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NVC in Action

"Murderer, Assassin, Child Killer!"

Interspersed throughout the book are dialogues entitled NVC in Action. These dialogues intend to impart the flavor of an actual exchange where a speaker is applying the principles of Nonviolent Communication. However, NVC is not simply a language or a set of techniques for using words; the consciousness and intent that it embraces may be expressed through silence, a quality of presence, as well as through facial expressions and body language. The NVC in Action dialogues you will be reading are necessarily distilled and abridged versions of real-life exchanges, where moments of silent empathy, stories, humor, gestures, etc. would all contribute to a more natural flow of connection between the two parties than might be apparent when dialogues are condensed in print.

I was presenting Nonviolent Communication in a mosque at Deheisha Refugee Camp in Bethlehem to about 170 Palestinian Moslem men. Attitudes toward Americans at that time were not favorable. As I was speaking, I suddenly noticed a wave of muffled commotion fluttering through the audience. "They're whispering that you are American!" my translator alerted me, just as a gentleman in the audience leapt to his feet. Facing me squarely, he hollered at the top of his lungs, "Murderer!" Immediately a dozen other voices joined him in chorus: "Assassin!" "Child-killer!" "Murderer!"

Fortunately, I was able to focus my attention on what the man was feeling and needing. In this case, I had some cues. On the way into the refugee camp, I had seen several empty tear gas canisters that had been shot into the camp the night before. Clearly marked on each canister were the words "Made in U.S.A." I knew that the refugees harbored

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a lot of anger toward the U.S. for supplying tear gas and other weapons to Israel.

I addressed the man who had called me a murderer:

I: Are you angry because you would like my government to use its resources differently? *(I didn't know whether my guess was correct, but what is critical is my sincere effort to connect with his feeling and need.)*

He: Damn right I'm angry! You think we need tear gas? We need sewers, not your tear gas! We need housing! We need to have our own country!

I: So you're furious and would appreciate some support in improving your living conditions and gaining political independence?

He: Do you know what it's like to live here for twenty-seven years the way I have with my family—children and all? Have you got the faintest idea what that's been like for us?

I: Sounds like you're feeling very desperate and you're wondering whether I or anybody else can really understand what it's like to be living under these conditions. Am I hearing you right?

He: You want to understand? Tell me, do you have children? Do they go to school? Do they have playgrounds? My son is sick! He plays in open sewage! His classroom has no books! Have you seen a school that has no books?

I: I hear how painful it is for you to raise your children here; you'd like me to know that what you want is what all parents want for their children—a good education, opportunity to play and grow in a healthy environment . . .

He: That's right, the basics! Human rights—isn't that what you Americans call it? Why don't more of you come here and see what kind of human rights you're bringing here!

I: You'd like more Americans to be aware of the enor-

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mity of the suffering here and to look more deeply at the consequences of our political actions?

Our dialogue continued, with him expressing his pain for nearly twenty more minutes, and I listening for the feeling and need behind each statement. I didn't agree or disagree. I received his words, not as attacks, but as gifts from a fellow human willing to share his soul and deep vulnerabilities with me.

Once the gentleman felt understood, he was able to hear me as I explained my purpose for being at the camp. An hour later, the same man who had called me a murderer was inviting me to his home for a Ramadan dinner.

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NVC in Action

"The most arrogant speaker we've ever had!"

This dialogue occurred during a workshop I was conducting. About half an hour into my presentation, I paused to invite reactions from the participants. One of them raised a hand and declared, "You're the most arrogant speaker we've ever had!"

I have several options open to me when people address me this way. One option is to take the message personally; I know I'm doing this when I have a strong urge to either grovel, defend myself, or make excuses. Another option (for which I am well-rehearsed) is to attack the other person for what I perceive as their attack upon me. On this occasion, I chose a third option by focusing on what might be going on behind the man's statement.

MBR: *(guessing at the observations he was making)* Are you reacting to my having taken 30 straight minutes to present my views before giving you a chance to talk?

Phil: No, you make it sound so simple.

