

seemed prisons were increasingly focused on punishment, with fewer rehabilitation programs available to inmates with each passing year.

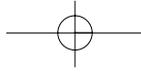
OF ALL THE prison programs Marie and the volunteers had started, she thought the conflict resolution course had the greatest rehabilitative potential for inmates. She had discovered that inmates often struggled with the concept of nonviolence, which was the foundation of the whole conflict resolution course.

In early 1989, Marie taught the course to twenty inmates at the Camp Hill prison, where the men engaged her in a lively discussion about nonviolence. Marie especially wanted that group to have a firm grasp on principles of nonviolence, since the Camp Hill administration had approved a plan for those twenty inmates to teach the course to other inmates.

The men she trained at Camp Hill were part of the New Values therapeutic community, an intensive eighteen-month drug and alcohol treatment program. They lived in Mod 8, a housing unit separated from the rest of the prison population. There, they received intensive counseling and treatment from a team of specially trained corrections officers and counselors. The program focused on helping the men overcome their addictions, change their attitudes, think before they acted, make wise decisions, and turn their lives around. Because of the structure of the New Values program, the men were generally more mature and responsible than inmates in the general population at Camp Hill. But in Marie's class, they struggled with the idea that, even when confronted with violence, it was best to respond nonviolently.

Marie read to them from one of the class handouts:

People say you have to fight fire with fire, not so! You fight fire with water. The objective is to quench the adversary's anger by being cool, offering to help him in some way, showing you bear good will toward him and that he has nothing to fear. – Lawrence Apsey



Some of the men in the class looked dubious.

Marie extended her hands, palms outward, and drew an imaginary wall across the front of her body. “Violence stops here,” she told them. “It’s an attitude you have to adopt that says, ‘There isn’t anything anyone can say or do to me to make me want to hurt them.’”

“But what if someone’s coming after you?” Douglas¹⁸ asked. “Planning to hurt you? You’d defend yourself then, right?”

“Not with violence,” Marie insisted.

“Hmmp,” another inmate said. “If you’d ever see some of the characters we see in here, and they was coming after you, you’d do what you had to to survive.”

“Well, I can tell you what I would do, because it’s happened to me,” Marie said.

The men stared at her, looking surprised.

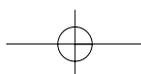
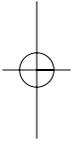
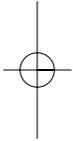
“I was in my office one afternoon not too long ago, and a man I didn’t know appeared at my door. He looked at me with such rage and said, ‘Because of you, I had to spend five extra years in prison. Well, today is your day.’ Then he moved toward me. I knew immediately that he was there to kill me.”

She paused and took a sip of water. The men in the class sat stock-still, all eyes on Marie.

“At first, I couldn’t move, I couldn’t think. I whispered a little prayer as he took another step toward me.” Marie paused again to take a deep breath. Telling the story still made her heart pound.

“I knew I needed to acknowledge how angry he was, this terrible injustice he felt had been done to him. So I said, ‘Oh, how terrible. You sat in prison for five extra years and here I sat in this nice office.’ I got up out of my chair very, very slowly. I looked at him with all of the love I could muster and just kept saying, ‘How awful, how terrible,’ as I slowly walked toward him.”

“You walked *toward* that joker?” Douglas asked. “Man, you need to be getting *away!*”



“Well, he was between me and the door. And my moving slowly toward him probably wasn’t at all what he expected. He might have expected me to jump up and try to run, or to scream, or to yell at him to get out of my office. So, what I was doing—moving slowly, speaking quietly, acknowledging his feelings—was completely disarming to him. And when I got to where he was standing, I gently put my arms around him.”

“Say, *what*? No way!”

“Yes, that’s what I did.”

“You coulda been dead right there. That’s when he coulda got you with a knife, gun, whatever.”

“But he didn’t,” Marie said.

“What *did* he do?”

“He was so confused, I think he didn’t know what to do. So he turned and ran out the door, down the stairs, and out of our building. I never saw him again.”

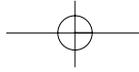
Several of the men sank back into their seats, looking relieved. One let out a long, loud breath. A few of them shook their heads in disbelief.

