

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence.

The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 100 of our previous interview programs and special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the TV programs link to reach www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a .pdf document describing the program.

JULY 2014

"A VIETNAM VETERAN NOW WORKS FOR PEACE"

by GLEN ANDERSON, PRODUCER AND HOST OF THIS TV SERIES

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The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's July 2014 TV program features a warm and frank conversation with Larry Kerschner, whom I have known and respected for many years. Larry Kerschner is a Vietnam veteran who started working for peace and social justice a few years after returning – and has been accomplishing more and more ever since.

Drawing upon his religious roots and his experiences in the army, Larry has developed himself into a wise, compassionate, and courageous peace activist who "connects the dots" between spiritual grounding and how to live actively and nonviolently in a world that is far different from what we want. Larry expresses his experiences, his values, and his analysis not only through peace activism in our local region, but also through traveling to other countries and through writing poetry.

Larry recently retired from a career as a health care professional in Lewis County. He grew up in Seattle, was drafted and sent to Vietnam, where he served in the US army's infantry. He shares a powerful experience that happened soon after arriving in Vietnam. He wrote a poem about that, titled "Answering a Question." It appears on page 5 of his 2013 book of poetry, *Grave Lines*, which people can buy from Larry at larry@peacepoet.me

During our TV interview, Larry tells about the few years after returning from Vietnam and some steps that later connected him with the peace movement, including the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and Veterans for Peace (VfP). The end of this article offers ways to contact these and other organizations.

More than a decade before George W. Bush launched his 2003 war against Iraq, his father, President George H.W. Bush, had launched his own war against Iraq in 1990. Between these two wars – in 2000 – Larry traveled to Iraq with other peace activists in order to protest the brutal economic sanctions that were killing hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis by denying them medicine and resources for treating water and sewage.

In 2002 and early 2003 George W. Bush was pushing for another war against Iraq. A nationally respected poet from Washington State's Olympic Peninsula – Sam Hamill – used poetry as a way to oppose the war. Larry tells this inspiring story, and he reads a poem he wrote about this, called "Eyes Wide Open" from page 7 of Larry's *Grave Lines* book.

Larry tells how he got connected with Veterans for Peace and helped organize local chapters for VfP.

In 2006 he went to South Korea with other members of Veterans for Peace. The Korean War is actually still underway, without a peace treaty, but only a ceasefire that has gone on for 60 years. China had pulled its troops out in 1956, but the US military still occupies South Korea and had begun dominating Korea way back in the 1800s. Even now, the US repeatedly evicts farmers from their lands in order to expand US military bases in South Korea. You can hear Larry

tell the fascinating story of US military domination of Korea by watching the Olympia FOR's November 2007 TV program through this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3zNdXBJEQs&feature=youtu.be>

In 2009 he traveled to Afghanistan to meet with the Afghan Peace Volunteers and to help local folks there make low-tech biosand water filters to remove contaminants and provide safe drinking water. Dirty water has been killing more Afghan children than the war, but the biosand water filters can prevent these unnecessary deaths.

For many years Larry has protested against nuclear weapons at the Trident nuclear submarine base at Bangor in Kitsap County, and he has been arrested there for nonviolent civil resistance. He read a poem that he had written about Trident. It appears on pages 44-45 of *Grave Lines*.

In 2011 Larry returned to Vietnam (this time voluntarily). He explains how he helped to heal some of his pain from his war experience.

In the fall of 2013 he went to India and Nepal with Bernie Meyer. It was Bernie's 13th trip to India, portraying Mohandas Gandhi – the Mahatma – in an authentic way. Larry and Bernie spent more than a month there. Bernie – in character as Gandhi – was the featured speaker on a great many occasions, and Larry had intended only to accompany Bernie, but Larry discovered that people wanted to hear from him too, so he ended up talking with people in heartfelt ways about his experiences and his values. During more than four decades Larry has transitioned significantly from a soldier in Vietnam toward his longstanding and current commitments to peace and nonviolence. People in India were interested in hearing from Larry as well as from Bernie.

Larry has traveled not only throughout the world, but also traveled internally as a human being – a very long way from the person he was when the US Army sent him to Vietnam. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people act based on their values, their ethics, and how they see the world. Larry dug deeper and shared some steps and insights from his own spiritual development from when he was young to where he is now. This warm and fascinating TV interview allows viewers to hear experiences and insights from Larry's profound journeys, including some lessons that inspire him and the rest of us to continue working boldly for peace.

Near the interview's end, we urged the American people and the US government to learn some of these lessons. A very important lesson is the lesson that **militarism does not solve problems**. That has been called “the **Myth of Redemptive Violence**.”

We discuss that, and also the myth that the US Empire is good for the world, and the myth that the US Empire will persist over many more years. Larry suggests better goals instead of empire and militarism. He also urges the American people to move ahead toward better goals. For example, we should practice compassion instead of domination.

This TV program is a fascinating interview with one person who:

- started out in a fairly ordinary way as a young person,
- paid attention to his experiences,
- reached out and learned a lot,
- stretched his spiritual grounding, and
- took a variety of risks to act boldly for peace.

Larry Kerschner is not the only person who can do this. Every human being has potential to continue experiencing, learning, and sticking our necks out to act for peace and other worthy goals.

Some people do this by interacting with people in other nations around the world. Other people do it in their own local communities. Nobody can do everything, but each of us can do something. Most of us can do a lot more than we have. The work is really satisfying.

We recommend these organizations:

- Veterans for Peace, www.veteransforpeace.org
- Olympia's VFP Chapter 109 (the Rachel Corrie Chapter), (360) 867-1487, www.vfp109rcc.org
- Fellowship of Reconciliation (national level), (845) 358-4601, www.forusa.org
- Western Washington FOR. (206) 789-5565, www.wwfor.org

- Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, www.gzcenter.org
- Olympia FOR, (360) 491-9093, www.olympiafor.org