

Choosing hope over fear: a peace tradition continues

By **SANDY SAMPLE**

When my son Stephen was 15 months old, he rode in a backpack on my back at a Modesto Peace/Life Center's vigil at Castle Air Force Base. Throughout his childhood we marched many times for peace and justice, attended Peace Camp together, and collected peace songs that would provide the right rhythm for marching feet. His 6-year-old son, Theo, rode on his daddy's shoulders at his first peace march, so the family tradition continues, So when Stephen asked me if I'd like to participate in the One Nation Working Together rally at the National Mall in Washington, DC on October 2nd, during my fall visit with them, the tug of tender memories was so strong that I immediately said, "Yes!"

The powerful tug of the role reversal — my son now inviting his mother to join his family in a public witness for peace and justice — was too strong to resist. So in early October we four drove from Durham, NC to the DC suburbs, stayed overnight with an old friend, hopped on

the Metro the next morning, arrived at the Smithsonian station and walked to the Lincoln Memorial, joining many thousands of people who represented a wide spectrum of causes: peace groups, unions, civil rights groups, faith communities and environmental organizations, all energetically gathering together in a positive, hope-filled spirit. Each time I heard the One Nation Working Together refrain, I quietly added, "with liberty and justice for all," recalling the days before "one nation under God" was inserted into the cadence of the Pledge of Allegiance. The National Mall was wall-to-wall people that day, people of all colors, ages, shapes and persuasions, speaking multiple languages but each sharing a common purpose and goal: returning our nation to its senses. Impassioned speakers cried out for justice, citing sacred texts from a variety of religious traditions, and choruses sang blessings upon our work. A variety of Issues were lifted up: universal health care, an end to racism, job-creation, money for small businesses, better public

education, workplace justice, equality for all, care for the most vulnerable, an end to this endless war, with a common theme: everybody in, nobody out, choosing hope over fear.

There were, of course, fine rants against the crippling poisons of racism, corporate greed, immigrant-bashing, union-busting, the immoral, unconscionable and unwinnable wars we continue to wage, and the undermining of our Constitution; and fervent appeals for repairing the damage greed has done to our country and for rekindling Martin Luther King's dream. The spirit was one of commitment instead of cynicism, hope instead of anger, and trust that our continued united effort can help our country live up to its highest ideals. Everyone we met, walked alongside, and chatted with was hopeful, energized, determined, and as eager to connect as to share his/her viewpoint. Many weeks later, signs and slogans and quotable quotes from the rally still linger in my memory, and I offer them for signage at our next vigil: "If Wall Street doesn't

like feeling like a piñata, maybe it should try sharing the candy." "The threat is from no enemy without, but from failing to adequately educate our children." "We must awaken the apathetic, the cynical, and the angry." "There's nothing we can't do if we stand together side by side." The memory of marching and singing and praying and weeping and claiming hope with thousands of people in one united voice warms my heart in these days of post-election disorientation. And I look forward to having hope restored by John McCutcheon's lively, tender music on January 18th. We won't be as numerous as the many thousands who rallied on the Mall in Washington, DC, but the music we'll hear and sing along with, and the tears and hugs we'll share will remind us that because the task of peacemaking is a marathon, not a sprint, we need to be together in struggle and spirit in order to keep claiming hope in harsh times.

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In America, youth bring people together

By **EBOO PATEL** and **SAMANTHA KIRBY**

Chicago, Illinois - Last month, Zach Jordan, a senior at Elon University in North Carolina, found himself aghast at what he was hearing in the media about Muslims. But instead of just turning off the television or even yelling at it, Zach took what sociologists Bob Putnam and David Campbell tell us is amongst the most effective steps at increasing religious tolerance: he created a space for people from different religious backgrounds to have a positive, meaningful encounter with each other.

Zach organized an event on his campus, attended by 150 students and staff from dif-

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*Annual
Modesto Peace/Life Center*

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Dan & Alice Onorato
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*Bring your festive spirit
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Information: 526-5436

Youth bring people together

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ferent faith backgrounds, on religious diversity in America. The event was so thought-provoking – and there was such a high demand for this type of discourse – that most of the students stayed for hours after it ended, working through the ideas presented with each other. They engaged in a civil discussion through a common activity.

In their recent landmark book *American Grace*, Putnam and Campbell refer to this casually as the “your Pal Al syndrome”. They explain that if you come together with somebody else in a common activity – even if you enter into that relationship with negative attitudes or even suspicion about their religion – your attitude improves throughout the course of participating in that common activity.

If we prize religious tolerance and interfaith cooperation, and if we know those things are increased by meaningful, positive encounters from people with different religions, we ought to expand the opportunities for these encounters.

At Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), we think the Zach Jordans of this world are our best hope at expanding such opportunities. We believe that college students can – first on their campuses and then in their civic, professional and personal lives – create common activities for people from

different religions to come to know one another.

Zach was trained as what we call an “interfaith leader”, somebody with the framework, knowledge-base and skill set to create such meaningful positive encounters. Last week, we trained 200 more Zach Jordans, as well as 100 campus staff who can support them, from 136 different campuses in Washington, DC at our inaugural Interfaith Leadership Institute.

When we first organized the Institute, hosted by Georgetown University with a kick-off session at the White House, even we had no idea how much demand there would be. In just two weeks, we received over 500 applications for 150 spots from students and campus staff across the country, and had to add a second session to accommodate this demand.

In the two intensive sessions, we trained these campus leaders to *speak out* about the importance of interfaith cooperation in the world and on campus, *mobilise* their peers to participate in interfaith action on a chosen social issue and *sustain* these efforts on campuses across the country through IFYC’s “Better Together” interfaith action campaign.

The bottom line here is that we’ve learned from sociology that positive, meaningful encounters can change people’s

attitudes about people from different religious backgrounds. And we know that we don’t have to wait for it to randomly happen. There are tens of thousands of Zach Jordans out there, hungry to create these opportunities and eager to learn how. We just have to train and mobilise them to do it.

* Eboo Patel is Founder and President of the Interfaith Youth Core. Samantha Kirby is IFYC’s Communications and Policy Specialist. This article is distributed by the Common Ground News Service (CGNews) with permission from the authors. <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=28831&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0&isNew=1>

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Enter the Young Masters Art Show

The Central California Art Association hosts the Young Masters Art Show from January 20, 2011 to February 6 for children age one to eighteen at the Mistlin Gallery. The show is part of Third Thursday Art Walk, January 20 from 5:00 to 9:00 PM.

Entry categories are in painting, drawing and sculpture and are grouped by age. The Awards ceremony ends the show Sunday, Feb 6 at 2:00 PM. The Mistlin Gallery is at 1015 J Street, Modesto, 209-529-3369. Gallery hours: Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 AM to 5:00 PM, Saturday noon to 4:00 PM. Entry form is available under “calendar” on line www.ccartassn.org

Deliver entries to Mistlin Gallery on Monday, January 17 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

MLK speaker cancels

Donna Brazile, the planned speaker for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration has cancelled. The committee is seeking another speaker. Watch the Connections online calendar for information. Contact Jim Costello for information, jcostello@igc.org

John McCutcheon’s Coming to Town

By NOEL RUSSELL

Oh, you’d better think fast,
You’d better act now.
The tickets won’t last,
I’m tellin’ you - Wow!
John McCutcheon’s coming to town.
He’s singin’ right here,
He’s in town for one night.
He’s gonna be great -
January’s delight!
John McCutcheon’s coming to town.
He sings some songs ‘bout baseball,
And politicians, too.
He’ll play a lot of instruments
And the dulcimer for you!
So, you’d better think fast,
You’d better act now.
The tickets won’t last,
I’m tellin’ you - Wow!
John McCutcheon’s coming to town.

