

Fresno Center for Nonviolence 2023

March 2023

Every year we lose a blessed soul, accept that fate we must. Yet although we feel less, we wish the winds would bring us someone new, not to replace but to replenish.



Edited by Richard Gomez

Dedicated to PEACE and SOCIAL JUSTICE through

SIMPLICITY ~ JUSTICE ~ INCLUSIVENESS ~ NON-INJURY

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*In Memory of: **María Telesco August 7 -1933 - January 30, 2023***



Maria Telesco was once the President of the Fresno Center for Nonviolence. She grew up in New York and became involved with U.S. death penalty laws in high school in the early 1950's when Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were tried and executed in Sing Sing in 1953, near where her family lived at the time. Maria came to Fresno, and joined the Amnesty International, Death Penalty, Focus (DPF), FCNV, and California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty. She soon organized a local DPF chapter, and later, the Friends and Families of Murder Victims for Reconciliation. Maria is survived by her daughter, Denyse whom she loved dearly. We honor Maria, our dear friend and mentor, with the following sentiments.

I got to know Maria because someone gave her my number when she was organizing an event for Friends and Families of Murder Victims for Reconciliation and needed help. I knew from the outset I wanted to work with her in the future. I'd long been against the death penalty (which long ago been abolished in my country, England). I started learning a lot from her about the difficulties involved in prison reform in the United States. Shortly after I met her, Maria joined the Fresno Center for Nonviolence concentrating on prison and prisoner issues. I found her to be dedicated (rather bossy!) but so sincere in her wish for prison improvement and, of course, the abolition of the death penalty, that one forgave her. I miss her sense of humor, often irony, and her friendship over many years. She did not "suffer fools gladly," and in this respect we both learned a lot from our friendship with our late friend Richard Stone! Her health issues hampered her so much in recent years, but instead of giving up she kept fighting for what she believed using whatever tools that were available to her. - Angela Price.

I met Maria in 2015, when I joined the Fresno Center for Nonviolence Board of Directors. She made me feel welcome from the start and did not hide the fact that she was glad I was so young joining the board (at 44, it had been a while since someone called me young). I sensed a toughness to her and could tell she was no-nonsense when it came to, well, pretty much anything. I was inspired by her work and dedication to ending the death penalty, humanizing the Prison Industrial Complex, and her dedication to peace, social and economic justice, which are goals of FCNV. Unfortunately, I did not get to know Maria well; we did not get to work on any projects together and I only got glimpses of her sense of humor. But, her strength of character leaves a lasting imprint, and that is fortunate for anyone who knew her. - Rita Bell, President, Fresno Center for Nonviolence.

I met Maria in 2003 when I joined the board of the Fresno Center of Nonviolence. I was impressed with her dedication to prisoners, prison issues and her stand against the death penalty. I looked forward to her monthly reports on her visits with prisoners. I joined her at vigils that she organized for prisoners on death row. She was always outspoken and had a dry sense of humor. I miss Maria. - Dan Y.

I met an angel who changed my life, Maria Telesco. We first connected in 2009 when I was serving a 14-year sentence at a Californian prison in Avenal. After 5 years of incarceration, I was struggling to hold onto my emotional well-being and my life felt hopeless. Desperate for a connection to the outside world, I found an article written by Maria about the abolition of the death penalty in a copy of the Community Alliance gifted to prisoners. I was struck by her passion for social justice and wrote to her about my desire to start a men's self-help group within the prison. To my surprise, she responded, and we began a collaboration that lasted several years. Together, we worked with organizations such as the Fresno Center for Nonviolence and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno to promote tolerance, inclusion, and positive thinking within the prison walls. Our relationship grew from a working partnership to a close friendship, and Maria became a mentor and an inspiration to me. Maria had a strong and determined personality, but she was also kind and compassionate. She would often close our meetings by leading us in singing her favorite song, "Amazing Grace."

When I was released from prison, I would travel to visit Maria regularly. I remarried, became a welcome member of my wife's family and worked hard to expand our family business. I now volunteer and work with various local organizations to give back to my community.

As Maria grew older and her mobility and mental acuity declined, I continued to visit her and was grateful for her influence in my life. She recently passed away and I can't help but miss her amazing presence in my world. But I take solace knowing that she was able to achieve something very important. Her life became the embodiment of the virtues of that beautiful song Amazing Grace:

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." - Anon.

Thank you, Maria, your amazing integrity helped me find the path back home. You are my angel of mercy. I love you. - CJ, a former prisoner turned productive citizen.

My strongest connection with Maria Telesco was through her work with Death Penalty Focus. She organized several events in Fresno focused on death penalty issues, including vigils in front of St. John's when a California execution was imminent. I think I attended every one of those vigils. I also attended a big event at the Newman Center, the presentation by Sister Helen Prejean, which Maria helped to bring about. That event had a pretty big impact in Fresno, and I was quite proud of Maria for her role in it. Of course, the death penalty issue was only one of a long string of social justice issues addressed by Maria during her stay on this planet. She was a true treasure for us in the social justice community. - Gerry Bill

Maria has been and will be missed by more than people will know. She didn't want a fuss but she does want everyone to know that she loves you and not to mourn her. Of course, she would want us all to get off our ass's and back to organizing and making this a better world. There are plenty of problems and she dealt with a few. Just try to help one problem at a time and not to worry about the rest. - Editor.



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Next Show:
March 8th

Our radio show in March has our host Josh Shurley with guest Bob McCloskey on the latest news regarding the crisis of the unhoused in Fresno. For more information call on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at (559) 237-3223 or check our website at www.centerfornonviolence.org.

In February our show with Josh Shurley and his guest was Paulina Cruz from the Community Alliance. To hear again go to: <https://on.soundcloud.com/ZVaAA>

In January, just before the Martin L. King jr. Holiday, our host, Joshua Shurley talked with Dr. Jean Kennedy, psychologist, WILPF activist, restorative justice advocate and community organizer. Through the lens of the “beloved community” concept, they disclosed the legacy of Dr. Martin L. King Jr. life and struggle for racial, global, and social justice and how it impacts reverberate through to today. To hear again go to: <https://soundcloud.com/joshua-shurley/stir-it-up-january-11-2023>.