

Stanislaus CONNECTIONS

Working for peace, justice and a sustainable environment



A MODESTO
PEACE/LIFE
CENTER
PUBLICATION

MARCH, 2010
VOLUME XXII, NO. 7

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Making the world a better place, one call at a time

By LOUIS & MARGARET DEMOTT-FELDMAN

Someone stops you on the street and asks for spare change. A neighbor confides that there are domestic violence issues in the home. Another neighbor on your block expresses anguish because their family's home is in the foreclosure process. A young couple with a child stops you in the parking lot of a shopping complex for help purchasing baby food and diapers. Someone holds up a cardboard sign at a freeway entrance requesting help of any kind in order to survive the day, the week, the month...

Does any of this sound familiar? In these stressful economic times, all over America people are reaching out for help more than ever before. But the good news is that many counties in forty-five states across the country, and twenty-three counties in the State of California, including Stanislaus County, have a simple yet effective way of searching for help with these growing human needs. It is a program called Stanislaus County 2-1-1, sponsored by the United Way, and

it has been operating in Stanislaus County since October 2007.

A person who calls 2-1-1 is referred to those public and private agencies that are most likely to be able to provide help for that person's specific needs. In the year 2009 alone, the program provided over 7,000 referrals to over 4,000 local callers.

The way Interim Chief Executive Officer Francine DiCiano sees it, "It's like one-stop shopping for resources in our community. 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember number for social service referrals."

Not only is calling 2-1-1 free for the caller, but it also reduces the number of misdirected calls. Before 2-1-1, a person with a social service need typically called eight or more agen-



2-1-1 continued p. 7

Redwood Family Center: where miracles happen

By BETH NELSON
RFC on-site supervisor

Redwood Family Center (RFC), "Where Miracles Happen", is an inter-faith-based transitional living facility which provides long-term residential support for women with children or who are pregnant and are in the process of breaking the cycle of drug abuse, domestic violence and/or homelessness.

The center's assists women through the help of treatment programs during their transition from early recovery back into mainstream society. Residents stay from 6 to 18 months and work closely with a case manager who monitors and assists them in everyday tasks and life skills within the center's structured environment.

RFC partners with many Stanislaus County agencies, including Child Welfare Services, Parent Resource Center, Sierra Vista, First Step and Families in Partnership. The women's days are filled, on-site and off, with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups, as well as GED, nutrition, parenting and budgeting classes.

Many of the women have completed vocational training and college classes and have gone on to secure sustainable employment. The miracles continue when some of the mothers, who enter the facility separated from their children, are successfully reunited with their families and continue to live happy, healthy productive lives.



ACTION: Volunteers are an important component at the center. You can be part of the miracles at RFC. Call Inter-Faith Ministries, (209) 572-3117, to learn how you can help.

Visit <http://www.interfaithmodesto.org/redwood.html>

Read poetry written by the women of the Redwood Family Center on page 9.

You are invited to attend the
Twenty-fourth annual
2010 Peace Essay Contest
Awards Reception

Friday, March 19
7:00 in the evening

At the Mary Stuart Rogers Learning Center
Modesto Junior College/West Campus
2201 Blue Gum Ave., Modesto

Light refreshments will be served.
The public is welcome.

The Peace Essay Contest, a project of the Modesto
Peace/Life Center, is co-sponsored by the
Modesto Junior College Dept. of Literature and
Language Arts

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Family World dance class - Spring 2010

By JUDY KROPP

Learn easy, playful dances from around the world. Learn basic steps for dances from Europe, South America, Asia, USA. No dance background or partners needed. Exercise to interesting music. Appropriate for families, scouts, church groups, singles. \$25 per family for 4 classes. Refreshments included.

Class taught by retired school teachers. Plan to attend all four classes: Friday nights on April 16, 23, 30 and May 7, 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM, Sylvan Elementary School Auditorium, 2908 Coffee Rd., Modesto.

Pre-enrollment required. Call Judy for registration form and info. Scholarships available. 480-0387.

Everything turns into music with the Joe Craven Trio

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

Joe Craven, who can make music with anything...his head, his toe nails, a garbage-bag raincoat...instruments too (strings and found sound)... will "serve up a bouquet" of jazz, blues, Latin, and folk music with trio members John R. Burr (keyboard) and Kendrick Freeman (drums/percussion) at the last concert of the Sunday Afternoons at CBS 2009-10 season 3 p.m. Sunday March 7 at Congregation Beth Shalom, 1705 Sherwood Ave. in Modesto.

Whether the trio is "tweaking an old time fiddle tune or rendering original jazz, the sound is always innovative and captivates audiences nationwide.

ACTION: The concert is open to the entire Modesto Area community and beyond. Check out www.joecraven.com to learn more about Joe Craven and his music. Tickets (\$20 adults, \$25 seniors and students, \$7 children) are available by calling 571-6060.

Stanislaus CONNECTIONS

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March against wars

By SHELLY SCRIBNER

Years of war with Iraq. Nine years of war with Afghanistan. Drone planes bombing Pakistan. Had enough? On Saturday, March 20, 2010 there will be a march and rally at 11:00 a.m. in San Francisco at the Civic Center. There will be peace marches all over the United States in Washington, D.C., Boston, and New York. Now you can be part of standing up for the changes you would like to see.

The Modesto Peace/Life Center will carpool to Bart in Pleasanton. Meet at the Peace Center, 720 13th St., Modesto at 8:00 a.m. If you want to go, call John Lucas at 209-527-7634. It is important that you call. Signs provided or bring your own.

UNDERCOVER TV: exposing the truth about animal abuse

Submitted by MICHELLE SETARO

Billions of animals are exploited every year to make food and clothes, and for research and entertainment. Most Americans don't know that animals imprisoned in factory farms, fur farms, research labs, and other secretive facilities live in a nightmarish reality from which their only escape is death. The severe overcrowding, painful mutilations, and cruel mistreatment often remain hidden from the public.

Each week Undercover TV takes viewers behind the scenes of industries that abuse animals airing video exposés that show animals' plight. Watch Undercover, Thursdays at 10 p.m. on Channel 26

For information, visit www.UndercoverTV.org

New Book: Growing Up In Someone Else's Shoes: poems by Sam Pierstorff

WHAT: Publication Party, Reading, and Reception.

WHEN: Thursday, March 11, 2010, 7:00 p.m.

WHERE: Modesto Junior College East Campus, Student Center Lounge.

WHO: Free & Open to the public.

WHY: Q&A and book signing will follow reading. Books available for purchase.

Sam Pierstorff received his Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from California State University, Long Beach and became California's youngest Poet Laureate in 2004 when he was appointed by the City of Modesto. He teaches English at Modesto Junior College, edits the *Quercus Review*, and hosts "Slam on Rye."

Information: contact the Modesto Junior College Department of English: 209-575-6149.


Meeting of Nicaragua support groups

By SHELLY SCRIBNER

The Nicaragua Network Regional West Coast Meeting will be held on Sunday March 7, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at 210 High St., International Health Programs Office, Santa Cruz.

This will be the first regional meeting of Nicaragua support groups in several years and should be interesting and fun. Chuck Kaufman, the co-coordinator of the Nicaragua Network, will review recent happenings in Nicaragua. All are invited.

The event is free but, if you are coming, please RSVP to 510-525-5497 or nicca@igc.org or suzannebaker@earthlink.net. You can also call Shelly Scribner at 209-521-6304 for further information and directions.