The concert is at 7:00 PM, Tuesday, January 18, 2011, at the Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2301 Woodland Ave. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$23 at the door. Groups of 10 or more are \$15 per person. Youth (18 and under) are \$5. Tickets are available at the Church of the Brethren, 523.1438 and at Anderson Custom Framing and Gallery, 1323 J St., 579.9913. Sponsorships are also available (see below).

As in previous years, we are offering a chance to be a sponsor of the John McCutcheon Benefit Concert. For the suggested donation, you’ll receive tickets to the concert, your name in the program, and reserved seating at the concert. Five levels of sponsorship are available:

- Autoharp — \$40: One ticket, name in program, reserved seating

- Guitar — \$75: Two tickets, name in program, reserved seating
- Banjo — \$150: Four tickets, name in program, reserved seating
- Piano — \$300: Eight tickets, name in program, reserved seating
- Hammer Dulcimer — \$500: Sixteen tickets, name in program, reserved seating

To become a sponsor, just fill out the form below and mail it to given address. Please send it in by January 10th, so we can have time to acknowledge your sponsorship in the program. If you have any questions, just call 572-1307 or email keith.werner@sbcglobal.net

I would like an Autoharp Sponsorship (\$40). I would like a Guitar Sponsorship (\$75). I would like a Banjo Sponsorship (\$150). I would like a Piano Sponsorship (\$300). I would like a Hammer Dulcimer Sponsorship (\$500).

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Enclosed is a check for: _____

If you would like, you can dedicate your sponsorship to another. Just specify how you would like the dedication to appear in the program (such as “In Honor of ...” or “To the Memory of ...”):

Make checks payable to: Modesto Peace/Life Center. Mail to: McCutcheon Sponsorship Program, 1313 Floyd Ave #184, Modesto, CA 95355.

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- Keep sending me CONNECTIONS. (Check renewal date on mailing label)
- I am enclosing an extra tax-deductible donation for Modesto Peace/Life Center
- \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 Other

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Waiting For “Superman”: a review

By LUELLA COLE

Ed Note: Connections welcomes readers' comments on this film, which returns for a second engagement on December 12-14 at the State Theatre

Anthony, Daisy, Bianca, Francisco, Emily. Five promising, photogenic elementary-school aged kids whose parents are determined to get them the best education available. Four of them live in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Anthony is being raised by his grandmother after his father's death by drug overdose. Daisy, a fifth grader, is determined to be a doctor. Bianca's mother lacks the money to keep her in a private school. Francisco is struggling in first grade, and his mother's attempts to talk to his teacher go unanswered. Although Emily lives in the San Francisco Peninsula community of Woodside, one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the country, her parents, like those of all the other four children, are convinced that their only chance for a decent education for their children is to compete in a lottery for a slim chance of enrolling in a nearby tuition-free charter school.

The children's heart-wrenching story is interwoven with devastating statistics building the case for public school failure despite taxpayer support amounting to an average of \$9,000 per student. As he did in *An Inconvenient Truth*, director Davis Guggenheim makes the statistics vivid with clever animations. Nostalgic film clips of the schools that members of the audience may have attended in the '50s and 60's are used as contrast to the “dropout factories” that the narrator asserts the public schools have gradually become since the 1970's.

What does the film hold responsible for the demise of a public school system once among the best in the world? The “Blob.” Piece by piece, statistic by statistic, expert by expert, Guggenheim lays out the argument that the blame for failing public schools lies with the education “establishment”—from policies of the Federal Education Department to the differing educational standards of the fifty states to the proliferation of local school boards to the intransigence of local school district central offices—and ultimately to the inflexibility of teachers' unions contracts.

The villain of *Waiting for “Superman”* is the “Teachers' Unions,” portrayed as a monolithic, unassailable barrier to providing “great teachers.” What constitutes a “great teacher” is hinted at, but never defined. And the film's solution for providing “great teachers” for children? Hire them to teach in charter schools under contracts that don't allow them to band together to negotiate their own working conditions, and summarily fire them if they don't produce higher test scores. Because the primary evil of the teachers' unions, asserts the writer of the script, is that they prevent the dismissal of less than “great” teachers, providing contracts which give teachers a guaranteed job for life. The alleged power of the teachers' unions to accomplish this feat, says the voice-over narrator, makes the union “a menace and an impediment to reform.”

As evidence of the power of the “Teachers' Union,” one scene of the film shows an educator riffling through a thick document which he says is the procedure a public school administrator would have to follow to fire an ineffective teacher. The implication is that such a document is the rule in every school district. Another scene shows a classroom filled with adults occupied with reading newspapers, playing cards, web surfing, and sleeping. This, the narrator said, is the “reassignment room” of the New York City Schools. The

adults in the room are teachers who have been accused of serious offenses such as drunkenness, drug abuse, assaulting students or other crimes. According to the script, the union contract forces the school district to pay these teachers their full salary while they are waiting for the process of dismissal to take its course, a process that might take several years. If teachers accused of crime can't be dismissed immediately, the narrator implies, how much more difficult it must be to dismiss a teacher who is merely incompetent. Devastating, if universally true, which it is not.



What most often stands in the way of the dismissal of an ineffective teacher is the unwillingness of school administrators to exercise the power most teachers' contracts give them to do so.

If the villain of *Waiting for “Superman”* is the teachers' unions, Michelle Rhee is one of its heroes. Not yet 40 years old when she was appointed in 2007 by Mayor Adrian Fenty to lead the Washington D. C. schools, and equipped with a Harvard master's degree in public policy, three years of teaching in Baltimore public schools, but with no school administration experience, Rhee set about to neutralize the power of the D. C. teachers' union. In 2008, according to the narrator of the film, Rhee offered six-figure salaries for “top performing” teachers in exchange for the abolition of teacher tenure. In a scene showing Rhee addressing a large auditorium full of people, the voice-over asserts that the “union leadership” refused to allow the rank and file members to vote on the proposal.

Sharing star billing with Michelle Rhee is Geoffrey Canada, the Harvard educated, charismatic President and Chief Executive Officer of Harlem Children's Zone. Guggenheim spotlights Canada's charter schools' accomplishments throughout the film. What he doesn't say is that Canada's charter schools are part of HCZ's nonprofit social

services agency. HCZ is described on its website in a quote from *The New York Times Magazine*: “... the Zone Project “combines educational, social and medical services. It starts at birth and follows children to college. It meshes those services into an interlocking web, and then it drops that web over an entire neighborhood.... The objective is to create a safety net woven so tightly that children in the neighborhood just can't slip through.”

The Harlem Children's Zone operates three charter schools which are demonstrating the kind of progress children can make when they spend ten hours a day at school, get adequate medical care, and have parents who value their children's education enough to attend parenting education classes starting at the birth of their children. Harlem Children's Zone tackles the whole environment the children come from. HCZ community organizers help residents of Harlem convert their tenement buildings into resident-owned cooperatives. Initiatives under the Harlem Children's Zone umbrella provide such social services for families in the area it serves as child care, addiction treatment, weight management, mental health care, asthma prevention, crisis intervention, help in getting debt counseling, legal services, public benefits and domestic crisis counseling. The cost of transforming a neighborhood? Canada says that it is \$5000 per child. The source of this funding is not disclosed in the film. Examination of the HCZ Business plan, available to download from the HCZ website, shows that over 60% of its funding comes from private sources.

The message the audience is intended to take away from viewing *Waiting for “Superman”* is that the answer for the best education, the prize all the parents and children are longing for throughout the film, is enrollment in a tuition-free charter school. Although the narrator admits that only 20% of the nation's for-profit and nonprofit charter schools show higher average test scores than those of the public schools, the film simplistically offers this relatively new development in American education as a panacea. Space does not permit a full discussion of the pros and cons of charter schools. But ponder this: If enrollment in a charter school is as competitive as the process so emotionally described in this film, what happens to the children who don't win the lottery? What about the children whose parents are not as devoted to their children's education as the ones who enter their children in

SUPERMAN. continued p. 4

stanislaus
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the charter school lottery? Unless all neighborhoods and schools in the country are lavished with the kind of attention provided by the Harvard Children's Zone, the result will be much worse than the kind of winners and losers shown at the conclusion of the film: Accepted. Not Accepted. Unless all children have access to the kind of safety net that Geoffrey Canada has created in Harlem, we will create a caste system in which children with devoted parents like those in the film will succeed, and those who don't will populate a permanent underclass. Providing a Harlem Children's Zone in every neighborhood will take much more political will than doing away with teacher tenure.