“But he was going to *kill* you!” said Douglas.

“Perhaps,” Marie said. “But I believe that the power of nonviolence I showed to him was stronger than his violent intentions. Before we finish for today, I’d like to read to you one more thing that Lawrence Apsey wrote:

While acting non-violently may be dangerous, it is no more dangerous than acting violently. Violence evokes violence from the adversary and he may be stronger, a better fighter, or more skillful with weapons than you. Violence is no guarantee of safety. Even if you win, the other party will be on the lookout to get you the next time. Also, the law may get you.¹⁹

“There are many reasons to choose nonviolence. If I had responded differently in my situation, I probably wouldn’t be here today telling



you this story. And he would probably have ended up in prison for the rest of his life. It wasn't easy, but I'm convinced that choosing the path of nonviolence saved my life. That's why I believe it's so important to adopt the attitude that nothing anyone could say or do would ever make you want to hurt them." Marie held her hands out in front of her body again, and moved them in a gentle arc. "Remember, gentlemen, violence stops here."

Letters from several of the men after the class confirmed for Marie the power of what they had learned.

I want to again extend my appreciation to you for introducing me to Conflict Resolution and for teaching me what I think is something very important to me. . . . I want to learn all I can about Conflict Resolution before my release. I feel that it will be very helpful in my future with dealing with others.

God bless you, Marie
Douglas²⁰

The enthusiasm of the men at Camp Hill for the conflict resolution program inspired Marie to propose that the prison staff take the training as well. She sent a proposal and materials to Camp Hill's training department and offered her services to train the staff.

She received a response from the training coordinator a few weeks later.

I have reviewed your material with key staff at the institution and we decided that there is presently no need for this training at SCIC. Our staff are well versed in conflict resolution, as these skills are practiced daily with their interactions with inmates.²¹

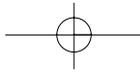
It was rare for a group to refuse free training. But she had plenty of other teaching engagements to keep her busy. The most exciting

for Marie was the training she offered to 200 people at the conference of the U.S. Association for Victim-Offender Mediation in Minnesota. She had been hearing about victim offender mediation and was hungry to learn more. The conference brought her into contact with mediators from all over the country. Victim offender mediation had originated in Canada in 1976 and was first tried in the United States through a project in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1978.²² It was based on restorative justice,²³ principles that really resonated with Marie. She had seen such a need for those who had committed crimes to redeem themselves. She'd seen so many victims of crime who continued to suffer for years after a crime, unable to move on with their lives. And she'd seen how ineffective the court system could be. The courts were sentencing more and more people to longer and longer prison terms. The country's "war on drugs" had led to an exploding prison population.

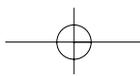
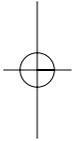
Commissioner David Owens addressed the issue in his keynote address at the 1989 Serenade to Volunteers in Corrections. Owens told the audience that it cost taxpayers between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to build a single prison cell, and about \$17,000 to incarcerate one person for one year.

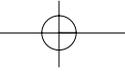
"If we are to incarcerate in greater numbers, then we must be prepared to pay for it," Owens said. "There is no free lunch. It is costly to imprison people, and we cannot incarcerate individuals in substandard living conditions. First of all, it is dangerous for staff to work in institutions where the standard of living is inhumane. Secondly, it is dangerous for the inmates who are forced to live in such conditions. Lastly, prisons that lack the resources to operate properly are counterproductive to rehabilitation and treatment. Indeed, they return to society individuals who are more dangerous than when they entered the system."²⁴

No one in that audience could have imagined how accurate Owens' warning would prove to be.



168 GRACE GOES TO PRISON





10

VIOLENCE STOPS HERE

While acting non-violently may be dangerous, it is no more dangerous than acting violently . . . violence evokes violence . . .

—Lawrence Apsey (1902–1997)

At approximately 3 p.m. on Wednesday, October 25, 1989, a riot broke out at the Camp Hill State Correctional Institution near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In the two days that followed, the Camp Hill riot would become one of the worst prison riots in U.S. history.

