

# Motivated to forgive

## Cadets hear how a detective saved his own soul

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**Cornwall** — They were talking nonviolence at a military academy.

The gym full of New York Military Academy cadets, many dressed in sports uniforms, full of energy and eager for their afternoon games, sat listening to a man in a wheelchair strain to tell his story.

It was 1986, Steven McDonald told them. Many in the audience were not yet born that summer night when the young New York Police Department cop stopped to question three teens in crime-ridden Central Park. One of them, 15 years old, the age of many in the audience, pulled a gun and shot McDonald three times.

McDonald, permanently paralyzed from the neck down, forgave the boy.

Those who are old enough to remember still do. The crime was yet another symbol of a city run amok. But for most cadets here, the now-middle-aged cop's name drew a blank. Until yesterday.

Using his mouth to control his wheelchair, McDonald rolled into the gym here to the sound of bagpipes, the latest stop on a tour that takes him to schools to talk to students about how he used love and forgiveness to overcome anger and hatred.

A tube ran from his throat to the apparatus behind his chair that lets him breathe. Above the ventilator, stickers: a flag, an NYPD shield, a dove of peace.

When a man bent over to hold a microphone in front of his face, the fidgety cadets straightened up. The members of the pipe and drum band sat looking straight ahead, their pale knees sticking out from under their kilts.

McDonald recounted the story of his recovery, his rediscovery of his Catholic faith, and the day, just months after being shot, that his newborn son, Connor, was



Times Herald-Record/KEN BIZZIGOTTI

**Christoph Arnold, left, author of "Why Forgive," and Steven McDonald, who was shot while on duty as an NYPD detective by a teenager in Central Park 18 years ago, spoke yesterday at the New York Military Academy about nonviolent conflict resolution. McDonald, who was left paralyzed by the shooting, has forgiven the boy who gunned him down.**

being baptized. That's when he says he realized he'd have to forgive the kid who put him in that chair or else the damage to his body would pale in comparison to the damage to his soul.

He's told his message of forgiveness to thousands of students. And he told it to Christoph Arnold, senior pastor of the Bruderhof community of Christian pacifists, for his book, "Why Forgive?"

Arnold joined McDonald yesterday, as he does on many of his talks. He traced the

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arc of violence from his native Nazi Germany from which he fled, to the civil rights movement of which he was a part, to the bullet that paralyzed McDonald.

Eighteen years later, McDonald's words sometimes fail him, but even from across a big gym, his intent is clear.

"It was good to be alive," he recalled of his time in the hospital, then his head hung down and the men standing on either side of him pressed down on his knees to stop the involuntary shaking. "As badly injured as I was, it was good to be alive."

Before last week, Cadet Melissa Magazu, 18, of New Jersey, had never heard of McDonald. Now, she's not likely to forget him.

"I was very emotional," she said after the talk. "I have a lot of respect for him, to be able to come in front of all these cadets and say what he said."

As her fellow cadets streamed out the fire doors into the afternoon sun, they took free copies of Arnold's book from a table. As they stood outside in formation, a few cadets opened their books and started to read.