United States government is, as Martin Luther King, jr., consistently argued the "world's leading purveyor of violence."

State and local governments, including school boards, mostly go along with it. Which means that when you manage to get a few moments with the head of the Manalapan High social studies

department trying to persuade her to create a peace studies class, what you are really doing is trying to change the government's ways. A government is a collection of people who themselves went to schools that had no peace department the way their schools had English, math or science departments. Flexuous, they think: I turned out well, I didn't study peace, so why change things. And that's making the large assumption that someone like you isn't dismissed as an unpatriotic and ungrateful malcontent: who

are you to think you know better than we do.

Schools ought to put a sign over the main entrance: "Students, you're here to learn how to think." In small print: "Just don't get any big ideas."

That's where you're nuisance and nagging skills come in. Almost all social reforms—ones brought about growth, not mere changes—come from below. When the 40 hour

Work week was first proposed—by Eugene Debs, the five time Socialist candidate for president from 1900 to 1920—the idea was dismissed as lunacy. Debs went further. He called for paid vacations for the workers. More lunacy. Then he went to far and urged people to oppose the U.S. entry into the First World War. He praised opponents of the draft. For that he was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison.

Debs never yielded. He as a nuisance and a nag, and he hung in. When you prose your peace studies idea to the chair of the Social Studies department, ask her if she knows about Eugene Debs. If she knows a fair amount, suggest she pass along the information to her classes. In depth. If she doesn't know much, suggest that she isn't qualified to be a teacher. Suggest politely, of course.

To be practical, and to go where growth happens—below—you might think of finding some first or second year students who can do the pushing for peace studies after you graduate. Drum up interest at the school. Write a column for the school newspaper. Do some reporting for the paper: interview the principal, some teachers, parents. Get you Mom in the story, first paragraph if necessary. Write an op-ed for your local newspaper on the need for pace education. Start an anti-war protest. Hit the streets with some peace signs. At one of my high schools, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, I gave my students the option of protesting the war every Friday morning on the highway in front of the school. And it's during class time. Students hold their signs. "Money for Books, Not Bombs." "Study Peace, Not War." "No Blood for Oil." "Honk for Peace." "Honk Again For Peace."

The other morning, a woman came out of a large office building across the street from our protest. She looked angry. Here it comes, I thought: a rightwing crank telling us she's going to call the cops. She crosses the street. The students are watching.

"I have a little problem," she begins. "You aren't making enough noise. Back in the '60s when we were protesting the Vietnam War, we made plenty of noise." She takes out her wallet and writes a check for \$50. "Go buy some bullhorns. Do it right. Makes your voices heard. Really heard." *

The students gave her a round of applause. I invited her to my class the next morning to tell her story--which included, for sure, her arrest record. My students learned

So there's plenty you can do, both inward and outwardly. Go inward and ask yourself how close you are to living simply. There are the lines that Dorothy Day wrote: "As you come to know the seriousness of our situation—the war, the racism, the poverty of the world—you come to realize it is not going to be changed just by word or demonstrations. It's a question of risking your life. It's a question of living your life in drastically different ways."

So glad you are thinking about American University. I can't imagine you wouldn't thrive. The School of International Service has many of the university's most seasoned professors. I taught the first peace studies class in 1984, and now we have a degree program. If you do make a campus visit this Fall, please call ahead. I have a Wednesday afternoon class, "The Principles and Practices of Peace"—you'd be most welcomed to join, plus a couple of morning high school classes. Press me a bit and I'll give you another chance for my \$100 bill.

I enjoyed speaking with your Mom. She's a sweetheart.

In friendship.

Colman McCarthy

On November 22, 2005, The Tattler, the B-CC student newspaper, carried a news story by senior Dan McCartney, "Teachers Protest Peace Studies Demonstration." It read: Traffic along East-West Highway is usually heavy in the morning. But Friday bring even more noise than usual—students shouting and horns honking, all in opposition to the ar in Iraq. Excitedly waving signs, the students enrolled in Mr. McCarthy's Peace Studies course encourage cars to honk to show their opposition to the international conflict..

More locally, however, they are receiving a negative response from B-CC teachers who say the honks are disruptive to any first-period class on the outside of the A building. It's a constant distraction every Friday morning. "How am I supposed to teach over the noise?" asks Mrs. Kirk, who teaches in a classroom that faces East-West Highway. "It doesn't accomplish anything....It's just a distraction....."

