

THE SEEDS OF SERVAS

Opening Doors for Peace



A Personal Recollection of the Earliest Days of Servas

by

BOB LUITWEILER

Richard Piro, Editor

Acknowledgment

This book would never have happened was it not for the continuous encouragement of Richard Piro and Mary Jane Mikuriya. For many months Richard urged me to fill in the blanks by constantly asking. "What did that feel like?" His other mantras were, "Experience, don't observe," and "Show us, don't tell us." The original dozen or so pages grew - often painfully into a book. Then, as often happens when creative people mesh, communications derailed. Mary Jane stepped in and because of her Aristotelian, manner of asking tough questions, what had deteriorated into a scatter!d manuscript transformed into a tight, and - we hope - powerful account of the beginnings of Servas.

At first my intention was to relate how I had only sowed the ideas of Servas whereas the real founders of Servas were those dedicated people like Connie Thorpe, Esma Burrough and the others in the Birmingham, England Peace Builder's team, and, of course, Grandma Esther Harlan in California. Perhaps, as some have suggested, this book will be considered the first installment of a more complete autobiography.

Bob Luitweiler, Bellingham, Washington

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Introduction

This story is not only about the beginning of Servas but the awakening of a mind on a slow overland trip from Norway to India. Confrontations with divergent cultures replaced my colored glasses with an often diamond clear vision. An ever deepening awareness from immersion in diverse ways of life shook up my ingrained assumptions. From shades of gray suddenly rainbow colors burst into my consciousness. Freed from the shackles of my upbringing and a classic American mentality I began to soar with the perspective of a global citizen. The human community emerged as a magic quilt of life styles and manners of thinking and living, a single tapestry of myriad designs unfolding before me.

Shifting from a tourist absorbing scenic vistas to a traveler actively searching the central ideas of cultures happens gradually. At first the subtle thought/observation changes are unnoticeable. Then one discovers that a once passive and barely opened mind has blossomed into an inquisitive flower hungry for pollination. As I learned to listen with empathy, the most humble persons from distant corners of the globe became my mentors, pulling me into undreamed of chambers of thoughts and insights. I was no longer a touring observer looking in but a participant savoring many ways of life.

This recollection tells about a seeker's trip that had none of the benefits of a Servas network of friendly hosts along the way. But the unimagined rewards, life enhancing insights and experiences I had 50 years ago are now awaiting every Servas traveler. An awakened traveler is merely helped along the way by lists of welcoming hosts. That's the easy part! This account describes the gradual shedding of native prejudices and preconceptions as one young man gives himself permission to blend with the people he was among; to sense their hearts and their yearnings; to glimpse even a little of their souls.

Perhaps because it was so obvious I never felt superior to any of them, complete strangers welcomed me as if I had belonged to their communities. With actions rather than words, I tried to reach out to them with empathy and to tell them I felt they were important and valuable persons who had much knowledge to share with me. The scientist or journalist who sees their study subjects only as objects builds a wall around himself. The people studied may be viewed* pieces in a puzzle more than wann, feeling cousins. Many times I was treated like a son returning home after a long journey. Even the policeman in Skoplia who was ordered to arrest me ended up inviting me to be his guest at his home. The chief of police in Tunisia, where I was picked up for hiking in a war zone, welcomed me to tea.

This story, in other words, is the story of three trips in one sowing the seeds of Servas; learning about special social movements; and the discovery of the value that comes from losing myself among distant peoples who immediately ceased to be strangers. Looking back fifty years from now, my heart overflows with joy as I remember the kindnesses, the thoughtfulness, patience and generosity I encountered almost daily as a questing vagabond. Call it a pilgrimage into the soul of humanity, if you like. My temple was the world; my fellow parishioners the human family; my bible the sennons of the lives of the people in all social strata. This story covers only the trip to India and back, the first chapter of a seeker's life. Since Servas was started, many others have had similar adventures each on their own unique quest. What experience could be more fulfilling than a pilgrimage into the soul of the human family? Almost 15,000 hosts around the world are waiting to help *you* on your journey of discovery.



(Bob Luitweiler Circa 1948)



Mary Jane Mlkuriya. Northern California Rep. Bob Luitweiler (Circa 1999)

The Arrival

The rails of the ship were crowded by youth hostellers craning to get their first view of Europe as we glided up Oslo Fjord on that brilliant June Sunday morning in 1948. The people who came rushing out of their tiny cottages to joyously wave to us made us feel like we were on a homecoming. The contrast with our brief stop at Southampton was stunning. There we had to anchor out in the harbor because all the piers were destroyed. I had gazed in disbelief at the skeleton of the ancient cathedral and tangle of steel girders from newer buildings that looked as though some unearthly power had twisted them together with the fury of an angry child trashing his toys in irrational frustration. The sight of the chaos carried my thoughts back to the incoming buzz bombs rocketing across the English Channel and the shrieking of people under the burning and crumbling buildings.

The picturesque Norwegian coast as gentler world, in no way the war-torn Europe we anticipated. For many of us it was like landing in a fairyland. No ugly billboards, no snarling auto traffic, no derelict cars or residue from unchecked industries marred the landscape. Central Oslo was a clean cozy 'city with boulevards and narrow streets and little friendly shops. Even more striking were the robust people of all ages who looked as though they could take a ten-mile stroll in the country with no effort.

On Saturday the big bus could barely edge through the throng of bicyclists crowding the narrow city streets of Oslo. Without so much as a car it seemed like the whole city was headed for a weekend in the bright-summer countryside, some to shepherd's cabins, some to country cousins, many to camp out. After a few days, I began to feel an affinity with these proud nature-loving people who conserved and cherished their forests, fjords and thousands of coastal islands, despite their unspoken aloofness. There was no consumer's crazed society with blighted, logged off mountain slopes and resorts blanketing the shorefront.

A Previous Trip

So began my second life-changing visit to Europe. My first trip's experiences still lingered just below the surface. I remembered how that little cargo steamer had stood on end in the rough February sea, almost tossing some passengers into the sea. But it wasn't the bucking ship that turned me around. A few months in Switzerland studying French shattered my complacent American mentality. Being with youthful fellow campers from all over Europe opened my eyes. Football scores and racing cars were farthest from their minds. One high school French girl introduced herself by asking, 'What is your politics?' Then my limited French pushed her to explain, "Surely, you must be Socialist, Right Wing, Communist or Anarchist?" When I told her I believed in democracy because I barely understood those political ideologies she gave up on me.

I can still see the pained expression on the face of the fellow camper from Italy when I asked him about Mussolini. My 16-year-old room mate was called back to Spain to fight in the Spanish revolution. On the way home I passed through shiny Germany where even the Bulgarian boys in the Youth Hostel were in swastika uniforms and hailed Hitler as they signed in. At the time I had no idea I was seeing Europe on the verge of another slaughter. I realized, however, how sheltered my childhood had been and when I returned home how insulated from the world my fellow high school students were. However, each turn shook my thinking in ways that well prepared me to see below the surface as I slowly traveled from Scandinavia to India on this, my second trip abroad.

Learning From Outcasts

In 1942, as a Gandhian-inspired conscientious objector (CO), I had refused to be drafted to fight in World War II. I objected not only to the killing but also to the government assuming it had the right to force young men to kill each other. There are better and more effective ways to stop despotism than the barbaric violence of war. Finding other approaches was one more purpose of my field studies.

I chose to think of my imprisonment as the US Government's gift of a residential seminar in criminology with all expenses paid including room and board and hundreds of subjects eager to be interviewed. For a wanderer and lover of open spaces the confinement was no picnic. I remember looking out through the bars at the pretty hills of Connecticut and dreaming what it would be like to be hiking in them. However, there was satisfaction in turning the experience into a learning one rather than bemoaning my confinement. The guards seemed angered at my joyfulness.

I was supposed to feel remorseful and chastised.

Often when I saw men pacing their cells like caged wild animals, I did feel quite angry. How is it that a country that called itself free and civilized would put humans in cages? Even though both of the prisons in which I did time were model institutions some frustrated inmates tried to kill themselves.

Two years in two different Federal Correctional Institutions (Oanbury, Connecticut and Ashland, Kentucky) never *corrected* me but made me a more detennined social reformer. I was given the opportunity to live among and become friends with the outcasts of our society. They were sons of poor immigrants, destitute plantation workers from Puerto Rico, slum bred AfricanAmericans, Kentucky mountain moon shiners and a few wellschooled con artists. The stories of the broken lives of these outcasts who had robbed the government far less than the officials running'the establishment would make a heart-rending book. teaming to see the world through their eyes was a revelation for all socially concerned conscientious objectors. We were shaken to see how our wealthy country abandons many of its poor and its minorities and how it wastes millions of dollars punishing them, when helping them to adapt to productive lives would cost a fraction as much and express a sense of compassion instead of punishment.

Equally valuable was living among the creative minds of the other conscientious objectors who were leaders in their fields. Many were, visionaries in various fields of education and social change - now all criminalized by a violent government. Noteworthy was the way we turned our prison lives into constructive pursuits. Famous books were illegally written and smuggled out the back gate. Arnold perfected his Arabic while walking the yard with an Arab inmate and later became head of a Middle East language school. Bill, or was it his brother Fred, started his studies in medicine in the prison hospital. Fran took the night job watching the generators so as to study in isolation like a monk in his cell. He became a well known religious educator. Bob and Steve became carpenters and builders starting with their experience in construction on the farm. Jim, a pastor on the outside became a pastor to the other inmates. Another pacifist tried to organize the guards into a labor union. African American Bayard astonished the racist illiterate Kentuckians with his gifted literacy courses in the educational department. I learned Esperanto out of a book and then started an Esperanto class. Then I started a sociology seminar where we invited other inmates to be resource people.

I gained valuable experience working on the farm and in construction details. Then, as janitor, I learned to quickly clean the fifty-man dormitory and washroom so as to have maximum study time. Life there, for many conscientious objectors, was an ongoing spontaneous and stimulating seminar in which we used each other as resource people. For some prisoners it is a crime school. For us it became life-awakening education.

The creative outlets prisoners discover are legion. A pacifist inventor in another prison made an electric pop-up toaster while in solitary confinement with materials he spirited from the broom closet. He let himself out of his cell an+into the closet with keys he made by flattening and then rubbing spoons on his bed legs. I also like the story of the artist who did sculpture in solitary where everything is taken away from you. The "hole" prisoners call it is the second level for breaking a man's will. He sculpted with a mixture of his pasty breakfast oatmeal and clean toilet paper.

But social leaders on the outside are not lulled to sleep when incarcerated. Beleaguered prison wardens were squeezed between racist inmates and anti-segregation pacifists. First we were permitted to have interracial eating areas. Then we pressed for desegregation in the dormitories. Worst for the wardens was the way every mistaken move made by the prison administration flashed like lightening to awkward questions asked in the US Congress. Our mail was censored and our visits limited but word got out. and traveled fast through a grapevine of concerned, politically active people. In Lewisburg, PA the warden is said to have become very cautious of the way he treated inmates. The prison population was so well organized any unfair move he made could result in a nonviolent prison wide strike. Another federal prison warden is said to have commented, "Oh for the good old-days of bootleggers and bank robbers when we don't have these damn CO's to deal with."

The Arousal

If someone had told me, as our ship steamed toward Norway, that I was destined to sow seeds that would grow into a worldwide movement I would have laughed. Nothing could have been farther from my mind.

