

## “10 Days for Peace” taking shape

By JANA and MIKE CHIAVETTA

What was an idea is now shaping into a reality. “10 Days for Peace” is moving along as the coordinating committee continues to meet and put together a wonderful, diverse and thought-provoking list of activities for the 10 days following the 10th Anniversary of the September 11th tragedy. There is still plenty of time for you to have input into this dynamic event. The following “calendar” is shaping up.

On Sunday, September 11th we are planning a solemn, interdenominational commemoration of the 9/11 tragedy. The focus of this event is on peace, understanding, tolerance and reconciliation. The person who has taken the leadership role on this event is the pastor of the Modesto Church of the Brethren, Russ Matteson. He is working to get several leaders of different denominations to contribute to this endeavor. Initial planning of this is calling for a communitywide meeting on Sunday afternoon.

The second community event is being planned for Wednesday or Thursday,

September 14 or 15th. Tentatively scheduled is a “Peace Art Structure” to be constructed at Modesto Junior College. This “structure” is the brainchild of Dan Onorato (who saw a similar structure while vacationing in Italy). We are hoping to coordinate this with either a “Civic Engagement Film” on Peace or the College Poetry Slam. Assisting Dan as the head of this committee is Norma Ovrachim.

Saturday, September 17th is shaping up to be wonderful day of peace and community involvement. In the morning we are hoping to coordinate with Tuolumne River Trust and have a “Community River Clean-up Day.” One of the ideas that have been floated is the possibility of planting a “Peace Grove” on this day. In the evening we are hoping to put together the first LBGT/ Straight Unity Dance for high school-aged students. Both of these endeavors are still seeking committee heads to lead the effort.

The final community activity is being planned for the final day of the “10 Days for Peace” on Wednesday, Sept 21st. by the able team of Shelly Scribner, John Lucas, and

Mikes Killingsworth. Wednesday, Sept. 21st is the International Day of Peace and the plan is for a community “Song-Circle and Peace-Nic (picnic)”. Included in this event would be music, food, peace poetry and (maybe) the commemoration of a community peace pole.

So as one can see, the “10 Days for Peace” is making serious progress! Some other “big” events that are being considered are a community “teach-in” about the current wars that the US is involved in. Stan Cunningham is looking into this worthy pursuit. Peggy Castaneda is investigating the possibility of a “Peace Poster Presentation” that would be displayed at the community Song Circle and Peace-nic. Another idea that has been discussed is to bring in a Peace Activist to come and speak.

The interceding days of the 10 Days will have suggestions for individual commitment and reflection, such as a day of fasting etc. The “final” calendar (hopefully) will be posted in Connections next month. We have other dedicated committee members working on such aspects as publicity (John Frailing). If you are interested in helping and planning this momentous event come to our next meeting. It is on Thursday, April 7th from 6 to 7 PM. (It is prior to the monthly PLC Board meeting for April). The meeting will only be an hour, promise! If you want to volunteer for one of the activities listed above contact us @ [chiavetta.mi@monet.k12.ca.us](mailto:chiavetta.mi@monet.k12.ca.us) or call 527-7530. PEACE!

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## Rich Man/Poor Man Dinner: Saturday, April 16th

By MIKE CHIAVETTA

One of the gravest issues confronting this world is the misdistribution of resources and the huge discrepancy between the haves and have-nots. As certain developed countries get the lion's share of food and resources, the rest live in want. Even in highly advanced countries there exists large pockets of abject poverty, child malnutrition and preventable diseases. These facts are the inspiration behind

a joint effort by the Modesto Peace/Life Center and Project Hope at Modesto High School to address this issue.

A group of dedicated students and adults are planning a “Rich Man/Poor Man” Dinner. The event will be held on Saturday, April 16th at the Modesto Church of the Brethren. The doors will open at 5:30 p.m., with a program

**RICH MAN . . . . . continued p. 2**

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## Rich Man

... from page 1

and dinner at 6:00 p.m.

The gist of the event is to bring to focus the fact that 10 % of the world's population eats at a certain privileged level and the "other" 90% subsist at a much lower level. The central part of the event is a dinner in which 10% of the attendees will be served a gourmet five-course dinner reflecting the caloric intake of an individual in the developed world. The rest of the attendees will receive much less. A video produced by Modesto High students on hunger, both regional and national will also be shown. Central to the event is a "lottery" of student-prepared biographical representations of fictitious individuals worldwide.



