

## From Fred Feucht:

I took my first AVP workshop in the fall of 1981 and did my first prison workshop with Larry Apsey in Fishkill Prison in 1982. I served on the AVP New York Board with Larry Apsey, Steve Angell, Mary Gray Legg and Marge Zybas from about 1984 to 1990. I have been coordinating the workshops at Sing Sing Prison for 28 years, planned the first national gatherings, and helped in the formation of AVP-USA.

A good reference for the beginnings of AVP is Larry Apsey's autobiography, "Following the Light for Peace" published in 1991 by Kim Pathways, the publishing company of Betty and Rudy Cypser. You may be able to order copies from Betty and Rudy, 16 Young Road, Katonah, NY 10536.

A little bit about Larry Apsey. Larry was not a big person; he was about five foot five and probably weighed about 130 pounds. He was very gentle and soft spoken, and he was a long-time Quaker and very spiritual person.

Larry spent his business career as a highly successful corporate lawyer. In his autobiography he speaks about Corporation X. Well... Corporation X was the Celanese Corporation, a giant chemical company that produced polymers, plastic resins, acetates, polyethylenes, and many other products. Larry built the law department from scratch to a staff of 25 lawyers handling contracts, patents, real estate labor relations etc. Larry served as the Corporate Counsel for Celanese and was highly respected by his peers. Larry brought a very strong organizational background and experience to AVP.

In the '60s Larry did some legal work in the South getting civil rights workers out of jail. In the '60s and early '70s, he became a leader of the Quaker Project on Community Conflict (QPCC) along with Lee Stern. QPCC trained civil rights workers in non-violent methods through workshop programs and also did workshops for police departments.

QPCC had an office in a loft in Lower Manhattan with a staff of volunteers included hippies and nonconformists. Larry was in charge of the office. In a Quaker style, all decisions were made by consensus and this led to many long meetings. This was the exact opposite of the corporate world of suits and ties that Larry came from and this was a real challenge for Larry. Since they needed to print many materials they bought a Multilith printing press and found a man and a woman to run the press. They arranged that the printers could use the press to print materials for other customers if they would print the materials for QPCC for free. Their printing business flourished. This was the era of women's lib and burning bras. The hippie printers started growing pot in flower pots on the windowsills. And since

the office was not air conditioned, when it got very hot in the summer, the presswoman decided to stay cool by going topless around the office. This was a serious distraction to the staff but the printers were not willing to change their behavior. The conflict resolution process failed and the staff finally decided that the only solution was to find another office leaving the press, the pot garden and the hippie printers behind.

The QPCC workshops included talks about the philosophy of non-violence and various kinds of role plays like Hassle Lines and Quick Decisions. They also used personal stories and sometimes brought in civil rights leaders as role models who told inspiring stories about their experiences. However, the workshops did not contain any community building exercises that we use in AVP today such as Concentric Circles and Broken Squares or I Messages and Light & Livelies.

Larry Apsey and his wife moved to Red Hook, New York in 1973 where they attended Bulls Head Quaker Meeting. This was a small rural meeting on Bull's Head Road about 20 miles northeast of Poughkeepsie. Members of the meeting also attended the Quaker Worship Group in Green Haven Prison that was nearby. Since they were a religious organization they were given access that other groups did not enjoy. Many inmate activists had been transferred from Attica to Green Haven before the Attica protests and some of these activists formed the Think Tank Concept at Green Haven. They were instrumental in bringing in college courses and other programs at Green Haven. Some members of the Think Tank attended the worship group and with Larry Apsey's direction, they began to plan a nonviolence workshop. Working with the chaplain and the administration, they conducted the first prison workshop in March 1975. The workshop was modeled the QPCC workshops and the invited Dr. Bernard Lafayette who had worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in organizing the Poor People's Campaign to participate in the workshop.

Shortly thereafter, another workshop was held in Auburn Prison near Syracuse and Bernard Lafayette was on the team again along with Ellen Flanders and Janet Lugo. However, after several workshops, the civil rights talks began to get tired. The workshops were still being operated as part of the QPCC program that had a background of training people for social protests. As the interest in more workshops increased, the administration became concerned that the workshops might be teaching social protest methods and the last thing that the prisons after wanted after Attica were civil disobedience and social protest programs. Larry Apsey met with the Department of Correctional Services and made an agreement that the workshops would not teach civil disobedience.

The first AVP workshop was not the only thing that happened in 1975. About that time there was an underground spiritual study program that was called "The Course In Miracles" that redefined Christianity using psychological concepts. This material had been circulating as Xeroxed copies in binders for a number of years. Then, in 1975 the material was finally edited and published in three volumes called "The Course in Miracles." Shortly after that, Larry Apsey, Steve Angell and Ginny Floyd (an early facilitator) began to study the Course in Miracles materials and began to practice the principles that the course contained. Larry Apsey found that these spiritual ideas changed his life and he said that it was his study of the Course in Miracles that led him to incorporate the concept of Transforming Power as a key principle of the AVP program.