MBR: *(trying to obtain further clarification)* Are you reacting to my not having said anything about how the process can be difficult for some people to apply?

Phil: No, not some people—you!

MBR: So you're reacting to my not having said that the process can be difficult for me at times?

Phil: That's right.

MBR: Are you feeling annoyed because you would have liked some sign from me that indicated that I have some problems with the process myself?

Phil: *(after a moment's pause)* That's right.

MBR: *(More relaxed now that I am in touch with the person's feeling and need, I direct my attention to what*

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he might be requesting of me) Would you like me to admit right now that this process can be a struggle for me to apply?

Phil: Yes.

MBR: *(Having gotten clear on his observation, feeling, need, and request, I check inside myself to see if I am willing to do as he requests)* Yes, this process is often difficult for me. As we continue with the workshop, you'll probably hear me describe several incidents where I've struggled . . . or completely lost touch . . . with this process, this consciousness, that I am presenting here to you. But what keeps me in the struggle are the close connections to other people that happen when I do stay with the process.

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NVC in Action

"Bring back the stigma of illegitimacy!"

A student of Nonviolent Communication volunteering at a food bank was shocked when an elderly co-worker bursts out from behind a newspaper, "What we need to do in this country is to bring back the stigma of illegitimacy!"

The woman's habitual reaction to this kind of statement would have been to say nothing, to judge the other severely but silently, and eventually process her own feelings safely away from the scene. This time she remembered she had the option of listening for the feelings and needs behind the words that had shocked her.

Woman: *(first checking out her guess as to what the co-worker was observing)* Are you reading something about teenage pregnancies in the paper?

Co-worker: Yes, it's unbelievable how many of them are doing it!

Woman: *(now listening for the co-worker's feeling, and what unmet need might be giving rise to this feeling)* Are you feeling alarmed because you'd like kids to have stable families?

Co-worker: Of course! Do you know, my father would have killed me if I had done anything like that!

Woman: So you're remembering how it was for the girls in your generation who got pregnant?

Co-worker: Sure thing! We knew what would happen to us if we got pregnant. We were scared about it all the time, not like these girls nowadays.

Woman: Are you annoyed that there is no fear of punishment for the girls who get pregnant these days?

Co-worker: Well, at least fear and punishment worked! It

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says here that there are girls sleeping around with different men just so they can get pregnant! That's right! They have babies and the rest of us in society pay for it!

The woman heard two different feelings in this statement: astonishment that girls would deliberately get pregnant, and annoyance that taxpayers end up paying for children born in this way. She chose which feeling to empathize with.

Woman: Are you astonished to realize that people are getting pregnant these days without any consideration for reputation, consequences, financial stability . . . all the things you used to consider?

Co-worker: *(Feeling heard around her astonishment, she now moved to her other feeling, that of annoyance. As often happens when there is a mixture of feelings present, the speaker will return to those that have not received empathic attention. It is not necessary for the listener to reflect back a complex mixture of feelings all at once; the flow of compassion will continue as each feeling comes up again in its turn)* Yeah, and guess who ends up paying for it?

Woman: Sounds like you're exasperated because you'd like your tax money to be used for other purposes. Is that so?

Co-worker: Certainly is! Do you know that my son and his wife want a second child and they can't have one – even though they have two jobs – because it costs so much?

Woman: I guess you're sad about that? You'd probably love to have a second grandchild . . .

Co-worker: Yes, and it's not just for me that it would make

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a difference.

Woman: . . . and for your son to have the family he wants . . . *(Even though the woman guessed only partially correctly, she did not interrupt the flow of empathy, allowing the co-worker to continue and realize another concern.)*

Co-worker: Yes, I think it's sad to be a single child too.

Woman: Oh, I see; you'd like for Katie to have a little brother?

Co-worker: That would be nice.

At this point, the woman sensed a release in her co-worker. A moment of silence elapsed. The woman felt surprised to discover that, while she still wanted to express her own views, the urgency and tension had dissipated because she no longer felt "adversarial." She understood the feelings and needs behind her co-worker's statements and no longer felt that the two of them were "worlds apart."