This reviewer is a 37-year member of the California Teachers' Association and the National Education Association with 40+ years of teaching experience in both public and private schools. From the point of view of an educational insider—yes, a "Teachers' Union" member—*Waiting for "Superman"* does not tell the whole truth. Yes, many school systems in the United States are low-performing. Yes, many inner-city schools are abysmally poor. Yes, there are some teachers who should have chosen other careers. But the question of who or what is to blame for this situation is less clear than the film would have its viewers believe. It has become politically correct to blame the "Teachers' Union" for all the ills of not only the education system, but of society. The truth is that there is no such thing as THE monolithic "Teachers' Union". Most teachers' "unions" are associations—of teachers. I am the teachers' union. Your child's teacher is most likely a member. An attack on the "Teachers' Union" is an attack every public school teacher in the country. And most teachers work harder than any non-educator can imagine, trying to compensate for the poverty-stricken environment many of today's students live in, competing with every distraction modern society offers children, and attempting to convince even many parents that their child's education is more important than vacations and extracurricular activities. Most teachers' contracts have nowhere near the kind of power portrayed in the film. And it is categorically untrue that it is impossible to fire a tenured teacher. I have seen it happen. I have also seen fine teachers harassed into resignation for political reasons. Having tenure and being "great" teachers did not protect them. What most often stands in the way of the dismissal of an ineffective teacher is the unwillingness of school administrators to exercise the power most teachers' contracts give them to do so.

Geoffrey Canada has the right idea: change the children's environment to make their welfare and education everyone's main priority, and their whole lives will improve, including their test scores. Given the kind of community-wide support the schools under the Harlem Children's Zone umbrella enjoy, any school's performance would improve. Charter schools, which receive private millions and turn professional teachers into at-will employees constantly fearing for their jobs, are not the best answer to achieving educational success. What this nation's schools need is more parents like those of Anthony, Daisy, Bianca, Francisco and Emily, who believe in the importance of education; private donors who support public education; and an electorate who cares enough about the future of this country to put into practice a Harlem Children's Zone in every neighborhood. Millions of public school students and their tenured teachers would thrive with this kind of support.

Cooking under pressure

By JENIFER WEST

These days, we're all trying to get the biggest bang for our buck, and cooking at home is one great way to do that. And there is an excellent piece of equipment that can be absolutely invaluable in that rewarding pursuit. I have, over time, acquired appliances that make the time I spend in the kitchen both more efficient and more pleasant. And I thought I'd rounded up pretty much everything I could ever want or need.

I *did*, that is, until my grandmother agreed to share a beloved (and coveted) recipe, the first step of which requires the very piece of equipment that I'm now convinced should be in every busy person's kitchen. This particular gadget can cook almost faster than a speeding bullet – while saving energy, preserving nutrients, and cleaning up in a flash, to boot!

And the miracle gadget is... A pressure cooker!

Being a die-hard canner, I do own a 21-quart, cast aluminum pressure *canner*, which easily stood in for the task at hand. And that first experience with the speed of cooking under pressure made me wonder why I had never experimented with it before. It's not, after all, as if I'd never encountered a pressure cooker. Growing up, I can remember our house being permeated with the grassy smell of artichokes and the sound of the rocker jiggling, letting off steam as it regulated the pressure. But artichokes were pretty much all that were ever cooked that way at our house. Maybe that was because the pressure cookers of old occasionally wreaked havoc in a kitchen – stories abound of some unfortunate soul, scrubbing the remains of a chicken dinner off the kitchen ceiling... Fortunately, today's pressure cookers are very safe when used according to the manufacturer's directions.

So, after cooking a few dinners in my behemoth pressure canner, I decided it would make sense to take the plunge. Logged on to my favorite online discount retailer, and soon a shiny, new, 6-quart stainless steel number arrived. And I haven't been able to leave it alone since! (I've learned a bit more, and would recommend anyone interested in purchasing a new pressure cooker to consider the "second generation" models – no rocker. You can cook anything in them – even things like split peas, and rice, neither of which is recommended in the old, rocker type because of the vent-clogging foam they create.)

Pressure cookers can cook many things, in record time and using about a third of the energy that it would take otherwise. And because the steam stays inside the cooker, they preserve both flavor and nutrients, in the bargain! Dried beans, for example, cook in 3 – 15 minutes, depending on the size and age of the beans. You can even, using a technique called "speed soaking" (thanks, Lorna Sass!!), cook unsoaked beans, in about 30 – 45 minutes!! Meat cooks in one-third the time, and the pressure cooker is as good at tenderizing tough, inexpensive cuts of meat as a crockpot. As an experiment, I've even tossed in dry pasta, sauce, water, and about a pound of frozen chicken. Took a total of 31 minutes (twelve minutes to come up to pressure, 6 to cook, and the remainder for the pressure to come down). Maybe it wasn't quite as



nice as it might have been if I'd started with thawed chicken and cooked the pasta separately, but it's great to know that option is available, if I'm ever in a bind. It can even, as it turns out, do double-duty: You can braise something in the bottom of the pan, put the rack (comes with most cookers) on top of the food, and steam-cook something else on top of that. Pork chops or ribs on the bottom, for example, with potatoes steamed above (thanks, Miss Vickie – www.missvickie.com) I was, in fact, in a bind the other night, and so tossed a pound & a half of bite-sized frozen chicken, some sauce & water and put the rack on top. Put in some seasoned potatoes, loosely wrapped in foil, turned on the fire and, viola! Homemade chicken dinner, freezer to table in about 30 minutes!

Pressure cookers can cook pretty much anything you'd cook on a stovetop, and even a lot of things you'd put in the oven – provided there's enough liquid to create the necessary steam. Soups and stocks, dried beans, meats and vegetables – even things like roasts and whole chickens can be cooked successfully in the pressure cooker. Some things will need to be browned first, and others may need to be placed in an ovenproof baking dish (or canning jars) inside the cooker and covered with foil. But you can cook a lot of different kinds of meals in this kitchen wonder.

If I haven't convinced you by now that pressure cookers are the best thing since homemade granola, here's one more thing to consider: Unless you've really goofed and scorched something onto it, clean-up is a breeze! Because you're cooking with steam, things don't dry out and stick as they might on the stovetop.

So, if you're looking for a way to get dinner on the table in a flash and save money, nutrients and clean-up hassle all at the same time, a pressure cooker might be just the thing.

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

By LILLIAN VALLEE

70. Dirt!

I am driving south on Highway 165, towards the Merced River, in the direction of Hagaman Park, when I see that the vineyard established on the north bank of the river has been expanded. The vineyard that had existed to this point left a corridor of riparian zone with its older Valley Oaks intact. Now I notice that the rich bottomlands of the Merced are plowed to the very edge of the river and, to my horror, ripped the entire length of the vineyard with a bulky rampart of salvaged pavement slabs to prevent flooding. The bend in the road leading to the bridge over the Merced has always been one of my favorite sights along the route to San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, and I have always greeted the river in the name of poet Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel who considered the river and its name “holy.” Her migrant parents and their friends had enjoyed picnics along the Merced under the native Valley Oaks and Black Walnuts, and she wrote of their voices traveling downstream on Sunday afternoons.