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stanislaus CONNECTIONS

is published monthly except in August

by the Modesto Peace/Life Center

720 13th St., Modesto, CA 95354.

Open by appointment.

Mailing address: P.O. Box 134,

Modesto, CA 95353

209-529-5750.

CONNECTIONS is available for a suggested donation of \$25.00/yr.

477,000 signatures needed for State Parks Initiative

By ELAINE GORMAN

The State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010, a proposed ballot measure for the November 2010 election, requires 477,000 valid signatures by April 15. This measure would provide a dedicated funding source from an \$18 annual State Park Access Pass surcharge on most California vehicles. California drivers would then have free day-use admission to all 278 California State Park properties. Supporters include Sierra Club California, Audubon California, Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Save the Redwoods League, and California Travel Industry Assoc.

State parks were given a brief reprieve last year when Governor Schwarzenegger suggested closing 220 state parks. Environmental groups and individuals flooded state legislators and government offices with phone calls, emails, and letters, protesting the closing of these areas. But there have been reductions in hours/days/seasons of operations, and reductions in maintenance, park staff, and services. Currently, parks are already underfunded and are suffering vandalism and other crimes due to lack of rangers and enforcement staff. There is a backlog of more than \$1 billion in park maintenance and repairs due to recent budget cuts.

State Parks have cultural, historical, and biological values. They provide inexpensive recreational and educational

opportunities. According to a recent study, tourists spend \$4.32 billion annually in state park-related activities. It is estimated that for every dollar spent by California on state parks, \$2.35 is generated for our state's treasury. The average state park visitor spends \$57.63 in surrounding communities per visit. Think about two local state parks: Railtown in Jamestown and Columbia State Park in Columbia. These towns will suffer tremendous losses if those parks close.

If this ballot measure passes, state parks will receive approximately \$500 million in annual revenues. Current general fund park expenditures will be able to be diverted into other vital areas such as schools, health care, and transportation. Eighty-five percent of the fund will go to state parks, and the remaining 15% will go to other state wildlife and ocean protection agencies.

The local Yokuts

Sierra Club group has led many recent outings to local state parks, such as Chaw 'Se Indian Grinding Rock SP, Pacheco SP, Los Banos Creek Reservoir State Rec. area, Mt. Diablo S.P., Caswell S.P., and Calaveras Big Trees SP. We have hiked beneath towering Sequoias, learned about Miwok culture, walked among beautiful displays of spring wildflowers, retraced the Path of the Padres, observed wildlife, and wandered amongst the remnants of the Central Valley's riparian oak woodland habitat. These experiences are priceless, and California's natural, cultural, and historical heritage must be maintained for the next generations.

ACTION: If you have 10 friends, neighbors, family members, or co-workers who would be willing to sign a petition to protect state parks, contact Elaine Gorman at 524-7630 or goford@sbcglobal.net. For more information, go to www.yesforstateparks.com or www.calparks.org. Park Advocacy Day will take place on March 8 in Sacramento, Call California State Parks Foundation at 916-442-2119 for information.

Sign up for Peace Camp now!

By KEN SCHROEDER

The 28th annual Peace Camp in the Sierras is set for June 25-27, 2010. A full moon will rise on Saturday night, the creek will be running with melting snow and wild flowers will be lingering. The lineup includes Karlha Arias, River Parkway Project Manager for the Tuolumne River Trust, with other workshops to be announced. Deborah Roberts will cook up her food magic in the camp kitchen.

Enjoy the usual hiking, singing, children's activities, talent show, recreation and lively conversation with a fascinating people of all ages. Peace Camp takes place at Camp Peaceful Pines on Clark Fork Rd., about 25 miles past Pinecrest off Hwy.108 and runs from Friday afternoon to Sunday noon.

Registration forms are available online at www.stanislaus-connections.org and can be copied and mailed by U.S. mail. Scholarships are available. The first 10 families or individuals to register will get a free, cool peace bumper sticker. Contact Ken Schroeder, 209-526-2303 for more information.

Our Friend Martin

By GAVIN HIGGINS, age 7
Student, Wilson School
Mrs. Chiavetta's class

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a brave peacemaker. Dr. Martin Luther King was a preacher. He gave speeches. His most famous speech was called, "I Have a Dream" speech. He also said, "use your words not your fists." Dr. King was an African American hero. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. won the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. King Jr. was proud of himself when he got the Nobel Peace Prize.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led marches. He marched for equal rights. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became a minister. He believed in equal rights. One day a white guy shot Martin and Martin died.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was my hero because he made people take down the white only signs, and made a better world.




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A journal of the corn harvest

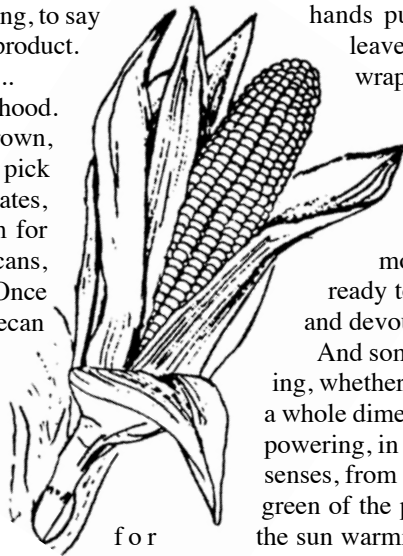
By JENIFER WEST

10:28 p.m. on a Wednesday night in the middle of August. Was the happy recipient of a whole fridge-full of sweet corn after work tonight, and with my dear husband's help, have managed to get the first couple dozen ears into my stalwart Nesco dehydrator. Made four trays which should fill a quart jar, maybe two. It's a messy proposition, no getting around that. But the effort required offers its own rewards, and drying it's a lot easier & faster than canning, to say nothing of the much lovelier flavor of the end product. It'll brighten up many a cold winter evening...

The experience reminded me of my childhood. Growing up in an area where a lot of food is grown, I had opportunity to go with my family and pick various things. I remember picking pomegranates, later helping my mother peel and seed them for her famous pomegranate jelly. We picked pecans, my father knocking them with a long pole. Once I ate so many of them, I couldn't look at a pecan for quite awhile.

One of my dad's friends had a pasture, and one especially wet year, we brought home enough field mushrooms to add depth and flavor to spaghetti sauce, among other things, for quite a while. My mother treated them as the rare treasures they were, saving them for special occasions -- or when she'd grown tired of hearing us ask. I can still, over forty years later, recall the long walk through the muddy grass to get to them, and their wonderful, earthy flavor. And I remember asking, long after they were gone, if we couldn't go back and get some more.

And so, abundance translating to generosity, a friend invited me to come and pick. Despite the fact that we drove



to the cornfield in a vehicle powered by fossil fuel, wearing clothes loomed by machine and shoes manufactured, at least in part, of plastic, the experience was wonderfully primal. Corn -- ancient, simple, basic, delicious. The act of picking, a connection with generations uncountable, cultures aboriginal to sophisticated, time out of mind. Countless feet, yellow, red, brown, black and white, finding cool respite on ground shaded

by skinny stalks stretching high overhead; many hands pushing long, slender, slightly scratchy leaves aside to grasp long, slender ears, gift-wrapped and ready for cooking, crowned with the brown tassels that indicate perfect ripeness. The original "fast food."