This dinner is a benefit for several organizations. The Church of the Brethren and its weekly contribution to feeding the homeless, Modesto High Project Hope and it's commitment to Haitian relief and the Modesto Peace/Life Center youth activities.

The price of this event is \$10, and it will either be the cheapest gourmet meal that you have ever eaten or a very expensive bowl of beans and rice. What will be priceless is the awareness that participants will receive of a world dominated by the Rich Man/Poor Man dichotomy.

For tickets and/or information contact [chiavetta.mi@monet.k12.ca.us](mailto:chiavetta.mi@monet.k12.ca.us) Tickets will also be available at the Modesto Church of the Brethren and other area "peace" churches.

## See the "The Peace Panel Project" at MJC

"The Peace Panel Project: Arts & Graphics of War & Peace" started in the spring of '08 as an attempt to communicate with the local citizenry on issues that seemed important and under discussed and under reported. It is 12 to 15 exhibit panels measuring 2 ft. x 4 ft. with statements and graphics.

Most people know Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, but how many can quote from his "Beyond Vietnam" speech? Some have called this speech, "by far, the most important speech of the 20th Century, not even a close second."

Other panels promote:

Beyond War; awareness of military spending; number of wars we have been in since Vietnam; the description of a year's military spending, - a stack of 1 000 dollar bills 55 miles high! The Chico Peace and Justice Center; Democracy Now!, The Central Asia Institute (Greg Mortensen).

With matching white easels, the Peace Panel Project has promoted discussions, and interested viewers at The Pathway to Peace, The World Peace March, Pastors for Peace, the Pancakes for Peace, and occasionally on a random Sunday afternoon in Chico's downtown City Plaza.

The Peace Panel Project is a registered donor to Pennies For Peace.

See The Peace Panel Project at Modesto Junior College, East Campus Quad, 435 College Ave., Tues., April 5th from 10 AM - 4:30 PM

# 29th Peace Camp is June 24-26

By KEN SCHROEDER

This summer marks the 29th year that peace-minded folks have gathered in the Sierras for Peace Camp.

Come and join us on June 24-26 at Camp Peaceful Pines for stimulating ideas, community and fun for people of all ages. The weekend will offer workshops, hiking, campfire, singing, a talent show, children's activities and delicious meals.

Lenore Montegna from Santa Cruz will present a workshop on Nonviolent Communication (see below) and Deborah Roberts returns to cook up some wonderful food in the dining hall.

At the 6,200-foot elevation in the Stanislaus National Forest near the Clark Fork of the Stanislaus River, Camp Peaceful Pines is located about 25 miles above Pinecrest off Hwy. 108. Surrounded by tall peaks, the camp is set in the forest and has a creek running through it. Sunrise Rock, with views of the river valley, is a short hike from camp.

The camp features kitchen and bathroom facilities, rustic cabins and platform tents and a cabin for those with special needs. Campers share in meal preparation, cleanup, and other work. Families and individuals are welcome. The \$70 fee covers program, food and lodging for the weekend. Young people are \$50. Early registration, before June 6th, entitles registrants to a \$10.00 per person discount. Partial scholarships and day rates are also available.

Registration forms are available at <http://www.stanislaus-connections.org/2011/PCamp2011.pdf> where they can be printed and mailed.

Campers are welcome to arrive any time after 2:00 p.m. on Friday. The camp opens with supper on Friday and closes at noon on Sunday. Directions and other information will be mailed to participants before camp.

Information: Ken Schroeder in Modesto, 209-569-03213.

## What is Nonviolent Communication?

We have all been in situations where misunderstanding occurred. Either we have felt misunderstood or the other person got the wrong impression. What went wrong? We often leave these situations feeling mystified as to what happened. How were we misunderstood? Why was the other person so stubborn? Why couldn't they understand what I was trying to say?

Marshall Rosenberg, PhD., founder of Nonviolent Communication, has spent most of his life trying to understand what makes people communicate in way that is com-

passionate and caring, even under adverse circumstances.