Mrs. Kirk also acts as the Faculty Representative on the Leadership Team, and has received several complaints from her colleagues.

Mr. McCarthy remains skeptical. "Those who choose to protest know that studying nonviolence should be back by opposition to the U.S. killing spree in Afghanistan and Iraq. "Why aren't all B-CC students given the option of joining our protest?" he wonders.

Mr. McCarthy is a volunteer teacher and is thus exempt from restriction place on the MCPS [Montgomery County Public School] staff. There is currently no concerted effort to ban the protests aside from the objections some teachers have raised. The "Students Guide to Rights and Responsibilities," published by MCPS, states students "have the right to meet in groups to...demonstrate peacefully" and requires that such demonstrations be "orderly."

Mr. McCarthy's support for the protests remains unfaltering. "We should be making more noise, not less. We need some big brass drums, a half-dozen bullhorns and cowbells, and two or three tubas."

The same issue of *The Tattler* ran a column by Laura Swartz.

"For the past 15 years, B-CC students have witnessed spirited Friday morning protests led by B-CC popular Peace Studies class, taught by Colman McCarthy. However, this practice has recently come under protests of a different sort from several teachers throughout school.

The Peace studies protests, held weekly during the first period class, are meant to raise awareness of the United States' violent activities abroad. The protests also allow students to exercise their First Amendment rights to assembly and protest—a lesson well worth teaching in American public schools. That teachers would oppose the protests now, when there is more reason for protest than there has been in last

fifteen years, is astonishing. Students should be able to protest, especially when they believe their opinions should be expressed. The students protesting are protesting for peace in the world, an admirable goal. Why should teachers oppose such protests, especially in today's world of conflict and suffering?

The biggest complaint is the honking that protestors create on East-West Highway. Teacher complaints about the "Honk for Peace" signs protestors hold up are

completely unjustified, especially when simply closing a window shuts out

almost all of the noise. Many B-CC students have had the experience of looking out the window to see what all the honking is about, then turning back around and getting on with the lesson. Peace Studies only protest for a half an hour a week.

Teachers should not be infringing on a group of students' right to free speech, but should rather commend those students willing to stand out in the Friday morning cold to make sure their opinion is heard—by both those on East-West Highway and those

The February 14, 2006 *Tattler* ran a letter to the editor.

I am writing in response to an article in *The Tattler* by Dan McCartney on the subject of Mr. McCarthy's Friday morning protests on East-West Highway. When I read that the protests were "receiving a negative response from B-CC teachers," I was shocked. I took Mr. McCarthy's class during my senior year, and before then, I had never been involved in any type of political protest. I consider taking Mr. McCarthy's class among the most interesting, exciting and stimulating things I ever did at B-CC.

I would like to emphasize the importance of reminding B-CC students and staff that there is a war going on. Like many other B-CC students, I am ashamed to say that I had never even met someone who been to Iraq until after I graduated. I've moved away to a less affluent area [Idaho] where many students are forced to join the army to pay for college, and making friends that have served in Iraq has become a constant reminder to me of the violence that is taking place in the Middle east. However, as a high school student it was something I almost never thought a bout.

I am truly sorry for teachers...who find the protests to be "a distraction." To me, they meant much more. They were the one constant reminder of the tragic loss of life overseas. If students could be reminded, maybe just for 20 minutes once a week of what is going on, I think it would be a positive contribution to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase community.

Amanda Hunt

Class of '05

(After B-CC, Amanda came to American University. She enrolled in two of my classes and in May 2012 finished her second year at Tulane University Law School.)

March 27, 2009 brought this message to Karen Lockhard, the principal of the high school from an official of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, 4350 East-West Highway, Bethesda, Md.

Good morning:

I work across the street from B-CC and usually B-CC is a fine neighbor, but not today. The students encouraging people on E-W Highway to honk their horns is literally a major headache. I'm finding it very hard to get any work done. Encouraging civic engagement is an important lesson, but this is imposing on the rest of us. Is there an alternative path to civic engagement that is quite so inconsiderate and doesn't have such negative consequences for the rest of us?

I don't know Mrs. Lockhard's reply to the researcher but she did email this to the chair of the B-CC Social Studies department: "Can you guys talk to Coleman (sic)? No honking...just signs."

The demonstrations continued as did the signs and the honking.