All that was required of our ancient forebears was to throw them into the coals of the cooking fire, and then summon the patience to wait until they were ready to be plucked, smoldering, from the fire, and devoured.

And something about being involved in harvesting, whether or not one has grown the produce, adds a whole dimension to the enjoyment of food. It is empowering, in an indefinable way. A feast for all of the senses, from the moment one arrives at the field, lush green of the plants setting one's retinal cones abuzz, the sun warming one's face, the heavy scent of earth, perhaps a breeze to ruffle one's hair, arms brushing sandpapery leaves, the warmth of the ear in its grasscloth cloak. The snap-rip as the ear is broken away from the stalk, then twisted free, and, finally, the first tangible reward in the process -- the weight of the ears in one's arms.

Or perhaps we enjoy it more because we are accustomed to the utterly uniform offerings at the supermarket, and our brains (and psyches) appreciate the opportunity to choose something a little smaller, or bigger, or riper.

Or that what you pick yourself is invariably fresher.

And there is the satisfaction that comes from the rows of jars safely stored in a dark pantry, waiting to bring a bit of summer sun to a cold winter day. A few hours spent shucking, blanching, cutting kernels from cobs and spreading them onto trays yields the second reward -- half-gallon mason jars of dried corn to be tucked away, and brought out to savor long after the last of the bright green stalks, ground into silage, has fermented into cattle feed. The jars, a gift from my mother-in-law, no doubt indispensable in feeding her three boys and two girls, a treasured connection to my husband's childhood.

The third reward is the comfort of knowing that each jar of dried corn (or canned peaches or strawberry jam) puts the possibility of suffering if food ever, for whatever reason, becomes scarce, that much further away.

And the ultimate incentive: Pleasant crunch and bright corn flavor, enjoyed out of hand or sprinkled on a salad, singing out sweetly in a chowder, adding a high note to cornbread, all throughout the winter.

So I found myself threading my way between stalks and in and out of rows, gathering up armloads of bright, sweet corn. Dropping it into my Costco totebag (you can use them for groceries, too!!), heading back into the corn forest for a few more ears... Knowing full well the amount of work I was getting myself into.

And certain, as our ancient forebears were, that it would be worth it.

Sierra Club and Audubon Society offer scholarships

By ELAINE GORMAN

The local Yokuts group of the Sierra Club and Stanislaus Audubon Society are offering two \$500.00 scholarships for Fall 2010. High school seniors and continuing college students may apply. The Donna Durham Memorial Scholarship and the Bob Corey/Paul Illick Memorial Scholarship will honor former members of the Sierra Club and Audubon Society.

These scholarships are offered to students working on a conservation or environmental project/activity, or who have worked on one in the past, and are also residents of Stanislaus County or attend school in Stanislaus County.

Besides submitting an application, qualified students must submit a short essay. Postmarked deadline for submissions is March 31, 2010.

Information about the scholarships is available through high school counseling offices, Modesto Junior College, or California State Univ. Stanislaus. The applications will also be available on the Sierra Club website at <http://motherlode.sierraclub.org/yokuts>. For more information, contact Yokuts member Elaine Gorman at goford@sbcglobal.net.

Community Garden plots available now!

It's about that time to get growing! Come learn as we grow our groceries in the Modesto Church of the Brethren's Community Garden. This year we will also host some gardening workshops. Plots are only \$10 each month and are rented for the whole season. Call the church office with questions (209) 523-1438 or visit <http://www.modcob.org> and complete the registration form at under the "Service tab."

Agape Satyagraha: Conflict Resolution Training for Youth

Is your child interested in learning how to be a peacemaker? The Modesto Church of the Brethren is launching a new program that works with the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi to help children ages 10-18 work through five levels until they graduate with the skills and tools to mediate, communicate and resolve conflicts.

Classes meet Thursdays from 4 p.m.-5 p.m. and are free! Register today by completing the form online and getting it to the church office, 2301 Woodland Ave. For more information, call (209) 523-1438 or visit <http://www.modcob.org> under the "Activities tab."

Stanislaus CONNECTIONS, published by the Modesto Peace/Life Center, has promoted non-violent social change since 1971. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the center or editorial committee. CONNECTIONS encourages free speech to serve truth and build a more just, compassionate, peaceful and environmentally healthy community and world. We seek to enhance community concern, bridge interests of diverse groups. CONNECTIONS' editorial committee views peace as built on economic and social justice and equal access to the political process. We welcome pertinent signed articles - to 800 words - and letters with address, phone number. We edit for length, taste, error and libel. Deadline is 10th of the month. Send articles to Myrtle Osner, 1104 Wellesley, Modesto 95350, 522-4967, or email to osnerm@sbcglobal.net or Jim Costello jcostello@igc.org.

Photos and ADS should be submitted as high-resolution JPEG or TIFF files. Do NOT submit as pdf files if possible.

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Rivers of Birds, Forests of Tules: Central Valley Nature & Culture in Season

By Lillian Vallee

64. In Praise of Saltgrass

In early February Modesto Junior College students Julie Harper, Jennifer Cangiamilla, and Sally Vander Tuig joined U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff and other volunteers at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge to plant thousands of saltgrass plugs. It takes a lover of Central Valley flora to appreciate this effort because saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*, var. *nana*) is one of the least conspicuous members of a plant community usually found in the least charismatic of Central Valley habitats, the alkali sink.

An alkali sink is characterized by alkaline soil, poor drainage, little rainfall, and exposure to temperature extremes. The moisture evaporates and, in some areas, leaves behind high concentrations of salts rendering the soil white (alkaline “scalds”). Not much grows there, but in the adjacent areas plants and animals have adapted to rid themselves of the excess salt in their tissues and to make efficient use of scarce water. Historically, some of the most interesting places in the Valley featured alkali sinks right next to freshwater environments such as marshes and lakes (San Luis, Tulare Lake).

Handbooks describe coastal saltgrass as stiff and wiry, but Valley saltgrass has sharp, fine leaves with “chubby” inflorescences. According to Lauren Brown, the species is unusual among the grasses, “in having the male and female flowers on separate plants. The two look generally similar except that the female inflorescences are usually *fatter* than the male” [no comments, please]. Saltgrass likes lean soils and its neighbors are often pickleweed (*Salicornia bigelovii*), saltbush (*Atriplex californica*), and my favorite bunchgrass, Alkali Sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*). We were instructed to plant the saltgrass plugs in groups of twenty, pretty easy work in soil softened by rain. Established saltgrass provides formidable resistance to exotic annual grasses because it forms dense mats and, according to Beecher Crampton, “is valuable as range forage often occurring on sites where there is a scarcity of other vegetation. It provides forage over most of the year and recovers well from close grazing and trampling by animals.”

In his *Handbook of Yokuts Indians*, Frank Latta explains that mineral salt was an expensive item among natives of the San Joaquin Plain and Tulare Basin: it had to be transported across the Sierra Nevada from deserts east of the mountain range and this exacted a high price in shell or steatite beads. Instead Yokuts collected salt from the kind of saltgrass we

were planting at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Saltgrass exudes excess salt and the tiny globules (smaller than mustard seeds) adhere to its leaves. In the early morning this excretion exists as a small drop of liquid. By noon of a warm day, the drop has become solid and by mid-afternoon it is dry and hard and can be removed from the grass by threshing.