Nonviolent Communication helps us to:

- Identify underlying needs, values, and hopes of any person we are communication with, even those with hard-to-hear messages for us
- Communicate in ways that identify our own feelings, needs and hopes
- Notice the difference between true feelings such as "I feel sad" and feelings missed with interpretations such as "I feel betrayed"
- Notice how we often add interpretations and judgments to what we see or hear and mistake them for the observation.
- Understand what is motivating someone we are in conflict with and learn that understanding them does not mean they are right or that we agree with them
- Make requests that enrich life and create harmony and balance
- Give joyfully and from the heart

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# Support growing for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions for Palestine

By DAN ONORATO

When one looks squarely at the prospects for a just and secure peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's easy to feel disheartened. For months the two sides have not talked with each other, at least not officially. And the actions of the most important broker for peace, President Obama, belie his stated goals. But despite major setbacks in recent history I think there are grounds for hope. First, a brief review of the last three years:

- In December 2008 Israel invaded Gaza, killing nearly 1400 Palestinians and injuring over 5000. Israel had 14 dead. In January 2009 the UN Security Council, in Resolution 1860, called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and a full Israeli withdrawal. Of the Council's 15 members, 14 voted yes. The U.S. abstained.

- In October 2009 the UN's Human Rights Council voted overwhelmingly to endorse the recommendations of the Goldstone Report. That report, authored by the internationally respected South African Justice Richard Goldstone, criticized both Israel and Hamas (the Palestinian ruling group in Gaza) for serious human rights violations and war crimes in Gaza. It also called on both the Israelis and the Palestinians to carry out their own open and honest investigations into the report's documented allegations. The following month the U.S. House of Representatives, with only 36 dissenting voices, voted to condemn the Goldstone Report as biased. The President didn't take issue with their hasty action.

- In May 2010 Israeli commandos attacked a flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, killing eight people on one boat. The vast majority of the international community condemned Israel for its violations of international law, but President Obama, refusing to join the condemnation, merely expressed his "concern and regret," and suggested the blockade be loosened.

- In February 2011 the UN Security Council voted on a Palestinian-backed resolution that condemned Israel's settlement policy as illegal and called for an immediate halt to further expansions. Since September 2010 peace talks had been suspended over Israel's refusal to extend its moratorium on such construction. Fourteen voted in favor. Despite its long-standing objection to Israel's continued annexation of Palestinian land for settlements, the U.S. vetoed the measure.

Actions speak louder than words, so these actions by the same President so immensely popular among Arabs when he spoke in Cairo in early 2009 have eroded trust in Obama's and America's moral leadership in the Middle East. Obama's lack of bold, principled leadership and a growing disillusionment over the widening chasm between Israel and the Palestinians can well lead people to conclude that resolving the conflict is hopeless. But history sometimes surprises us. Three current changes, I think, are seeds of hope. I'll mention the first two and focus on the third.

The first is the outbreak of democratic aspirations in the Arab world. It's too early to tell how democratic Egypt's newly emerging government will be, but there's growing belief that Egypt, while it will continue to honor its peace treaty

with Israel, will open its border to Gaza and stop complying with Israel's blockade. In addition, as popular movements in several Arab states keep organizing for democratic rights, Israel's oppressive occupation and violations of Palestinians' human rights will become more patently contradictory, and Arabs will increase their pressure for a just resolution.

A second cause for hope is General Petraeus's reassessment, stated a year ago, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was fomenting anti-American sentiment because the Arab world is angry with U.S. favoritism towards Israel. "Enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors," Petraeus said, "present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests" in the region. As official U.S. reactions to events in the last year show, it will take time for this clear-eyed pragmatism to counter the incessant pressure on Congress from the pro-Israel lobbies, but change is in the wind.

The third major reason for hope is the growing movement that calls for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) of Israeli products, cultural activities, and professional exchanges. Inspired by the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, BDS was initiated by a coalition of 170 Palestinian organizations in 2005, a year after the international court of justice at the Hague found Israel's wall and colonies built on occupied Palestinian territory illegal. The movement has three goals: end Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied since 1967; end racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel; and recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194. Supported by Nobel Laureates Desmond Tutu and Mairead McGuire, the movement is now international, involving churches, universities, trade unions, and businesses.

In this country, regional bodies within the Presbyterian and United Methodist Church have taken the lead in publicly endorsing the boycott, withdrawing stock in companies like Caterpillar that sell Israel equipment that maintains the occupation. Other church groups have joined. In universities from Hampshire College in the East to UC Berkeley and UC San Diego in the West, students have led efforts to divest. In Europe Britain's largest trade union (UNITE) passed a resolution to boycott Israeli companies, two of Italy's biggest supermarket chains suspended sales of Israeli settlement produce, and a Swedish pension giant divested from Elbit because it operates a surveillance system for the West Bank security barrier.

