

*"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. But I stay very engaged in my local community, like for the local elections. I need to be engaged politically." - Richard Deats*

# All Eyes On: Richard Deats

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

BY HÉLÈNE BIELAK  
Staff Reporter

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 40 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 professor of social ethics. He trained with small groups of people during Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship, he said. But working under hectic conditions all over the world became a practice for him.

"I have experience in a lot of different countries working with sometimes revolutionaries, sometimes reformist groups that were working for change," Deats said. "For example, during the breakdown of the Soviet Union, I was in Lithuania, and I went to Moscow for a non-violence workshop."

Originally from Texas, Deats said his involvement in non-violence movements stemmed 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, and I wanted to deal with it," Deats said.

As a student, he was involved in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s. Afterward, he worked with Mrs. King after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. Their main project was to transform Dr. King's birthday into a national holiday, Deats said. The project succeeded in 1994. However, when Deats relates Dr. King's

goals to the current events in U.S. foreign policy, he said he remains skeptical.

"It's ironic," Deats said. "Dr. Martin Luther King was against violence in our country, but as he said during the Vietnam War, the U.S. are the largest prevailers 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 writing on his computer.

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Peace Activist

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

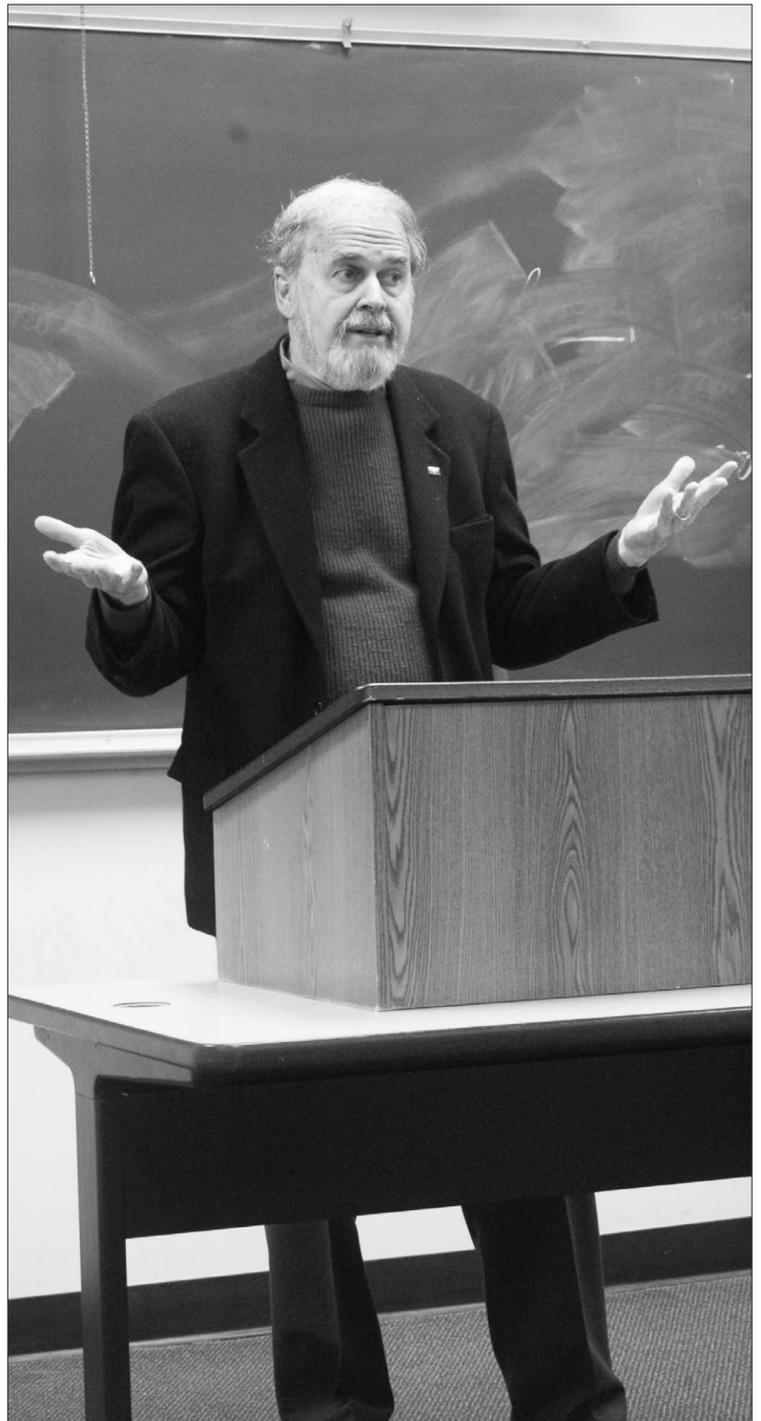
"In that trip, we travelled around and talked to people who have been in the Bosnian war," Ashcraft said. "For a couple of weeks, we also taught English as a second language to children in a school. It's because of those experiences that I decided to teach a course on non-violence here in Truman. I was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

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, about his philosophy," Andrew McCall said. "I have a great respect for him."

McCall described Deats as a man who is incredibly humble and devoted, but also a man with a great sense of humor.

"He is very funny," McCall said. "He really likes to tell corny jokes, which is what I remember the most from him."



Krista Goodman/Index  
Peace activist Richard Deats recalls memories spent in the Fellowship of the Reconciliation, including time he spent with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s widow.

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