In the *Handbook* are photos of Aida Icho (whose Indian name was Wahnomkot) working in an old saltgrass field near Guernsey Slough in Kings County. This was a historical harvest field used by Wukchumne Yokuts “from time immemorial.” Latta writes that as late as 1950 “a large portion of the salt used by the Yokuts still was obtained from salt grass.”

There is great beauty in the photographic details: Aida Icho, alone, stooped, fingers of her right hand bandaged to prevent their being cut by the sharp, dry blades of the saltgrass, traditional threshing basket at her side. “This is a good illustration,” writes Latta, “of features, posture, and the way the salt grass is pulled.” Another photo shows Aida Icho with two young girls who are probably learning from Aida Icho’s practiced hands. Visible is a windrow of salt grass drying on canvas “to receive the powdered salt grass when it was flailed out.”

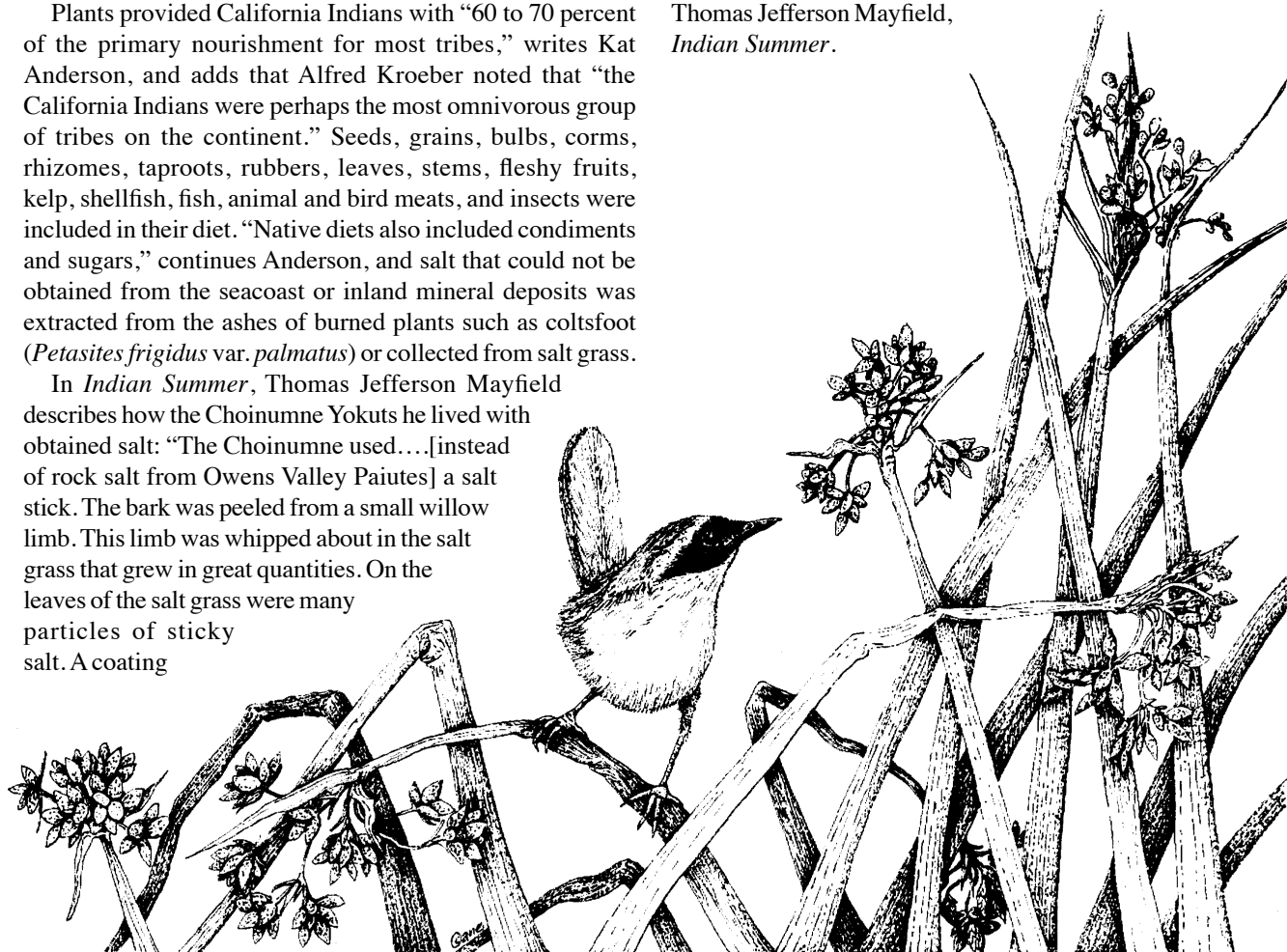
Plants provided California Indians with “60 to 70 percent of the primary nourishment for most tribes,” writes Kat Anderson, and adds that Alfred Kroeber noted that “the California Indians were perhaps the most omnivorous group of tribes on the continent.” Seeds, grains, bulbs, corms, rhizomes, taproots, rubbers, leaves, stems, fleshy fruits, kelp, shellfish, fish, animal and bird meats, and insects were included in their diet. “Native diets also included condiments and sugars,” continues Anderson, and salt that could not be obtained from the seacoast or inland mineral deposits was extracted from the ashes of burned plants such as coltsfoot (*Petasites frigidus* var. *palmatus*) or collected from salt grass.

In *Indian Summer*, Thomas Jefferson Mayfield describes how the Choinumne Yokuts he lived with obtained salt: “The Choinumne used...[instead of rock salt from Owens Valley Paiutes] a salt stick. The bark was peeled from a small willow limb. This limb was whipped about in the salt grass that grew in great quantities. On the leaves of the salt grass were many particles of sticky salt. A coating

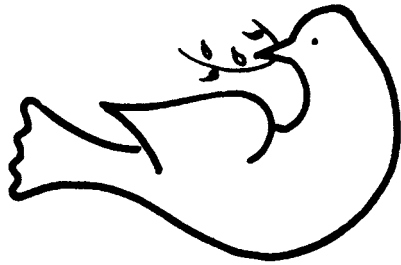
of this salt, which they called *ah-lit*, was accumulated on the stick...The Indians would pull a handful of sweet clover, roll it into a ball between the palms of their hands, and stuff it into their mouths. Then after it has been chewed, the salt stick was drawn through the mouth.” The dried salt crystals were also used to season other greens, including mustard and miner’s lettuce.

Stooping to plant thousands of saltgrass plugs, we thought of Yokuts women, camped out for days to bring in a good harvest, faces gleaming in the mid-day sun, cutting and threshing salt grass globules which they were going to mix later with bear fat and berries for a nutritious treat. For a few hours on a winter Saturday we echoed their movements under a rolling canopy of thunderheads and wished we had their songs to animate our work.

Sources: M. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources*; Lauren Brown, *Grasses: An Identification Guide*; Beecher Crampton, *Grasses in California*; Phyllis Faber, *Common Wetland Plants of Coastal California*; Frank Latta, *Handbook of Yokuts Indians*; Kent G. Lightfoot & Otis Parrish, *California Indians and Their Environment*; and Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, *Indian Summer*.



Look for
CONNECTIONS
online at:
<http://stanislausconnections.org/>



Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.

— The Dalai Lama

2010 Peace Essay Contest

“Imagine that you suddenly have the power to put into action a non-violent plan to bring about a more peaceful future that includes respect and fairness for all.”

The 24th annual Peace Essay Contest received 1015 qualifying essays from fifth through twelfth grade students from throughout Stanislaus County.