George

The sounds of hammers and saws filled the carpentry shop. Fine sawdust swirled in the beams of late autumn sunlight streaming in through the tall, barred windows. George Snavely looked at his watch and calculated how much more he and the inmates who were his students could get done in the last hour of the carpentry class. He walked around the shop, stopping to check on the progress of each team of men assigned to work on the new storage room they were building.

“Nice workmanship, Curt¹. Great job, Jamal². That’s looking real good,” he said to the men who were painstakingly measuring and cutting lengths of lumber to frame the walls.

“Bill³, you okay with those joists?” he asked another.

“Yes, sir,” Bill replied. “Thomas⁴ is helping me. We got it under control.”

“Mr. Snavely!” Khalid⁵ shouted from the outside work area. “Something’s going down over at E-Gate!”

George rushed to the window and looked out. His throat tightened.

"Khalid, get the men in here! We need to lock down, now!" he shouted.

George looked up to the second floor deck where Bear⁶ was working with a group of new students.

"Bear, bring your guys down here right away!"

George locked himself and the men inside the carpentry shop. He went back to the window. Hundreds of inmates, their faces covered with bandannas, stormed the gate. Some carried two-by-fours. Others wielded lengths of steel pipe. They flooded Unit II of the prison complex in waves. Corrections officers sprinted toward the control center. Inmates swung at everything and everyone in their paths. Several people were knocked to the ground and beaten. George looked away, his heart pounding. He met the eyes of one of his students and saw the same raw fear he felt—that they might all die there.

"Let's get the tool room secured," George ordered. The men scrambled to gather up the hammers, saws, screwdrivers, and other tools scattered around the shop and put them on the wide closet shelves. George pulled the closet key from the large ring on his belt and locked the door. He checked the handle twice to make sure it was locked.

George grabbed the phone and called Mr. Fleagle, the instructor in the machine shop.

"There's a riot in the yard," he warned his fellow teacher. "I'm locked down here with my students."

"I heard," Fleagle replied. "I'm taking the women to the storage area at the west end. They should be safe there."

George hung up and went to double-check the exterior locks on the shop door, praying they'd hold. His students stared out at the chaos. Some stood silently, visibly flinching at the attacks they witnessed—inmate against CO, CO against inmate. Others paced back and forth along the row of windows. A few whispered prayers, others cursed under their breath.

"Yeah," one student shouted, pumping his fist in the air. "Get those pigs!"

Another grabbed at the steel bars across the shop windows and rattled them. "Go! Go! Go!" he yelled. "Kill the white-hats!"

George was chilled by the sudden change in some of the men he knew as his students. He never allowed himself to forget that they were inmates, but inside his classroom he had worked to establish an air of mutual respect, treating the men as human beings worthy of his time and concern. George's own

Brethren upbringing had made him a lifelong pacifist, opposed to violence of any kind. Hearing a few of his students talk this way and seeing what was going on outside made him feel nauseous. Suddenly, he wondered about a couple of the men who hadn't shown up for class today. Were they part of this? He didn't want to even consider the possibility.

He heard the sound of breaking glass, then a loud crash next to the shop. George rushed to the door to look out. Inmates had broken into the commissary next door and were taking everything they could grab. Within minutes, flames shot high into the air from fires set by the rioting inmates. Thick smoke began to filter into the shop.

"Everyone cover your mouth and nose," George shouted. "Get down on the floor!"

George and the men lay on the floor, listening to the pandemonium outside. George squeezed his eyes shut. He wished he could close his ears as well to the shouts, screams, and the heavy thuds of bodies. Amid the human sounds were the noises of breaking glass, the crash of steel against wood, steel against steel, steel against concrete.

Curt crawled across the shop floor to George's side.

"Listen, Mr. Snavely, if it looks like they're gonna get in here, I'll give you my browns⁸," Curt said. "You're a little taller than me, but they should fit. You just take 'em and put 'em on so they think you're one of us."

"Yeah, you gotta do it, Mr. Snavely," Bill urged. "Otherwise, you ain't gonna make it out of here alive."

"I hope it won't come to that," George quietly told his students. "But I thank you."

