

INTERVIEW ON 'LIFE TIMES' WEBSITE

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Bridget Belgrave, a certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), is coming to Life Times in Reading to run a two day NVC Foundation Training workshop on 9th/10th February 2002.

To find out a bit more about Bridget and NVC, Life Times asked her a few questions:

LT: Bridget, thanks for making time for this interview. Can I begin by asking how you got involved with Nonviolent Communication originally?

B: I had worked as a teacher of the Alexander Technique for many years. Teaching this gave me insights into how hard it is to change fundamental habits, even when we know they are messing us up!

The Alexander Technique teaches how to increase awareness, centredness and well-being through a subtle psycho-physical approach.

I found this very healing, and wonderful work. Yet I was also searching for more - especially ways to work directly on emotional and spiritual levels. I trained in Psychosynthesis, and other fields, and worked with various healing modalities to increasingly deepen my work. I always worked on the boundary between healing and teaching, but had not found one clear method that I wanted to centre my work around.

Then I spent three months living in a community in France where the main goal was to live non-violently. This was not an expression I had focused on before. My experience of how people in this community were relating, and how it felt to live among them, set off a new hunger in me. This experience, plus some challenging aspects of being a parent, increased my desire to find a way to make connections with others in some kind of new way.

LT: So how did that link you to NVC?

B: I saw a very small advert in a newspaper - there must have been about five words in it - advertising an open evening in Birmingham for Nonviolent Communication. Although this was a difficult thing to organise at the time,

living in Oxford with a young child, I felt determined to get there. Which I did, only to find that it wasn't so much an open evening as a practice group, and I was the only new person there. Although I didn't consciously understand all of what was going on in that group during that evening, I could feel on the drive back to Oxford that something profound was shifting in me on a deep level, simply as a result of being with those people and how they were communicating using NVC.

LT: Like a "Eureka!" moment?

B: No, not at all. Much sadder than that. I felt a lot of sadness, because I longed to have this in my life, and I so much wished I had had this knowledge in many situations I had been through. I was very impressed that after just that one evening, I was able to consciously alter a dynamic between my son and myself that I had been trying to transform for eight years! This seriously intrigued me, and I decided to go back to the next session.

Some months later, I had an opportunity to find out who was at the end of this piece of string I had got hold of, as Marshall Rosenberg was giving a workshop near Bristol. I was lucky that it was a group arranged at the last minute, with only 12 people. By the end of the morning, I was deeply impressed by the way Marshall modelled NVC in a very simple, low-key way, and the profound shift I noticed in the level of connection between people in the room. This was a non verbal thing, which impressed me all the more, with my background in 'hands on' healing work - yet it had come about simply through sitting together and talking in a certain way.

I also really enjoyed the way Marshall mixed serious work with humour.

This experience led me to sign up for a 10-day International Intensive Training. At this training there were three participants from Africa - two of whom had survived the genocide in Rwanda, while losing most of their family members. The other was a journalist from Sierra Leone, and was suffering deeply from what was going on in his country.

The training was highly experiential.

I was riveted by the mixture of us European/American participants, working on our personal "stuff" plus our wish to learn skills to contribute to wider social issues in our countries, along with the kind of experiences

that the Africans had been through, and what they hoped to transform in their countries.

Marshall worked in exactly the same way with everyone. This convinced me beyond any doubt that NVC is a totally cross cultural tool. Its effectiveness is not limited to any particular culture (and by the way, the trainers I know now, who do very moving work all over the world, confirm this certainty). To witness the healing and the rare mode of learning that went on there was a real privilege.

So when I got home from the IIT, I wanted to share all this with my friends and colleagues. I wanted them to know about NVC - which was known by very few people in the UK at the time - and I wanted understanding for the changes I was planning on making in my life, as a result of what I had experienced. And it was my desire to share with friends how and why my life was going to be different from now on.

As the rooms in my house are small, I organised a gathering in the Friends Meeting House in Oxford, and to my surprise, 40 people turned up!

As a result, many of those people encouraged me to run an informal course to share with them what I had learned. I didn't feel ready, but they pointed out that I knew more about NVC than they did, and at the time, there were no certified trainers in the UK. Leading that first group led me to realise just how difficult it is to teach NVC!

Out of that group, a practice group formed and we met weekly. I went on to become a certified trainer with CNVC - which is the International Centre for Nonviolent Communication. Six years on from that, here I am, running a public programme of workshops, training in organisations and working to contribute to the spread of NVC.

LT: So what effects has NVC had on participants at trainings that you've run?

B: Well, sometimes, there seem to be mysterious personality transplants in people that participants know! So people who seemed obnoxious before the workshop suddenly become positively enjoyable! This tells me how the way we work with NVC powerfully alters people's attitudes, so that many of their relationships improve, seemingly with no effort.

Also, people take away a raised awareness of their own contribution to the misery of certain dynamics they are in with people. This can be tough! But I am glad to say, people also gain an increased understanding and skill in communicating in a way that brings them a lot of joy.

LT: So what hopes and wishes do you have for the future of NVC?

B: I'm very excited about being part of an interconnected global project, which works to give people the skills needed to create inner peace and interpersonal peace. Learning NVC seems to awaken a deep respect for all beings. Especially at this time, I feel strongly about the importance of how NVC enables people to connect more fully with others who are outside their natural affinity groups and sub-culture. If people from diverse backgrounds can learn to connect in this way, I feel the world will become a far safer place to be a human being.

Personally, NVC also helps me to deepen the connection to my own values, moment by moment, which helps me to follow my own path in a way that is centred and aligned. And what is on my path at this time is a strong commitment to contributing to the spread of NVC. This means that I am working mainly in the UK, but also in other countries, in diverse organisations and with public workshops.

I also reserve a little time for writing, as I have many writing projects that I look forward to completing in the next few years.

LT: Bridget, thank you for this informative and illuminating interview. Like many others, I'm looking forward to being with you in Reading on 9th-10th February 2002. And if people want to know more about you and your work, or buy NVC materials by post, they can access your website at www.LifeResources.org.uk, or email you at bb@LifeResources.org.uk, or phone you on 0845 456 1050, or to find out more about NVC in general, and for a list of trainers worldwide, check the website on www.cnvc.org.