**A DIFFERENT KIND OF WARRIOR**

by Sally Harrison-Pepper

David was a genius, a musician, and a prankster. His genius was confirmed when he was skipped past both the eighth and ninth grades at the same time. Even after that, however, he was still bored by the curriculum. And thus the prankster was born.

His pranks were clever and complicated and often annoying. He filled the princi­pal’s office with balled-up newspaper from floor to ceiling, packed in so tightly it formed a wall in the doorway that could not be penetrated without tools. He managed to persuade his friends to assist him in getting a teacher’s new VW Beetle onto the roof of their two-story school. All were sworn to secrecy about how they achieved this feat. Certainly physics and engineering were involved.

By seventeen, he was headed to college, as a physics major with a minor in music. A skilled violinist, he’d been offered a seat with a well-respected orchestra, but he loved science just as much. So, he opted for both, at one of several prestigious universities that had offered him full scholarships.

For his sophomore year, however, David abruptly transferred to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He had felt too constrained by the Ivy League university he’d chosen. Antioch, by contrast, was small and flexible. This college put him on a path that suited his complicated, brilliant, ever-restless soul, and he quickly settled in to days filled with physics, music, and friendship.

There were two barbershops in Yellow Springs at the time, Squire's Barbershop and Gegner's Barbershop. Squire's integrated in 1960, but Lewis Gegner refused to do so, using the excuse that he did not know how to cut an African American's hair. Gegner became a focal point for the rising Civil Rights movement, drawing national attention. There were multiple demonstrations in Yellow Springs, some­times attracting as many as 600 people to the little village, and David was always among them. A Washington Post photograph showed him standing amidst the smoke and tear gas.

Deeply disturbed by the inequities, the harassment, and the heartless treatment of a segment of Americans simply seeking equal rights, working for the Civil Rights Movement became David's calling, his mission, and his passion. He set aside both physics and his violin, and arranged to simultaneously continue his studies with Antioch long-distance while enrolled in a training program in non-violent protest, led by the Freedom Riders at Western College in Oxford, OH.

By May 1961, David was on a bus headed to Mississippi, intent on helping a rising voter registration effort to reach all the disenfranchised and terrorized African Americans in the South by using all the tools of peaceful protest to engage with and assist the citizens of Mississippi. He deeply believed in democracy, freedom, and equality for all.

In Jackson, Mississippi, David was repeatedly blasted with fire hoses, attacked by dogs, beaten, arrested, and jailed many times. He had both of his hands inten­tionally broken by an enraged, gleeful sheriff who stomped on them repeatedly. He maintained his position on non-violence, even as his dreams of being a concert violinist were crushed beneath the sheriff’s feet. His heart and courage only grew stronger.

Deeply committed to the values of America, and to seeing these values fulfilled in the South, he marched in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963, and heard the powerful oratory of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the now-famous “I Have a Dream” speech. David was only a few feet away from that great man.

David completed his undergraduate degree in Physics the following year – a year early, of course -- and entered a graduate program at American University in Washington, D.C. Within his first year as a Master’s student at AU, he made a discovery in particle physics that was published and celebrated by physicists around the world. At the same time, David continued to work for freedom and justice as a con­stant warrior for Civil Rights right alongside his work in physics.

On April 30, 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered an anti-Vietnam War speech at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Titled ”Why I am Opposed to the War in Vietnam,” King passionately spoke out on America's involvement in that war, connect­ing it to economic injustice and the unequal treatment of the mili­tary’s African American soldiers. Though David was not able to attend that speech, he read the speech with interest. Thinking through the combined issues of Civil Rights and Vietnam with his interdisciplinary zeal, he realized that these issues were, in fact, linked in profound ways. He folded King's resolve into his ongoing work in Civil Rights. David's focus in physics had also shifted, toward sonar and acoustics, thus blending his love of music with his ongoing explora­tions in physics. It was a complicated combination for an equally compli­cated man.

And then, in the summer of 1967, he was notified to appear before the draft board. He learned that even though, as a graduate student, he had been awarded draft status 2-S just the year before, he was now no longer exempt. Desperate for more bodies to send into a losing war, Congress voted to limit students’ deferment to only one year, unless they were either in a Ph.D. program or were seniors due to graduate. David had completed his Master’s degree in May, but had not yet begun the Ph.D. program at AU scheduled for September. He was stuck in between the new regulations.

He was also both mystified and confused. His most recent work in physics would actually con­tribute to America’s national defense, as he had discovered and developed groundbreaking sonar and hydrophonic listening capabilities for sub­marines. And yet, they wanted to pull him away from that work, hand him a gun and send him to Vietnam with little to no training. He con­templated his love for the idea of democracy, his ongoing work for greater equality and justice, and struggled with King’s firm position on the war.

David consulted family, faculty, clergy, civil rights colleagues -- all with no clear answers to his dilemma, except a growing consensus that his beliefs and training in non-violence pointed him toward becoming a Conscientious Objector. Achiev­ing this status, however, required a complicated maze of paperwork and inter­views. Fortunately, he was organized, focused and ready. And yet, just he was preparing to submit the last of the paperwork required, he was told he could be criminally prosecuted for refusing to comply with the draft board orders calling him into military service immediately. There wasn’t time to prove his long-held beliefs to anyone who cared.

Yes, David *was* a warrior, but it was for civil rights. He was a well-trained, com­mitted, scrupu­lously non-violent fighter. Running out of time to work the prob­lem, he concluded that he simply could not be the kind of warrior the President, Congress and Vietnam required. It went against everything he believed about non-violence, compassion, peace and justice.

In less than a week from the notification, David left for Canada, knowing that he might never return. He had little time to prepare and left much behind. He didn’t know when he would see his family and friends again. His work for civil rights -- at least in the United States, where it really mattered -- was over. His work in physics continued with the Univer­sity of Toronto, where he had immediately been ac­cepted, the university recognizing the groundbreaking, prize-winning work that was already in progress. David simply saw no other choices. This brilliant, compli­cated, large-hearted warrior for justice left the United States. Heartbroken, he wholly committed his life and work to Canada, and never returned to live in the United States.

My brother is a Canadian.