The word “peace” has many meanings, from the absence of war and armed conflict to personal inner serenity. All around the world people yearn for the opportunity for their families to live work and thrive in peace. They dream of a future where forces like injustice, poverty and racism no longer exist. Each writer focused on a problem preventing people from experiencing peace and explained his/her plan for bringing about change.

Sponsored by the Modesto Peace/Life Center, the contest is co-sponsored by the Modesto Junior College Department of Literature and Language Arts.

2010 Peace Essay Committee: Margaret Barker, Indira Clark, Pam Franklin, Elaine Gorman, Suzanne Meyer, Deborah Roberts, Sandy Sample, and Shelly Scribner.

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2010 Peace Essay Contest Winners

Division I (grades 11 – 12)

First Place: Brian Lewis, Johansen HS

Second Place: Kyle Ridenour, Oakdale HS

Third Place: Katharyn Hildebrand, Pitman HS

Honorable Mention: Lyndsey Enoki, Whitmore Charter; Andrea Nunez & Ashley Raynor, Johansen HS

Finalists: From Enochs HS: Arturo Diaz, Nathan Fiskum, Katherine Jacques, Shanelle Prasad, Benjamin Romero, & Millie Sum; from Johansen HS: Jesus Castillo, Michelle Hurst, Kelly Loneragan, Scott Merenda, Sareeka Prakash, & Marisol Rios; Jacob Crothers, Oakdale HS

School Winners: Millie Sum, Enoch HS; Brian Lewis, Johansen HS

A school winner was chosen for all schools with ten or more entries in this division.

Division II (grades 9-10)

First Place: Julia Hackett, Johansen HS

Second Place: Morgan Krueger, Modesto HS

Third Place: Taylor Evans, Johansen HS

Honorable Mentions: Marissa Johnson, Oakdale HS; Sarah Lewis, Johansen HS; Brad Tobin, Denair HS

Finalists: Magegan Khorsand & Kyle Lo, Ceres HS; from Johansen HS: Jerel Constantino, Downey HS; from Johansen: German Becerra, Natalie Perez, Haide Rocha, & Jasmine Valenzuela; from Oakdale HS: Sunshyne Anderson, Laurie Baxter, Emily Clayton, Jared Firstbrook, Madison Manning, Nathan Van Ryn, & Robert Winders; Elina Sahagun, Pitman HS

School Winners: Magegan Khorsand, Ceres HS; Brad Tobin, Denair HS; Julia Hackett, Johansen HS; Morgan Krueger, Modesto HS; Marissa Johnson, Oakdale HS

A school winner was chosen for all schools with ten or more entries in this division.

Division III (grades 7 and 8)

First Place: Kalkidan Curtis, Oakdale JHS

Second Place: Davis Harper, Oakdale JHS

Third Place: Valerie Zemlyanskaya,

Honorable Mentions: Madeline Blain, Austin Clayton, Katie Homer, Oakdale JHS

Finalists: Miguel Rodriguez-Arias & Marisela Yopez, Blaker-Kinser; Michi Kirihara, Dutcher; Nick Damon, Hart-Ransom Charter; Abigail Schmidt, Hart Ransom Elem; Jack Dugoni & Leandra Johnson, La Loma; from Oakdale JHS: Brianna Allcock, Isabella Arellano, Kevin Crum, Hannah Hanko, Emily Luna, Delissa Martinez, & Darrin Powers

School Winners: Miguel Rodriguez-Arias, Blaker-Kinser; Amelia Johns, Gratton Elem; Leandra Johnson, La Loma; Kalkidan Curtis, Oakdale JHS; Lauren Ng, Prescott Sr. Elem; Carol Martinez, Riverbank Language Academy; Nicole Cohea, Savage; Harlee Burtschi, Valley Home.

A school winner was chosen for all schools with ten or more entries in this division.

Division IV (grades 5 and 6)

First Place: Selene Avina, Riverbank Language Academy

Second Place: Amy Nguyen, Hidahl Elem.

Third Place: Joseph Arnett, Fremont Open Plan

Honorable Mentions: Selena Beard, Agnes Baptist; Hannah Burgess, Keyes to Learning; Mahima Krishnamoorthi, Lakewood;

Finalists: James Cervantez & Andrew Jimenez, Adkinson; Kaeryn Cruz, Agnes Baptist; from Fremont Open Plan: Cica Akpovi, Odalys Caro, Victoreya Maravilla, Jayson Test; from Lakewood: Liam Coyle, Elijah Oliver, & Sarah Tanner; Reva Merriam, Hickman Elem; James Esparza, Riverbank Language Academy; Andrea Samano, Standiford; Daneil Ceja, Tuolumne

School Winners: James Cervantez, Adkison; Selena Beard, Agnes Baptist; Fernando Zepda, Cunningham; Joseph Arnett, Fremont Open Plan; Hannah Burgess, Keyes to Learning; Mahima Krishnamoorthi, Lakewood; Selene Avina, Riverbank Language Academy; Anaissa Medina, Salida Middle; Henry Rios, Somerset Middle; Andrea Samano, Standiford; Daneil Ceja, Tuolumne; Jojo Cambos Whitmore Charter, Patrick Rocha, Valley Home

A school winner was chosen for all schools with ten or more entries in this division.

Many thanks to the 2010 screeners and judges.

The 24th annual Peace Essay Contest is a project of the Modesto Peace/Life Center. Co-sponsored by the Modesto Junior College Department of Literature and Language Arts.



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The Peace Found in Literacy

Division I Peace Essay Contest First Place and School Winner: BRIAN LEWIS Johansen High School ~ Mrs. Sousa

This summer I had the opportunity to work with the Stanislaus County Literacy Center by helping Stanislaus County residents prepare to pass the GED test, giving them certification equal to a high school diploma. As I spent over 6 weeks tutoring adults from a myriad of backgrounds in basic reading, writing, and math, I became acquainted with certain individuals and their life stories. One man, in his forties, had been making six figures for over a decade when the recession hit; he lost his position, and couldn't be rehired because of the lack of a high school diploma. Another man, who was on welfare for multiple years due to his illiteracy, told me about the disintegration of his family as consequence of being illiterate. And an older woman was there to earn her GED after seeing one of her sons-in-law shot in a drive-by shooting and the devastating effect illiteracy had on family life; she wanted to set a different example and prevent the cycle from continuing.

One day, a man came to the tutoring center who had already passed his GED. He had been homeless, been in and out of prison for much of his adult life, had previously struggled with alcoholism and drugs, and had become estranged from his family. His life had been full of chaos and misery. At one point, he was living under a Modesto bridge and had reached the absolute lowest point of his life. A police officer found him and connected him with a community resource that included a literacy program. After spending a couple of years learning to read, write, and perform basic math, he received his GED. He now owns a business and is happily married. Because of the peace he found through literacy, he now looks for opportunities to explain the importance of literacy and the peace that it can bring into the lives of those who are functionally illiterate.

But too many people don't enjoy the peace of literacy. Nearly 75% of welfare recipients are functionally illiterate. The health care industry estimates \$73 billion per year of unnecessary health care expenses are attributable to poor literacy. American businesses are estimated to lose over \$60 billion in productivity each year due to employees' lack of basic literacy skills. In Stanislaus County alone, it is estimated that 26% of residents read at or below a 4th grade level. I would like to make every adult in Stanislaus County functionally literate, opening the door to a lifelong opportunity of reading, learning, and peace. Many adults are not literate because of inconvenience, time, or lack of resources available. I would like to change that.