Woman: You know, when you first said that we should bring back the stigma of illegitimacy (O), I got really scared (F), because it really matters to me that all of us here share a deep caring for people needing help (N). Some of the people coming here for food are teenaged parents (O), and I want to make sure they feel welcome (N). Would you mind telling me how you feel when you see Dashal or Amy and her boyfriend walking in? (R)

The woman expressed herself in NVC, using all four parts of the process: observation (O), feeling (F), need (N), request (R).

The dialogue continued with several more exchanges

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until the woman got the reassurance she needed that her co-worker did indeed offer caring and respectful help to unmarried teen clients. Even more importantly, what the woman gained was a new experience in expressing disagreement in a way that met her needs for honesty and mutual respect.

In the meantime, the co-worker left satisfied that her concerns around teen pregnancy had been fully heard. Both parties felt understood and their relationship benefited from their having shared their understanding and differences without hostility. In the absence of NVC, their relationship might have begun to deteriorate from this moment, and the work they both wanted to do in common—taking care and helping people—might have suffered.

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Sharing Fears About A Best Friend's Smoking

Al and Burt have been best friends for over thirty years. Al, a non-smoker, has done everything he can over the years to persuade Burt to give up his two-pack-a-day habit. Aware during the past year of the increasing severity of his friend's hacking cough, Al finds himself bursting out one day with all the energy and life that had been buried in his unexpressed anger and fear.

Al: Burt, I know we've talked about this a dozen times, but listen. I'm scared your damned cigarettes are going to kill you! You're my best friend, and I want you around for as long as I can have you. Please don't think I'm judging you. I'm not—I'm just really worried. *(In the past, when Al had tried to get him to quit, Burt had often accused Al of judging him.)*

Burt: No, I hear your concern. We've been friends for a long time . . .

Al: *(making a request)* Would you be willing to quit?

Burt: I wish I could.

Al: *(listening for the feelings and needs preventing Burt from agreeing to the request)* Are you scared to try because you don't want to fail?

Burt: Yeah . . . you know how many times I've tried before . . . I know people think less of me for not being able to quit.

Al: *(guessing at what Burt might want to request)* I don't think less of you. And if you tried and failed again, I still wouldn't. I just wish you'd try.

Burt: Thanks. But you're not the only one. . . . It's everyone: you can see it in their eyes—they think you're a failure.

Al: *(empathizing with Burt's feeling)* Is it kind of over-

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whelming to worry about what others might think, when just quitting is hard enough?

Burt: I really hate the idea that I might be addicted, that I have something that I just can't control . . .

Al: *(his eyes connecting with Burt's, nods head in affirmative. Al's interest and attention to Burt's deep feelings and needs are revealed through his eyes and the silence that follows).*

Burt: I mean, I don't even like smoking any more. It's like you're a pariah if you do it in public. It's embarrassing.

Al: *(continuing to empathize)* It sounds like you'd really like to quit, but are scared you might fail—and how that would be for your self-image and confidence.

Burt: Yeah, I guess that's it. . . . You know, I don't think I've ever talked about it before. Usually when people tell me to quit, I just tell them to get lost. I'd like to quit, but I don't want all that pressure from people.

Al: I wouldn't want to pressure you. I don't know if I could reassure you about your fears around not succeeding, but I sure would like to support you in any way I can. That is . . . if you want me to . . .

Burt: Yes, I do. I'm really touched by your concern and willingness. But . . . suppose I'm not ready to try yet, is that okay with you too?

Al: Of course, Burt, I'll still like you as much. It's just that I want to like you for longer! *(Because Al's request was a genuine request, not a demand, he maintains awareness of his commitment to the quality of the relationship, regardless of Burt's response. He expresses this awareness and his respect for Burt's need for autonomy through the words, "I'll still like you," while simultaneously expressing his own need "to like you for longer.")*

Burt: Well, then, maybe I will try again . . . but don't tell anyone else, okay?

