

John Marks '61

Bringing a vision for peace and conflict resolution to life

HOW MANY people who say they want to change the world actually go out and do it? John Marks did, and, he says, Andover played a role. "The school's *non sibi* philosophy made a difference. I probably would have had a perfectly good life anyway, but I don't think I would have taken on global change. Andover gave me that."

At 22, after earning a degree in government from Cornell, Marks passed the Foreign Service exam and entered the diplomatic service. His first post was in Vietnam as the war raged. In 1970, deeply troubled by U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, he resigned in protest. His next job was executive assistant for foreign policy to Senator Clifford Case (R-NJ) where he worked with Senator Frank Church's (D-ID) staff to manage legislation—the Case-Church Amendment—that cut off funding for the war.

After playing a key role in ending a war, what do you do for an encore?

In Marks's case, he coauthored a best-selling book, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, and then wrote the award-winning *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate."*

Beginning to realize that his career was being defined by what he was against, Marks decided he wanted to build a new system, rather than tear down the old. In 1982, he founded Search for Common Ground (SFCG). It has grown under his leadership into the world's largest nongovernmental organization, whose mission is to turn conflict away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions. "I had a very large vision," he says, "and very few resources." Today SFCG's funding comes from the European Union, the U.S. and European governments, U.N. agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals. Despite the bleak economy, Marks notes that funding increased by 20 percent in 2012.

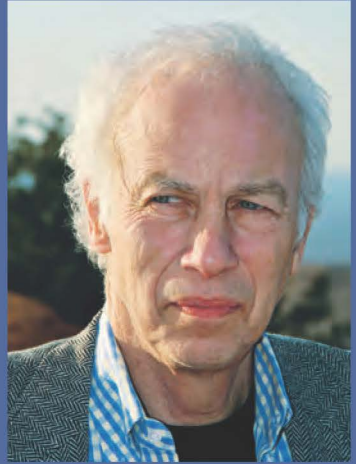
SFCG has offices in 30 countries and a staff of 600. Together with basic conflict resolution techniques—mediation, facilitation, and training—it uses innovative methods to promote societal healing and peace. Among these are TV and radio soap operas, reality shows, the Common Ground News Service, social media, community-organized sports, and music. SFCG has just finished its first feature film, a fictional drama about ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Among SFCG's successes have been negotiating the release, in 2011, of the American hikers who had strayed into Iran; retraining 25 percent of the Congolese army to reduce the occurrence of sexual violence; and playing a major role in bringing Burundi back from the edge of genocide.

"Search for Common Ground became an indispensable [U.S.] partner in Burundi, where its community peace-building efforts helped prevent the kind of genocidal violence that tore apart neighboring Rwanda," says Ambassador George Moose, who worked closely with Marks in 1995, when Moose was assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

In recognition of their extraordinary contributions, Marks and his wife, Susan Collin Marks—who is both his romantic and professional partner—received honorary doctorates from the U.N. University for Peace, and fellowships from the Skoll Foundation honoring their work as social entrepreneurs.

As he approaches 70, Marks's vision and commitment have not dimmed. An optimist, he says: "All conflict will end, but it usually will take a long time." Still, he doesn't advocate staying on the sidelines. "You need to wait proactively," he says.



—Paula Trespas