May 19, 2012

Dear Colman McCarthy:

I have read and am very impressed with your book, "I'd Rather Teach Peace." I am especially interested in your teaching style and success with students. Do you have an outline which I could get in preparation for discussions with our local Martha's Vineyard Regional High School teachers? I know you were here some years ago

And spoke in their auditorium. Did any of our teachers then express interest in starting a course? I read many of your columns when we lived in the Washington area 1952-1996, then reently read

your essay in “Peace Movements Worldwide” on which I led a book discussion for the Unitarian-Universalist Society of Martha’s Vineyard. Last year we had a discussion of “Living Beyond War” and the author, Winslow Myers, came to our Chapel for a lecture. I’d appreciate any help if you have time to reply.

Roger Thayer

Dear Roger (please call me Colman):

A treat to hear from you. Let me have your street address and I can send along a few sundries that might give you a few ideas. I do remember my visit to the high school and was heartened by the positive reception from many teachers to get a peace studies course in place. Whether it ever happened, I’m not sure.

I would guess not. It rarely does, for two reasons. First, high school teachers are trapped in the current evaluation campaigns. Let’s bounce the incompetents, the time –servers and assorted academic layabouts. These deserve to go but caught in the net are quality teachers.

At Wilson High, of the high schools where I’ve been teaching peace studies courses since the mid-1980s, evaluators have been swarming in of late. They come into the classroom, take a back seat, open a notebook and start evaluating. They stay for half-an-hour, fill a page or two of comments in a week send their findings, with a cc to the principal and assistant principals. Teachers have our possible ratings: very ineffective, ineffective, effective and very ineffective.

In the Fall semester at Wilson I had an evaluator—a “Master Teacher,” 26, paid \$90,000 a year who herself taught for two years but who is qualified to evaluate because she has an MA in education, rated me ineffective, just a point above very ineffective. My class meets for 95 minutes on alternative days. Due the 30 minutes the \$90,000 evaluator was in the room, one student, up late the night before, lay her head on the desk. I was marked down for lack of classroom management. Another student left to go the bathroom without getting my written permission. Another mark down: for losing control.

Then it worsened. The San Francisco Giants happened to be in town, playing against our Washington Nationals. One of the Giants was Emmanuel Burriss, a second baseman who the year before helped his team win the World Series. Emmanuel, 24, was a Wilson graduate and had been in a class taught by my son John who also runs Home Runs Baseball Camp where Emmanuel came as a 6-year-old and showed all the skills that 24 years later would win him a \$1.2 million contract. John, who played in the minors with the Baltimore Orioles, had been his mentor.

For 15 minutes I told Emmanuel’s story, inspirational as it was because he was the first ballplayer in 25 years to make it to the majors from the District of Columbia. The night before, the Wilson principal arranged to have a ceremony at the stadium honoring Emmanuel.

I noticed in the back of the room the evaluator’s hand was tearing across the page, in a fury of note taking. Maybe she’s a baseball fan and really enjoying my storytelling, I thought.

Hmmmmmm. Not quite. When my written evaluation came in, I was scored for wasting time on irrelevant information, for not sticking to a lesson plan. That girl with her head o the desk was still sleeping and the boy in the bathroom had yet to come back after five minutes. Worst, I wasn't preparing the class for the upcoming final exams. Gulp. Except I never give exams in my high school classes.

Months later, another evaluator shows up. Cured by the last experience, I made the potential sleepers sit in the front row, allowed no one to leave for the bathroom—"hold it in, kids"—and definitely told no baseball tales. Now I was rated between effective and very effective. The game goes on. I teach only one course, with my hourly pay less than the janitors rightly earn. So I have no financial worries about being cut loose. But other teachers. Hundreds, in D.C. alone, have been sacked with little recourse and even less effect on raising the city's quality of education: 60 percent of the high school students fail to graduate in four years, the nation's highest rate.

The second reason for peace education getting little footing is that school boards are suspicious: it's those "libruls"—the hate-America-firsters—always hot to propogandize impressionable children with leftist thinking. So we aren't overly welcomed. It's as if a lone peace studies course—for 25 or so students, one semester in the Fall, another in the spring—is as virus that will contaminate the whole school.