Some of the students began coughing as the smoke drifted down to the floor where they were crouched. George was short of breath. He strained to hear from which direction the sounds were coming. It sounded like the rioting inmates had moved out of the commissary.

"I think we need to move," George told the men quietly. "We'll try to get to the machine shop. I want everyone to stay together and stay low. We don't know what we're going to find out there."

George and his students crept down the hallway to the machine shop, where they joined several other instructors and their students. For the next two and a half hours, George, his fellow instructors, and about 125 of their inmate students were trapped in the education building.

Finally, heavily armed state police officers arrived to escort them out of the building, taking the inmates to a lockdown area and delivering the instructors to the administration debriefing room. George and the other instructors remained there for another five hours, answering questions about everything they'd witnessed, which inmates they recognized as participants, and which inmates had been with them.

"They [inmates] had the opportunity to take any of us [instructors], but they chose not to act accordingly," George reported⁹.

By 11 p.m., the instructors were finally given permission to go home for the night. Badly shaken by the day's events, George called his sons and asked them to pick him up. He reached home around midnight. Though physically and mentally exhausted, images of the brutality and destruction he had witnessed made sleeping nearly impossible.

Bear

Bear shivered in the cold night air as sirens pierced the dark. Hours earlier, police had escorted him and the other student inmates out of the education building, past a lineup of officers armed with long, wooden riot clubs. They'd been taken to an outdoor recreation yard, locked in and left there, while chaos raged around them. Smoke rose above the cell blocks and the air smelled scorched.

Though he was only twenty-nine, Bear was already an old-timer. He'd been sentenced to life in prison at seventeen for serving as a lookout while his cousin attempted a robbery. His cousin had ended up killing a woman and Bear had suddenly found himself charged as an accomplice to homicide.

When he'd come here as a terrified teenager, he'd quickly learned that prison could be an unforgiving, violent place. But this riot was on a completely different scale from anything he'd experienced in the past twelve years. The brutality he'd witnessed that afternoon chilled him.

Bear was especially worried about the new female employee at the commissary and prayed that the rioters hadn't captured her. Since her first day on the job, she'd made frequent disparaging remarks about prison inmates and had treated the men rudely. Bear knew that if the rioters found her, they'd take revenge.

As he stared at the stars winking overhead, he prayed that Mr. Snively would get out safely, too. Mr. Snively had become a cherished teacher and

mentor to Bear over the past two years. The carpentry class was a haven where Bear always felt respected, like he had something important to contribute. Mr. Snavelly had even asked Bear to help train some of the new students.

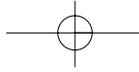
Bear wondered about the condition of their carpentry shop and all of the projects they'd been working on. With all of the wood in there, it would be like a tinderbox if the rioters got to it. Bear had been looking forward to the next day's class, as Mr. Snavelly was going to let the guys work on their own projects, using materials they had paid for themselves. Bear had saved up for months to buy the dark walnut wood and other materials he'd use to build a corner cabinet for his friend Nataly. He planned to make raised panel doors for the bottom and glass doors for the top. To distract himself from the surrounding chaos, Bear tried to concentrate on what he needed to do the next day to start on his project.

A little after 1 a.m., guards returned to the recreation yard, unlocked the gate, and started escorting small groups of men to their housing units. Bear hung back, wanting to be among the last to go inside. He hadn't spent time outside at night since tenth grade, before he'd been sent to prison. Despite the surreal events of the day and the destruction surrounding him, Bear wanted to savor a few extra moments under the vast openness of the starlit sky.

When the officers came to escort Bear and the few remaining inmates back to their cells, Bear could feel the tension radiating from the guards. They passed furniture that had been dragged out of the administration offices, smashed and burned. They passed a golf cart used by staff to get around the 52-acre campus. It had been flipped on its side and torched.

Bear was relieved to get to his cell and be locked in, alone. He sat down at the small wooden desk in his cell. He pulled out his pen and tablet and wrote down everything he had seen, heard, and felt through that long disturbing afternoon and night, struggling to comprehend the violence he had witnessed.

