

My Journey of Discovery **by Curt Young, Los Angeles**

ONE of the things I absolutely love about dialogue is what I discover in the process, about myself, about others, new ideas and fresh perspectives. It never fails, whether it is between myself and another or with a larger group. As I search for the words to express my thoughts about dialogue, I can imagine Socrates, Cephalus and the Sophist Thrasymachus going at it over a bowl of wine somewhere in ancient Greece. What came out of those dialogues has informed the Western mind until this day. As a student historian, dialogue, for me, is at the pinnacle of scholarly inquiry.

A couple of summers ago when my wife and I were in London, we visited Taplow Court where, among other delightful experiences, we shared a lunch with Indra Adnan and her associate Annabel McGoldrick, both of the SGI-UK. That's when we learned that the first Peace Journalism Option Summer Course, an event sponsored jointly by SGI-UK, TRANSCEND Peace and Development Network and Amnesty International, was in the final stages of development. If we were to be in England another couple of weeks or so, we'd be able to attend. Unfortunately we couldn't, but accepted a kind invitation to attend the following year's course. My wife's schedule was such that she wouldn't be able to go, but she readily agreed that I should.

In the fifty-page booklet that was published after last year's course, I learned that not only had Professor Johan Galtung played an active role along with Indra and Annabel in the success of the course, so had Jake Lynch, a correspondent for Britain's Sky News, the equivalent of Fox News here in America.

It was therefore with a great deal of anticipation that I attended the second Peace Journalism Option Course this past Labor Day weekend, a weekend of the most incredible dialogue I have experienced in quite awhile. There were forty-one of us from a dozen different countries at the SGI-UK's Taplow Court from September 4–7. Among us were journalists, media academics and students from Europe, Asia, Africa and the U.S. We divided our time between lectures, workshops and debate—debates that often extended late into the night over cocktails. We had come from Ireland, South Africa, Costa Rica, Austria, Finland, Scotland, France, Turkey, Norway, Belgium, Macedonia, and three of us from the United States: Dr. Jannie Botes, a professor of journalism at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in Virginia; Danny Schechter, author of *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*, and myself.

Other academics included Ninad Sheth with the department of politics at the University of Hull and Georgios Terzis with the Catholic University of Brussels; Gordon Adam with the International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting at Inverness; Cinthya Flores with the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica; Umit Ozturk of Amnesty International Journalists' Network in London; and of course Professor Johan Galtung of TRANSCEND Peace and Development Network, one of the founders of peace studies and the originator of the peace

journalism concept.

Each day started with an after-breakfast presentation and examination of some aspect of peace journalism. They were interactive and inevitably led to vigorous discussion and debate. We would then divide into groups of four and five to engage in a creative exercise allowing the participants to examine alternative journalistic strategies in the face of the voracious twenty-four-hour news cycle we all live with now.

This grand dialogue occurred in the intimate setting of a large sitting room full of cushy sofas and large chairs, a fireplace and an amazing view of the verdant English countryside from leaded glass windows that must have been hundreds of years old. Tea was served every afternoon and cocktails every evening. This was an idyllic setting for what was to be a rich and thought-provoking encounter.

THE first day's session began with a presentation of peace journalism and its meaning by Professor Johan Galtung, a co-sponsor of this event. He said: "In general there seem to be two ways of looking at a conflict, the high road and the low road, depending on whether the focus is on the conflict and its peaceful transformation, or on the meta-conflict that comes after the root conflict, created by violence and war, and the question of who wins. Media events confuse the two; they talk about conflict when they mean violence. The low road, by far dominant in the media, tends to see a conflict as a battle and the battle as sports arena and gladiator circus. The parties, usually reduced to the number two, are combatants in a struggle to impose their goals.

"The high road," Galtung continued, "the road of peace journalism, would focus on conflict transformation.... As people, groups, countries and groups of countries seem to stand in each other's way (that is what conflict is about), there is a clear danger of violence. But in conflict, there is also a clear opportunity for human progress, using the conflict to find new ways, being imaginative, creative, transforming the conflict so that the opportunities take the upper hand—without violence." He said: "The first victim in a war is not truth, that is only the second victim. The first victim is, of course, peace."

The more I listened and participated, the more I realized how deeply concerned these people were with the state of media in today's world. We discussed the importance of looking at other than mainstream sources. The journalists among us shared examples of what they called their "script driven" cultures, where one is short of time and knows nothing. One example many in attendance were familiar with had to do with stories in the British papers following an accident at a soccer stadium in which many were injured and killed. I found the story in a critical book that was recommended to me—*Hidden Agenda*, by John Pilger, a highly regarded award-winning journalist.