Currently, Berkeley-based Jewish Voice for Peace is promoting a nation-wide campaign to get TIAA-CREF, a large investment firm for teachers, to divest from companies complicit in Israel's occupation, like Motorola that provides surveillance systems and Northrop Grumman that sells Israel parts of Apache helicopters and F-1 aircraft.

Endorsements of BDS by cultural figures are also growing. Among them are art critic John Berger, writers Naomi Klein, Iain Banks, and Alice Walker, and musicians Pete Seeger and Roger Waters (Pink Floyd). In a written statement in February, Waters explained his decision: "Where governments refuse to

act, people must, with whatever peaceful means are at their disposal. ... My conviction is born in the idea that all people deserve basic human rights. My position is not anti-Semitic. This is not an attack on the people of Israel ... Artists were right to refuse to play in South Africa's Sun City resort until apartheid fell and whites and blacks enjoyed equal rights. And we are right to refuse to play in Israel until the day comes—and it surely will come—when the Wall of occupation falls and Palestinians live alongside Israelis in the peace, freedom justice and dignity that they all deserve."

March 30th, Palestinian Land Day, marked the third annual global BDS Day of Action. The day commemorates a major collective protest in 1976 by Palestinian citizens of Israel against Israel's expropriation of Palestinian land. Today in 2011 the day is intended to stimulate actions that will help create the conditions leading to a just and lasting peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. If we in the peace community

want to be a part of this effort, a useful action would be learning more so that we can act with conviction. Here's a suggestion: visit [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org) and click FAQs to learn more about

BDS. Peace isn't just the culminating dramatic events we read about in the headlines. Peace builds "stone by stone," John McCutcheon sings, as countless people of conscience add their little acts of caring, commitment, and courage to a cause they feel is right. Hope starts here and now. Please act.

**ACTION:** Besides the US Campaign to end the Israeli Occupation (website just mentioned), another source of information on the BDS movement is at <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>. For information on the excellent work of Jewish Voice for Peace, see [www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org)



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# Homemade sourdough starter

By JENIFER WEST

A friend loaned me *52 Loaves: One Man's Relentless Pursuit of Truth, Meaning and a Perfect Crust* by William Alexander. The author, despite having no particular expertise in baking, let alone agriculture, embarks on a year-long quest to bake the perfect loaf of peasant bread – and starts by growing the wheat. A wonderful, very inspirational book!

I have tried, without great success, to bake “artisan bread” with homemade starter. But that was before I read the book. As it happens, wild yeast, and therefore the character of sourdough bread made from it, varies from place to place. (Which explains why real sourdough bread from San Francisco is so good!) After reading the book, I was itching to get my hands on some unwashed apples – the skins are loaded with local yeast (grapes are, too). I visited an apple farmer, who was polite, if somewhat nonplussed, to learn that I didn't care if the apples were sweet – I just needed them straight from the tree. This was in the middle of January, long past apple harvest time. But he allowed me to tromp around in his orchard, even pointing me to some stragglers he thought might be suitable.

I found the idea of sourdough intriguing, for a variety of reasons. Of course, there's the fact that it's an ancient form of leavening (the Egyptians used it, starting around 1500 BCE). The idea of using naturally occurring leavening, the kind that's been in use for thousands of years, and doesn't need refrigeration (although I do refrigerate mine), was definitely part of the romance. Some strains came across the Plains in covered wagons. And that's to say nothing of the colorful history it's enjoyed here on the West Coast – during the Gold Rush, prospectors were known as “sourdoughs.” If it really is true that wild yeast varies, I wondered if my bread might any be different from that made in San Francisco, or elsewhere. But the problem I've had with other homemade sourdough starters was that they didn't seem to provide much leavening. In fact, some recipes warn that it takes weeks or months before the starter reaches full power. I proceeded therefore, with enthusiasm and skepticism in equal measure. But the latter turned out to be unfounded.