All around him men stood at the bars of their cells, talking in low voices, telling and retelling stories of the day's insanity, as though the telling might make sense of it all. Bear wrote page after page, into the deep hours of the night, before finally falling asleep just before dawn. A few hours later, he was awakened by an officer who reached through the bars with a small brown paper bag containing two hard-boiled eggs and two pieces of white bread: breakfast. Feeling unsettled and exhausted, Bear prayed fervently for calm in the hours and days ahead, but feared the worst.



George

After a restless night, George reported back to work at Camp Hill by 8 a.m. Thursday. As he went through the main gate, two things became eerily apparent. Not a single inmate was in sight; though that was to be expected, it gave the place an unnatural silence. But George didn't see a single state police trooper, either. He remembered the scores of officers who had patrolled the Camp Hill complex for days after the 1983 riots. Now, their absence after the previous night's riot troubled George deeply.

He picked up his keys at the control desk and went to the education building to inspect his carpentry shop. Fortunately, the rioting inmates hadn't broken in, and no tools were missing. The shop had suffered only smoke damage.

George was asked to work in maintenance for the day, helping repair the damaged lock systems throughout the cellblocks. However, by midmorning the administration had concluded that photos of the damage should be taken first and the repair work on the locks was put on hold. George was reassigned to repair an inside fence around the stockade field that had been damaged in the rioting.

Throughout the long afternoon, the prison loudspeakers crackled periodically with announcements about the lockdown. George tried to stay focused on the work at hand, but couldn't shake the deep uneasiness he'd felt since walking through the gate that morning.

As George worked on the fence, a CO he knew patrolled the outside. When the CO saw George, he came over.

"Snavely, you've got to get out of here," the CO warned.

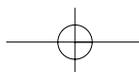
"What do you mean?" George asked.

"Man, I'd just leave as soon as you can."

George finished up, and by 4:00 p.m. he was on his way home. A few hours later, riots broke out again at Camp Hill.

Douglas

The men in the New Values Mod 8 housing unit were hunkered down inside with one of their COs while other inmates stormed their building and tried to set it on fire. One of the men trapped inside was Douglas, who had been in Marie's conflict resolution class the previous year. He and the other men tried to hold off the rioters by putting lockers in front of the windows. Several of the



men grabbed fire extinguishers to put the fires out, while others watered down the entire Mod 8 unit to keep it from burning.

"We're going to kill you," the rioting inmates outside their door screamed. The men knew that if the rioters broke in, their CO would be attacked first. They insisted that the CO put on one of the men's prison browns to disguise himself. When the rioters finally broke in, Douglas and the others formed a protective circle around their CO, and ran for the front gate. The rioters beat, punched and kicked Douglas and the others, shouting at them, "Traitors!" Finally, the men from Mod 8 and their CO reached the front gate and were escorted to a safe place away from the riots.¹⁰

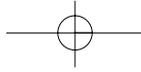
By FRIDAY MORNING, October 27, the Camp Hill prison campus lay in ruins. More than 140 staff and inmates had been injured. It had taken hundreds of corrections officers, state police, and others to put a halt to the riots. Eighty percent of the buildings on the 52-acre campus were damaged. Six of the prison's ten cellblocks were destroyed by fire. George Snavely's carpentry shop in the education building had been torched and everything inside was destroyed. In all, damages due to the riots were estimated at over \$17 million. Mod 8 was one of only two housing units still standing amid the smoking rubble, thanks to the efforts of Douglas and the other men from New Values.

A FEW WEEKS after the Camp Hill riots, Marie received a letter from one of the inmates from the New Values group who had completed her conflict resolution training.

Dear Marie,

We are witnessing history in the making. . . . My efforts to defuse a potentially explosive situation placed me in the eye of the storm, and on the front line as a soldier of peace. I feel that it is very necessary that the success of your Conflict Resolution techniques be made known . . . your methods work.

Nathan¹¹



Marie saw another of the New Values inmates later that month. She asked him about the riots, saying she had been told that his group had not participated in the violence.

“It was no big deal,” he told Marie. “We just refused to get involved. We didn’t play into the anger and the harassment that was going on. Besides, Marie, remember what you taught us?” he added, drawing an imaginary wall across the front of his body with his hands. “Violence stops here.”