I had not returned to Europe to be a *tourist* but rather to launch a learning quest. Finland was to be my first "seminar." It had taken less then a year's residence at Antioch College and then incarceration as a Conscientious Objector to realize that sociology could be better learned from life than in academia, no matter how qualified the books and professors. Ivory tower learning was artificial, vicarious and too often out of touch with the dynamics of the people's world - the workers, minorities, refugees, and rapidly changing societies.

The course I assigned myself I called Social Dynamics what causes societies to flower? What makes others disintegrate? What are the root causes of injustice, alienation and prejudice that lead to war? Above all, I wanted to know those movements that had been most successful in awakening a strong sense of social consciousness among ordinary folk. I was looking for credible foundations for a nonaggressive democratic society. Experience and study of social movements had convinced me that this was the best route to developing a more just social system.

For my syllabus on this trip I planned to study three movements in depth:

- (1) The Folk High Schools of Denmark which had demonstrated an educational approach for an awakening of social responsibility in rural youth for almost a century;
- (2) The Israeli Kibbutzim for their extensive experience in communal living, and
- (3) The Gandhian movement to see if it had succeeded or failed in spreading the philosophy of nonviolence in India.

But these goals turned out to be only a few high spots in a four-year trip to India. As it turned out, I was headed for a comprehensive education from life that included, among other things, sociology, political science, ethnology, linguistics, economics and cultural psychology.

Unlike the other passengers, mostly college students on a summer's jaunt, I had a special quest. The first trip was for me a baptism in the bigger world. It gave me a different a perspective. Attending the Quaker meetings focused my concern for peace, strengthening my convictions that a world free of war was possible. After a year at Antioch College I joined with a few other students to start a little cooperative farm that cultivated more ideas than crops.

I had already served a stint as a migrant worker picking string beans in Aorida and learned much *mOle* than a couple of years of sociology books and lectures would have taught me. I worked and lived as a migrant and simply listened to their stories and heartaches as we worked side by side. They had no idea I was there to learn from them rather than to earn twenty-five cents an hour on the grading belt or twenty-five cents for picking a bushel of string beans.

Before leaving home, I learned a little Danish by mimicking the guttural sounds on a language recording until I got a sore throat. Unfortunately when I asked directions my phrases sounded .so authentic the local people thought I was a Dane. Since all educated Danes understand Oslo Norwegian, they answered in rapid Norwegian, not a word of which I could even guess. The best I could do was head in the direction they pointed. Then, as soon as I turned a corner, I asked again.

After a week in Oslo, our group of Americans cycled down the Oslo Fjord and across the wide and mostly open pastures of Sweden. One day we were suddenly astonished to see a Lilliputian steamboat materialize in the pasture before us. The tiny ship that squeezes through tunnels and across viaducts looked more like an amusement park ride than the passenger cruise ship it was. Without hesitation we bought tickets and were soon silently gliding through immaculate fields, with tassels of grain brushing both sides. In places we looked down hundreds of feet to roads passing under us. It seemed like we were floating in the sky.

There was barely a car on the road, frequent crystal lakes to refresh in and youth hostels for every night's stay, made it a cyclist's paradise.

A Stream-lined City

Sailing into Stockholm with its shiny buildings glittering in the sun and naked children playing in the parks and fountains ushered in another magic scene. The youth hostel was in the historic quarter where narrow streets squirmed between medieval hand carved buildings. Bridges reached across clear placid waterways connecting the old town to other islands and the mainland. Snuggled up to the hostel the old town was a storybook village. Every building was an artistic creation from an earlier age when artisans, proud of their skills and a strong sense of humble beauty, carved a little of their soul into the doors and window frames of each house and shop.

Stockholm was a contrast in cultures and political ideologies in a new and old city with monuments to an aristocratic empire on one side and a socialist egalitarianism on the other. Beyond the grand government buildings of an earlier period were long streets of repetitious apartments. They were crowded with tiny apartments unable to accommodate the deluge of families migrating from fanns all over the country into the newly industrialized city. My social worker friends complained the government had tried to streamline family life creating special activities for children, different ones for mothers, otherS for fathers and still others for the elderly. These concerned social workers felt the programs had the effect of splintering families. When I later asked the professor of social sciences about this trend, he seemed to have never thought of it.

So pressing was the influx, families had to wait five and six years to get one cramped apartment. Children were

moved to children's hospitals when they had measles, mumps or other children's diseases so as not to infect the other siblings at home. Neither could the tight little apartments squeeze in an additional relative. When one family hosted me for a night, I slept on a mat with my feet in the kitchen and my head in the hall where people had to step over me.

A Cozy Country

After my last companion returned to the US, I got a job living with a Danish family. Working as farm hand in the harvest brought me into a new level of Scandinavian life. Since no one on the farm knew a word of English, I had plenty of practice talking Danish. The meaning of Anglo-Saxon struck me when I discovered how many terms this rural dialect had that were closer to English than Copenhagen Danish, the kind I had learned from my recordings.

The farm apprentices all lived with the family, a common practice in those days. Although all the work was done by hand or horse power except for the motorized thrashing machine in the barn, their mode of work was so calmly paced we weren't exhausted at the end of nine hours in the harvest fields. Doing this farm work, in effect, paid me to learn Danish. My hosts were especially amused when I went out to the kitchen to help wash the dishes and also when I used the newly installed toilet instead of going out behind the cows as all the men did. For my part, I was appalled to see, after the enjoyable harvest dinner, all the left over vegetables that had been grown for the celebration, thrown to the cows. Our meals then went back to meat and potatoes. One gets a much better feeling for family life, even with only a couple weeks working like that, than can be had in a twoday "visit."

One evening at dinner the four-year-old daughter started gently pulling her six-year-old sister's hair. The older girl pushed her hand gently away. I held my breath expecting the kind of angry conflict so frequent in American families. Daddy just said in a firm voice. "Stop it." A little incident barely worth mentioning but I think it was significant because in all my time in Denmark I only saw one serious conflict dealing with disagreements either between children or between children and parents.

In observing various cultures and ways of life during many years of travel, I have discovered that by unobtrusively watching child-parent conflict resolution one can get an extraordinary insight into the psychology of a community. Little incidents vividly reflect the mentality of the community, their authoritarian or democratic mentality, their preference for violence or gentle persuasion, their patience or quick temper. There even seems to be a correlation between the way these little incidents are resolved and the kind of government country has - unless it is a country with many conflicting cultures.

Outsiders who think Scandinavians are almost alike could not be more wrong. The Swedes are great people when you get to know them, trustworthy in every way and really industrial innovators who care about the welfare of their communities, their people and the environment. For example although they have a higher standard of living per capita than Americans they use less energy per person. Perhaps they became shy and not always flexible because they lived for many generations far apart from each other and in a country on the northern edge of Europe. Their Danish cousins, on the other hand, who live close together in a country with intensive farming and compact villages are some of the friendliest and most outgoing people in the world.

For example, one wet day when we were looking for the youth hostel where we could change and dry off, a girl we asked directions from told us her uncle, a judge wanted to invite us in. We shed our wet muddy clothes, and took warm showers in his polished bathroom and then enjoyed tea with the family as though we were old friends. The Danes call it a cozy land. In those days it really was.

A Road's Scholar in Finland

Who would expect crossing from Sweden to Finland on a dreary October afternoon could open one's mind into a new, life lasting realm? It was no flash of discovery, no sudden revelation but a crack in a very slow opening door. The view from the train as it chugged across the featureless landscape of frost bitten fields and shadowy buildings veiled in drizzle were hardly mind-altering stimuli. It awakened to a deeper level of inquisitiveness that has enriched my life from that day until now. Since then most people I meet and places I visit are more than a pleasant experience or a snapshot for the photo album. Each is another piece in the jigsaw puzzle picture of our complex world. The disarray takes shape. Experiences appear less happenstance. They find a logical place in the puzzle. Life on our apparently discordant planet is interrelated. Every change, constructive or destructive, has its cause and its important effect on the whole of life. I now cherish the excitement of knowing, at least a little, the inside of a different society and discovering the holistic interplays there and with the outside world. That is the kind of enrichment that the fast-

moving person misses.

The Finns' rare mentality started this change in my life's perspective. I could no longer say, as I did in the other Scandinavian countries: Here they are, that's what they are like. Their very uniqueness urged me to look deeper, to ask what had made them that way. The searching in depth that started in Finland followed me the rest of my life because it opened the eyes of my mind. Gradually I learned how many different levels of understanding one can gain from visiting a community. There is the tourist picture post card site with people in colorful costumes doing interesting things. These people are to the tourist just part of the scenery. A little deeper insight may come by talking with a few people about their customs. The fortunate travelers are invited into a home and may get a superficial glimpse of family life and think he or she has really learned something. But there are many deeper levels to fathom. It is amazing to learn about the evolution of the community life, its efforts to emerge, its struggle to survive, its pride and visions, its class and racial conflicts and efforts to overcome them. The memories of the elderly give visions into earlier times. The dreams of the young can reveal the future - for they suggest how their society will develop.

Gradually one learns enough to stand in the sandals of the stranger and gain at least a vague sense of their feelings. When, that happens, I know I am beginning to see the inside of their community. Even greater are the rewards that come when I learn something that becomes part of my way of life or is useful to my home community.

These insights were initiated by the Finland experience. The habit of learning has grown over the years until today, though I am 80, not a day goes by that I do not learn something from a stranger. Each new insight from spontaneous friendly conversations with strangers adds to my appreciation of our complex life.

At the time Finland was under an oppressive debt to the Soviet Union. The Finns had fought to keep land near Leningrad which the Soviet demanded for fortification. For some time that little country held off the mighty Soviet army but lost in the end. When I was there, the Russians were supplying raw materials and demanding the Finns process it for them for nothing. The labor was the only thing they had to pay the reparations the Russians demanded. The poor, yet indomitable Finns, defeated and suffering the ravishes of the war were forced to give their labor to the Russians. All they had to eat was fish, boiled potatoes and an occasional apple.

In Finland I visited a number of their folk high schools which were just starting and again found warm receptions. In one school the girls came early to ready everything for the term. The teacher asked each one to get up in front of the group, tell where she was from and sing a song. Not a bit shy, with no instrument, in front of mostly strangers they sang with as freshness of voice as the birds in their fields.

There was a regular ritual at the folk schools. Everyone took a boiled potato and peeled it before anyone started to eat. Hoping for some extra roughage and vitamins I asked the person on both sides of me for the skins they were discarding and mashed them into my potato. "Ha," they said, amazed at the potato skin eating American, "you would have made out much better than we did during the war."

In Helsinki I visited some of the leaders of the Consumer's Co-operative movement who generously took the time to explain the movements and problems of their country. The Finns are a remarkable people who don't believe there is such a thing as defeat. They not only bought their freedom from the Russians but were some of the first to pay back American war debts. But their strong will caused their Consumer's Co-operative movement to splint down the middle. The factory workers were Marxists, but the farmers were not. The conflict resulted in making Finland one of the rare countries that had two parallel Consumer Cooperative movements. They had two wholesales which belonged to separate stores across the country. Many cities had Co-op stores competing with each other, farmers belonging to one, factory workers to the other. What was remarkable was that these two competitive systems gave Finland a more co-operative consumer's economy than any other country because the ideological conflict found in many co-ops all over the world was not a divisive element in their local co-ops.

Two Servas Seeds Planted

Outside of Stockholm, on the way back from Helsinki, I visited a work camp for peace where Gertraud Hertling, a German student volunteer sowed the first seed of Servas. A shapely girl with a ready smile, she said in excellent English, "You cannot imagine how isolated the German youth are. First, as a result of the Nazi regime then during the 'War, our youth have been cut off. Now the occupation forces allow us to take no more than five dollars out of the country. You can't go far with that. How can our German youth, locked into occupied Germany, learn the meaning of democratic ways?"