I propose first that a countywide Literacy Improvement Program (LIP) be instituted. The LIP would operate similarly to the current programs and resources found in the already-existing Stanislaus County Literacy Center, but be extended to function at every elementary school in the county. The LIP would hold adult literacy and GED classes for any illiterate or dropout adults during the day and evening six days a week.

It would provide childcare and one-on-one tutoring done by volunteers to give every adult the ability to become functionally literate and gain a love of learning. In addition, every adult who registered with the LIP would receive a bus-pass permitting him or her passage to the library and home at least twice a week and a library card at the time of registration. This would effectively target the illiterate populations in every single neighborhood and provide the means necessary for each nook and cranny in our county to receive resources to tutor and educate our adult population. This, in turn, would promote reading and respect for learning and education. If every adult in our county could learn to read and write from a neighborhood-based resource program, communities would be strengthened, and family life would be dramatically improved. Learning starts at home, and when the parents

2-1-1 delivers service referrals

. . . from page 1

cies before finding one that might be able to provide help. The frustration from being told again and again that the agency called could not provide help often had a very negative effect on the person calling, and the delay in getting help sometimes made the original problem worse. Furthermore, the misdirected calls wasted personnel time and other resources of the agencies involved. These adverse effects on persons needing help and the agencies that give help are greatly reduced by the efficiency of Stanislaus County 2-1-1.

In addition, this service is multilingual, and it even has a special number for hearing-impaired callers. Those who call 2-1-1 are provided with information about human services for everyday needs and for needs in times of crisis. Some of the agencies accessed for callers are providers of resources for basic human needs, including food banks, shelters, and utility assistance programs; physical and mental health programs, including medical information lines, counseling, and health insurance programs; employment support, including unemployment benefits and job training; support for older Americans and persons with disabilities, including home health care and Meals on Wheels; and support for children, youth, and families, including child care, Head Start, and protective services. These kinds of service referrals and many, many more are only a phone call away; all it takes is dialing the three "magic" numbers.

2-1-1 operators at the United Way office on McHenry Avenue in Modesto are available to the community from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. seven days a week. After these hours, calls are automatically transferred to San Bernardino, so that a caller has the convenience of calling the number *twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week*.

Trained to deliver both compassion and service referrals to 2-1-1 callers, Call Specialist Joanne Banuelos and Program Manager Linda Tagholm at the McHenry office explain just how important it is that they communicate with callers using patience and kindness. "Callers are often stressed and need to be treated with respect and compassion, so that we can get to the bottom of the problem and really provide them with the help they need."

value learning, then the children value learning by example, instruction, and encouragement. After instituting this program throughout our county, I believe we should adopt a national LIP following the same principles to establish a fully literate US. population and, eventually, establish respective LIP programs in every nation worldwide.

If this program were instituted it would, over time, reduce crime in our communities, reduce the number of welfare recipients in our county, raise the level of high school graduates, further employment opportunities in our county, and foster a new enthusiasm for learning, enlightenment, and ambition. These are the keys to empowering people and preventing crime, poverty, and the apathy that is the cause of such strife in our community and world; thus, facilitating peace through the means of literacy.

David Rivera, both a Call Specialist and Outreach Worker for the United Way in Stanislaus County, also adds, "Any health and human service agency or organization that serves people can be listed in the Stanislaus County 2-1-1 database. Getting other service agencies to join can only improve the quality of this referral system for the public."

With all that it offers at the present time, there are plans to make Stanislaus County 2-1-1 an even better program in the future. Currently, the United Way is working with the county on plans to have victims of natural disasters call 2-1-1 for non-emergency help, and the McHenry office is looking to receive calls twenty-four hours a day.

At the present time, Stanislaus County has the only 2-1-1 Program between Fresno and Sacramento. By December 2010, the plan is for all California counties to have the 2-1-1 Program available to each of its residents for disaster support, and many counties, like Stanislaus County, will have the complete 2-1-1 Program.

It is a great program; however, it could be much more effective if it were used by more of those who need human service assistance. To help make Stanislaus County 2-1-1 known to more of those who would benefit from it, the program has printed business-size cards displaying the 2-1-1 telephone number and an invitation to call this number for human service needs. Interim CEO Francine DiCiano would like each person in Stanislaus County who might benefit from 2-1-1 to get one of these cards. You can help by acquiring some these cards and giving them to persons who are in need.

The next time you're near McHenry and Morris Avenues, stop by the local United Way office, meet the friendly, competent staff, and pick up cards and brochures about Stanislaus County 2-1-1. Better yet, call ahead (523-4562) and ask the receptionist to set aside some for you, so they'll be ready. In this way, you'll be better prepared to help yourself, your family, your friends, and your fellow humans in Stanislaus County. You'll be doing your part to make the world a better place for *everyone*, one call at a time.

Visit <http://www.refersoftware.com/uwstan/#>

McCutcheon fans, your turn

By DON MCMILLAN

Maybe I do, once in a while, turn a nice phrase. I certainly do enjoy John McCutcheon's performances. As a long-time Modesto Peace/Life Center supporter, I want sell-out attendance. But when it's my words and byline we feature in these pages to announce his next appearance, it's sort of like plugging in a refrigerator. You get the reassuring hum that the electric grid hasn't gone away and that somewhere out there a coal-fired plant is liberating fossilcarbons; a dam's turbines are churning, telling salmon to detour or die; and somewhere smithereens of uranium atoms are piling up hazards for untold generations. Ford's in his flivver and all's right in the universe.

But John McCutcheon deserves better than white noise to announce his visits to Modesto. Among the people I enjoyed talking to at his concert in January, I'm sure I glimpsed the kind of passion my own writing about the artist and his music lacks. That's what deserves to sparkle here in *Connections* to invite people in next time. So what can I do to bring their vivid experiences and enthusiasm to these pages? What makes a *Connections* debut so forbidding? There certainly are things I've written with passion, and I'm honored that *Connections* has presented them. I'm equally certain that I'm not the best qualified in our community to write about John McCutcheon. I'd much rather play a supporting role. So I'm asking for help. If you're someone who might not like fog but can't wait for January because that's when John McCutcheon comes to town, you might just be the one. Your experience might flash like the feathers on a hummingbird's throat or might boom like thunder. Maybe it'd even have something of the desire of a whale surfacing for a fresh breath.

If you're ready to write, don't let me stop you! If you want to share something but don't feel confident writing it, I wonder if there's a way I could collaborate showing how your experience might be written while leaving you in charge of whether the result is after all an expression of you. At any rate, I ask for you not to allow another year of white noise leading up to a John McCutcheon concert.

ACTION: If you'd like to share memories or what John McCutcheon's Modesto concerts have meant for you, contact me, dccw1hub-mccutch2011@yahoo.com, 523-8871 or Keith Werner 572-1307, keith.in.modesto@gmail.com



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John McCutcheon with teens. Photo: Anna Garcia

My first McCutcheon experience

By LAUREN LEVERONE
Student, Modesto High School

Modesto was privileged enough to be graced with a wonderful performance by John McCutcheon for the ninth year in a row. This was my first McCutcheon experience and I enjoyed it immensely. I wasn't sure what to expect before the concert but as he started his first song I was blown away by what may very well be the best rhythm banjo playing I've ever heard. His guitar playing proved to be equally impressive. He also treated us to several beautiful melodies performed with precision on the hammered dulcimer as well as a rendition of a Woody Guthrie song with hammered dulcimer backing that really moved the crowd. He was also a particularly comical performer. Most of his songs contained witty remarks and humorous stories that kept the audience laughing.