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Al: Sure, you decide when you're ready; I won't be mentioning it to anybody.

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A Wife Connects With Her Dying Husband

A patient has just been diagnosed with an advanced state of lung cancer. The following scene at his home, involving a visiting nurse, the patient, and his wife, represents a last opportunity for him to connect emotionally with his wife and discuss his dying before being admitted to the hospital. The wife begins the conversation with the nurse by complaining about the physical therapist who was part of the home health care team assigned to her husband's care.

Wife: She's a bad therapist.

Nurse: *(listening empathically to what the wife is feeling and wanting)* Are you feeling annoyed and wanting to see a different quality of care?

Wife: She doesn't do anything. She made him stop walking when his pulse got high.

Nurse: *(continuing to hear the wife's feelings and wants)* Is it because you want your husband to get better that you're scared if the physical therapist doesn't push him, he won't get stronger?

Wife: *(starts to cry)* Yes, I'm so scared!

Nurse: Are you scared of losing him?

Wife: Yes, we've been together so long.

Nurse: *(listening for other feelings behind the fear)* Are you worrying about how you would feel if he dies?

Wife: I just can't imagine how I am going to live without him. He's always been there for me. Always.

Nurse: So you're sad when you think of living without him?

Wife: There is no one else besides him. He's all I have, you know. My daughter won't even talk to me.

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Nurse: It sounds like when you think of your daughter, you feel frustrated because you wish you had a different relationship with her.

Wife: I wish I did, but she is such a selfish person. I don't know why I even bothered having kids. A lot of good it does me now!

Nurse: Sounds to me like you might be somewhat angry and disappointed because you want more support from the family during your husband's illness.

Wife: Yes, he's so sick; I don't know how I am going to get through this alone. I haven't anyone . . . not even to talk to, except with you here . . . now. Even he won't talk about it. . . . Look at him! *(Husband remains silent and impassive.)* He doesn't say anything!

Nurse: Are you sad, wishing the two of you could support each other and feel more connected?

Wife: Yes. *(She pauses, then makes a request)* Talk to him the way you talk to me.

Nurse: *(wishing to clearly understand the need that is being addressed behind the wife's request)* Are you wanting him to be listened to in a way that helps him express what he's feeling inside?

Wife: Yes, yes, that's exactly it! I want him to feel comfortable talking and I want to know what he is feeling. *(Using the nurse's guess, the wife is able to first become aware of what she wanted and then find the words to articulate it. This is a key moment: often it is difficult for people to identify what they want in a situation, even though they may know what they don't want. We see how a clear request—"Talk to him the way you talk to me"—is a gift that empowers the other person. The nurse is now able to act in a way she knows to be in harmony with the wife's*

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wishes. This alters the atmosphere in the room, as the nurse and the wife now "work together," both in a compassionate mode.)

Nurse: *(turning to the husband)* How do you feel when you hear what your wife has shared?

Husband: I really love her.

Nurse: Are you glad to have an opportunity to talk about this with her?

Husband: Yes, we need to talk about it.

Nurse: Would you be willing to say how you are feeling about the cancer?

Husband: *(after a brief silence)* Not very good. *(The words "good" and "bad" are often used to describe feelings when people have yet to identify the specific emotion they are experiencing. Expressing his feelings more precisely would help him with the emotional connection he is seeking with his wife.)*

Nurse: *(encouraging him to move toward more precision)* Are you scared about dying?

Husband: No, not scared. *(Notice the nurse's incorrect guess does not hamper the continued flow of dialogue.)*

Nurse: Do you feel angry about dying? *(Because this patient isn't able to verbalize his internal experience easily, the nurse continues to support him in the process.)*

Husband: No, not angry.

Nurse: *(At this point, after two incorrect guesses, the nurse decides to express her own feelings)* Well, now I'm puzzled about what you may be feeling, and wonder if you can tell me.

Husband: I reckon, I'm thinking how she'll do without me.

Nurse: Oh, are you worried she may not be able to handle her life without you?