One of the advantages of traveling alone is the frequent loneliness of being far from home in a strange land. Missing friendly human contact impelled me to talk with everyone I chanced to meet - someone sitting nearby waiting for the train or ferry, someone sitting alone in a restaurant; someone sitting in the park or walking near me. Every kind of

person enlarged my knowledge and gave me new insights.

The next Servas seed came from a young American whom I met that on the road. He told me at great length and in the strongest reactionary terms how terrible the Swedish Socialist government was. At that time there was almost no country in Europe that cared more for its working people without blocking entrepreneurial initiatives, as the Communist countries did. Sweden's medical services were excellent and mostly free. Their Consumer's Co-operative movement was the envy of thoughtful people around the world. Their educational system was also outstanding. Of Equal significance, there were no unemployed or poor people. I was profoundly disturbed up by his attitude. This young man had gotten the most biased picture of Sweden possible from the reactionary rich host family he had been placed with for the summer, by a well known international student exchange program. Ouch! There was certainly a need for a different hospitality system.

The Universal Spirit

The experience of organizing a few world peace demonstrations such as the one when we walked 170 miles from Lancaster, P A to the United Nations building in New York, gave me the foolhardy confidence I could organize a little hospitality network in Europe, even though I was a foreigner. If committees in various countries could be formed that would gather the names and addresses of families, settlement houses, co-op living groups and children's villages, a hospitality network could be developed with no need for financial support or any other kind of backing. This network of hosts offering two nights hospitality would give youth, who had not been able to travel during the war, the opportunity to know people of other countries and hopefully learn from them ways they could improve their home communities. It is amusing, looking back from here, at this naive American, who believed by hitchhiking from country to country he could find families that, although they had been through a hellish war, would be willing to welcome strangers including former occupation soldiers as respected guests. I can't blame my Danish companions at Askov for calling me a "*fantist*" - wild dreamer. What they didn't know was that I had been given a special insight by my Quaker background - a penetrating view into the soul of mankind. In America they call it the *Inner Light*. The Hindus call it the *Atman*. By whatever name, it guides one to see the potential goodness in a stranger even one with the worst of attitudes and motives. If one looks deeply enough, one finds within every person that spark of humanity, the desire to be a wanted and respected part of the human family. Lighting that spark can bring out wonderful responses. This perspective has freed me from many dangerous conflicts and buoyed me up in the most depressing circumstances. It turned this "*fantist*" into a trusting realist.

Those people who put Servas on the map were persons who shared this faith in humanity and in the potentialities of peace. They had gone through the terrors of World War II and had their pacifism more sorely tried than mine. Where else could I have better found Europeans who had risen above the hatred of war and the bitterness of its aftermath? Actually, I did not choose them for those reasons. The leaders of the various anti-war organizations like the War Resister's International, the International Voluntary Service for Peace, the Quakers and the Fellowship of Reconciliation were my ideological family. Without them Servas never could have been started, at least in that place at that time. Though at first all of them were strangers, I always had the feeling I was talking to old friends. The world wide network of quiet, caring peacemakers is a powerful force too few people realize is there. In most other circles at that time there would have been much less sympathy for the open door plan. My failure would have proven my Askov critics correct in seeing me as a wild dreamer living in the clouds.

Thanks to those peace leaders, this vagabonding sower of peaceful seeds was led to the people who would cultivate them until they grew strong and spread over most of the world. The real founders of Servas are, therefore, those dedicated volunteers who cultivated those seeds by structuring national committees who then gathered the Open Door host lists. I was merely the agitator. The story I concocted about a group of students at Askov folk high school as being the founder of Servas is pure fiction created because I don't like any personality cult and wanted to avoid one in Servas. But this myth of which I am guilty has been harder to squelch than to create and can be found in Servas literature around the world. May it finally rest with this account!

Pacifist: To be or not to be

So you can rightly call me the seeder of Servas but call those who cultivated them the true founders for there would be nothing without them. Although many of them are pacifists, Servas was never intended to be a pacifist organization, either in terms of wanting mostly pacifist hosts or favoring pacifist travelers. We never wanted to

convert anyone to become a conscientious objector. However, everyone who benefits from Servas should thank those dedicated persons who worked for years, and took money out of their own pockets to make the Open Door network a world reality. Please, brothers and sisters, stop arguing about pacifism in Servas. Though not pacifists, Servas has from the start, aimed to build the foundations of justice that can lead to a peaceful world. The brief accounts that follow reveals the effect of the Danish Folk High Schools and of Gandhi's constructive program to clarify what I mean by peace building. Reading Gandhi's biographies can give an even clearer picture of those methods that inspired Servas, and might explain the difference between pacifism and Gandhian peace building through social transformation.

In the capitals of all the Scandinavian countries, except Iceland, I visited the offices of the peace organizations. Though they had different names in each country they were easy to find because they belong to a world network. In each one, I felt as though I were talking to old friends as they listened sympathetically and then referred me to individuals they thought might be interested in starting the program in their country. I guess I recited the plan of open doors for peace hundreds of times. Most committees melted down to one or two dedicated individuals.

In Denmark, Nana Funder, who had a well-known preschool in Copenhagen and had traveled Servas in the US was for a long time one of the Servas Committee members. Kristen Ingvorsen who manufactured roofing tiles was the other member of their little team.

In Norway, Ulf Christensen took the leadership for many years.

Although Germany was devastated and short of housing and food, they were most eager to be part of the program and Helmut Hertling, Gerlraud's father became the advisor to the first German Committee which he drew together.

Many nights I enjoyed the fragrance of a hay-filled barn or straw pile under the stars. On a dark night in Sweden when my hitch hike ride left me far out in the country, I approached a little barn to find the hayloft. The big bovine eyes and long horns in the beam of my flashlight quickly changed my mind. It was warm outside and the soft stack of weeds made a good bed. The next morning as the farm family was enjoying a breakfast on the patio a strange figure materialized out of their fertile compost. Instead of asking me who I was they called the police. In the meantime, I discovered a school a short distance down the road and was welcomed in to watch the class by the lone teacher. When a policeman finally caught up with me, he asked where I had been for the hour he had been searching. We both had a good laugh when I told him while showing my passport. I might add that in northern Finland when asking for the youth hostel, a local jail is often suggested for there the spring bed with a soft mattress and crisp sheets was often better than a hostel. It was vastly superior to the bed bug and vermin infested US jails I'd been stuck in while being transported to prison.

The freedom on the road was a piece of cake frosted with a kaleidoscope of ever unfolding adventures. I soon got used to the disorientation of waking up in weird and strange places. The new people I met through my simple mode of travel compensated many times over for the few minor hardships. The humblest people have offered me hospitality and shared a morsel of food with me in every place I vagabonded. They taught me what I had only known theoretically, to understand the innate goodness and generosity of people in all countries of all races.

My Quaker faith in human nature was gradually transformed from a faith into unforgettable experiences in human kindness. The goodness of human nature is no longer just a faith for me. It has been made into a reality from hundreds of generous kindnesses in every corner of the world where I have traveled. One can lose faith but it is hard to forget the reality of such generousities. Unfortunately too few of our middle class Servas travelers descend to bicycles and knapsacks, or enjoy the experience of spontaneously helping a strange farmer in the harvest, or reaching out to orphan children in the streets.

Learning Social Movements

From June to November when, Askov Folk High School opened for the winter term, I traveled from Finland to the German border investigating Scandinavian social institutions like family services, youth programs and particularly consumers' cooperatives that dominated their economies. In Sweden, since the country had been unscathed by the war, they had beautiful modern stores with most of the things any family would need. All the Scandinavian countries had factories owned by the Cooperative Federations. In Finland I was drawn to the settlement houses that were building bridges of understanding between the Finish and Swedish speaking population, a model that, if applied, could reduce ethnic conflicts in many parts of the world. The school for Laps in northern Sweden was a happier center than the mission schools American Indians were forced into. Cultural centers in farming communities across Denmark had programs for children, youth and adults. The local farmers invited leading writers and thinkers to speak there. After a day in the harvest fields, the young men who worked with me jumped on their bikes and rode to their

center where they read poetry and folk danced. I could fill many pages describing the high level of Scandinavian cultural appreciation.

The co-operative movements that dominated Scandinavia's marketing systems demonstrated the value of an economy that is neither profit-motivated nor government managed but is run by the people. The bright clean stores and the quality products were better and less expensive than one could get anywhere else. Many consumers' co-operative associations had their own factories producing for consumption, not for profit. This strong democratic sector influenced all Scandinavian societies from education to care of the elderly.

Folk High Schools

Much of the awakening in social and cultural matters was due to the education in the Folk High Schools. I had learned about this remarkable educational movement, which changed a whole country, from the son of my college's former president. The Danish folk high schools had been thriving for about a hundred years when I got there and were still a vital part of the life. They had been inspired by a few visionaries who believed Denmark could best protect its independence by awakening its people. They were outside of the public education system but well supported by the government. Most Danes were rural folk who left school at 14 to work full time on farms or as artisans, often in apprenticeship positions. Then between 18 and 25 people reach the questioning age when life forming questions asking: What are life's purposes? What relationship should we have with our society? What kind of conditions do we want to raise our children in? At that critical age the residential schools all over the country took these young people, usually for only a winter, when they weren't needed on the farms. Through non-academic programs the young adults gained a new view of life. Many became instruments in the revitalization their country.

Thus emerged one of the most unique educational movements in the world. I visited many schools in other Scandinavian countries that were patterned on the Danish movement. I didn't just look at the schools, but I became a student in one. I spent most of the winter at Askov but also visited many other folk high schools and children's schools in the same tradition. Listening in a strange tongue, sometimes cramped in children's seats I gained an understanding of a quite different approach to education, an insight I had never expected.

Participating in these schools was a life changing experience for me as much as it probably was for many rural Danes. The students all embraced me as one of them. I could not have felt more at home. Although my practice with recordings had given me a good ear, I had only a limited vocabulary. It was tantalizing for the first few months as I only got only the drift and not the whole meaning of the lectures. Sometimes the stress of trying to understand sent me to bed with a headache. In a few months, however, with my growing vocabulary, their inspired stories which they called the *living word* became vicarious adventures for me.

The teachers were all dynamic storytellers who brought past eras and great authors to life. History was no recitation of dates and politics. They brought to life the people and social conditions of the time and the locale of the story.

I discovered a different view of history, much deeper than any I had been exposed to in my American schools. In place of a frequently repeated recitation of wars and politics, a people's history emerged. The unfolding stories carried us back into significant times of the past. We felt like we were in the middle of an independence movement, for example, among an aroused people struggling for independence. We learned how they had changed their society. So vivid were the stories, it seemed like the narrator had actually been a part of the event - as though he had just come from the streets of Paris during the French Revolution, or sat next to William Penn as he talked peace with his Indian brothers. I watched the enlivening of these farm youth who had come there not to get a degree, to prepare themselves for a better paying job or to get any other practical advancement but just to get a cultural education and a broader view of life and the world.

The Folk High School teachers understood the significance of a social awakening because their country had demonstrated it. They knew that there is nothing that transforms a country as completely as an awakened and enlightened citizenship. Political leaders, they were convinced, were the people's servants. When they no longer represent their constituency, they risk being removed by ballot or bullet. Therefore their actions more or less, reflect the urges of their people. Of course if they are serfs who believe their thoughts are futile, who blindly follow the nobleman who almost owns them, then the government will be barely influenced by them. But when they wake up things change.