There was a particularly memorable moment in which he taught the audience a song first in Russian, then in sign language, and was miraculously able to get an entire roomful of people, children and teenagers included, to be silent while following along in sign language. It was chilling.

The multi-talented McCutcheon was far from boring, which is especially difficult for a one-man act. He displayed his talents on the banjo, guitar, hammered dulcimer, piano, and autoharp—all with ease. He mixed up his sets with well-chosen favorites like "This Land is Your Land," playful political parodies, catchy tunes, and beautiful, serious ballads. An audience member requested an original song titled "At the Top of the Stairs" that showed the performer's serious side and his dynamic songwriting abilities.

My personal favorite was the song he closed with—a cover of Phil Ochs's "When I'm Gone." He performed it beautifully and it really emphasized his talents as a vocalist. Overall, the concert was a delightful experience and I'm sure we all hope

that he will continue the tradition and come back to entertain us and support the Peace/Life Center every year.

Also, a big "Thank You" goes to the Modesto Church of the Brethren for hosting the concert and for their hard work providing what was easily the best intermission I've ever attended; and also to the Fun Strummers, who were, indeed, very "fun," for warming up the crowd.

Did you miss the McCutcheon concert? Watch it in March on Channel 26

By JOHN LUCAS

John McCutcheon returned again for his ninth appearance in Modesto January 21, 2010 as a fund and community spirit raiser for the Modesto Peace/Life Center.

The concert was attended by over 300 people at the Modesto Church of the Brethren. The audience of young and old not only enjoyed a great performance but also helped raise \$2000 for the Center to continue its work for a peaceful, just and sustainable world.

If you didn't attend the concert you can view it on Modesto Comcast Channel 26 on Wednesdays 9 PM to 10 PM for Parts I, or on Saturday from 9 PM to 11 PM to view both Part I and Part 2 back-to-back. The concert was recorded and edited by the Modesto Peace/Life Center Media Committee.

ACTION: If you are interested in getting involved with alternative media or have some ideas for programs, call John Lucas 209-765-3813. If you don't have time, donate to Modesto Peace/Life Center to support our work. The Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, P.O. Box 134, Modesto, CA 95353-1034.

Mommy's Heart

By Mia Victoria Sarah Valdez

Bedtime is here as the sun finally dies.
Night has come and it's time to close your eyes.
I whisper soft lullabies to fill your sweet ears;
Your worries slip away and you have no fears.
You will sleep tight tonight;
Mommy will be here all through the night.
Our hearts will align
As your cheek nuzzles against mine;
And when you finally drift into your dreams
Everything will become as real as it seems~
Because no matter how far we sleep apart
You'll always be right here in Mommy's heart.

Journal #9

By Letitia H.

What flips my soul is being with my family, my mom, brothers and sisters. We're a broken family and don't get to see each other much but when we do all get together with mom that flips my soul. I feel complete and I love my mother to death. She's the most beautifullest thing to me on this earth. I can tear up just writing about it. There is no one else like her. She's not like the other mothers. She is one of a kind, with the way she raised us and how she loves us. My mother is my soul. I can go to her with anything. We laugh, joke, cry, talk. I just can't imagine life without her. Hopefully G-d lets her live to she is 100 and dies peacefully in a nice warm bed in my house. I know she will have to go but just not now.

My Mother...

By Letitia H.

Theresa
Gave me life.
Brought me up right
And warned me about life.
Using herself as an example
Which opened my eyes
And made me realize
That life wasn't easy.
Don't be easy, take
"Care of you," she says. Cuz
Other than your mother
No one will.
I love you Mom.

These 2 poems were written by the daughter of one of the Redwood moms.

The Beginning

By CT

"In the face of devastation
I reach for who I was.
Strong, fierce, and protective
I know I am today.
Yet I've always seemed to care
What others see me as;
I don't know how to make them
Look beyond what I might share.
I'm more than just a silly girl
More than just school books smart~
Proud of my maternal side.
Maybe just where to start
My journey in recovery
Is a search for who I am.
Lost in this lonely heart of mine,
I'll begin just where I am."

Almost Home

By Shawna Crawford

There she goes pushing her cart. You've seen her before on 9th, in front of the bar.

What else would you think, she's just a whore. You drive by and ponder, how could she degrade herself, give up and not care.

Just keep driving; you're almost through town. Almost home.

Waiting at a light on Park, a little girl walks by holding her father's hand. You smile, she looks away. You think it's cute; little girls and their shy little smiles.

At night she hides. The little girl she will soon not be alone. Her daddy always comes. When you stop at the store you see a young girl leaving looking nervous. Knowing it's a school day and where are her parents and what would they say. She pops pills to hide the pain. She can't get away from the world or herself. The lady at the register greets you and asks about your day. Do you ask her? Would she ever say that her husband hits her and her kids are scared? Outside she smiles, inside she screams. I wonder if anyone will ever hear their fear or see their hurt. Do you just keep driving and wondering?

You're almost home.

Written by the niece of one of the Redwood moms

Love Is.....

By Debra Munoz

Love is like Life~
A breath of fresh air.
When two unify as one,
It's a dream come true.
Love is a flower that's
Blossoming in the early
Spring morning.
Love is a precious baby that
G-d has given to you.
Love is like a family that
Never ends.
Love is like me when
I spend time with Eragon.

To: Maggie

By Jacqueline Silva

Maggie,
I wish I was the one!
Chemo takes a toll;
Her veins worn out.
My darling, I love your precious soul.
I wish I was the one...

Your spirit straight and strong
Your courage amazing
I am in awe.
I wish I was the one...

Innocence shines bright in your face,
Sleep sweet and sound like the hum of a hummingbird
A whisper of a kiss into the night
Tomorrow another day ready for the fight
I wish I was the one...

My angel, the treatment's almost done!
When you open your eyes,
I will be by your side
Clean and sober again, my Angel, my daughter
I love you
But I still wish I was the one.



WE GET
LETTERS



Military making the world a safer place

It's not often that the military does something good. In short, they've decided to go 34% sustainable!

The military has promised to lower its use of petroleum-based fuels 34% over the next decade. Because they are the biggest user of petroleum, this is a big step.

As you all know, a lot of money goes to petro-dictators, who spend the money keeping their own people down and some spend some on international terrorism. I don't know exactly where the military's oil comes from, but because money is also liquid, other US oil dollars do wind up in unfriendly hands. So, short of getting rid of all those nukes, this is the number one thing they could have done to make the world a safer place. No kidding, #1.

See the January 29th press release at: <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=13276>

Steve Hay
Modesto

In Memoriam

HOWARD ZINN

Historian and Activist

August 24, 1922 – January 27, 2010



Modesto Peace/Life Center Youth Happenings

By JANA & MICHAEL CHIAVETTA

There are several exciting and important things going on with youth activities through the Modesto/Peace Life Center (PLC). We would like to give you continuing updates on the progress of youth-oriented activities sponsored by the PLC.