Husband: Yes, worried she'll miss me.

Nurse: *(She is aware that dying patients often hang on*

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due to worry over those they are leaving behind. Patients sometimes need the reassurance that loved ones can accept their death before they can let themselves go.) Do you want to hear how your wife feels when you say that?

Husband: Yes.

Here the wife joins the conversation; in the continued presence of the nurse, the couple begins to express themselves openly to each other. In this dialogue, the wife begins with a complaint about the physical therapist. However, after a series of exchanges during which she felt empathically received, she is able to determine that what she really seeks is a deeper connection with her husband during this critical stage of their lives.

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NVC in Action

Parent And Teen Dialog A Life-Threatening Issue

In this situation, 15-year-old Bill took a car without permission from Jorge, a family friend. He went on a joy ride with two friends and returned the car undamaged to the garage, where its absence had not been detected. Since then, however, Jorge's 14-year-old daughter, Eva, who had gone along for the ride, told her father what had happened. Jorge then informed Bill's father, who is now approaching his son. The father has just recently been practicing NVC.

Father: So I hear you, Eva and Dave took Jorge's car without asking.

Bill: No, we didn't!

Father: *(in a loud voice)* Don't lie to me; it'll only make it worse! *(Then remembers to first connect to his own feelings and needs in order to stay in connection with his son.)* You just sit there for a moment; I need to think. *(Going inside himself, he sees how angry and scared he is. He's angry because he's telling himself, "Bill should have known better!" and "What a liar he's become!" He's scared when he thinks of all the potential consequences of not only Bill's action, but his own misjudgment of what his son might do. "That was stupid of me to assume he knows better." "Some one could have gotten killed in this!" He catches himself, "Oops, I need to translate the labels 'stupid' and 'liar' into feelings and needs. For 'stupid,' I guess the feeling is disappointment in myself: I would have liked to think that I knew him better. And as for 'liar,' I'm feeling pretty scared because I want to be able to count on getting accurate information to deal with this situation." Silence*

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while he mulls over how to begin talking.)

Bill, are you worried that you'd be punished if you give me accurate information?

Bill: Yeah, you're always so mean whenever I do anything you don't like.

Father: Are you saying you'd like more understanding and fairer treatment for what you do?

Bill: Oh, sure, like I'm really gonna get fair treatment and understanding from you!

Father: *(silently to himself, "Boy, do I get angry when he says that! Can't he see how hard I'm trying? I really need a little respect for how hard this is, and I guess also a little caring for how scared I'm feeling")* Sounds to me like you're worried that no matter what you say, you won't be treated fairly?

Bill: What do you care about treating me fairly? When something happens, you just want someone to punish. Besides, what's the big deal? Even if we did take the car, no one got hurt and it's back where it was. I mean, this is no major crime wave.

Father: Are you scared there'll be harsh consequences if you admit to taking the car, and you want to trust that you'll be treated justly?

Bill: Yeah.

Father: *(allowing time for silence and the connection to go deeper)* What could I do to give you that reassurance?

Bill: Promise to never punish me again.

Father: *(Aware that punishment will not help Bill develop consciousness around potential consequences of his own behavior, but will only contribute to greater disconnection and resistance, the father expresses willingness to agree to Bill's request)* I'd be open to that agreement if you agree to stay in dialogue with me. That is, we talk until I'm satisfied you're aware of

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all the possible consequences of your having taken that car. However, in the future, if it happens that I'm not confident that you see the potential danger of what you're in for, I might still use force—but only in order to protect you.

Bill: Wow, great! It really feels good knowing I'm so stupid you have to use force to protect me from myself!

Father: *(Losing touch with his own needs, says silently: "Man, there are times when I could just kill the little. . . . I'm so furious when he says things like that! It really doesn't seem like he cares. . . . Damn, what am I needing here? I'm needing to know, when I'm working this hard, that at least he cares.")*

(Out loud angrily) You know, Bill, when you say things like that, I get really pissed off. I'm trying so hard to stay with you on this, and when I hear things like that. . . . Look, I need to know if you even want to keep talking with me.