How could a few more rows of grapes blind the growers, whoever they were, to the beauty they had destroyed and to the culture of the soil in the Valley’s increasingly rare riverine gallery forests? Why didn’t they realize that a healthy riparian corridor would serve them better than rip-rap as flood prevention? Slabs of pavement have no root systems to hold the soil, no mycorrhizal networks to increase the volume of water the soil can hold. I found myself fuming at the desperately extractive economy of the local wine industry, exposing the riverbank to erosion and heedless of the diversity which benefits more than just the profit margin.

I think again of the vineyard on the Merced River when I am watching the film *Dirt! The Movie* inspired by William Bryant Logan’s book, *Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*; book and movie are a paean to the dirt under our feet, to the earth, the soil, the pachamama, source of all fertility and matrix of life on this planet. The movie boasts a passionate, star-studded cast: Alice Waters, Wangari Maathai, Vandana Shiva, Miguel Altieri, Wes Jackson, Sebastiao and Leila Salgado, among others. All of them plead for a holy regard for dirt, for our fragile topsoil, by relating experiences with edible schoolyards, reforestation, desertification, diversification, and prairie libraries.

Viewers learn that every bit of ground has its own flavor

profile, and that the living skin of the earth has more organized information than the surface of all the known planets. Dirt is alive with microorganisms and mycelium makes dirt by breaking down organic materials and solubilizing raw, rock materials into mature, durable organic matter. The oldest sustainable agricultural models, according to Miguel Altieri, treat dirt not just as a growing medium but as their mother, a connection that is not just material but spiritual.

Vandana Shiva explains that soil of India was her cradle and playing with dirt was an immunity builder. She explains the importance of cow dung, how it feeds the soil, which was not just the matrix of life but a building material. She also argues that civilizations rise and fall based on how they treat dirt. Healthy soils produce more nutritious foods. We are not designed, says Shiva, for a diet of food empty of nutrients and loaded with toxins from pesticides and nitrogen fertilizers.

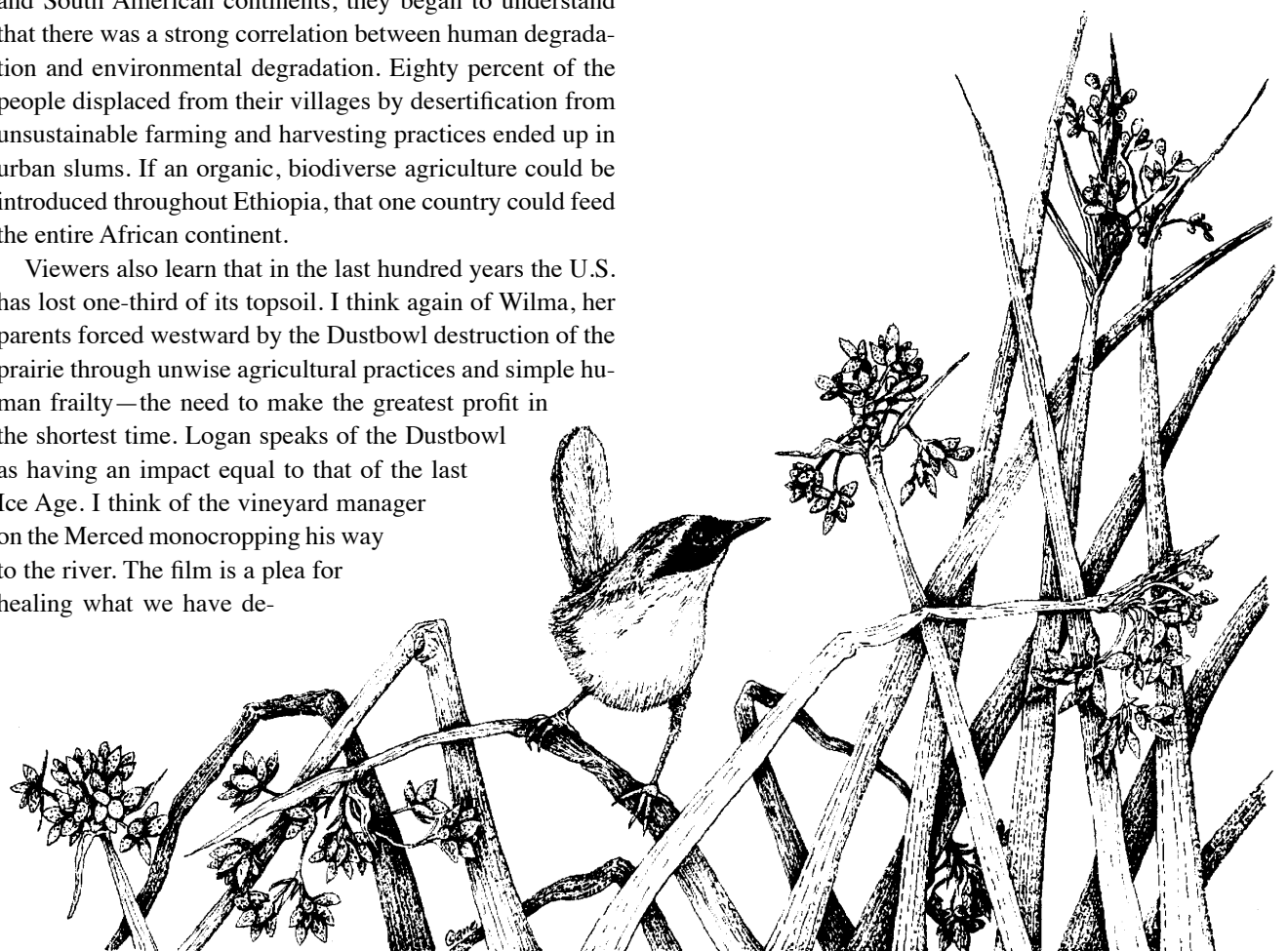
Miguel Altieri indicates that food riots around the world are a direct result of the failure of the industrial model of agriculture. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai tells viewers that taking care of the soil is the best way to ensure security in a country. The Salgados talk about how, in the course of photographing destitute peoples on the African and South American continents, they began to understand that there was a strong correlation between human degradation and environmental degradation. Eighty percent of the people displaced from their villages by desertification from unsustainable farming and harvesting practices ended up in urban slums. If an organic, biodiverse agriculture could be introduced throughout Ethiopia, that one country could feed the entire African continent.

Viewers also learn that in the last hundred years the U.S. has lost one-third of its topsoil. I think again of Wilma, her parents forced westward by the Dustbowl destruction of the prairie through unwise agricultural practices and simple human frailty—the need to make the greatest profit in the shortest time. Logan speaks of the Dustbowl as having an impact equal to that of the last Ice Age. I think of the vineyard manager on the Merced monocropping his way to the river. The film is a plea for healing what we have de-

stroyed, for understanding cowpies and compost, for creating healthy soil and zero erosion.

Later I visit my community garden plot at the Church of the Brethren to pick up some winter vegetable starts left there by Modesto Junior College student Shawna Guzman who is sharing them with other gardeners. The tomato vines have been blackened by the cold, but there are still tomatoes to pick and plenty of eggplants and sweet peppers. The untilled garden plots are covered with a green mantle of germinating weeds and wildflowers. At home stinkhorns, earthstars, dead man’s foot—the fruiting bodies of underground fungal networks—make their appearance even before the rains. The mycorrhizal freeways running through the soil under the Valley Oaks are a marvel of chemical commerce, as complex and surprising in the forms they assume on the ground as the oak galls on the leaves, stems and trunks of the trees. I marvel at the various dialects of dirt and remember the words of farmer and essayist Gene Logsdon: “the only escape from provincialism [is] to know your own province deeply enough.”

Sources: *Dirt! The Movie*, by Bill Benenson and Gene Rosow and Gene Logsdon, *Living at Nature’s Pace: Farming and the American Dream*



Middle East Peace negotiations?

By RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

Until the populations of Israel and Palestine really want peace, the peace negotiations will be nothing but a slightly sad sideshow, unless the Obama administration, momentarily freed from its own electoral concerns, is prepared to put forward a substantive peace plan of its own.