The humanist psychology movement had been developing many group process exercises in the '60s and early '70s. One of the centers where these exercises were being developed was the National Training Laboratory in Princeton, New Jersey. In 1975, two of the leaders from National Training Labs, David and Frank Johnson published a book called "Joining Together." This book contained about 50 exercises including Concentric Circles, Broken Squares, Moon Explorer and a host of other exercises. Joining Together soon became a textbook for group process courses in many colleges across the country. (In 1979 before I became involved in AVP, I took a course in Group Dynamics at Pace University and the course contained most of the exercises that we now use in the Basic Workshop. The Professor, Dr. Fran Delahanty, subsequently became an AVP facilitator and is still active today.)

In 1976 Steve Levinsky, a recent college graduate became an AVP facilitator and a very important contributor to the fledgling AVP organization. He brought in a host of group process exercises from the humanistic psychology movement including Concentric Circles, Broken Squares, I Messages, the Masks Exercise, Light & Livelies etc. His work created the Basic Workshop that we know today. In addition, he began work on the Advanced Workshop. Steve became the first clerk of the Education Committee and the first Basic and Advanced Manuals were published with his leadership. Ellen Flanders and Janet Lugo continued the work of the Education Committee. The manuals became a key element in the growth and expansion of AVP program since they eliminated the need for professionally trained leaders and they enabled new grass-roots facilitators to be trained. The manuals also set standards for the workshops. In addition, Steve Levinsky helped setup an organizational structure with local area councils. This was another vital element in the growth of the program. After shaping much of the AVP program, Steve Levinsky moved on and was no

longer involved in the AVP program when I joined AVP in 1981. However, he left a very large imprint on the program.

With Larry Apsey's corporate experience and organizational skills, AVP was incorporated as a 501c3 organization in 1979 and he was involved in obtaining some large foundation grants to fund the fledgling organization and get it off the ground. Another key decision was to operate as a volunteer organization and not pay a stipend to facilitators as they did in the sister Creative Response to Conflict Program that did school and youth workshops. Paying volunteers would have made AVP's growth dependent on its fundraising ability and the program never could have grown to its present size if it were dependent on funding.

Bulls Head Meeting, a rural Quaker Meeting about 20 miles northwest of Poughkeepsie, New York became a birthplace of the AVP program. Larry Apsey was a member of this meeting. The meeting had conducted a Quaker Worship in nearby Green Haven Prison for a number of years. The first AVP workshop sprung from this worship group. The members of the meeting were then trained as the first outside facilitators. This included Steve Angell, Mary Gray Legg, Douglas Smythe, and Nettie West. These people along with Larry Apsey were the dynamos that drove the growth of the AVP program. By the early 1980s Mary Gray Legg, Steve Angell and Marge Zybas were each leading more than 24 workshops per year. Soon AVP was conducting hundreds of workshops per year. In the process, these leaders trained many more facilitators. By the late '80s, Steve Angell became the AVP missionary who spread the AVP program across the country and around the world.

In about 1991 when Mario Cuomo was governor, the State of New York established the Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute for Non-Violence with a budget of \$3,000,000. The offices were in Albany and the director was a black politician. They hired Bernard Lafayette and his white co-facilitator (whose name I have forgotten) at a fee of \$65,000 per year each. Their agreement for the fee was to conduct four "Kingian" workshops per year. (About \$15,000 per workshop.) This seemed like a big opportunity for AVP since we had a network of over 100 facilitators around the state that could assist the institute in spreading nonviolence programs throughout the state. Larry Apsey, Steve Angell and I met with the director of the institute and offered the services of AVP. They did not seem to understand AVP and did not seem to understand volunteer organizations that were not asking for money. (I also think we were the wrong color.) We were disappointed that they made no effort to follow up on our offer. (The MLK Institute for Nonviolence ran out of funding when Pataki became governor and folded)

In 1992, I had the opportunity to attend a MLK Institute workshop led by Bernard Lafayette and his co-facilitator at Wainright House in Rye, New York. This was a two-day

workshop that included talks about inspiring personal experiences in the civil rights movement, discussions of the philosophy of Gandhi, the six principles of “Kingian Nonviolence,” and a long video of a 1980s reunion bus tour of civil rights workers in the South. However, the workshop did not contain Concentric Circles, Broken Squares, I Messages or Light & Livelies. On the second day of the workshop we divided into groups and each group was to plan a social action program similar to the Strategy Exercise. Since the workshop lacked community building and communication skills, the group exercise did not go very well. I was disappointed with the workshop and it seemed to be stuck in the ‘60s. ( Most of the group process exercises were added after Bernard Lafayette left AVP. and AVP had moved on from the 1975 model)

In summary, I believe that the key sources of the AVP program were:

Larry Apey who contributed the organizational skill, the volunteer model, fundraising ability, and most importantly the concept of Transforming Power.

Steve Levinski who contributed the group process exercises, the training manuals and the local area council structure.

Bulls Head Quaker Meeting that contributed a core of dynamic facilitators that drove the growth of the program.

The Think Tank at Green Haven that enabled the AVP program to come into the New York Prison System.

Dr. Bernard Lafayette was certainly a very important and influential person in civil rights movement and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was a star and added credibility to the first few workshops but it soon became clear that the program did not need stars. Unfortunately, I don’t think that Bernard Lafayette really left any lasting impression on the AVP program.

There are my recollections of the beginning of AVP and involve my personal opinions. Others may have different recollections.

**Fred Feucht, March 2012**