As I sat among them, I began to see how this very special educational movement had lifted farmers out of their fields and barns into, first the urgent issues of their country, and then into becoming enlightened citizens of the world. Soon after the folk high schools started, the awakened farmers became the leaders in the country's very democratic government. Then the cooperative movement that sprang from this education became central to the life of the

country. Since the primary exports were agricultural products and these were handled by the dirt farmer's co-operatives, these Folk High School "graduates" turned their country into an exceptional economic democracy. Actually no one graduated from these schools. Their time in school was viewed as an introduction to a long life of joyous learning.

The Danish revolution which resulted from the awakening of the Folk High School students was so quiet and peaceful most of the world never knew it happened. No one was shot, imprisoned or booted out of the country. The farmers simply formed a network of co-operatives in every imaginable economic operation. Since agricultural products were the chief exports of the country and the co-operatives were democratically managed by the dirt farmers, co-operatives created the most democratic economy of any country. It was much more democratic than centralized socialist governments where Conrail was in the hands of the bureaucrats.

These inspired stories from life have greatly altered my perspectives on social change, as has also the experience of knowing the Scandinavian social movements. I have also been awakened to the value of biographies of great social leaders and reformers and histories of people's movements. I had left school in the US believing literature was mostly for recreational escapist reading. Here I learned that quality literature can better reveal the life and times of a people and place than many dry sociological studies. Not only was the concept of literature's place in life special but the way these non-intellectual young people were fired up was amazing to see. A gifted storyteller introduced us to a famous writer with such feeling and insight we were sure he was a personal friend of the author. The community in which the author lived, his or her concerns and disappointments and the conditions of the society at the time they wrote were all illustrated by passages from their books. I could well understand how this educational experience motivated the students to want to know good writers and to make learning a vital part of the rest of their lives. They needed no grades or tests to prod them to study. In the village stores that mostly farmers patronized, the booksellers told me half the books they sold was good literature.

These young adults who studied enthusiastically, never missing a class. They expected no reward, no increase in wages, no advancement - not even a diploma. It was an experience I will always remember.

These schools for cultural education and vitalization of young adults did not try to fill students with facts. The only vocational training was in separate schools that included technical courses. Kristen Kold, the first folk high school teacher used to say, I want to wind them up so they don't run down the rest of their life. What they did was to change them from passive observers into active community builders. And this they did without preaching any kind of ism or advocating any particular ideology. The early Danish farm youth who attended these residential schools for only a winter were so awakened and motivated they laid the foundation for a new social order, one of the most democratic the world has ever seen and one of the most enlightened, too.

The spirit of growing and sharing permeated the life. Athletics was not competitive. There was tumbling for the men and rhythmic exercises for the women. We learned folk dancing, enjoyed music appreciation and no class started without a group song. The faculty and students ate together and the homes of the faculty were regularly opened to informal gatherings with the students.

By learning and using a "foreign" language in another part of the world, I escaped the confines of my nationalistic preconceptions and mother tongue. The experiences not only gave me a new way of looking at history but a fundamentally different view of the value of cultural education for social change.

A Peace Builder's Education

The Danish Folk High School movement is an excellent example of a peace building program. It generated a people-centered community that had more concern for quality of life and compassion for others in need than for gaining power and wealth. There was a strong desire among many Danes to find alternatives to violent conflict on all levels of society, local, national and international. When Iceland, which was a dependent colony, wanted independence the Danes just said "yes." When missionaries and merchants threatened the culture of Greenland's Eskimos, they were prohibited from going there while all others were welcomed. One of the main tasks of the Danish underground had been to spirit Jews from Germany to the safety of Sweden. During the boycott of South African apartheid products Denmark was one of the few European countries where South African oranges could not be found.

Germany: Down But Not Out

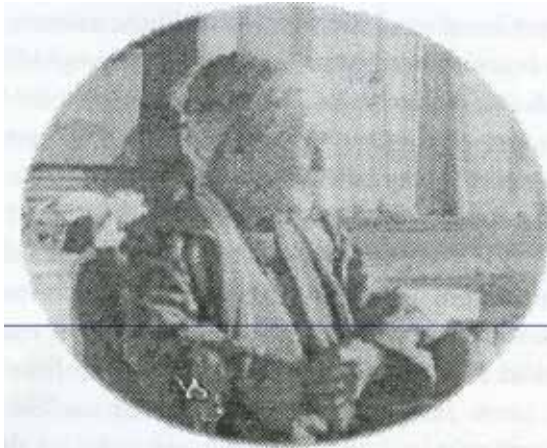
After a year in Scandinavia I moved on to a Quaker work camp in Gennany. While it was almost the only way I could

get a visa to visit the occupied country, it also proved to be a good introduction into the devastated nation. The work campers were youthful volunteers from several countries. We painted the rooms in an army barracks that was housing German-speaking refugees from areas lost to Poland after the war. The caretaker of the gym we lived in had a typewriter, something rare in fledged Germany. He let me borrow it for typing some original Servas flyers, hoping "nobody" would mind. Later he told me it belonged to the Communist Party.

Leaving the camp, I continued on to Hamburg where I came face to face with a city totally destroyed by bombing. A flattened modern city with people living in the rubble is a sight one never forgets. I asked myself how those living under sheets of steel were making out. A fancy hotel had been made from a converted deep underground bomb shelter.

With a letter of introduction from an American friend to the Socialist mayor of Hamburg, I went into the city hall and asked if they would tell me the best way to make copies of the Servas leaflet I had composed while in the work camp. They took the material. A half-hour, then an hour I waited. It seemed like a terribly long time to get an answer to such a little question but they had my only copy. I just had to sit. Then to my amazement it came back with a stack of copies not only duplicated but also translated into good German.

On the way to Hamburg I had hitched rides with a variety of people and discussed with each of them using my contrived Dano-German. Because I knew no German when I arrived, I created my own language by gradually replacing Danish words with German words as I heard them. "Where are you from?" exclaimed one woman I met in Hamburg. "I thought I knew all the dialects in Germany but I never heard that one before." Anyway it was understandable enough to permit some very interesting conversations with the people of many political colors who gave me rides. One Communist recounted how he had won the sympathy of his SS officer while a prisoner in concentration camp so instead of being punished for helping a fellow inmate escape, he was moved to a lighter prison. Another tried to sell me on Nazism. An anarchist told how he had built his own auto from odd parts. Adding them all up I could say Servas was helped, knowingly and unknowingly, not only by dedicated pacifists but also by Communists, Socialists, Capitalists, an Anarchist and a Nazi. It was truly cosmopolitan before it got off the ground. I spent a few days with Gertraud, Hertling's family. Her father, a tall dignified long-time teacher, pacifist and youth organizer, was determined to make Servas succeed in Germany despite the lack of housing, shortages of food and devastation from the obliteration bombing.



Grandma Esther Harlan, "Saint of Servas"

Servas Springs to Life

While I was sowing the seeds for Servas in Europe, a little miracle happened in California. Some years earlier I had met in an extraordinary woman in the hills of Berkeley who became my adopted grandmother. She lived by Gandhi's spirit and philosophy as no other American I have ever known. Everywhere I traveled there was a letter from her waiting for me. Many of these letters seemed to have a mystical insight into my moods, though I was on the other side of the world. When I wrote her about the open doors for peace plan, she set to work, never asking me or anyone. Without leaving her rustic humble vine shrouded cottage nestled among the wealthy hillside homes of Berkeley, she collected names and addresses of people all across the US. Stories she wrote about the program were printed in all kinds of periodicals, especially peace and

socially concerned magazines. Before I returned to the USA, she had gathered the names and addresses of more than four thousand US open door hosts. At first she used a typewriter which even then belonged in a museum. When her hands got too arthritic to type, she wrote with a wide pen. Though she was in her late seventies and had no transportation, she was more active than people half her age. Grandma Esther never told me how she kept the records and I was too preoccupied to ask. Imagine my astonishment when one day I discovered they were carefully filed on small scraps of paper in little shoe-boxes under her bed. I was even more flabbergasted to learn she had no savings nor income but lived only on welfare, squeezing her small income so as to cover the cost of stamps and stationary to develop the US Open Door Program.

No one in early Servas was more adamantly opposed to asking for money under any circumstances. All of us initiators agreed with that policy. Esther Harlan should be called the "Saint of Servas" for what she did to get us started and for a number of other things she also achieved. She deserves much more space than there is here.

Seeds of War

Before leaving Germany I tried to get some understanding of why many Germans followed Hitler. If we do not understand better what generates destructive social movements, I believe, we will never prevent them in the future. I had heard a fascinating lecture by an Askov teacher who detailed how, after the World War I, each new pressure on Germany by the Allies had moved the German vote to the Right. Then in Hamburg I was personally told by one of the leaders of the German consumer's cooperative movement that the supposedly democratic occupying powers, while blaming the Germans for their Nazi points of view was licensing pro-Nazi businesses. At the same time they were refusing to license branches of the democratic cooperative movement. That gave me a glimpse of the reality behind the scenes I would have missed if I had not been looking for answers. I have since learned how business interests of the Allied countries secretly backed the Nazi movement in hopes it would put down Communist Russia. I have fought fire with fire in the forest but in politics you are sure to get worse than burned when you do it.

Trying to understand the dynamics of Nazism drew me into a deeper understanding of Germany as a whole, just as studying the social and educational movements of Scandinavia had led me into the spirit of those people. Because I had a burning question about why the Germans created Nazism, my German experience gave me insights into political dynamics.

While studying at Askov, the history teacher gave one of the most penetrating talks on the rise of Nazism I have heard. He told how each new vengeful act by the Allies had shifted the German vote to the right. The long list which started with a starvation blockade for 16 months after the end of World War I led up to Hitler's sweep into power. In effect, unwittingly, the Allies were masterminding the German political attitudes by strengthening a sense of hostility in their public mind, an anger that said to the Germans "You are a pariah society and we will exclude you from the community of nations." Every one of these actions weakened the leadership of the democratic and peaceful elements and strengthened the more chauvinistic political groups. They produced the anger on which the Nazis thrived. Traveling in Germany, I felt an incredible subservience to authority that seemed to be part of their tradition. The first day I arrived was a Sunday and I had foolishly forgotten to get some German money because moving from country to country in Scandinavia had been so painless. No one on the street would change a few Danish crowns into German Marks so I would have at least bus fare. They even seemed fearful at the suggestion. Another incident was the 12-year-old boy in Nuremberg who dropped something. Instead of picking it up he looked in every direction to see if someone had seen him as though he felt he had done something naughty and hoped he would not be caught. Even parent-child and adult-youth relationships had a kind of unique authoritarian mentality like the "discussion" group I attended in a Protestant youth camp. The young people spoke but not to express their own thoughts, only to ask Herr-----that his answer was. The combination of subservience to authority and the anger over Allied vengeful policies made an ideal atmosphere for an ardent worship of the fatherland and a beat-down-the-minorities mentality.

It is remarkable that one of the most technically advanced countries in the world would turn to Nazism. In many places academic leaning is supposed to increase a democratic attitude. Was it possible that there was a relationship between their admiration and success in technology and the schooling system? Did scientific and technological learning foster the desire to create a super-efficient political structure--- a society smoothly running like a vast machine with a minimum of inefficient compassion and human kindness?

After fifty years of experience since Nazism was supposedly defeated, we are still seeing all kinds of despotism and racial conflicts around the world. When we attack these despotic leaders by isolating their countries, the same way the Allies isolated Germany, we strengthen the more fanatical nationalists and right-wing groups in these countries. In the process we weaken those elements who have been working for more peaceful and democratic policies. Why

are we failing to heed the basic principles of social psychology and social dynamics we could have learned from the German experience?