It used to be that the elites in both societies would tell you that once they worked out a deal, their relatively excitable populations would embrace it. Perhaps. But what has become clear in recent years is that neither side has sufficient stability based on popular support to actually make the compromises necessary to negotiate a peace agreement with terms that could actually work.

So, instead of playing to each side's elites, those who seek peace must now launch a broad educational campaign to reach ordinary citizens (if necessary, over the heads of those elites) with a message that is convincing — a message that says, here are the terms of a fair peace agreement and here is why we believe that if each side makes the necessary compromises, it will work to meet your best interests.

Some say this is a hard case to make. They point out that Israelis seem to be doing quite well at the moment from a material standpoint and have little interest in what goes on in the West Bank and Gaza. They argue this situation is unlikely to change so long as the restraint of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, the partial effectiveness of intrusive searches at checkpoints and the careful patrolling of the Israeli-constructed Wall, impressive intelligence based on willing (and less than willing) collaborators, and newer protection technologies collectively manage to minimize the number of terrorist attacks in Israel. We are glad for the reduction of terror, but not for the resulting complacency and willingness of many Israelis to live with the torture and oppression that their army inflicts on the subjugated Palestinian populations of the West Bank and the open-air prison that is Gaza.

The United States and other countries committed to a peaceful solution should present a detailed plan for what a final agreement must encompass to the people of the Middle East and the United States. Such a plan must on the one hand take into account the tremendous economic, political, and military inequality between the two parties, as well as recognize the historical injustice done to the Palestinian people. On the other hand, it must speak to the great pain that both parties have suffered. It is this pain from the past that leads them each to interpret everything through a framework based on memories of being betrayed, oppressed, and denied their fundamental humanity. Lasting peace will require steps toward healing that pain and trauma, so that each party can approach the other with a spirit of generosity and openheartedness, rather than needing to insist that since their pain has "really been greater than the pain of the other side," their needs (for justice, security, and respect) trump the needs of the other side.

We who live outside Israel/Palestine can play a role, partly by challenging the discourse of "blaming the other" that gets strengthened by the more extreme partisans in both camps, but more importantly by insisting that our political leaders present to both sides a vision of a future that will appeal to the people of the region and give them reason to push their leaders to make the necessary compromises. Obviously, the people of the region will make the final decisions, but having a proposal that seems comprehensive and fair coming from the greatest economic, military, and political powers of the world will strengthen the part of each Israeli and Palestinian who wants to believe in the possibility of a conclusion to this struggle based on peace, justice, and recognition of the dignity and fundamental humanity of both sides.

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Keeping that in mind, yet wanting to propose something that our spiritually and psychologically tone-deaf politicians might at least understand, I offer the following advice for what a peace plan proposed to both sides by the United States could involve. Use it also when assessing future negotiations, because proposals that do not address the issues below are unlikely to meet the approval of even the most fair-minded and balanced people on both sides of this conflict.

1. A peace treaty that recognizes the State of Israel and the State of Palestine and defines Palestine's borders to include almost all of pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza, with small exchanges of land mutually agreed upon and roughly equivalent in value and historic and/or military significance to each side. The peace plan must also entail a corresponding treaty between Israel and all Arab states — approved with full diplomatic and economic cooperation among these parties — along borderlines that existed in the pre-1967 period. And it should include a twenty-to-thirty-year plan for moving toward a Middle Eastern common market and the eventual establishment of a political union along the lines of the European Union.
2. Jerusalem will be the capital of both Israel and Palestine and will be governed by an elected council in West Jerusalem and a separate elected council in East Jerusalem. The Old City will become an international city whose sovereignty will be implemented by an international council that guarantees equal access to all holy sites — a council whose taxes will be shared equally by the city councils of East and West Jerusalem.
3. Immediate and unconditional freedom will be accorded all prisoners in Israel and Palestine whose arrests have been connected in some way with the Occupation and resistance to the Occupation.
4. An international force to separate and protect each side from the extremists of the other side who will inevitably seek to disrupt the peace agreement. And the creation of a joint peace police — composed of an equal number of Palestinians and Israelis, at both personnel and command levels — that will work with the international force to combat violence and to implement point number six below.
5. Reparations for Palestinian refugees and their de-

scendents at a sufficient level to bring Palestinians within a ten-year period to an economic well-being equivalent to that enjoyed by those with a median Israeli-level income. The same level of reparations must also be made available to all Jews who fled Arab lands between 1948 and 1977. An international fund should be set up immediately to hold in escrow the monies needed to ensure that these reparations are in place once the peace plan is agreed upon.

6. Creation of a truth and reconciliation process modeled on the South African version but shaped to the specificity of these two cultures. Plus: an international peace committee appointed by representatives of the three major religious communities of the area to develop and implement teaching of
 - a. nonviolence and non-violent communication,
 - b. empathy and forgiveness, and
 - c. a sympathetic point of view of the history of the "other side" mandated in every grade from sixth grade through high school. The committee should moreover ensure the elimination of all teaching of hatred against the other side or teaching against the implementation of this treaty in any public, private, or religious educational institutions, media, or public meetings. Such teachings would become an automatic crime punishable in an international court set up for this purpose.

7. An agreement from Palestine to allow all Jews living in the West Bank to remain there as law-abiding citizens of the new Palestinian state as long as they give up their Israeli citizenship and abide by decisions of the Palestinian courts. A fund should be created to help West Bank settlers move back to Israel if they wish to remain Israeli citizens and to help Palestinians move to Palestine if they wish to be citizens of

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Peace

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the new Palestinian state. In exchange for Palestine agreeing to allow Israelis to stay in the West Bank as citizens of the Palestinian state, Israel must agree to let 20,000 Palestinian refugees return each year for the next thirty years to the pre-1967 borders of Israel and provide them with housing. (This number — 20,000 — is small enough to not change the demographic balance, yet large enough to show that Israel cares about Palestinian refugees and recognizes that they have been wronged.) Each state must acknowledge the right of the other to give preferential treatment in immigration to members of its leading ethnic group (Jews in Israel, Palestinians in Palestine).

Agreement by the leaders of all relevant parties to talk in a language of peace and openhearted reconciliation, and to reject the notion that the other side cannot be trusted.

8. Agreement by the leaders of all relevant parties to talk in a language of peace and openhearted reconciliation, and to reject the notion that the other side cannot be trusted. The agreement has the greatest likelihood of working if it is embraced in full and pushed for enthusiastically by the leaders of all relevant parties, as well as endorsed by a majority vote of the populations of each country that wishes to be a party to this agreement.

Our task in *Tikkun* and in the Network of Spiritual Progressives is to devise strategies to get our own Western countries to publicly articulate this vision, and to get President Obama to use his full energies and skills to convince the American public, the Israeli public, and the Palestinian public that this agreement and nothing less will provide greater security and well-being to the people of the United States, Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East more broadly.

All the other stuff happening in the “negotiations” should be viewed as political theater. At the moment the main issue is who is going to be blamed for getting the process to fail, with people on each side maneuvering to prevent the blame from falling on themselves. But the plan we present seeks a very different spirit — a spirit of hopefulness that we now have a concrete plan that would work if implemented and should be adopted by anyone serious about lasting peace. All the rest is commentary, fluff, and political self-interest and has little to do with creating peace.

In the final analysis, we at *Tikkun* believe that peace can only come through a fundamental transformation of consciousness, so that the people on each side begin to abandon the worldview that teaches that their own security depends on dominating the other side, construed as the “evil other.” Only an openhearted reconciliation based on faith that the other side will be able to see its former enemies as real human beings sharing similar needs for peace, security, dignity, and recognition as created in the image of God will produce lasting peace. The implementation of these formal proposals would not necessarily be sufficient to create that change of heart.

