

Stan Koehler – April 28, 2017

When one reaches a certain age it is fairly easy to fill up a page or so of this and that when called upon to provide background. But before going there, I'd like to take a moment to say why I founded Peace on the Street. To begin with I love cities, and having grown up on a farm, I have no illusions about what it means to return to the land. It means unmitigated work and often poverty. Although I grew up on the West Coast, I really love New York.



A lot of people talk about the city being the source of sin, corruption, etc. But when it comes right down to it the Christian scriptures say that Jesus will return and create a city, the New Jerusalem; a city not a suburb or farmlands. To that end I own property here in Spanish Harlem, where we operate our

programs.

I did a bunch of stuff before starting to meditate. I grew up as a Catholic in a third generation American family with two sisters and one brother. My mother was a special education teacher. My father retired from the military and we moved to a farm after World War II. Some years later we moved to the Bay Area and my father became a correctional officer at San Quentin. I went to Marin Catholic High school and initially St. Mary's College.



I got an advanced degree from the California State University at San Francisco as well as a lifetime Community College Teaching Certificate. My undergraduate work was in Classics and Social Science. My Masters is in Intellectual European History with a focus on bureaucracies. I did a lot of management work for the City and County of San Francisco, particularly in mental health. In 1964 Ann Marie and I got married and a year later had twin sons, John-Paul and Alex.

In 1969 I came to Manhattan for a couple of years and worked for the Addiction Services Agency. My family and I lived in Horizon House, a therapeutic community on East 4th and Avenue C, for most of that time. In the mid-70s, back in California, my sister and I founded and operated a private school for autistic children, St Bernadette's.

I was certified as a Community Dispute Mediator by the San Francisco Community Board Program as well as an Emotional Support Counselor for the terminally ill by the Shanti Project. This was in the early 80's when AIDS was just being to appear and within a short time we focused exclusively on clients with this illness. I met Randi, my second wife, another volunteer at Shanti. She went on to direct their practical support program.

During the 90s, prior to starting Peace on the Street, I owned and operated Matrix International Consulting. It was a small business that provided software developers for various companies. We brought many of our consultants to the United States from India. During that time we developed a residential intensive socialization program so that the consultants could rapidly acclimatize themselves to American culture.

I also managed software development projects for different companies and governmental agencies including New York City's Administration for Children's Services. In the past I've provided consulting services for the United Nations as well for the NY Consul General's Office of the Dominican Republic. During that time I received the Project Management Professional Certification from the PMI Institute. For two of these years I was on the faculty of Columbia University teaching the Project Management Course for their Professional Certification Program.

During 1982 I began to study meditation and in 1991 I began teaching. From 1982 until 1998 I studied, for the most part, with the controversial teacher Dr. Frederick Lenz (Rama). Randi and I moved from San Francisco to New



York in 1989 to enhance the study. I was both certified to teach and ordained as a monk by Rama in 1991. Randi and I separated in the mid-90s and she returned to California. I also took on the clerical duties of officiating at weddings and funerals.

I taught on 182nd St in a classroom that was provided by the Alianza Dominicana. I also taught classes on campus at CUNY. And again, it's easier to practice in faraway, quiet places but that's not available for most of us. So I developed techniques and exercises that worked in the city.

I also decided to push the envelope and developed a meditation program for the inmates at Rikers Island. I spent five years there from 1998 - 2003, with the support of a very talented co-teacher. One reason for creating, along with Sifu Garcia, Peace on the Street was the goal of providing a program that would support inmates returning to the city as well as our neighborhood residents themselves.

I was also involved in supporting families that had relatives that joined religious groups of which the family disapproved. In addition to the family reconciliation counseling, during the late 90's I co-authored a book, *The Cult Around the Corner*, to help families concerning this issue.

During the 80's and the 90's a great many Americans who belonged to Asian based religions were tarred with the accusation of belonging to 'cults'. Meditation students studying with Rama were not immune to this type of 'mental health' discount. I made a point of studying the issue and providing support to families who were victimized by those who were inciting fear for profit. As of 2010 these anti-cult programs have significantly diminished. One researcher theorizes that the movement was a baby boomer empty nester phenomenon that ran its course as the baby boomer adult children entered middle age.



In the spring of 2000 Sifu Richard Garcia and I did the Mankind Project Warrior Weekend. Some years passed during which I introduced a number of men to the Project. In October of 2005 I began staffing the Warrior weekends and took a more active role in bringing the New Warrior Weekend Uptown. Since that time a number of men from Spanish Harlem have attended the weekend, some of whom have staffed a number of times and have moved into leadership roles. In 2007 I stepped up, along with Jonathan Figueroa, for Multicultural co-chair and we both served on the NY Metro Council until 2012.

Sifu Richard and I started Peace on the Street in 2003. As time went on we discovered that our joint meditation/martial arts program was unusually effective. Youngsters came to Sifu Garcia to learn to fight. After they got nice with their hands, it was a short walk across the hall to learn how to get nice with their minds.

I've studied martial arts from time to time although I never took it to the level accomplished by Sifu Richard. But then I didn't take my first martial arts class until I was 43. I studied Capoeira and was initiated by Camisa and Preguisa into Omulu Senzala School of Capoeira in 1987; I studied Karate and was awarded the Sixth Kyu at the World Seido Karate Organization Honbu in 1991. I currently take the JKD classes taught by Sifu Garcia. I suppose at 74, at least for the moment, I hold the position as his oldest student.

By 2005 it became obvious that a Zen program integrated into a martial arts program was a successful method for bringing the Dharma to the inner city. In 2008 we moved outside of this model into adult education. We expanded the program to create an enhanced TASC curriculum. This program integrates meditative and martial arts practice with traditional high school equivalency subjects. Jonathan (Rahula), who participated in facilitating these early groups, currently is co-facilitating meditation and conflict-education groups at YouthBuild Youth Action Program of Harlem.



During the last several years I have been actively involved in the Hollow Bones Order. I was ordained as a Zen Priest with the dharma name Hui Neng in 2004 by Zen Master Jun Po Dennis Kelly, 83rd Patriarch in the Rinzai Zen lineage. I took Inka transmission from Jun Po in November of 2016 as well.

Hui Neng, the Sixth and final Zen Patriarch, is credited with completing the transformation of Zen from a foreign psychology into a genuine Chinese expression of the basic teachings of the Tathagata. I look to Hui Neng as a model in my goal of creating an approach to Buddhism that resonates with inner city Americans.

During 2005 Jun Po created the Mondo Zen protocols. I was amongst the initial Zen priests that first tested out the technology in Colorado and since that time have made these protocols a central part of our curriculum in Spanish Harlem. I'm particularly interested in providing an access to Zen that crosses class barriers so that Zen will be as available to working class men and woman as it is to upper middle class Americans.

During the winter of 2013, I joined the CPE program of the Spiritual Services Department of Mt. Sinai Hospital and worked up through the spring of 2016 as a volunteer intern chaplain. For the most part during that period I provided weekend and night support for patients that were actively dying.

Previously we expanded our program to GreenHope providing support for woman returning from prison. And last winter we conducted a series of meditation workshops for the participants in our neighborhood Youth Build program as well as conducting our "You've Been Stopped" survival training for local youth when there is police contact.

Looking towards the future, we just opened our new Zendo, November 2016. We continue to provide meditation workshops as well as conflict resolution training in our neighborhood. We are developing a pilot workshop in self-preservation for LGBTQ youth as well. These initiatives, like all of our programs, have the fundamental goal of making life easier and more successful for members of our community through applying Zen principles to the day to day challenges.

In retrospect and conclusion I would quote the poet:

*“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*