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Arun Gandhi

I was a teenager when Muriel Lester visited our Home in South Africa. We lived at the Phoenix Settlement, the original institute for nonviolence that my grandfather, Mohandas K. Gandhi, had started when he first devoted his life to the philosophy of nonviolence. In the Fifties, Phoenix was still an island in a sea of sugarcane fields where the calm, the peace, and the serenity were shattered occasionally by deadly snakes straying in search of water.



This visit was the first time I heard of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and its manifold activities. My parents, Manilal and Sushila, included my sisters and me in most of their discussions, so Muriel's stay with us was, for me, a week of joyous communion - except that she dispossessed me of my bedroom! I quickly forgave her this trespass because she was such a gentle and charming soul.

The bond that she forged between the Gandhi Institute in South Africa and the Fellowship of Reconciliation became unbreakable, but my only other meeting with Muriel Lester was in January 1968, when she lived in a cottage on the outskirts of Epping Forest in England. She treated us to some delicious homemade scones and tea and reminisced about the days at Kingsley Hall in London's East End.

The Phoenix Settlement became a victim of political turmoil in South Africa. It was reduced to ashes. Alas, unlike the legendary bird, the Settlement could not rise again. At least in that place. It did rise in Memphis, Tennessee, in the form of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence. For one who grew up in the Phoenix Settlement in South Africa, the Institute in Memphis seems a direct extension. And the bond with FOR remains strong. We wish the IFOR many more diamond jubilees.

October 2, 1994, is the 125th anniversary of Gandhi's birth, we at the Gandhi Institute are using this anniversary to focus the attention of people on how to reduce violence in our personal and public lives. To start with, the Gandhi Institute together with Welsley College, The Boston University School of Theology, and the Life Experience School in Sherborn, Massachusetts will hold a conference: "Nonviolence or Nonexistence - Life in the 21st Century" - in which we will explore the seven sins that are the source of violence (October 1-2).

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Seven Social Sins according to Gandhi

- Politics without Principles
- Wealth without Work
- Commerce without Morality
- Education without Character
- Pleasure without Conscience
- Science without Humanity
- Worship without Sacrifice

I was once told by my mother, who along with Father spent all her life working for nonviolent change, that there is a big difference between throwing a pebble in a pond and throwing a big rock. The pebble causes gentle ripples that go a long way. The rock makes a big splash that quickly disappears.

Arun Gandhi is founder/director of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, Christian Brothers' University, 650 East Parkway South, Memphis, TN 38104. (901) 452-2824, Fax (901) 452-2775.

From September/October 1994, Fellowship Address: Fellowship P.O. Box 271 Nyack, NY 10960 (914) 358-4601



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M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, 510 Wilson Commons, Rochester, New York 14627-0423
(585) 276-3787 · Fax (585) 276-2425 · Email director@gandhiinstitute.org
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