Yet the step of envisioning this process may itself contribute to a thawing of the icy rejection of “the other” — a thawing that is the precondition for developing the consciousness that is needed. For that reason, articulating this vision may itself be a step toward its achievement. And that is precisely what Obama could do, and what *we must do*, if we want to thaw out the frozen stalemate and get outside the ridiculous process of buying off Israel with airplanes and arms shipments to get them into negotiations that at the moment will go nowhere

Jews and Muslims confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together

By MARC SCHNEIER

New York, New York - For generations, misunderstandings have existed between Jews and Muslims on what the other believes and practices. These misperceptions, as well as social and political factors, have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities.

We are all the children of Abraham and like any sibling relationship it is vital for us both to remember our shared roots and support each other. The Weekend of Twinning is designed to foster and strengthen relationships between Jews and Muslims. This groundbreaking initiative joins together Jews and Muslims in their own communities at mosques and synagogues, as well as Muslim and Jewish students and young leadership groups.

Each year, participants pledge to work on an ongoing basis to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. In some communities, this programme is the beginning of interreligious activities between Muslims and Jews that we hope will continue for generations to come.

The first Weekend of Twinning was held in November 2008 and spearheaded by The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) in cooperation with the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the World Jewish Congress. The twinning programme resulted from a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis hosted by FFEU in New York in 2007. In addition, the Weekend of Twinning has the support of His Majesty, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and it mirrors his vision to promote the moderate voices and cooperation with other faith communities.

In July 2009, FFEU led a Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the United States, co-sponsored by the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America. The imams and rabbis (28 in total) from France, Britain, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and Russia interacted with US political leaders and social advocates, and discussed how to improve interreligious relations in their own communities. The mission concluded with a commitment by the European imams and rabbis to take part in the 2009 Weekend of Twinning in their home countries.

In November 2009, the second annual Weekend of Twinning of Mosques and Synagogues culminated in 100 mosques and 100 synagogues joining together under the theme “Building a Common Agenda” to embrace social issues together as one community. The twinning in Europe was launched in Paris at an event sponsored by the Jewish-

except to proposals that are pure posturing or agreements that cannot possibly work.

—Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor, *Tikkun* and Chair, The Network of Spiritual Progressives RabbiLerner@Tikkun.org

If you want to have these perspectives heard in contemporary debates in Israel and the US, join our Network of Spiritual Progressives, or subscribe to *Tikkun* magazine, or make a tax-deductible contribution to *Tikkun* or the NSP at www.tikkun.org or www.spiritualprogressives.org.

Muslim Friendship Society of France, and co-sponsored by the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF), the Consistoire, the Great Mosque of Paris and the European Jewish Fund.

As a result of the July mission of European imams and rabbis, participation in the 2009 Weekend of Twinning expanded to include twinned congregations from seven European countries — Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Netherlands. In France, where Muslim-Jewish tensions have been especially high, 19 mosques and 19 synagogues twinned with one another, reinforcing the notion that reconciliation between the two faith communities is possible.

This year, throughout November and December, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries on four continents will participate in the Weekend of Twinning. On 31 October, the twinning kicked off with a worldwide virtual twinning event during which participants from around the world heard reports on Jewish-Muslim initiatives underway in various countries.

In further support of our outreach efforts, we are announcing the publication of a new book that I am co-authoring with Imam Shamsi Ali, spiritual leader of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the largest and most prestigious mosque in New York City. We will analyse difficult and controversial passages from the Torah and the Qur’an, and present the voice of moderation in reviewing these sacred texts. The book will be an invaluable resource in advancing Muslim-Jewish relations to communities worldwide.

In the past three years, thousands of Jews and Muslims from California, New York and Toronto, as well as London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and other European cities, have not only visited their respective houses of worship for the first time, but have also studied the Torah and Qur’an together, served meals side-by-side to poor and homeless people, and built meaningful friendships.

The Weekend of Twinning has time and time again shown us that Jews and Muslims can not only live together peacefully as neighbours, but also partner together to build a better community.

* Rabbi Marc Schneier is Vice President of the World Jewish Congress and President of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews).

Source: Common Ground News Service (CGNews), 9 November 2010, www.commongroundnews.org

Picking potatoes part of enticing weekend retreat

By DANIEL NESTLERODE

I left Modesto on Friday evening, near dark. I needed a weekend to escape from both work and life. A recent invitation from some friends to come to the farm to eat play music, and dig potatoes seemed not only novel but downright enticing. I jumped at the chance.

The gathering clouds and my easterly travel made the sunset seem abrupt. In the quickly gathering darkness I started to worry a little about getting lost. I had only been to the farm once, so I was a little worried I would miss one of the many forks in the road. But my memory served me well. I arrived a little after full dark just in time to partake of the evening meal and announce the arrival of the rain.

After dinner we opened the jam. Ken and Meg brought guitars and mandolins; Steven brought his fiddle and a guitar; Lucy brought a fiddle; Richard, one of our hosts, had his guitar, numerous flutes, and harmonicas of almost every key on hand; and Lynn, our other host, got out her tenor banjo.

I had thrown a pair of mandolins in the car before leaving town. I decided not to take a guitar, knowing that Ken and Meg would have theirs on hand, and wanting to use a hybrid mandolin (a mandola strung up with thinner strings and tuned up to EBF#C#) as a vocal accompaniment.

Most everyone in attendance has some familiarity with Celtic music. Richard and Steve are regulars at local Celtic sessions; Ken has played with several Celtic groups around the holidays and at Sonora's Celtic Faire. So that's the direction the evening jam took. Somewhere between the long workday, the furious packing, and the two-hour drive, I spent too much energy to play unfamiliar music long into the night. I bowed out at about 1 in the morning and sought my bed.

Saturday dawned gray and late. Warm, comfortable, cozy, and dry, I was in no hurry to leave the confines of the futon I spent the night on. I could hear the rain on the tin roof and remembered that the neighing of horses (complaining about the weather, I later learned) had actually lulled me to sleep. I grabbed a book and read a few chapters before hearing the purposeful footsteps of my hosts and fellow guests.

After a hearty breakfast (I wondered if this is how farmers eat all the time), we donned our heavy work clothes, garden gloves, hats, and boots. The light rain was not a deterrent to digging potatoes. I learned that it was actually an aide as long as the heavy rain stayed away: no dust, fewer bugs, easy

digging. So we cheerfully commenced to separate the tasty little tubers from the earth.

Lynn showed us how to loosen the soil with a large garden fork, look for the dead potato vines, and dig the potatoes free of the dirt. The work was not difficult, though it required us to be on our hands and knees most of the time.

We knocked out a few rows in about 4 hours before shuffling back to the house for a late afternoon dinner. (Shuffling was all we could manage in boots and jeans weighed down by both water and muddy dirt.) We stripped unabashedly on the front porch and sought warm dry clothes inside. The grungy boots, socks, blue jeans, coats, and hats stayed out on the porch laying on benches and hanging from hooks. It looked as though a troop of Civilian Conservation Corpsmen had dropped the contents of their packs in front of the door hoping someone would take pity and do a little laundry.

Following dinner (leftovers from Friday night and a fresh assortment of late summer vegetables), the instruments came out of hiding and the small valley in the foothills rang

again with the sounds of reels, airs, and an occasional jig.

The rest and the work had served me well. I stayed on top of the changes with a little help and tried to learn a few of the tunes as they went by. Make no mistake, I couldn't play real Celtic music to save my life. But some prompting from Richard and reasonable tempos from Steve kept me in the game. The occasional non-Celtic song from Ken or Meg allowed me to rest a bit in a genre I know much better. So the combination of the two things made the extended Saturday jam a much more rewarding affair.