The battle for peace education is being lost. Take comfort, though. I. F. Stone,

long on barricades of causes seemingly going nowhere, gave us this: "The only kinds of fights worth having are those that you are going to lose, because somebody has to fight them and lose and lose and lose until someday, somebody who believes as you do, wins. In order for somebody to win an important major fight 100 years hence, a lot of other people have to be willing—for the sheer joy of it—to go right ahead and fight, knowing you are going to lose. You mustn't feel like a martyr. You've got to enjoy it."

My best to the Vineyard's Unitarians. Keep them united in these disunited times.

November 9, 2005

Dear Colman:

Well, this was my last essay.* I'm not sure where to go from here. However I feel this course has taught me a lot and it's been absolutely wonderful to learn from yo. Thank you so much.

I have a question, which is along the lines of the first lesson in the course. I live in a small town [Ojo Sarco, New Mexico] with a high incidence of crime and drug abuse. A few weeks ago a deal friend of mine since childhood disappeared, and he's assumed to have been murdered, probably in connection with drugs. While I'm not directly involved in these things, my town is small enough that it affects me. Recently I've been feeling frightened, especially at night. Today a friend suggested that I buy some pepper spray and keep it in my purse for emergencies. This started a discussion with my Mom where we talked about both sides of the issue. On one hand, I want to lead a truly nonviolent lifestyle. On the other, can I really put my trust in my ability to

nonviolently protect myself. I can believe that it is better to die or be raped than to inflict temporary pain on my attacker but even as I state this I doubt my own words. I'd love your opinion on this.

P.S. In lesson one there is a story of a man who had to gently restrain his wife.** I wonder: if she was going to harm their child and he didn't have the physical strength to gently hold her back, then what? With the options to reason with her or gently stop her gone, then what? Surely he shouldn't have allowed her to hurt his child?

Aspen Meleski, 15, enrolled in the eight lesson home study correspondence course from my Center for Teaching Peace. The assignment involved writing a eight essays reflecting on the eight chapters in the course text, "Alternatives To Violence." I was Aspen's teacher, sending back each essay with my comments .

The reference is to Gerard Vanerhaar's essay, "Dealing With Personal Attacks."

November 26, 21005

Dear Aspen:

Much praise to you for finishing the course. It's the purest kind of education, based on desire, not fear. Tests, exams, homework and grades represent fear-based learning: if I don't ace the exam, something bad will happen to me. If I don't my homework, I'll be in trouble. If I don't get an A, I'll fall behind. Students adapt. They cheat. Whenever I speak at student assemblies, I ask halfway through the talk for a moment of absolute honesty: can anyone raise your hand and say truthfully that you have never cheated in school. Rarely does a hand go up. When I call a cople of students to explain why they cheat, it's almost always the same reason: fear of the consequences if they don't score a high grade.

In "Your Adolescent: An Owner's Manual," Carol Rinzler cannily explains it: "Little Kimberly asks her parents, 'If they tell you in nursery school that you have to work hard so that you'll do well in kindergarten, and if they tell you in kindergarten that you have to work hard so you'll do well in high school, and if they tell you in high school that you'll have to work hard so you'll get into a good college, and assuming that the tell you in college that you have to work hard so you'll get into a good graduate school, what do they tell you in graduate school that you have to work hard for?' Kimberley's parent's answer: 'To get a good job so you can make enough money to send your children to a good nursery school.'"

We've moved away, stumbling really, from the kind of teaching and learning that Socrates believed in. e gave no tests, no homework and no grades. And went further: come to school however long you want and leave when you wish. I'm able to be Socratic at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, to which I bicycle every morning for a 7:25 a.m. first period class. No tests, no homework and no exams. A few students see it as an educational paradise, the ultimate gut course. It's the opposite, I explain. No course will ever be as challenging: it requires self-discipline to write papers without being asked to, it takes energy to do the readings, it means prodding your conscience to use your gifts flyly, it means giving full effort with that being the

only reward, it means making demands on yourself rather than responding to the demands of a teacher. Sure, some students blow off the course and float through the semester, wasting not a calorie on pushing themselves. But many others seize the chance to do the opposite: study and learn because they want to, not because they have to. I'm sure you know the line: when you love to learn, you'll learn to love.

You asked about self-defense. A worthy question, one that we all think about, especially if we want to live nonviolently. As you wondered, "Can I really put my trust in my ability to nonviolently protect myself?"

