Why I Spent Yesterday in a Federal Holding Cell

By Deborah Good

Contributing Writer

Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny.

–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Yesterday morning I was placed in handcuffs for the first time. I was arrested with more than 100 others for nonviolently blocking all the entrances to Philadelphia’s Federal Building, about half a block from the Liberty Bell, symbolically shutting down “business as usual” for a government who had begun “Operation Iraqi Freedom” the night before.

Why you? may ask. My first answer is that I have something to do with the fact that my 87-year-old grandmother and the rest of her extended family are currently an intern at “The Other Team” in Northlawn, which is the name of the place where the beds are filling with those injured and dying from shrapnel wounds. One father he met in a hospital pleaded, “Is this liberation? Is this democracy? We are brothers and sisters to the American people. Ask them why they are killing our children. Tell them this is invasion, not democracy. Tell them if this is liberation, we do not want it.”

My final answer: I am not entirely sure. I choose civil disobedience as one means of dissent, knowing that it is not a choice everyone will make and many will criticize, and I do so with questions and hesitations. While I respect those who act out of absolute certainty, I believe there is danger in leaving no room for doubt. And while I feel very strongly about the injustice wrought by this war, I cannot be absolutely sure. I hope I am not harming others for our cause. Without such humility, I would be guilty of the same arrogance I deplore in my government.

Many will die, civilians and soldiers, Iraqis and Americans. I do not disagree that Saddam Hussein has brought much violence and destruction to his own people. I do not dispute that Iraq may have dangerous chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction. I do believe, however, that bringing further violence and destruction will never solve the world’s problems and that the best way to rid the world of its weapons of mass destruction is to begin with our own. The freedom Bush is talking about when he was speaking of “liberating” the Iraqi people is certainly not the same kind of freedom we sang about from the holding cells where I spent most of yesterday with women of all ages, including an 88-year-old in her wheelchair: “We who believe in freedom,” we sang with the words of Sweet Honey in the Rock, “cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”

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Letter to the Editors

Peace Fellowship: There All-Along

In the Mar. 27 issue of The Weather Vane, SGA Co-president Russ Pile is quoted in the article “Vigils to Remember Iraq” as saying, “Peace Fellowship didn’t plan anything [in response to the war].” With the onset of the war in Iraq, I am grateful for those who bring new energy to the continuing pacifist struggle. However, I ask that you do not speak too harshly of those who have been working steadily against the war all along.

Among other things, the leaders of Peace Fellowship have been working all year to prevent a war in Iraq. We held letter writing sessions, distributed leaflets in downtown Harrisonburg, and advertised all across campus for the various peace marches that EMU arranged transportation for. Unfortunately, in most events, less than a handful of people participated – none of whom were SGA leaders. Now the war has started, and people on the

EMU campus are doing something. Students show up to the vigils that Earl Martin has organized. People are making Iraqi relief kits, simulating refugee camps, and holding discussion forums about the war.

In the midst of the terrible tragedy, I have been handed a bit of hope by being shown that EMU students do care. Come to our Peace Fellowship meeting Tuesday, Apr. 8, at 5 p.m. in the East Dining Hall to help join the long-term peace effort. We will be picking next year’s leaders. Since none of the current active members will be here next year, even if you have never been in a Peace Fellowship meeting in your life, you have the opportunity to take on a role that will enable you to participate in the campus mission to “walk boldly in the way of nonviolence and peace.”

– Catherine Dewtever