But seeking to understand the genesis of Nazism was only one side of my effort to understand Germany. The other was a never-ending search for oasis of social sanity -- groups, organizations, little movements that were sowing seed that seemed to hold promise for more compassionate and more just ways of life. It is the height of naivete, I believe, to think wars can be halted only by increasing the number of war objectors. The roots of war are deeply ingrained in our ethic, in the ways our societies deal with conflict and injustice. In a world where a few people are overfed, over clothed, over-housed, while half the other humans on our planet are hungry or starving there is no hope of creating lasting peace.

For this reason everywhere I go, I look for those individuals and small groups that seem to be laying the foundations for more just and more compassionate societies. In devastated Germany, as in every country, I found such groups. The Anthropologists had created children's villages where orphans lived not in institutional types of dormitories but with the families together with the children of their care givers. The Workers Movement had excellent educational programs. There was the village organized by a teacher who had no resources but faith who led a group of workers to build their own sustainable community. Milk sheep mowed the lawns, fruit trees shaded them, pigs recycled the garbage with the help of laying hens and biogas plants turned sewage and barn sweepings into fertilizer for the gardens. His example inspired a movement across France called the *Beaver Movement*.



*Peace Builders at the Wyre Forest Camp
Usbet Folliard & Daughter, Esma Burrough, Bob Luitweiler*

The Esperantists were looking out to a society of brotherhood beyond the national borders. And Helmut Hertling, whose daughter threw me the first seed of Servas and whose son was on the first Servas working committee in Germany, had worked all his life for peace and was still organizing vital youth programs.

In almost every country I found this dichotomy, the nationalistic and power driven groups on the one hand and the compassionate peace builders on the other. The most rewarding experiences were knowing the courageous people, often working against serious odds, who were building a better world by starting with vital projects in their own local communities. One of the dreams of those who started Servas was to help open-minded people experience these oases of sanity and generosity in a splintering, a disillusioned world and then apply some of what they had learned when they returned home. We called it the work-study-travel system.

As a result of seeking answers to some burning questions I met many special people who made the travels far more fruitful and interesting. I believe we should ask every potential Servas traveler to select at least one special subject that is close to their interests and then make this part of the focus for their trip. The questions studied, chosen by the traveler, not the interviewer, can greatly enrich their travel experience, even bring life changing insights without lessening the enjoyment of sight seeing.

Sowing The Seeds

In the Netherlands, I learned about Nazism from a totally different point of view, for the Dutch, as a nation, had

suffered more than most people. Under the occupation they had faced near starvation and were caught in the crossfire from both sides. Despite their harsh experiences getting the Open Door network started there was not difficult. At the border with France a little telephone booth size structure held the single French custom's official. But I could find no passport to show him. Along the way my passport had vanished. It could have fallen out of my tom jacket pocket. It could have been lifted by someone who gave me a ride. I was told by the US Consulate that American passports, in those days, to smugglers were worth their weight in gold. Here I was on the French boarder rummaging in vain from top to bottom in my knapsack while the man who was giving me a lift' waited impatiently because the ferry to England was due to leave Calais shortly. 'Was my whole trip going to collapse?' I wondered. 'Would I have to limp back to the US and give up the plan I had looked forward to for many years?' I guess I would have really panicked if had known what a tough time the US State Department would give me when I requested a replacement. Perhaps because of the experiences of being sentenced twice to prison and living under the heel of Uncle Sam had callused me a little. At any rate I decided to go as far as I could and trust to my experience in the reasonableness of people that everything would work out for the best.

I have developed a little system when confronted by an official who is dutifully blocking my way. I say to him "If you were in my place what would you do?" Their first answer is usually, "I'm not here to be your advisor." Then I say, "But can't we talk as man to man? Besides being an official you are a man who respects other people and believes in helping someone in trouble." It is amazing how well it works sometimes, but not always. At any rate I did not have to plead with the French immigration official. He just said, "You had better go on or you'll miss the boat." Arriving in England with no passport was not so simple. When I flashed my seaman's card, which I had never used, I was directed into an interview room. There the long questioning started. "Peace Builders" which was on many of my papers, threw up a red flag. Perhaps I was a Communist spy, he undoubtedly thought. Every inch of my jacket was felt for hidden lists. Then when I told him I had been studying in Denmark, he got someone to buy a book for me to translate as proof. No Danish book was available in the seaman's bookstore but one in Norwegian was. My easy translation of the passages he chose got me over that hurdle. When I asked him politely if his job was to make it difficult for people to visit England he said "yes", politely. Then he asked what were the purposes of Peace Builders. It was a pleasure telling him my understanding of Gandhian methods of non-violent social change. Most amazing was his closing the interview by saying, "It was very interesting talking with you. Good luck in your efforts. I will give you a sixmonth visa to stay in theUK."

From London, where I visited the various peace offices, I was directed to people in Birmingham. There I made my temporary home for several months sleeping in the attic of the Peace Pledge Union office in the slums. Those months in Birmingham became one of the high spots of my life. Connie Jones Thorpe, a jolly *Connie Thorpe, Peace Pledge Union*



school teacher my age was the dedicated secretary of the

Peace Pledge Union, the English branch of the War Resister's

International. She became one of the pillars of our group. Her family was deeply ensconced in the Labor Party and her father was so worried I would entice her to come to America I was never invited to come to her home and get to know here family. Esma Burroughs, a few years older, with a hearty laugh and rare bushy beard for those days was the secretary of the English branch of International Voluntary Service for Peace Work Camp Movement.

He lived with his unmarried sister. They were from a farming background. Lanky, serious, idealistic Chris Smith was our aristocrat, also a teacher and the local secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. In some ways he was a lonely lost soul who had been raised by two maiden aunts.

In our group there was an enthusiastic brother. Lisbet Foliard, born in Czechoslovakia, had been married to an Italian prisoner of war and had a vivacious three-year-old daughter. Her effervescent enthusiasm gave our group a special vitality. She regularly enriched our gathering with guests from many countries who worked with her in the Cadbury Chocolate factory. She represented the Quakers in our group.



They received this renegade American as long lost brother. I was the ex-Yankee and grandson of a Dutch florist immigrant. Thanks to the fates who had stopped me from moving so fast, Servas took root there. Birmingham became the European Servas headquarters, if you can call it that. This group of dedicated people embraced the idea of forming Peace Builder's teams and asked me to help them constitute one. We discussed methods and systems. I wrote the first handbook for national secretaries with Connie Jones Thorpe's tireless editing. This format for Servas host lists, slightly simplified, is still being used in most countries after almost 50 years. We supped, took trips and went camping together but mostly we worked out many things that formed the foundation for Servas. After I left, they made Esma Burrough the first European Servas secretary.

Chris Smith, Fellowship of Reconciliation

Suspicious Bureaucrats, Friendly Englishmen, Difficult Americans

When a replacement passport had not come through within the six months, I was given permission to remain in England, I was visited by a very polite Home Office representative. I told him I was determined to go on to India as soon as I got a passport and was sorry it had not yet come through. When he suggested I should return to the US, I said if he sent me to prison that would be a good opportunity to study British criminology, one I would not mind. I also explained I was taking nothing from England, not a job, not a living place and no money. He must have concluded I was not subversive for I was never put on a black list or shoved out of the UK. Finally, after some fifty American friends wrote to the US State Department on my behalf, a replacement passport came through. The US embassy officer, when I first applied for a replacement in London, had told me he thought I had either destroyed or sold the passport because it had an Israeli visa. We both knew that the Israeli visa would prevent me from traveling through Arab countries.

Building Cultural Bridges

One of the high spots of the Birmingham stay was what the team there later dubbed "International At Homes." We tried to copy a program initiated by a Quaker in gang-ridden New York. Rachel Davis Dubois brought people together of different races and ethnic groups who were antagonistic to each other. In an informal friendly gathering, she encouraged them to tell about their cultures, festivals and ways of life. Some sang songs. Many related personal experiences. The experiences in these informal parties turned people from fearing their neighbors into admiring their various colorful cultures and lives.

Our team gathered mostly younger people for evenings with similar programs in different people's homes. Lisbet, who met people from all over the world as fellow workers in the Cadbury Chocolate factory, was our expert outreach person. Many lonely participants were overjoyed with the gentle gatherings. After I left, they wrote that these gatherings became so popular they had to have three going simultaneously to accommodate everyone who wanted to

participate in the small intimate groups.

Later in Israel I started a group of Arabs, Druse, Christians and Jews and used a similar format. As I was leaving the Jewish members told me how much they appreciated getting to know their Arab neighbors. If peace people all over the world were to use their homes or patios or wherever other friendly space they could get for intercultural gathering places, where all participants discovered how human, fascinating and beautiful the customs of the others were, it could undermine the efforts of the power brokers who expertly play one group against the other so they can pick up the pieces. The violence of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chiapas would be more difficult to incite. I was not happy to leave the close-knit fellowship that developed in Birmingham. It became my fondest family, warmer than I had known in my own home.

Barren Ground

In France, Austria, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria my efforts to find good Servas representatives failed each for a different reason. These countries have subsequently developed good Open Door programs. The French were not used to opening their homes to strangers preferring to entertain their guests in the local bistro.

The Many Faces of Oppression

Austria was divided among the allied occupying powers. In Vienna, some Russian soldiers I tried to talk to looked terrified to just be approached by a friendly stranger. Worse was the mass fear I saw on the train as we entered the Soviet occupied sector. Two Russian soldiers went up the aisle inspecting identification documents. When one passenger who seemed to speak fluent Russian struck up a friendly conversation with the soldiers, the other passengers with fear in their faces scrunched down in their seats as though they wished they could vanish. The contrast between the Russian speaker and the other passengers' attitudes were an example of mass hysteria and intercultural prejudice. If the soldiers had been American, British or French there would have been no such terror.

Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were police states. Citizens associating with strangers were suspect and often hassled by the police. One man who befriended me in Skopje told me the next day the police had pulled him down to the police station at 3:00 AM. and questioned him for hours. When I visited a professor of sociology, a secret agent waited outside the apartment building and followed me all the way back around the circuitous route I took back to the hotel. In the only hotel tourists could stay in a female employee who spoke excellent French said that the hotel was run by the secret police. When I left my room all my papers, she explained, would be taken and examined so I might as well just give them to her. My prison experience, which had been good training in a miniature police state had been good preparation. While in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria I had been careful not to write anything, because even in my most private papers could be used against me or against a local person who befriended me.

Trying to understand the Soviet initiated agricultural program, which Tito had continued after getting out from under the Russians, was a valuable education. Farmers all over the country were imprisoned when they could not meet their quota because of the drought.

I spent some time with the Zagreb demonstration folk dancers who were college students paid by the government to demonstrate the regime's support of the folk arts. When these professional folk dancers had a party, they did modern American dances, unlike my unpaid Swedish friends who did their traditional dances for enjoyment. Observing control by fear and intimidation, which permeated every action and thought from the student dormitory to peasant homes, revealed the opposite of freedom. No wonder this naive American was arrested five times in 10 days for asking innocent questions!

Great Families Still Live

One of the most interesting experiences in Zagreb was visiting farms with extended families, some of which had more than twenty people in one household. The matriarch or patriarch controlled all the family money. One teacher explained that when he came home, he gave all his earnings to his grandmother or great-uncle and then had to ask him for the price of a pack of cigarettes.

