Peace activist Richard Deats comes to Truman to talk about his career fighting for change around the world

Richard Deats' serene smile reflects the cause for which he has been fighting for the past 40 years. Deats gave a presentation Nov. 18 at Truman about his life as a peace activist.

Deats worked for 44 years with the Fellowship of the Reconciliation (FOR), the oldest peace organization in the U.S. Based on non-violent methods, the organization is inspired largely by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. Today, FOR has chapters in about 45 countries, Deats said.

Deats said the organization is spiritually based but not sponsored by any religion. Members include Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists.

Deats spent 13 years in the Philippines as a prisoner of social ethics. He trained with small groups of laymen and trained laymen for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, he said. But working under harsh conditions all over the world became a practice for him.

"I have experience in a lot of different countries working with sometimes revolutionaries, sometimes religious groups that were working for change," Deats said. "For example, during the breakdown of the Soviet Union, I was in Lithuania, and went to Moscow for a non-violence workshop." He explained that his involvement in non-violence movements continued from the environment he grew up in. He said that when he was young, he experienced segregation in his community.

"It was an obvious evil in my community," Deats said. "I trained with small groups of laymen and trained laymen for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but working under harsh conditions all over the world became a practice for him."

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Richard Deats Peace Activist

Deats said. "It was ironic," Deats said. "Dr. Martin Luther King was against violence in our country, but as he said during the Vietnam War, the U.S. was the largest prevailer of violence in the world. And this is still the case today—even with a new president, we're stuck in an old paradigm of violence."

Although Deats has been retired for four years, he is still involved with the organization. Today, he spends most of his time traveling across the U.S. to give conferences or teaching on non-violent methods. Deats said, "I feel like the most important thing to do for me now is to write down my life and my experiences as long as I can think, type and work."

"In that trip, we travelled around and talked to people who have been in the Russian war," Ashcraft said. "For a couple of weeks, we also taught English as a second language to children in a school. It's become of those experiences that I decided to teach a course on non-violence here in Truman. I am very moved by what we saw."

Senior Andrew McCall was born in Richard Deats' house in New York and lived with him and his family until he was about 18 months old. He said Deats' presentation was very special because he saw him in a different light.

"We didn't use to talk that much about his experiences, or about his philosophy," Andrew McCall said. "I have a great respect for him."

Professor of Religion William Ashcraft was responsible for bringing Deats to Truman. He said they met in 2001 in Russia with other volunteers from the Fellowship of the Reconciliation.

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