Bill: I don't care.

Father: Bill, I really want to listen to you rather than fall into my old habits of blaming and threatening you whenever something comes up that I'm upset about. But when I hear you say things like, "It feels good to know I'm so stupid" in the tone of voice you just used, I find it hard to control myself. I could use your help on this. That is, if you would rather me listen to you than blame or threaten. Or if not, then, I suppose my other option is to just handle this the way I'm used to handling things.

Bill: And what would that be?

Father: Well, by now, I'd probably be saying, "Hey, you're grounded for two years: no TV, no car, no money, no dates, no nothing!"

Bill: Well, guess I'd want you to do it the new way then.

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Father: *(with humor)* I'm glad to see that your sense of self-preservation is still intact. Now I need you to tell me whether you're willing to share some honesty and vulnerability.

Bill: What do you mean by "vulnerability"?

Father: It means that you tell me what you are really feeling about the things we're talking about, and I tell you the same from my end. *(In a firm voice)* Are you willing?

Bill: Okay, I'll try.

Father: *(with sigh of relief)* Thank you. I'm grateful for your willingness to try. Did I tell you—Jorge grounded Eva for three months—she won't be allowed to do anything. How do you feel about that?

Bill: Oh man, what a bummer; that's so unfair!

Father: I'd like to hear how you really feel about it.

Bill: I told you—it's totally unfair!

Father: *(realizing Bill isn't in touch with what he's feeling, decides to guess)* Are you sad that she's having to pay so much for her mistake?

Bill: No, it's not that. I mean, it wasn't her mistake really.

Father: Oh, so are you upset she's paying for something that was your idea to start with?

Bill: Well, yeah, she just went along with what I told her to do.

Father: Sounds to me like you're kind of hurting inside seeing the kind of effect your decision had on Eva.

Bill: Sorta.

Father: Billy, I really need to know that you are able to see how your actions have consequences.

Bill: Well, I wasn't thinking about what could've gone wrong. Yeah, I guess I did really screw up bad.

Father: I'd rather you see it as something you did that didn't turn out the way you wanted. And I still need reassurance about your being aware of the conse-

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quences. Would you tell me what you're feeling right now about what you did?

Bill: I feel really stupid, Dad . . . I didn't mean to hurt anyone.

Father: *(translating Bill's self-judgments into feelings and needs)* So you're sad, and regret what you did because you'd like to be trusted not to do harm?

Bill: Yeah, I didn't mean to cause so much trouble. I just didn't think about it.

Father: Are you saying you wish you had thought about it more and gotten clearer before you acted?

Bill: *(reflecting)* Yeah . . .

Father: Well, it's reassuring for me to hear that, and for there to be some real healing with Jorge, I would like you to go to him and tell him what you just told me. Would you be willing to do that?

Bill: Oh man, that's so scary; he'll be really mad!

Father: Yeah, it's likely he will be. That's one of the consequences. Are you willing to be responsible for your actions? I like Jorge and I want to keep him for a friend, and I'm guessing that you would like to keep your connection with Eva. Is that the case?

Bill: She's one of my best friends.

Father: So shall we go see them?

Bill: *(fearfully and reluctantly)* Well. . . okay. Yeah, I guess so.

Father: Are you scared and needing to know that you will be safe if you go there?

Bill: Yeah.

Father: We'll go together: I'll be there for you and with you. I'm really proud that you are willing.

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NVC in Action

Dealing With Resentments And Self-Judgment

A student of Nonviolent Communication shares the following story.

I had just returned from my first residential training in NVC. A friend whom I hadn't seen for two years was waiting for me at home. I first met Iris, who has been a school librarian for 25 years, during an intense 2-week heartwork and wilderness journey that had culminated in a 3-day solo fast in the Rockies. After she listened to my enthusiastic description of NVC, Iris revealed that she was still hurting from what one of the wilderness leaders in Colorado had said to her six years ago. I had a clear memory of that person: wild woman Leav, her palms gouged with rope cuts holding steady a belayed body dangling against the mountain face; she read animal droppings, howled in the dark, danced her joy, cried her truth and mooned our bus as we waved goodbye for the last time. What Iris had heard Leav say during one of the personal feedback sessions was this: "Iris, I can't stand people like you, always and everywhere being so damn nice and sweet, constantly the meek little librarian that you are. Why don't you just drop it and get on with it?"