We continue to have monthly trainings in the interpersonal skills of "Peace Making." The **Social Justice Youth Gatherings** have been growing each month under the direction of co-Youth Coordinator Jana Chiavetta, on the first **Tuesday from 6-7 PM**. In these training sessions, students are introduced to the communication and life skills necessary to act and react in a peaceful manner when dealing with others. Students share their perceptions and attitudes to better understand their role in creating a more just and cooperative world. We have been averaging about seven students per month and have had about 15 different individuals attend one of the sessions. The response by those who participate has been uniformly positive. The students feel empowered to open up and share their beliefs in a non-judgmental environment. We invite any high-school-aged person to come and check it out. Each training is unique and independent, so new individuals are always welcome. **The next gatherings are on Tuesday, March 2nd and Tuesday, April 6th (spring break) at the Peace/Life Center, 720 13th St., Modesto.**

The 2nd Social Justice Youth Leadership Conference is scheduled for **Saturday, September 25th, 2010**. We hope to make it bigger and better. Last year's keynote speaker, Bonnie Kay from Free the Children, may be hard to top, but we will try. We are working on bringing a speaker or presenters who are involved in an environmental cause. We hope the organizations that participated last year will come back. We are also interested in having more local groups that are involved in the areas of sustainability, peace, social justice and civil rights participate as well. If your organization wants to be involved, please contact us. The projected budget is \$2000, so any sponsors or donations are greatly appreciated.

One of the primary goals of the initial conference was to

increase participation of area high school students in numerous activities organized by the participating groups. Many students were enlightened to the opportunities of doing real, constructive community service. Students have been involved most extensively with the Tuolumne River Preservation Trust, the Sierra Club, Habitat for Humanity and Free the Children. We hope that this introduction to community service to social justice organizations spawns a lifelong commitment to helping others.

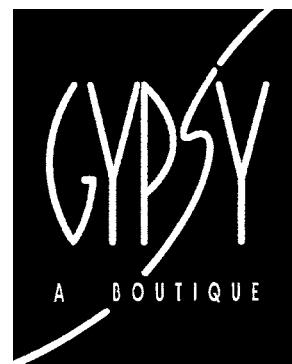
Area youth have been involved in numerous activities that have been sponsored by the PLC. **The John McCutcheon Concert** had dozens of high school students experiencing the joy of his music. For many of them, the concert was their introduction to folk music. The response was universally positive. **The Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration** was also attended by area youth. They came away with an appreciation of the career of Willie Brown. Many students thought that the highlight of the evening was the performance by a student from Modesto High School, Rosa Stanley. Her dramatic presentation of her original poem was awesome and thought provoking (her poem appears on page 11).

Finally, there are several events and activities that we hope to motivate students to be involved in. Next on the agenda is the ANSWER coalition's **"U.S. Out of Afghanistan and Iraq Now!"** March and Rally on Saturday, March 20th in San Francisco. **Earth Day** (April 17th) is right around the corner, and the Tuolumne River Trust **"Green on the Stream"** is in May. We also hope to have large student contingent at **Peace Camp** this June. You can see the youth movement is active and well at the Modesto Peace/Life Center.

To be informed or involved with Modesto Peace/Life Center Youth activities, contact Mike Chiavetta at chiavetta.m@monet.k12.ca.us or call 209-527-7530. As the Modesto Peace/Life Center prepares to celebrate its 40th year of existence as an organization, let's continue to nurture the next generation of social justice leaders.

Library used book sale coming May 1

Modesto library used book sale, portico of the Stanislaus County Library, Modesto, 1500 I St., Modesto, Saturday, May 1, 10 am-3 pm. Great buys, lots of fun, wonderful cause. Donation info: contact Clare Noonan, clarenoo@gmail.com, 522-5054. Do NOT leave books at the library.



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Is someone you
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Modesto Chapter

meets on the
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at the Emanuel Lutheran Church
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Helpline: 527-0776
www.pflagmodesto.org

Visit the **Oakdale** satellite
Meetings on
3rd Wednesdays from 7-9 pm
"Golden Oaks" Conference Room
Oak Valley Medical Building
1425 West "H" St.
pflagoakdale@dishmail.net

Paint Your Own Dream

This poem was written and presented by Violorosa “Rosa” Stanley at the 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration at Modesto Junior College, January 22nd, 2010

All I can do is dream back days of soft silhouettes running alongside draped up sheet lines

Aligned one

After another

After another

After another

Another day of looking at blank canvases trying to retrace etched scar lines on the backs of black silhouettes

Hoping to find that American dream that was so lovingly sketched into the back of our ancestor’s minds

So well that it carved mastermind pieces onto the back lids of their eyes so
When they cried, tears streamed down blood lines staining blank canvases
With pictures of unfulfilled wishes
Like fishermen casting nets of unfound fishes

Can you fish out that hook that hung necks on tree-branched shelves with books, like the books you judged based on the color of its cover
Throw it in the fire because you can’t read it
Push it to the back because you’re too ignorant to read it

Let these canvases paint pictures sensible to the mind because those cried out blood lines birthed young artists trying to make sense of your dream
Only binding together books of blank sheets following one page,
After another,
After another

Absent of a drawing explaining how you wanted us to live out your American Dream

Wasted canvas spaces painting of a false but beautiful American dream sketched hope and desire into the eyes of people
Drawing them away from their mother land

Land of the free who imprisoned many believer of the possibilities attaining the life of that dream.

Maybe, if you were a better judge, you could sentence us to sleep on that dream we spend nights
on end searching for in the far corners of our minds

Trying our hardest to find those lost silhouettes running along draped up sheet lines aligned one,
After another,
After another

These are our ancestors
Trapped on canvases you neglected to paint for passed generations
Left us trying to get close to our ancestry as much as we can
Only to find ourselves cut from the umbilical cord of our ancestor’s wombs that nursed us to dream sweetly

Tied her tubes many generations back so she can no longer birth her future children to hear those tunes that bring comfort

Confusing us by reading bedtime stories with happy endings
Having us fall asleep feeling discomforted with nightmares
We thought you sent us sweet dream wishes before you snatched up our nightlights

We wish we could go back a couple generations and prevent our ancestors from falling into your deceiving sketches
And replace that nightlight so they wouldn’t be misled by your false bedtime stories
A couple generations back stood a man who dared to speak of his dream far before America could suck up her pride and tell us hers

A dream more reasonable than white picket fences housing a stay at home mother whose home could be closed off by blue shutters
Shut her up
Her dream has done nothing but paint back lies
His dream stroked spoken words of peace
Piecing together black silhouettes and white canvases

Can America close her eyes and etch that silhouette to the back of her heavy eyelids
Or does the weight of her lies on her eyes blind her from her own creations

Can America dream a masterpiece of peace and prosperity because she is sending her people to sleep on nightmares
Or has America become American’t
His dream brought comfort so now we sleep freely

A dream she should have bargained to buy because it holds far more riches than she claims to have
Our lids no longer have to be etched up so you no longer have to cry those same bloodlines as before

Don’t leave that canvas unpainted she was a corrupted painter who deceived you of being the reality to your dream

She signed away your life on a contract with an inkless pen leaving you feeling empty like that blank canvas that
once held a beautiful didn’t she mention “temporary” American Dream

Don’t let her dream of riches and luxury conceal his dream of peace
And let it be known that your canvas will not go unpainted

Most importantly you will no longer be the product of her dream
Those black silhouettes did not fight just to remain on a canvas dominated by white
It’s time you picked up your own brush and followed your own sketch lines
Be that next brave soul and paint out your dream