Some thoughts. Nonviolence offers no guarantees. Neither does violence. With about 22,000 homicides annually and a sexual assault every 17 minutes, it's clear that this part of the planet is a high risk place to live, especially for women. I asked my American University students the other morning to take 10 minutes and write down everything they did in the past month to deal with their fears of sexual assault or sexual harassment. For 10 minutes, the men look at me with blank stares. The women? They were busily writing away, some of them filling the page. I asked the women to read aloud what they'd written, so the men in the class could a bit about their sisters' lives, beginning with the reality that women are vulnerable in ways tht men are not, that the sexes live in different worlds. The women wrote about never making eye contact with men on the sidewalk, carrying pepper spray in their purses and practicing on trees how to air (one student told of spraying herself in the face the fist time she tried), never crossing the campus alone even in daytime, never letting a boy get a drink for her because he might slip a drug into it, always locking the car door after getting in, phoning ahead when going somewhere, deciding what clothes to wear to a party. Men never think this way, women do everyday.

In a crisis or panic situation, sometimes no attempt at self-defense will work—true for women and men. I remember taking my high school and college students to a Virginia state prison to spend an after with prisoners on death row. The warden, a humane man, saw our visiting as a way to ease the numbing boredom endured by the prisoners. During the seminar, student asked an inmate how best to defend oneself if an attacker on the street threatened your life during a hold-up. First, the prisoner said, don't to fight or flee. The attacker, who has probably held-up plenty of people before getting to you, is ready for that. Instead, defend yourself by saying something unexpected. Try the Jesus defense.

Look the attacker in the eye, say Jesus loves you and so do. And then reach out to hug him.

Everyone had a good laugh at that one. But the prisoner was serious: short of giving over all your money, it's your best chance of coming out alive. You're defended yourself with an appeal to the attacker's humanity, not his evil. Will it work every time? Of course not. Will it work more often than a violent defense? Each of us has to decide.

For many years here in Washington I came to know William Proxmire, five term senator from Wisconsin and as decent and thoughtful a person ever to serve in Congress. He was something of an athlete. Most days he ran from his home in the Cleveland Park neighborhood in northwest Washington to his office on Capitol Hill, showering and changing when he arrived, and then

running back home in the evening. The inevitable happened late one night. Two thugs, one aiming a handgun, stop him. Senator Proxmire said he had no money. They didn't believe him: hand it over or you're dead. Calmly, the senator said, "go ahead and kill me. I have cancer and I'll be dead anyway in four weeks." Hearing that, the thug without a gun said to the other, 'Let's leave this brother alone, he's a sick man, he's got cancer.'

When Bill Proxmire told me this story, I said it's one worthy of Gandhi. He smiled. But I asked if he planned to keep running through that rough part of time again. His little cancer tale probably wouldn't work again. "I have another plan," he said. I wished him luck.

Months passed and the senator was attacked again. Same story, except this time the two attackers were boys in their late teens. He asked them why they were robbing him. "we need money, why else would we rob you." "If you really want to get money, I'll tell you where to get some, a lot of it." He told the two to come to his office the next day and he would give them jobs. Entry level work, answering phones, sorting mail, errands. The two did come. One turned out well, the other didn't and was soon in prison.

A footnote to these stories. Another senator, John Stennis, a Mississippi Democrat back when the South almost always sent Democrats to the Senate, was returning to his home near the National Cathedral. Two attackers jumped him on the walkway to his front door. Stennis, who served on the Senate Armed Services Committee and lavished money on military programs and thought that the violence of war was the proper defense for America, swung his fists at the pair. They shot him. Hospitalized, the senator survived—barely. His health never returned.

Those are the two options: nonviolent or violent defense. It's the same in our personal lives and our collective lives. I was visiting with my friend Joan Baez last month when she was in Washington for a concert. As she has done more than a dozen times over the years, she generously gave tickets for my students and passes for a get-together back stage after the concert. As much as anyone I know, Joan believes in and practices nonviolence.. You might try to locate her autobiography, "And A Voice to Sing With." In it are the lines: "Nonviolence offers no guarantees. But the curious thing is that people who do violence don't receive guarantees either. Statistics show that you have a better chance of coming out alive in a nonviolent battle."

It's been a joy to have you as a student. You have a caring heart, ample ideals, an open and searching mind, and plenty of energy to put those rare assets to full use. From time to time, let me know what you are doing and thinking. I'll do the same from this end.

Hello to your parents. Always show appreciation to them.

In friendship, Colman McCarthy