Pilger writes:

The ancient turnstiles became a bottleneck as 5,000 Liverpool fans sought to gain entrance before the kickoff. When the police eventually opened the

main gates, instead of directing the fans to the open terraces they sent them into the crowded pen. Eddie and Adam (a father and his 14-year-old son) were crushed in each other's arms. Adam was one of ninety-six fans who died.

AS I read this, I suddenly remembered the PBS television documentary I had seen about the incident and how it was reported that the main reason behind this disaster was the failure of police control. But here's how journalism, with a scarcity of facts, a deadline and a bias, enflamed passions with untruthful reporting.

According to Pilger:

By the following Tuesday, the editor of the *Sun*, Kelvin MacKenzie, had convinced himself that the tragedy had been caused by Liverpool "football hooligans." ... [He wrote a story that] described how "drunken Liverpool fans viciously attacked rescue workers as they tried to revive victims" and "police officers, firemen and ambulance crews were punched, kicked and urinated upon" ... A Tory MP, whose sole source was the police, was quoted.

None of it was true. There was no hooliganism. People were vomiting and behaving strangely because they had been crushed and traumatized. Others died because senior police officers failed to understand that the fans inside the pen were fighting for their lives, not trying to "invade" the pitch. The TRUTH was the opposite.¹

That evening we had an informal question-and-answer session with Sir Phillip Knightley, world-renowned author of the classic history *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from Crimea to Vietnam*. Sir Phillip spoke of how war correspondents unwittingly become voluntary participants in the wars they cover. He said they tend to choose sides and push their side's agendas, warning us that it would be naive to think otherwise. He said, "We must maintain skepticism about what we read."

On a subsequent day, we had a morning session led by independent producer and film maker Sebastian Cody, creator of the precedent-setting British talk show *Afterdark*. Imagine a talk show with no recognized host that is allowed to continue until the dialogue has exhausted itself. A facilitator rather than a media star at the helm. It was modeled after an Austrian show, *Klutz Vie*. Immensely popular with the viewing public, *Klutz Vie* had a working method and a set of very clear ground rules. There was no title sequence. The participants arrive just as the show is to go on air. The same format was adopted by *Afterdark*.

THERE is no makeup. The guests are allowed to sit where they want. Rather than tethering people with those microphones you see sticking out of someone's shirt, a boom mike is used so they can move around, get up or leave if they want. The show was not taped, but live. It ran from 1987 until 1991. It was taken off the air, not

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because it wasn't enormously popular with the viewing public, but because the network managers couldn't control the output. Everyone who appeared was on an equal footing.

Cody's presentation led to a lively discussion about the media as an instrument of change. How to connect with the agents of change outside of the official agenda-making mechanisms. How too often vested interest are described as public interests. What must we do, we asked ourselves, to encourage our audiences to question perspective? What, someone asked, did realist painters do when photography made their work redundant? That afternoon, we broke up into small groups where each group was given a current news story to examine. Based upon the information in the stories, and our knowledge of current affairs, we set about reconstructing the stories. We stripped them of sensationalistic jargon, bias and demonizing expressions such as "Arab Terrorists" (which paints an entire civilization as demons, rather than human beings).

Once done, we represented the stories where we looked at other sides and supplied historical perspective. One of the news outlets provided us with a camera and sound equipment. With the help of Jake Lynch, who does this sort of thing for a living, we recorded "two-ways," those events we see on local TV where an anchorperson in the studio is asking questions of a reporter on location. When we played the results over tea later that afternoon, it was amazing how much more information and balance we were able to provide.

The award-winning BBC news correspondent Sue Lloyd-Roberts talked about her experiences as a woman in journalism and the unique perspective she brings to her work. Her job often has her going places alone, sometimes into dangerous situations, with a hidden camera in her hand bag, at times posing as a tourist or a minor official, to tell the world of the horrors people are facing from oppressive governments.

And the dialogue continues. I've received a birthday message from Macedonia, an invitation to a Turkish wedding, as well as an invitation to participate in a similar experiment at the United Nations University in Costa Rica. One recent Sunday I was driving to a discussion meeting, listening to one of my local Public Radio stations when I heard the familiar voice of Danny Schechter. He was being interviewed about the Peace Journalism Option.

I couldn't help but smile as I could feel the energy that Indra Adnan and Annabel McGoldrick expended to have this event happen at Taplow Court spread out, across the oceans, around the world, and find its way to a radio station in Southern California. I smiled because I know deep in my heart that this is only the beginning.

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1. John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas* (London: Vintage Press. 1998) p. 446.