

Beginnings of my journey**

Louis Kriesberg*

*Maxwell School of Syracuse University, PARCC 400 Eggers, Syracuse University, Syracuse,
New York, USA*

(Received 8 May 2013; final version received 9 May 2013)

My career as a peace and constructive conflict scholar and a sometimes peace activist derives from personal inclinations, world conditions and intellectual understandings as a boy and young man.¹ I grew up in Chicago, a son of parents who joined many other Jews leaving Tsarist Russia to escape the discrimination and poverty of their village life. As a child, I heard stories of anti-Semitism in Europe and experienced it as part of my daily life in Chicago. As a boy, I was fascinated and appalled by the reports of wars in China and in Spain, and frightened by what I understood of Hitler's growing power and increasing threats. I constructed scrapbooks filled with newspaper images of current war-time destruction and I collected horrors-of-war bubble-gum cards.² I shuddered when seeing notices of German-American Bund rallies on lamp-posts.

The American engagement in World War II evoked new emotions and questions. I remember that the day after Pearl Harbor was attacked the school principal tearfully spoke of the war we were entering. He also reported (incorrectly) that a US pilot had crashed his plane into a Japanese naval vessel, killing 200 Japanese sailors. The students cheered, but I felt it was not right to cheer at their deaths. When I registered for the draft, I applied for conscientious objector status. This was denied, but when I was called for induction, I was rejected on medical grounds.

With the end of World War II and the emergence of the cold war, I was determined to do what I could to prevent future wars. My quest when I entered the University of Chicago College was to learn how to stop wars, which nuclear weapons would make more devastating than ever. I discovered sociology and believed that it could best help me understand the underlying conditions for peace. I began my journey of doing sociology and of seeking to understand how wars and other violent conflicts might be averted and how they could be peacefully transformed. I became a good friend of another graduate student, a German woman, who helped arrange a visit to Germany in the

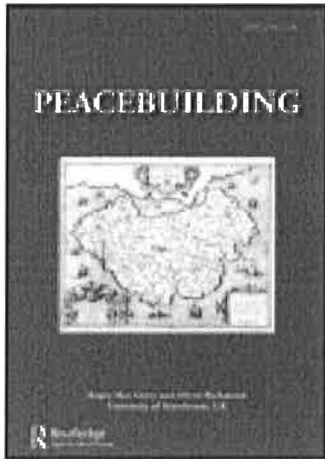
*Email: L.Kriesbe@maxwell.syr.edu

** Several of the early articles cited in the text may be downloaded from my webpage: <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/lkriesbe>. A link to a 12-minute video of me reflecting on my journey can also be found on my webpage.

1. For another self-reflective article, see Louis Kriesberg, 'Reflections on My Roles, Identities, and Activities, Relating to Conflict Resolution', *Nexus: Journal of Peace, Conflict and Social Change* 1, nos 1,2 (1999): 118–25.

2. Sheets of bubble gum were typically wrapped with cards of sporting heroes, which were collected. In this case the cards depicted the horrors of World War I.

This article was downloaded by: [Syracuse University Library], [Louis Kriesberg]
On: 20 February 2014, At: 11:13
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered
office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Peacebuilding

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcb20>

Beginnings of my journey

Louis Kriesberg^a

^a Maxwell School of Syracuse University, PARCC 400 Eggers,
Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, USA

Published online: 14 Feb 2014.

To cite this article: Louis Kriesberg (2014) Beginnings of my journey, *Peacebuilding*, 2:1, 8-10, DOI:
[10.1080/21647259.2013.866456](https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.866456)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.866456>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

summer of 1950. I visited Displaced Persons camps, worked in an international work camp and lived in West Berlin at her mother's home. I experienced some of the complex possibilities and impossibilities of reconciliation and the cold war realities at the street level.

My doctoral research focused on the limitations of patriotic appeals in constraining economic conduct such as selling steel in the grey market during the Korean War.³ With my PhD in hand, I took a job as an instructor at Columbia University. I did research on matters that I thought could foster transnational integration and thereby prevent wars. This included studying international non-governmental organisations, specifically, interviewing leaders in the International Chamber of Commerce and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. I also conducted interviews with the staff of the UN Secretariat. I learned from these projects, but did not publish any findings. Working at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, I prepared a survey of the literature on community conflict for the Twentieth Century Fund, which was concerned about the many polarising community fights at the time. My review became the basis for a booklet by James S. Coleman.⁴ That undertaking helped me to think systematically and broadly about social conflicts. However, I still knew few people who shared my concerns relating to peace studies.