In the winter everyone made something useful and often beautiful. Young women sat at their looms. Grandmothers did lace work and men made furniture and harnesses. I was reveling in preindustrial history. Except for the police,

strangers treated me with kindness and generosity. It seemed to be a government policy to hassle visitors who did not behave as good tourists. Asking to visit a factory was OK but asking farmers about the government distribution of their crops was taboo. Just asking questions, even though they were not critical, got me arrested. Each time after several hours of questioning I was sent on my way, never locked up. Each time I tried to be more circumspect but no way could I avoid being a suspect, except the time I was the guest of a Communist village entrepreneur. The last policeman who arrested me invited me to be his guest in his home.

A student who started a branch of the International Student Organization was thrown out of school. A teacher who taught Esperanto to her class was punished in front of her students. This was not the action of Soviet or German occupation but American oppression. Costas Voumas, a student who lived with his family in a little mud floor cottage volunteered to be Servas representative there but he never was allowed to assemble a list of hosts.

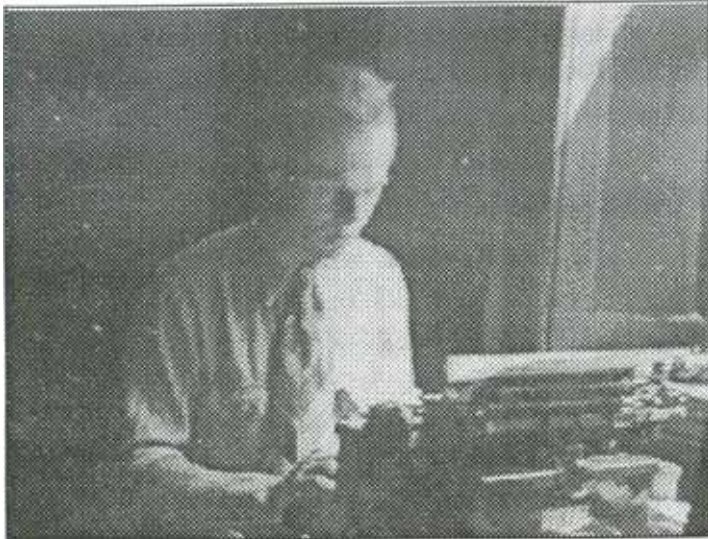
Unfriendly Neighbors

Passing from Greece to Turkey would have been easy if I had followed the tourist route through Istanbul but I thought a more picturesque route would be by boat through the islands of the Aegean. In Piraeus, the seaport of Athens, after searching for days I realized there was almost no commerce between Greece and Turkey. They were long-time sworn enemies. Finally, I got a little cargo boat which sailed when the wind was right and used gas engines when it wasn't. For three days we wove in and out among the islands. When the wind was too high and the waves endangered the sacks of flour on deck we r_m for shelter into the nearest cove. I was allowed to steer the little ship part of the way. The simple diet of greens and fish was tasty and just what my system craved. But that only got me to los. Though it was only three miles from the shores of Turkey I spent a week there before I got passage across. Never have I been so frustrated by a narrow channel of calm water.

Barn Raising

Turkey was a happier country with quite another mentality. Though defeated in war they were far from beaten in spirit. Most interesting to me were the villages where the peasants had ancient traditions of neighborly help. Actually one of Saroyan stories had tipped me off. One day my guide and I walked for miles across a barren grassy plain, ancient forest destroyed millenniums earlier. In the village was a very well built school. My guide translated its remarkable history recounted by one of the villagers. Without pay

for their contribution of materials and labor, the villagers had built this building because the government promised them a teacher. They also told me how every spring all the villagers repaired the feeder irrigation canals with no compensation except, of course, the shared use of the water. They also explained that in most villages there was a free hospitality room for Turkish travelers maintained by the village headman. The Turks had an Open Door system for hundreds of years before Servas was thought of.



Bob Luitweiler typing in the first Servas Handbook

Birmingham, England

The village where I stayed near the rail road station had its own stories. A family that had moved there to set up a little store had failed to earn enough to carry them over the winter. Despite their being outsiders, one possible strike against them, and being merchants, another strike against them, the village headman took up a collection large enough to tide them over the lean months of winter. They pointed out a house that had burned down and proudly told how the villagers had gathered materials and also with freely donated labor to rebuild it in record time.

Someday I hope there will be many books on the people's history. Everywhere I go, I discover old customs of cooperation and mutual help, practices of generosity and compassion neither the news media nor the political centered history books recount. When an inquisitive and optimistic mind wanders over the globe looking for the kinder sides of human nature, a new world blossoms. We started Servas to help open-minded people have experiences like these. We wanted to help them get out of their myopic preconceptions and imbibe the warm heartedness common among ordinary people. It is too easy to visit someone in one's own class or profession and to reenforce a class bias. It is much more rewarding, however, to discover the wisdom of other classes such as these peasants. But such warmhearted customs are only revealed to a traveler who learns to look deeper. A friend who traveled with me in Czechoslovakia, many years later, said 'Bob, you are terrible to travel with. We can't get anywhere because you talk with everyone who comes down the street' (In those days, German, which I spoke, was almost universally understood in Bohemia) I answered "True, but you gladly come along when they invite us in for tea."

In Turkey teachers in the American School wanted to be Open Door representatives for that country but I felt it should be a Turk. I still wonder if that was a mistake for they could have started a good list and then turned it over to a Turk.

A Gem in a World of Sharing and Fear

In Israel I connected with Joseph Abilea, a gem of a man, who took on the leadership of Servas there for many years. He was a violinist in the Israel symphony orchestra and later became the conductor. Then his deep sympathy for his Arab neighbors and concern for their suffering caused him to resign in order to spend full time on the Arab-Israeli Friendship Association. From him and other Israeli pacifists, by working on several Kibbutzim and by visiting Martin Buber, famous writer and Jewish philosopher, I learned a lot about the inner workings, the history and problems of that tension ridden country.

I had the privilege of knowing the small peace-minded group in Israel, people who put humanity above ethnicity. They were beautiful and courageous often facing insurmountable odds. Joseph Abilea was one. He lived compassion.

Cooperation Without a Heart

My attraction to the Kibbutz movement stemmed from an interest in voluntary sharing societies of all kinds. The Zionist youth training farms I visited in New Jersey were alive with enthusiastic, dedicated young people. Seeing these idealists who were looking forward to living in moneyless communities, even though they were from business oriented families, was inspiring. That same spirit I expected to find in the Kibbutzim. Alas it was very different. The fanaticism, which made Israel possible, colored the idealism of their founders and the life of their communities. Economically, thanks to enormous American financial infusions, Kibbutzim prospered and was one of the foundations of Israeli agricultural production. Those who lived in them were the upper class. One man told me he lived there not for any desire to be in a sharing community but only because it gave him a higher standard of living.

Compassionate sharing was not strong, however. In one Kibbutz I had a bad case of diarrhea. They gave me a little room. The doctor, who spoke good English, came but had no time for even a few sentences of conversation. The food was delivered on time, without a word. Incidentally I could communicate in German with those who spoke Yiddish and in Spanish with the Saphardic Jews but that was useless if no one would talk. The rest of the long hot days and nights I just laid there lonelier than I would have been in a desert cave for one feels more isolated when among non-communicating people than alone in the wilderness. The people who conversed for hours at a time only ten feet away never thought of asking me how I was doing. Being immobilized I could not seek out friendly company. It was a strange mentality for a close-knit community. I later learned my experience was not exceptional.

One evening when I went to talk with the leaders of one Kibbutz I was directed to a private apartment. Here in this egalitarian society, the leaders were feasting on luxuries from the US, which no one else in the Kibbutz had. All around their residence were expensive American toys.

Worse than that was the unintentional, yet painful, isolation experienced by some of the kibbutz members. In the beginning the plan was to make the dining hall the community center. To keep it peaceful no children were allowed in. Israeli children from highly tense families are much more boisterous than Mexican village children, for example. The children were raised in special children's dormitories where their parents saw them for a couple hours in the evening and during the Sabbath. But these communities grew to more than a thousand members the meeting halls

were far from quiet and cozy. When coffee makers were finally allowed in private rooms, coffee klatches spontaneously formed around various ethnic groups. They were made up of Jews from Anglo-Saxon culture, those of Polish background, Romanians, East Indian and so on. If one was unlucky enough to come from a country that had no coffee klatch he or she was more or less out in the cold. Being isolated in a city where you can go a few blocks to meet friends is one thing but in the kibbutz that isn't possible. IndividualS unfortunate enough to not belong to one of these groups found themselves out in the cold. They were in a society that shared everything but compassion.

The dark-skinned Yemenite Jews found themselves treated as second class members as a kind of racism grew up in their idealistic society.

All over the world are groups trying to create the cozy associations and security of communal societies of past ages. Yet our prejudices and practices of individualism are so deeply ingrained we carry them into our planned community like a virus infection. Reflecting on this experience I'm reminded how often ideologically driven people can become so wrapped up in their cause they forget the very human spirits that motivate their ideals. Insensitive missionaries, evangelical Marxists, fundamentalists of all religions too often fail to relate to their immediate neighbors. How many Servas hosts with generous Open Doors for foreign visitors take heed of the refugees or lonely foreign students right in their own community. Martin Buber, the famous Jewish pacifist writer and philosopher who believed wholeheartedly in community said to me. "In the kibbutz there is the form of community but not the spirit. The mechanics work so smoothly they forget the humanity."

Escape to New Worlds

The next leg of my journey was a short ferry trip to Cyprus, a delightful South Sea-like island despite the underlying conflict between the Greek and Turkish residents. Often these ethnic conflicts, so common in many parts of the world, are stirred up by political groups that use the humble people in their community for their own selfish purposes. I rented a bicycle and toured much of the island, visited with people of different cultures, swam in pure water under tall shading trees and basked in the calm atmosphere. Everywhere people were kind and friendly. The respite from tense Israel was an enormous relief.

From there the way east was blocked because no Arab country would let one pass who had an Israeli visa in their passport. But I figured I could just catch a steamer bound for

India that landed in Cyprus, which was on the way. Was I naive! Of course, a short distance south, in the port of Suez were hundreds of ships that had to stop on the way through the Suez Canal. That was off limits for anyone with an Israeli visa, however. The only way to catch a passenger steamer to India, I was told, was to go all the way back to Italy.

Bedouin Port

So, as I so rarely did, I took to the air and flew over Israel's enemies landing in Kuwait which was then a British protectorate. At that time it was little more than an overgrown Bedouin port, an ancient smuggler's center. There was the royal family's high walled castle, a few old buildings and nomads camped near by. Oil money was just beginning to transform it. Some "homes" were only four stakes in the sand with mats around three sides and a mat over the sand to house a whole family. The European oil workers on the other hand, had air-conditioned quarters with a club house. The mechanics from India had fiercely hot wooden dormitories. Except for that and a long ship pier, the place was its ancient self. On my first night the place was so alive with

people I could hardly sleep. When I went out on the street the

next day, there was no one in sight. Then I realized people slept in the baking heat of the day and worked in the cool of the night. Westerners with my ignorance generated the expression, "Mad dogs and Englishmen walk in the midday sun."

Vagabond Among Pilgrims

Deck passage to Karachi was an adventure into Moslem family life. My fellow passengers, who were pilgrims returning from Mecca, gave me an opportunity to see inside Moslem family life, something rare in a society of veiled women. One of the most important things a Moslem can do is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca before dying. Making it

back home is less important. Because of this custom the ship stopped briefly several times so elderly pilgrims who died on the trip back could be buried at sea.