For six years Iris had been listening to Leav's voice in her head and for six years she'd been answering Leav in her head. We were both eager to explore how a consciousness of NVC would have affected this situation. I role-played Leav and repeated her statement to Iris.

Iris: *(forgetting about NVC, hears criticism and put-down)* You have no right to say that to me. You don't know who I am, or what kind of librarian I am! I take my profession seriously, and for your information, I

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consider myself to be an educator, just like any teacher . . .

I: *(with NVC consciousness, listening empathically, as if I were Leav)* It sounds to me like you're angry because you want me to know and recognize who you really are before criticizing you. Is that so?

Iris: That's right! You have simply no idea how much it took for me to even sign up for this trek. Look! Here I am: I finished, didn't I? I took on all the challenges these fourteen days and overcame them all!

I as Leav: Am I hearing that you feel hurt and would have liked some recognition and appreciation for all your courage and hard work?

A few more exchanges follow, whereupon Iris shows a shift; these shifts can often be observed bodily when a person feels "heard" to his or her satisfaction. For instance, a person may relax and take a deeper breath at this moment. This often indicates that the person has received adequate empathy and is now able to shift attention to something other than the pain they have been expressing. Sometimes they are ready to hear another person's feelings and needs. Or sometimes another round of empathy is needed to attend to another area of pain in the person. In this situation with Iris, I could see that another piece needed attention before she would be able to hear Leav. This is because Iris had had 6 years of opportunity to put herself down for not having produced an honorable comeback on the spot. After the subtle shift, she immediately went on:

Iris: Darn, I should have said all this stuff to her six years ago!

I: *(as myself, an empathic friend)* You're frustrated because you wish you could have articulated yourself better at the time?

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Iris: I feel like such an idiot! I knew I wasn't a "meek little librarian," but why didn't I say that to her?

I: So you wish you had been enough in touch with yourself to say that?

Iris: Yes. And I'm also mad at myself! I wish I hadn't let her push me around.

I: You'd like to have been more assertive than you were?

Iris: Exactly, I need to remember I have a right to stand up for who I am.

Iris is quiet for a few seconds. She expresses readiness to practice NVC and hear what Leav said to her in a different way.

I as Leav: Iris, I can't stand people like you, always so nice and sweet, being forever the meek little librarian. Why don't you just drop it and get on with it?

Iris: *(listening for Leav's feelings, needs and requests)* Oh, Leav, it sounds to me like you're really frustrated . . . frustrated because . . . because I . . . *(Here Iris catches herself at a common mistake. By using the word "I," she attributes Leav's feeling to Iris herself, rather than to some desire on Leav's own part that generates the feeling, i.e. not "You're frustrated because I am a certain way," but "You're frustrated because you wanted something different from me.")*

(She tries again) Okay, Leav, it sounds like you're really frustrated because you are wanting . . . um . . . you're wanting. . . .

As I tried in my role-play to earnestly identify with Leav, I felt a sudden flash of awareness of what I *(as Leav)* was yearning for: "Connection! . . . That's what I am wanting! I want to feel connected. . . . with you, Iris! And I am so frustrated with all the sweetness and niceness that stand

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in the way that I just want to tear it all down so I can truly touch you!"

We both sat a bit stunned after this outburst, and then Iris said, "If I had known that's what she had wanted, if she could have told me that it was genuine connection with me she was after. . . . Gosh, I mean, that feels almost loving." While she never did find the real Leav to verify the insight, after this practice session in NVC, Iris achieved an internal resolution about this nagging conflict and found it easier to hear with a new awareness when people around her said things to her that she might previously have interpreted as "put-downs."

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