In searching for research on peacebuilding, I was drawn to David Mitrany's work on functionalism.⁵ I applied for and received a Fulbright Research Scholarship to study the peacebuilding impacts of the European Coal and Steel Community upon Germans. In the academic year 1956–57, I lived in Cologne, analysed survey data on German public opinion and interviewed German managers and union leaders in the coal and steel industries. I found support for the idea that working together in international organisations could help create shared interests and counter overly nationalistic views.⁶

Following the year in Germany, I accepted a Ford Fellowship at the University of Chicago Law School and then worked for four years as a Senior Study Director at the National Opinion Research Center, which is affiliated with the University. I broadened my knowledge and learned the skills of doing survey research. This enhanced my career as a sociologist, but did little to contribute to my desired career in peace work.

In 1962 I became an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Syracuse University. I soon was teaching an undergraduate course on international relations and a graduate course on social conflict. My research, writing and publishing on mainstream sociological topics continued, but I also again undertook analyses of international non-governmental organisations, using Yearbook data.⁷ In 1968 I published a book of interdisciplinary analyses of international relationships: *Social Processes in International Relations: A Reader*. By the end of the 1960s, I had discovered colleagues, spurred by the anti-Vietnam War movement, who shared some of my peace concerns. I joined the group

3. Louis Kriesberg, 'Occupational Controls among Steel Distributors', *American Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (1955): 203–12.

4. James S. Coleman, *Community Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1957).

5. David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944).

6. Louis Kriesberg, 'German Businessman and Union Leaders and the Schuman Plan', *Social Sciences* 35 (April 1960): 114–21.

7. Louis Kriesberg, 'U.S. and U.S.S.R. Participation in International Non-Governmental Organizations', in *Social Processes in International Relations*, ed. Louis Kriesberg (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), 466–85.

in the American Sociological Association (ASA) led by Elise Boulding, which worked to demonstrate how sociology could help advance peace.⁸ We and others soon founded an ASA section on World Conflicts. Elise encouraged me to join the Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development (COPRED) and the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). I became active in those organisations and in the Peace Studies Section of the International Studies Association (ISA). I began to learn about the work done at the University of Michigan, in creating the intellectual foundations for conflict resolution. I saw a clear path forward and decided then, as a tenured full professor, that I was only going to do work that I believed would directly contribute to advancing peace.

As the years went on I became more concerned with the immediate threats of the cold war and wanted to focus more on avoiding violent escalations. My research strategy was to study what worked, what yielded ‘good enough’ successes. When Gene Sharp’s book, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* was published in 1973,⁹ I tried to emulate and broaden his ideas by focusing on the use of non-coercive measures, persuasion and positive sanctions, in waging conflicts. I began to apply this thinking to de-escalating moves in the cold war.¹⁰ I also began studying and writing about the Arab–Israel conflicts and applying my ideas to ways to transform those conflicts.

In 1973, my book, *The Sociology of Social Conflicts*¹¹ was published, one of the very first comprehensive analyses of the trajectory of all kinds of conflicts. Notably, it brought attention to conflict de-escalation. A second edition, *Social Conflicts* soon followed and later a new more focused version appeared, *Constructive Conflicts*.¹² In 1978 I began editing the annual series: *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*.

By then, the field of conflict resolution had clearly emerged and was rapidly growing; I excitedly joined it. The fields of conflict resolution and peace studies fit together well to cover all stages of conflicts. I drew from my experiences and a wide range of intellectual sources to fashion, together with many colleagues and students, a broad constructive approach to conducting conflicts in better ways. This remains an immense source of pleasure, even when terrible tragedies occur in the world.

8. Elise M. Boulding et al., ‘Teaching the Sociology of World Conflicts’, *The American Sociologist* 9 (November 1974): 187–93.

9. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent).

10. Louis Kriesberg, ‘Noncoercive Inducements in U.S.-Soviet Conflicts: Ending the Occupation of Austria and Nuclear Weapons Tests’, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 9 (Spring 1981): 1–16.

11. Louis Kriesberg, *The Sociology of Social Conflicts* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

12. Most recently it appears as: Louis Kriesberg and Bruce W. Dayton, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).