I found a nice place for my sleeping bag on the forward hatch away from the ship's smoke and the hard steel decks, without knowing this was the traditional prayer space. In the wee hours of the first morning, a time for the first of the daily rounds of prayer, I was kicked in the ribs and commanded to move. On later mornings the devout pilgrims actually prayed with an infidel at their feet. Had I given vibes that told them I considered myself a brother though I was not a coreligionist? My ignorance of their religious customs led to worse faux pas. Sleeping in their prayer space was nothing compared with photographing their families. Two taboos were broken at once. Pictures are considered equivalent to image worship. Pictures of their unveiled women were even more insulting. Why, on some dark night, they did not drop me into the sea with their dead grandfathers, I'll never know.

Pakistan

Though I spent three months in Pakistan and worked for a while in a work camp for peace in Karachi, where we built houses for refugees, I was unable to make useful contacts for Servas. In Peshawar, I visited the brother of the man known as the Frontier Gandhi, Kahn Abdul Gafar Khan. His brother was nervous when I came because, I discovered after getting there, he was under house arrest. Kahn Abdul Gafar Khan, who had been a close coworker of Gandhi, was in prison.

The real adventure there was a trip to the Principality of Swat, an isolated semi- autonomous state in the foothills of the Himalayas. When I requested the required permit, the officer asked me if I was a journalist or scientist. Since I could claim neither, he said he could not give me permission. "What would You do if you were in my place?" I asked him. He answered, without hesitation, "I'd just go." A long and rough bus ride took me to one of the most interesting places I'd ever seen, a place living in medieval customs. The bridge across a thousand-foot deep gorge was spanned by a rock arch bridge using no modern materials. The very substantial houses were all made of large stones precisely laid up with only clay for mortar. Intricately carved wood pieces surrounded every door and window. Most fascinating for me was their economic system. They had a currency that could not be inflated because their money was the grain that made their bread. Their thousand-year-old system of payment was in annual wages, a system advocated by modern visionaries. Every year at harvest time the community carpenter who did all the house repairs for the previous twelve months was paid a fixed quantity of grain. So was also the barber and the marriage match maker and the Moslem pastor. Thus, these people had secure services. The specialists had secure incomes. When I went to pay my bill for food and lodging I was told the prince of Swat had made me his guest. It was already paid. I now regret I had not taken more time to converse with him and learn more about the people's customs and ideals.

The Swat annual wage of grain is only one kind of people's economic system. The kibbutzim and other communal societies like the Shakers and Hutterian communal communities are another. The neighborhood mutual help of the Turkish villages is also an ancient kind of sharing economy. I also found this among the sheep farmers in Wales, the mountain herders in Norway and the Swiss shepherds. Most all societies that have not been captured by the national and international money systems have some aspects of indigenous non profit economies. The world consumer's cooperative network is the neighborly exchange moved into the money world but still democratically controlled by the consumers through membership in their local stores.

Unfortunately the power brokers have subtly brainwashed the public, through their control of the popular press, TV and school textbooks, into believing there are only two kinds of economic systems. That is why most people believe we must choose between a profit driven capitalist system and a government run socialist or communist system. In other words we are supposed to be just pawns in the hands of the money makersthe merchants and czars of industry, or socialist government bureaucrats. It is all part of the process of economically disenfranchising the people by convincing them they are helpless and should therefore go home and be quiet while the few in power enrich themselves.

Next Door and Worlds Apart

Crossing to India was something else. In those days, Indians and Pakistanis could not cross over into each other's countries. They were technically at war. My train went to the last station on the Pakistan side. After a mile walk I came to the border. Here Indian stevedores carried enormous bunches of bananas on their shoulders to the demarcation line and slung them over onto the shoulders of the Pakistani porters because neither could set a *foot* in

the other's land. A few years before, this had been one country named after the Indus River that now flowed mostly in Pakistan.

Indian vs. Mechanical Logic

It was an invisible line between Lahore and Amritsar. The people on both sides of the wall had the same ancestry and mostly spoke the same language yet the reasoning in India was so different it took me some time to discover why I so often failed to communicate. I remember a long discussion on social issues with a Gandhian follower who spoke better English than I yet for some reason we couldn't understand each other. It took weeks for me to understand that their logic was quite different from what I had learned was rational thinking. As I gradually let go of my Western mentality, their logic of the heart became a new reevaluation. In physics and chemistry where one can measure things in a controlled environment, using distilled water for chemical experiments, for example, mathematical analysis works well. The difficulty comes when westerners try to use the logic of the laboratory to understand social problems and social change. Here there is no distilled water and rarely a controlled environment. In a biological experiment you may have hundreds of variables. In a human social situation there may be millions of variables. The Western trained scientist narrows down the number of variables. This may be called formulating the problem. Pick a few of the variables you consider most central and disregard all the others. Then you try to analyze your problem with a manageable number of variables. Only one trouble - you have distorted your view of the problem by leaving out most of the variables, perhaps so many, the conclusion is quite wrong. The *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the sacred teachings of the Hindus, says there is a higher understanding than that which comes from the logical mind. The Indians, I discovered, look at social problems not through mathematics and statistics but through feeling, compassion, sympathy and intuition. You can argue with them for weeks using reasoning that may seem totally rational to your Western mind. However if your conclusion doesn't feel right to them, your reasoning will also be meaning less to them.

Gradually I had to admit when it comes to social issues the logic of the heart is best. My experience in the kibbutzim was strong evidence of that. These communal societies ran like clocks. They seemed economically successful; there seemed to be little friction and life was peaceful *but* for many who grew up in them it was not a good way of life. The logic of the heart was missing.

Unfortunately in the West we call our Women irrational and illogical because they work on intuition and follow the logic of the heart. Is it because most Americans reject the logic of the heart that in some parts of the USA we are now spending more on building prisons than schools?

The land was the same. The people looked alike. Their languages were similar but their ideals were quite unlike. Islam is a dogmatic religion at its roots, like Christianity and Judaism. They all stem from the ancient Israelites and what Christians call the Old Testament. Hinduism, Buddhism and other Oriental religions are motivated by far different precepts. Their difference in life values affects deeply the societies they dominate. I am still trying to fathom their wisdom. It is in many ways so distant from our Western mechanistic thought processes one almost has to start life over in another thought mode to really encompass it. Many American cults take a little piece and make it into a new doctrine, missing their holistic vision.

Spiritual Awakening

I had a library full of the writings of Gandhi yet I could not have been more ignorant of the core of their spirit for I only knew the shell and not the kernel.

Eventually I overcame my Western narrow mindedness and understood that the logic of the heart in the field of human relationships is better than Aristotelian logic. Each logic has its value, if used in the appropriate realm. It was a lesson difficult to learn. What can be more frustrating than talking with someone who speaks your tongue better than you do and completely failing to communicate, especially when you consider yourself a very logical and reasonable thinker? Fortunately, in the past fifty years more and more people in the West are beginning to understand this Eastern logic of the psyche and of the heart.

The Land of Gandhi

Ironically, though I had come to India to discover their acceptance of Gandhian non-violence, it was a much deeper level of Gandhi's insights that changed my life. Gandhi had the rare ability to penetrate to the core of problems. Unfortunately, population control was not one of them. His understanding of education and rural community development was phenomenal. It would be a very different world if all those agencies and individuals who want to help Third World peoples gained even a small understanding of his wisdom. He understood well that helping rural villages meant not first pushing them into the commercial world where they became subject to the whims of international trade. He had seen how under the British Raj some of the best land in the Indus Valley had been turned into enormous cotton plantations which produced cotton for the textile mills of

England. By the time the cloth got back to India the very people who worked on these plantations could not afford to buy it. They had lost the land on which they produced their food for hundreds of years. They lost cohesive village life that had cradled them and their children. They became flotsam from a sinking ship.

India, Gandhi's country, was very different. Fathoming this subcontinent would take three lifetimes. It's as an extraordinary complex of cultures and religions, wonderful spiritual leaders and fierce communal conflicts. I traveled third class, slept in peasant mud homes and Gandhian centers and rubbed elbows with the poorest and the wealthiest. The suffering and starvation in this cramped subcontinent had turned their belief in the sacredness of life into a hardened shell. The pain a sheltered Gautama felt 2500 years earlier when first seeing an invalid and a beggar would have been a hundred times deeper yet the ordinary people had no place to escape to. Thousands of acres grew cotton and tea shipped to rich foreign countries while the cultivators starved. Though the search for spiritual enlightenment was alive, a magnet to seekers from all over the world, the smell of death was pervasive. When I stopped to help a local man just recovering from an epileptic fit, the passers-by asked me if I was his brother. When I slung my pack on my back in a poor village to follow Vinoba, people were astonished to see a European skin carry his own luggage. I asked a shoemaker, whose whole repair business was a collection of hand tools on the sidewalk next to him, to repair my sandals. I told him I had nothing else to wear, when he asked me to leave them for tomorrow, so could I just use his tools so as not to interrupt his work. The sight of a light skin working with his hands completely stopped him from working.

In that place I may have been the only light skin they had ever seen who was ready to share their life, but in the Gandhian centers there were several from various countries who had thrown their lives in with the Gandhian movement. They were rare and great people who worked with no pay. In Gandhian ashrams I met more people whose lives had been transformed than I ever had seen. Not one of them went around proclaiming they had been saved, or even spoke of a new enlightenment. They just silently, joyously lived it. To me, this social movement which created widening circles of rural reconstruction was a revelation. As another example of peace building, their work demonstrated how the lives of a few committed people can influence a whole society. The Gandhian Ashram founders came from city middle class homes to live in mud huts. They ate the simple diets of the neighboring farming communities and dedicated their lives to the revitalization of India.

The nearby children from illiterate families were invited to come to their schools where they often sat on the mud floor and wrote on slates. Through the children, the Ashrams reached out to the parents and through these connections advanced Gandhi inspired programs of livestock improvement, better treatment of women, improved sanitation, spinning thread for their own clothes, improved home construction and many other kinds of rural reconstruction.

The program he inspired had roots in many corners of the country. I attended an amazing gathering in Benares of Village Development workers. Thousands came from every corner of India. Gandhi was no longer living but I had the privilege of meeting many of his closest coworkers, the leaders of the movement. They spent many hours discussing the future of their movement. What was remarkable was how very different they were from each other. There were socialists and anarchists, intellectuals and educators, economists and agronomists. They were Hindus of high cast and Hindu outcasts, Harijans, Gandhi called them. There were also Moslems and Christians and atheists. Gandhi's magnetic spirit had pulled together a diversity of people more unlike each other than I had ever seen in one movement. As long as he lived there was remarkable harmony among them. Though they still functioned together there were schisms and serious diversions of purpose and direction.

Perhaps it is inevitable, when a country succeeds in freeing itself from an outside power, the factions within who have worked shoulder to shoulder for independence start new conflicts. In Israel the kibbutzim split down the middle as soon as they got independence. The conflict, amazingly, was not between those who wanted to educate their children as open-minded thinkers and those who wanted to indoctrinate them. No, it was between two forms of

indoctrination - those who favored USSR socialism and those who favored British Labor Party socialism. The ideal of encouraging children to think for themselves didn't enter the argument. Even families split over these issues of dogma, parents moving to one kibbutz while their children moved to another.

The Village Development Centers all over India - which he called Ashrams - inspired me as much as any movement I have ever experienced anywhere. Each rural center was independent, owned and run by the leader in it. Many of these leaders were remarkably dedicated persons who gave up comfortable city lives, sold their homes and committed themselves to the Gandhian village work for the rest of their lives. They were scattered all over the country but no one knew where they were or even how many there were. Why spend time doing statistics when there are eyeing needs for village development, the Indians would have probably said with their people-centered logic.