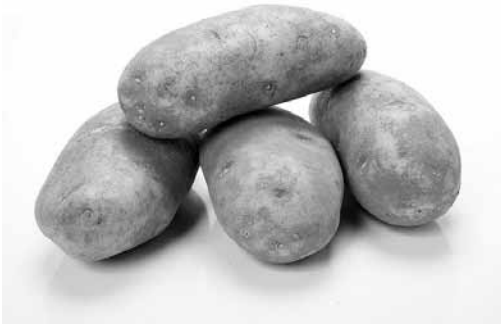

After a supper that consisted entirely of pumpkin and strawberry pie, Lynn announced a musical game. When a letter of the alphabet is announced, players sing a song whose lyrics start with that letter. Points can be awarded to the first singer and anyone who knows the song can join in for points as well. We had a blast with it, singing songs from Broadway shows, the Beatles catalog, the folk tradition, etc.

After the game, we picked our instruments back up and jammed some more. But the day's exertions started to get the better of me, and my concentration waned. After that, my eyes refused to stay open. Finally I took the hint and retired.

Sunday morning. Early. Lucy, another guest, and I are the only ones up. We gingerly climbed back into yesterday's work

clothes, and we are the first ones in the garden. The dirt is soft and cool beneath my hands. It carries the moisture of the past two days and the coolness of last night's cloudless sky. My knees sink a little every time I shift my weight to reach for small golden prizes in the ground.

In a little while the rest of the group will join us, bringing insulated cups full of hot coffee. And we'll finish digging up the potatoes before eating another amazing meal. After that will be the necessary return to reality. But for right now I have my hands in the soil, the sun on my back, and music in my head.

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Poet Salvatore Salerno

Salvatore Salerno was a poet and playwright in the 1980's for the N.C. Visiting Artist Program. He received his M.F.A. from U.N.C. at Greensboro, where he was awarded The Academy of American Poets University Prize. His poetic influences range from the populist genius Walt Whitman to the late Romantic Theodore Roethke. His poems have been published in more than fifty magazines, and his self-published book is *Sunleaf*.

He is retired from having taught drama and English at Davis High School, as well as part-time positions at several community colleges. He is currently president of Stanislaus Audubon Society.

Sad Carnival

Another weekday & the carnival's in town, where admission's free, except for that other price.

The Painted Harpies and Tattooed Man are copasetic, just so long as we don't talk.

I can't avoid Fire-breathing Demagogues & Daredevils on Wheels whose acts come just too close.

The Halls of Mirrors, from which versions of me reflect, alternate between glowing & grotesque.

I'm stopped by hawkers for Magic Booths of Merchandise, food & trinkets gotten on the cheap, packaged—*presto chango!*—

then re-sold dear for legal theft.

Though they eke their lower crust, Cardboard Robots dance below the bar of dignity.

Oh, it is the antidote for fun, to see God's broken Children of the Curb doing their survival tricks.

Taking a wrong turn home, I run a gauntlet of open-air markets.

Canaries sing from cages as their vendors laugh & gnaw on ribs.

Close Enough to Christmas Eve Broken On Fortune's Wheel

In the lees of a frigid day,
beneath a holly wreath
lashed to a light pole,
a man clad in plastic bags
turning still & gray from dusk
sits cross-legged on a curb.
He holds the one word *HELP*
scrawled on a cardboard sign,
and stares at the freezing ground.

From the crowd in the parking-lot,
another man with grayer hair
approaches with a plastic bag
of oranges & bread.

One stretches his arm to the other,
who reaches out with his hand
in that ancient gesture signifying
both nothing & everything
for a night which can only
get darker and colder.

Peace, That Holding Action

Rumors of war and wars
Occupy the minds of the old
While shocking the flesh of the young;
Cain slew Abel, ancient story told
On my hands bleeding black
From today's newspaper page;
A man with a gun, an ape
With a thing in its hand,
Proved John Lennon dead wrong;
The battles on streets, in homes,
Mano a mano, surpass the count
Of soldiers massing on fronts—
Violence, our feverish curse.

Go and bare your teeth to a mirror,
Stare at your beetle-browed kin,
At those incisors and canines
The better to eat life with.
Raise up that grasping hand,
Flex a grip that handles things,
And picture whatever falls down.

This is our crimson spell
For a brew that is boiling,
It's roiling, it's all spilling over
The lip of the cauldron,
So come,
Lend your hand for God's stake,
In whatever you do press down
With mine on the rattling lid—
The better to be scalded than taken
In single combat, or swept away
By the clamor for one more war.

On a morning like the others,
sunlight falls sifts down upon
the crowns of the royally privileged
as equally on the heads of the least.
Potato Joe is burying buckets in a park,
the patch-eyed Pirate is folding up bags,
Rachel is rinsing her hair by the river,
The Old Man's reading his Bible aloud,
Ruth is digging through a bin of trash.
Surviving's their business, as they
cadge and share their daily bread.

Ruth hears a voice against her will,
Joe takes warmth from his bottle,
the Pirate attends to that humming
in his blood after the needle,
Rachel, in her shell of routine,
is strung on cigarettes and ranting,
The Old Man reads, mutters and spits.

They never present well, these others
with their odors and rags—
their very being repels, making us
squirm or curse or shake our heads.

All are weaker than their demons,
none has begged to be born,
none is deemed to be worthy
to tie the laces or touch the hems
of most of the blessedly busy.

In the evening like all others,
rain pours down on the covers
of the tiled roofs of the castles
as equally on cardboard and tarps.
Ruth and Rachel stretch on cots in shelters,
the Pirate on a bench in the park,
The Old Man beneath a concrete bridge,
Joe down the stairwell in an alley.
They deem their luck worthy
if their only achievement is having
endured for the breath for another day.

All are accounted for, except for
a common friend none has seen
all day; hidden beneath trees by a river,
beneath a blanket brown as earth
lies a man whose mother felt
the spear of pain in her side
that made her name him *Jésus*.
The man is hidden who lies alone
sealed in a disturbing dream
from which he can never recover.

Jimmy Buffet and Rush Limbaugh

By JOHN WINTER

My friend Jake is 85, a former WWII bombardier. I've chosen to move to California to assist him. He doesn't need much help, still rides his motor scooter every day, but has mobility problems afoot, so I chose to come be his legs.

Jake listens to Fox news all day, so I'm being exposed to a constant diet of right wing rhetoric, interspersed, sadly, with music like Jimmy Buffet singing about cutting his heel on a pop top walking barefoot down Caroline Street one lazy Fall day in Key West. Just a little too cross-cultural for comfort.

Rush Limbaugh made the point recently that 'nobody listens to Obama anymore.' Finally, I found common ground with Rush Limbaugh. It's not only Obama we're not listening to however, it's that we're not listening to anyone.

There's a mental condition called dissociative disorder that is a symptom of PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My Father taught me how to disassociate by haranguing me for what seemed like hours over the most trivial (but frequent) offenses. Charley Brown tuned out by hearing nothing but 'blah, blah, blah.'

I think our society is suffering from PTSD. We're so bombarded with information, over which most of us have no control, that we've shut down.

Nero fiddled while Rome burned, a classic dissociative behavior. Romans, the city is burning. Grab a hose, a blanket, hell, piss on the fire if need be, but we MUST extinguish the blazes we've started before we're consumed by them.

'They' won't fix it, whichever 'it' you're concerned about, but mostly, as Pogo said, (I miss Pogo!), we is they.

Things happen from the ground up. Plants grow roots before they grow leaves. We've become a society that expects Washington to fix our local problems. The fox is in control of the henhouse.

Our divisiveness and our consumeristic mentality won't be fixed by the fox, or Fox. We have become consumer units. Our votes go to the candidate who hires the best ad agency and copywriters. Our politicians on every level, except perhaps the local, are packaged just like any other product. They are unapproachable and govern us as opposed to governing for us.

We need to loan our power to those whom we can literally look in the eyes.

We need locality in our politics. To re-establish community; co-unity.... Strong communities in all environments, from bacteria to Redwoods, are based on diversity rather than population, each dependant on one another, each a vital part of the fabric.