Marie wrote a letter to the men of the New Values group and sent it to their director, Robert Morck, to disseminate, as many of the Camp Hill inmates had been shipped out to other state and federal prisons after the riots.

It was you gentlemen who took the Creative Non-Violent Conflict Resolution course who saved the day from complete destruction . . . you did shine brilliantly amidst the conflict and violence. Truly if there has ever been a test put upon people to see if conflict resolution skills make a difference, it was tested and proved with you. . . . Although few will know of your contribution, I personally will never forget. . . . Continue to rise above. Continue to be an example for others.

Sincerely, Marie¹²

Deeply disturbed by the violence at Camp Hill and increasing tensions and overcrowding in many other prisons, Marie also wrote an open letter to all inmates and staff across the Pennsylvania prison system.

You are all in prison: the staff and inmates. Those of us who care for you are also involved . . . the safety of the staff and the inmates is heavy on our hearts . . . We have given the staff an impossible task. We have asked the inmates to accept an impossible situation . . . The only successful demonstrations in prisons have been non-violent. Once violence starts, all rules are lost—all listening stops—and all

regret later. If we are to resolve our conflicts, we must listen to each other. We must have respect for each other's values. We must recognize that anger and hatred destroy those who harbor it and forgiveness frees the forgiver. We can use mediation. We can create a justice system based on wholeness rather than vengeance. It can start in our prisons . . . This is an opportunity for us to work together. My concern and blessings to each and every one of you.

Most sincerely and respectfully, Marie Hamilton¹³

AT THE TIME of the riots, the Camp Hill prison had 1,414 single cells, and a rated capacity of 1,825 beds. The actual population of the prison was 2,656 inmates. A governor's commission appointed to investigate the riots reported that inmates were "frustrated by overcrowding, food quality, inoperative and overcrowded showers, inadequate educational and vocational opportunities because of understaffing, and limited law library privileges."¹⁴ Sudden policy changes related to family visitation and inmates' access to medical care in the weeks prior to the riots also were cited as contributing factors. Commissioner David Owens' words at the Serenade to Volunteers in Corrections the previous spring suddenly seemed prophetic. Within a few months after the riots, Owens resigned as head of Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections.

He was soon replaced by Joseph Lehman, whose prescriptions for the state's burgeoning prison population included construction of seven new prisons in a two-year period, along with legislative changes that would allow the use of alternatives for nonviolent offenders, including work release, house arrest, and electronic monitoring. Lehman also opposed mandatory sentencing and life sentences without the possibility of parole, and he urged lawmakers to reevaluate these policies.

While Marie was glad to hear that Lehman supported alternatives to incarceration, she had also seen that much more needed to be done

to improve conditions in the existing prisons. She wondered how much more of the violence at Camp Hill could have been averted if more inmates and staff had completed the conflict resolution training. She and other VAC volunteers had already trained over one thousand people in the program across the state and nationally.

But Marie wanted to train even more people. She was offered a unique opportunity at the Huntingdon prison to train inmates and corrections staff together. The combined training was the brainchild of Bill Love, Huntingdon's superintendent. Love believed that putting inmates and COs together for the training would foster greater levels of understanding and respect between them. Sixteen inmates and two COs signed up.

Partway through the morning of the first day of class, one inmate who had been staring at the two COs all morning blurted, "Now I recognize you. You two were at Camp Hill during the riots, weren't you?" Marie held her breath. She knew that tensions between inmates and guards who had been at Camp Hill during the previous year's riots were still dangerously high.

"Yeah," another inmate chimed in. "I remember seeing you there, too!"

The COs shifted uncomfortably in their seats. Every inmate in the room turned to look at the two COs.

Finally, one CO spoke. "Yes, we were at Camp Hill."

In an instant, the inmates' expressions darkened. The COs sat straight-shouldered, as though daring the inmates to respond.

The atmosphere was heavy and electric, like the air before a thunderstorm. Marie sent up a quick, desperate prayer. *This one's for you, God.* She knew it would be impossible to refocus on the course until the volatile feelings between the inmates and guards were addressed. Not knowing what else to do, she suggested they take a break. She went to the activities manager's office and asked whether they could break early for lunch. He consented. The inmates were sent back to their cells until