When I looked for a list of Gandhian rural development centers so as to ask them if they would like to be Servas hosts, I found, not only that such a list did not exist but no one knew even how many there were. Here was another conflict between my Western mind and India's. I did, however, start a list by

asking Ashram leaders if they would like to be Servas hosts. A fascinating book could be written about that gathering in Benares, the different personalities who made up the movement and their influence on the development of the country in later years.

Gandhi saw the development of village industries as part of the liberation of India but he was discouraged. He said before he was murdered, "India will get her independence but not her freedom." What I think he meant by that was India will separate itself from British rule but that will not bring the real freedom to all the people they had hoped for. Many things he understood "

about freedom of the rural folk. Villages need to have viable industries using simple devices which the villagers can afford. Many of their own needs should be produced by the villagers even things that could be more efficiently made in factories. Most all their food should be grown in the village.

Villages which have control of their own economies can only be free if the village leaders care about the welfare of all the people. Gandhi's rural development center at Wardha, which he called an Ashram, was a complex of relatively primitive village industries. They pressed oil, made paper, had a daily herd and large vegetable gardens and ground their own grain. Everyone spun cotton.

With his coworkers he developed a remarkable system of children's education. It is the most holistic system I have ever seen. Central to the program was the children's school with a remarkable system of education.

Central to learning were the various practical skills the children were learning. Each kept a diary and wrote in it how many ounces of thread he or she spun that day. Each class had its own government and elected officers. Listening to the various class ministers give their monthly report and then having their administration criticized by others in the class was a novel experience for me, especially when I remembered the kids came from illiterate and very poor homes. This program for rural children although it was craft centered was not primarily a vocational one. The hand craft centered activities were used to lead the children into world geography and history, reading and writing.

Through the children of the rural development workers, ideas reached out to their parents and through them into the life of the Country. Since most people in India were villagers, he was reaching for the mass of the people but not on a mass basis but on a person to person plan. Unfortunately the Western trained establishment of India had little belief in his down to earth village centered approach. They proceeded to industrialize the country in many cases with environmentally destructive methods. If they had followed the plan worked out by Gandhi and his very wise coworkers, India might have developed a model sustainable, well-fed society despite overpopulated crowding. Gradually the bullock powered water lifters and oil presses would have been upgraded to solar powered devices. The Gandhians were developing excellent low-cost methane generators that turned cow dung into compost and cooking gas. Their fierce sun is an excellent power source for cooking and electric generation. Instead, in 1950 half of the national budget was used to buy or build military equipment.

The Indians called this village-centered movement the Gandhi Constructive Program to distinguish it from his non-violence independence struggle. It encouraged people to be true to the best in their own culture and become more self reliant instead of trying to work for some foreign company. Everybody who investigates rural development programs in India, now speaks highly of the superior results the Gandhian centers have. But they only reach a small part of India. As far as bringing nonviolence to India or awakening India to the value of developing an alternative economic system, Gandhi was almost a voice in the wilderness. Indians, like many other people, like a guru who lights the way, shines the torch into the darkness so they can blindly follow. They listened to his evening "prayer" meetings when he tried hard to explain his philosophy but few internalized the significance of his messages. He was shining a light through very troubled times. They put their trust in him. When he was killed, they looked for another leader to follow without thinking, but no one could take his place.

Vinoba Bhave was both a genius and a man of faith but he never fired the enthusiasm of his people as Gandhi did,

always living in the shadow until Gandhi was killed. He developed many kinds of ingenious village devices. I think he was partly responsible for much of Gandhi's outstanding village school program. For several days I walked with him and his followers as he went from village to village asking those who had big pieces of land to give some to the poor. In some places he was able to get whole villages to pool and then relocate their land.

I gradually understood the meaning of holistic reasoning and how essential it is to finding solutions to our complex social and biological challenges. India opened up a whole new perception for me. After being there, I have seen the world differently.

In six months I had a lifetime of experiences. I became friends with the saintly comparative religion teacher from Tagore's former educational center. I got acquainted with some of Gandhi's closest followers, and walked with Vinoba Bhave and his entourage who were collecting land for the landless. Several Gandhian ashrams agreed to be Servas hosts. Everyone of those I visited gave me new insights into rural development approaches. In Benares I attended an enormous gathering of Gandhi inspired community workers from all over India. The Gandhi-inspired scene of morning prayer where college educated men sat silently at cotton spinning wheels while the peasants watched in awe looked like a reversal in roles. At this gathering I met a remarkable man who invited me to come to his center where he was initiating an extensive rural development program among isolated and neglected mountain tribes. He insisted on being Servas secretary for India and has tightly held on to this Position for many years, often using visitors who come to his outstanding rural development center from all over the world to update Indian Servas Host Lists.

First International Servas Conference

After three months in Pakistan and six in India I got a letter from my Birmingham friends announcing the first international Peace Builders (Servas) conference and urging me to attend.



First Peace Builders International Conference, Hamburg, Germany Out of which came the name "Servas" (1952)

*(L to R) Folke Hertling, Germany, Chris Smith, UK;
Nana Fundar, Denmark, Claus Weiss, Germany, Leticia Grove,
Bob Luitweiler, USA, Dagny Ingvorsen, Esma Boroughs,
UK, Connie Jones, UK, August Budinski, Helmut Hertling, Germany,
Krisun Ingvorsen, Denmark*

Should I continue my planned trip through South East Asia, the Philippines and Japan or retrace my steps back to Europe? I canceled my plans to continue around the world and took the next ship back to Europe.

The first International Servas gathering met at Claus Weiss' and the Hertling's house near Hamburg. Gertraud Hertling who had sowed the first seed for our program was not there but her father took us in like his family. Only England, Denmark and Germany were officially represented. Besides agreeing on some basic procedures, we settled on a name for our program. Esther liked "Open Doors." I liked "Peace Builders" but did not like using an English title. Esma Boroughs, the first International Servas Secretary, chose "*Servas*" that is Esperanto for "serve," in the present tense. We all agreed. The thought was that people who traveled would learn from their hosts how they could more effectively serve in their home communities to develop programs and human relations that were free of the

seeds of war. At no time did anyone suggest that choosing Servas meant we would abandon our original purpose of peace building. The story that choosing the name Servas meant we wanted to alter the aim of our program is wrong. We just wanted a name that was more international than Peace Builders which was exclusively English.

By the time I returned from India, Claus Weiss with fellow students Joachim Wessloh and Gertraud's brother Volker had established a German working committee and had already gathered around 40 hospitality addresses. Joop van der Spek was leading the program in the Netherlands. Nana Funder who had an outstanding preschool in Denmark and had been a Servas traveler in the US along with Kristen Ingvorsen a manufacturer of roofing tiles, ran Servas in Denmark for many years. In those early years the leadership of Servas in most countries changed frequently.

The Future of Servas

If we could encourage all Servas travelers to discover the rewards from questioning-travel that can lead life changing insights, we would rekindle the vision that inspired Servas in the first place. Back then we called it a work-study-travel system. We might come to understand better what makes a society what it is today and what it will become tomorrow. We might see more clearly that the communities we live in are not primarily the result of battling politicians and their posturing. They are the sums of our personal lives, our ways of making a living, our relationships with our neighbors and our reaching out to the needy people near and far. We would discover how important the actions of we little people were in building a more sane world future. We would no longer be in the back row of the theater trying to catch the lines of the actors. We would know we are a part of the drama.

I do not think we need to be sociology students to discover that learning about social movement is exciting and reveals a community in deeper ways. As citizens of a troubled world, we can make a difference because everything we do is creating the society of the future. We may think we are only watching a drama from our theater seats, but in fact we are part of the drama of human life. World humanity is not only family. It needs us. I should say we need each other's help if we are to build the kind of world we want our grand children to flourish in.

I do not think there is any "ism" that has most of the answers. Caring and compassion, however, do. If these sentiments can be embodied in our ways of life, our sharing with those in greater need, our active participation in those movements which are seeking to advance a more liveable, a more gentle world is possible.

If every one of the some 15,000 hosts organized regular intercultural parties like the ones we had in Birmingham and Jerusalem, we could reach in a years time thirteen million people and help them discover how beautiful the human family can be when we appreciate each other's rich cultures. We could break down the prejudices that Power *brokers* Use to *get* neighbors in Bosnia, in Israel, in Ruanda and Urundi, in Yugoslavia and Serbia and in US cities, to destroy each other. These parties would not cost us anything but a little time and effort. They would not have to be in a home but could be in the back room . of a cafe or restaurant, often available free if we order their food, or even outside on a picnic. And they could result in a great deal of fun, music, stories and new friendships.

Servas, perhaps more. than the typical top down organization, depends on its members to make it succeed. Those who do nothing except wait for travelers are not helping solve our Problems. Those who are befriending foreign college students near them are making contacts with young people who could become good Servas travelers. Those who write stories in periodicals that reach the kind of people who would make, not just travelers looking for cheap lodging or superficial tourists, but people who care about the future of our world and want to learn how they can contribute in a way that makes a difference.

In Conclusion

Since starting to write *The Seed of Servas* I realized that, although there was no network of Servas hosts, my trip to India gave me Some idea how exciting a trip can be to the traveler

who has questions that lead deeper into the communities visited. I can, therefore, be taken as an idealist. Maybe someday, when I finish my other books, I should write a book on the amazing Servas hosts I have known. Better than that would be for you to meet these hosts and by asking the right questions discover how much they have that will enlarge your perspective. I visited a host in Idaho who, with his wife, had lived as a Bedouin in Saudi Arabia. For hours he fascinated me with his account of living in this society. Although I had passed along the edges if such a society, I had barely understood it. When he finished, he said, "You know, I have had many Servas visitors but you are the only one who listened to our experiences in Arabia."

The desire to find answers has followed me through life, and led me to study and participate in a variety of social movements. More and more I realized that the road to a lasting peace comes primarily from an awakened populace.

There is no short cut. Propaganda, political action and all the organizations they spawn only sway people temporarily. Membership organizations and political parties or battles between ideological camps may stimulate thinking but they rarely deal with the fundamental causes of war.

I gradually realized also that the fruits of peace lie deep in the roots of our ways of living. Our willingness to share more equitably the resources of our crowded planet, our acceptance of diversity and respect for all peoples are the root of peace. When a community reaches that level of maturity, the politics take care of themselves. With this perspective I began studying the social movements that had awakened whole communities. This led me to the Danish rural adult education movement. I studied every available book on it in English and came to the conclusion there was only one way to understand it - learn Danish and attend one of their schools.

The second movement I planned to experience on this trip was the kibbutzim. My belief in the importance of sharing led me to the Israeli communal communities. Were their communities a lasting way of living or a passing phase in the pioneer stage of a new settlement?

The third movement I wanted to know first hand was the greatest non-violent movement in history - the struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi.

Even before I reached my Danish school I discovered these targeted movements were only stops on my journey of awakening. Every place in between had serious lessons, experiences which added new hues to my panoramic vision. Some even unraveled my tangled perceptions. Thus, I was led into vagabonding from Norway to India with a seeker's inquisitive mind. It gave me an enviable education. As each experience took me deeper the disorganized piece of the jigsaw puzzle began to create a picture. I began to realize how totally interconnected everything is - how social, economic, political and personal relations not only fit together into a complex world but every little happening sends a ripple through the whole ocean of human society. Everything has a cause and an effect. Nothing happens in isolation. Utile by little I discovered the wholeness of the global human family, its inspiring aspects and its depressing ones and its total interdependence. I was drawn into a life long quest, a quest I am still pursuing that has kept me young at 81.