Instead, we have become dependent on huge corporations producing huge amounts of unsustainable products depending on unsustainable resources. 80 percent of our crops are GMO, and virtually all are engineered to withstand Roundup, the Mutha of insecticides. Without Roundup, our agricultural industry will fail. We import 100,000 container ships of goods from China each year.

United we stand, divided we fall, is an American truism, but only partially true. As the forest stands as an object, it consists of independent, yet interdependent parts. Co-unity is our strength, and, like Samson's hair, we've been shorn of it. We've become afraid of our neighbors, if we know them at all.

Shortly after moving to CA, I decided to make a meringue pie. Needing cream of tartar, since Jake had none, I

decided to meet our neighbors by asking around to borrow some. I knocked on three doors without success, which was not surprising. What was surprising was that none of them invited me in.

Where I grew up, the neighbors would have welcomed me with pies of their own making. We need that attitude back... we need neighbors.

Neighborliness is where we start a new society. Our forms of mass communication may fail, but hanging out over the garden gate or getting together a neighborhood picnic requires nothing but the doing of it.

Community – communication...different forms of the same word. We now have mass communication...an oxymoron...there is no 'co' in mass communication, as the word implies a two-way process.

The important aspect of communication as it relates to the political process is input from the citizen. We should all have immediate and full access to our elected representatives, those who 're-present' our interests. If that isn't possible, then our locally elected representatives should have that ability, and we should make sure they do their job!

One of the major reasons we're not listening anymore is because they're not listening to us. Like the farmer said of his mule after knocking it in the head with a 2x4, "Mules are smart, you just need to get their attention." We need to get the mules (and the elephants) attention.

Taking to the streets doesn't work right now, just look at the demonstrations in Copenhagen and Pittsburg(h) and Seattle. Our police, (OUR) police are now nothing more than domestic military. They drive vehicles that are disguised as automobiles, but in reality are disguised urban tanks. I understand their necessity on some levels, but is anyone asking why they're necessary?

If the government is against the people, then it isn't of, by or for the people. I agree with Glenn Beck and the other mouth-frothers that we need to return to the Constitution so long as "We, the people" are in charge, and not some self-serving sycophantic Mullahs of the military industrial complex that has owned this country since we discovered that coal burned.

As I mentioned, my friend Jake, who is 85, listens to Fox news all day. So does my friend Sharon, who has been a most ardent admirer and supporter, yet we're members of a community, bound by choice and love, history and communication, despite our differences, we have chosen to include each other in our community.

We've sat around each other's tables and shared stories,

cautions. We have taken communion together with coffee as our wine and cake as our wafer.

In an atom, the positive and negative charges must be equal or the atom either collapses (atom bomb), or disintegrates (atom bomb or decay). So can we be, our forces equally opposing (one definition of peace), or equally a definition of tolerance and acceptance; or we can disintegrate...disintegrate; become un together.

We need to be separate. we need to be equal. We need the separation of diversity as much as we need the cooperation of unity, the co-operation of co-unity; that is the definition of community.

Words have many ways of being looked at. Just as words are put together to make sentences, so are words put together to make new words. Take revolution, for instance; revolt, re-volve as in re-evolve.

I propose we re-evolve. I'm not proposing we take to the streets in any other demonstration than peaceful ones, and, more importantly as a way of getting to the county clerk's office to run for office. While voting is important, we need candidates that carry our message, OUR message.

I propose we take to the feet instead. Walk next door with a plate of cookies and a pot of coffee. Take communion with your neighbors. Co-union. Communicate. Listen, not to talk radio, but to each other.

Ask not what you can do for your country, but what you can do for your county.

Grow roots.

Reach the author at winterglas@aol.com

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.

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Making peace through giving is contagious

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

'Tis the season for making Peace on Earth through the love and joy of giving. Not just "seasonal givers," Dallas and Garrad Marsh make peace through giving 365 / 24 / 7.

The couple met at Downey High School in the 60's, where they took one class together – biology. Garrad gets a kick out of pointing out that they "were lab partners to breed fruit flies." They didn't see each other again until after Garrad came home from 7 years as a Navy electronics technician. Upon returning, he attended MJC and UC Berkeley. Meanwhile, Dallas had gone to work for McHenry Bowl - the Marsh family business. Following his graduation from Cal, Garrad went to work at the bowl. Garrad's dad felt he should learn the business from the ground up, so Dallas became his boss. They dated and bowled together for 10 years and married in 1992. In 1986 they teamed up and bought the bowl from Garrad's family.

Garrad, 4th generation Modesto native and current Modesto City Council member, and Dallas each have two children from previous marriages. Giving has been their legacy to their children, extended family, to bowling league members at McHenry Bowl, and to the local and global community.

In 1970, Dallas felt called to help people in need when her brother-in-law, a social services worker, asked her to help a family who lived near the Tuolumne River in a cardboard lean-to. He frequently called on her to help supply seniors at risk with basic living needs.

As a single mom, she and her two children could not give much in the way of money, but together the three began to

adopt families during the holiday season, and her children chose to give up personal gifts and money to help families in need.

"My relationship with Dallas has taught me to give," says Garrad. "It's hard to articulate how good it feels to help others."

"It takes on a life of it's own," they say. "It's not hard to be involved at all."

"It's contagious," Dallas claims. "I get much more reward knowing I have helped people to have a better life [compared to anything] I give away. It's such a good feeling, we're encouraged to continue."

The giving has grown to include Garrad's two adult children, the couple's many grandchildren, extended family members, and now, says Dallas, "We're in a unique position, because we have 2000 regular bowling league members who step up when we announce a need."

Early on Dallas began making Christmas wreaths to raffle. Many others now join her to create wreaths, the raffle has grown to include even more items, and more families are being helped each year with Christmas gifts and food during the holiday season.

During the holidays she and Garrad also donate a room at the bowling center to wrap the gifts from the Soroptimist Community Christmas Tree and a van to transport them from Vintage Fair mall. They also provide toys for the Stanislaus County Foster Family and Crows Landing Hispanic Community Christmas parties.

Over the years the couple has been called upon by Interfaith Ministries to adopt larger families and extend help throughout the year. They have a history of helping folks "settle into a place" with furniture, food, blankets, clothing, a much-needed refrigerator, a washer and dryer, even replacement windows for a house with broken windows.

Along with individual family adoption, the Marsh's have taken on the Community Housing and Shelter Services Transitional House for Recovering Women and Their Children, providing furniture for a living area and 7 bedrooms and stocking the kitchen and linen closets.

They have been named 'Angels of the Year' by Sierra Vista Children's Services, selected as 'Volunteers of the Year' for Community Housing and Shelter Services and awarded the 'Children First Award' from the Center for

Human Services.

Avid travelers, they have participated with Rotary International in three health services missions:

- In 2002 they joined a Rotary group planning to receive 3 shipping containers of medical equipment for a hospital in Sorsogon, Philippines as part of a Rotary 3-H (Health, Hunger, and Humanity) grant that established a medical equipment repair course at two colleges in the Philippines.

- In 2003 the couple accompanied 21 color ultrasound machines to Romania that had been donated by General Electric through Keckler Medical to Rotary.

- In 2009 they joined a group of Rotarians on a polio immunization campaign in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

They also have participated in several Modesto Sister Cities exchanges, one to Vijayawada, India and a second with Modesto Sister City pioneer, Gene Palsgrove, to of Khmelnsky in the Ukraine.

For ten years they have sponsored a Benefit Bowl, which now raises about \$20,000 annually. Recent recipients have been The Redwood Family Center (2010), Stanislaus Literacy Center (2008 -09), and the Salvation Army (2006-07). They also put on a Crab Feed, which last year raised about \$14,000 for the Red Shield Center (2010).

Garrad and Dallas have supported many other local social justice and arts organizations, and hosted many foreign visitors and local performing artists in their home.

ACTION: Do these local "angels" inspire you to lend a hand? If so, they suggest you contact Sierra Vista Child and Family Services at 524-6371, or Community Housing and Shelter Services at 572-2095.



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