I brought my unwashed apples home and, per the instructions in the book, chopped them up. The book doesn't indicate whether the apples should be washed, but I made the assumption that washing them could remove the yeast I was trying to capture, and so elected not to. But it definitely went against the grain – cutting anything unwashed violates every food service rule in the book. So I gritted my teeth and cut off the obviously dirty parts, then poured in the required measure of



water. Three days later, the apple-water was slightly foamy and smelled right, so I strained it and added flour. Then it needed to be stirred. Vigorously, several times a day.

Two days later, my starter was ready. So I mixed the ingredients, and kneaded it per the instructions. Then, a 4- or 5- hour proof. That's one of the keys to good flavor – a long, cool rise, while the enzymes and yeast work, unlocking the flavors. Shape, let rise again, bake and, viola – homemade sourdough bread!

I was pretty impressed by the yeast in the starter. Unlike the insipid starters I've made before, this had the thick, stringy consistency of fairly wet bread dough, without the addition of any “store-bought” yeast. In fact, the “Peasant Bread” recipe in Mr. Alexander's book calls for a full two teaspoons of salt, which controls yeast, for a single loaf of bread. I thought this way too much, and so only used about a teaspoon. Then I saw how vigorously the yeast was working, and corrected my mistake.

I've taken some liberties in the baking, too: I've adjusted the temperature down from 500 to 475 (we've just been through some oven adventures, and I wasn't in a big hurry to see the repairman again). And most recipes call for steam: a cast iron skillet is heated as the oven preheats, with a cup of boiling water poured into it when the bread is put in to bake. Instead, I'm trying something I found online – the bread goes onto the baking pan (or, preferably, preheated pizza stone), and a lasagna pan or similar container is inverted over it. This traps the steam, eliminating the need for water.

A final liberty I found necessary: There seemed to be some stray “bug” in the starter that was causing slight gastric distress. Most folks probably wouldn't have noticed, but I happen to be unusually sensitive to that sort of thing.

Fortunately, there is a natural remedy that kills “bad bugs” without bothering the good ones. I've used it many times to combat food poisoning, and found it absolutely essential when visiting Mexico. This miracle cure is Grapefruit Seed Extract, in the liquid form. (Check your favorite health food store, or go online.) Mixed into water or juice, it can provide fast relief from the symptoms of food poisoning. So I crossed my fingers and mixed a typical dose into my starter. An admittedly unusual use of this miracle, which is typically consumed directly in water or juice. But it worked beautifully!

Now all that remains is to keep the starter vigorous, which means reasonably frequent feedings. We may not be part of Pharaoh's court, but we can still enjoy bread with a long and interesting history!

[WWW.PEACELIFECENTER.ORG](http://WWW.PEACELIFECENTER.ORG)



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

By Lillian Vallee

## 72. Trickle Down Education

On a recent Saturday morning, volunteers at the Merced National Wildlife planted blackberry, coyote bush, and wild rose while Lesser Sandhill cranes caught the thermals in preparation for the long flight back to the northern reaches of the continent. About a third of the volunteers were affiliated with Modesto Junior College; a substantial number of volunteer hours contributed to restoration efforts at our local national wildlife refuges during the last decade and a half have been contributed by hardworking MJC students, and often their family members, sometimes four generations of them, who give up their Saturday mornings to enhance wildlife habitat. This time we were joined by many high school students and children from Merced and Stanislaus counties; someone counted seventy people altogether, an impressive turnout, and the gracious U.S. Fish & Wildlife staff provided everyone with lunch, as they always do.

We had not been working ten minutes when I overheard one high school student tell her mom that she was planning to study Italian at Modesto Junior College. "Sorry, honey," her mom said, but "German and Italian are two programs that got cut." The mother tried to soften her daughter's disappointment by saying that she would buy books and disks and might be able to teach her daughter herself. The conversation caught my attention because the person teaching Italian at MJC is a multilingual colleague who also teaches German. She herself is from Austria, but she has spent years studying Italian to pass stringent exams in Italy to obtain her certification. I can imagine this conversation being repeated an infinite number of times as high school students head to MJC for programs that will no longer be there, in foreign languages, journalism, communication, architecture, engineering, arts, etc.

I am not blaming administrators for a war economy siphoning resources from our collective lives, nor am I demonizing them. They are not responsible for everything. But I am holding them (and a quiescent Board of Trustees) responsible for the narrowness of their vision. The beauty and transformative power of teaching at MJC has always been located in the interdisciplinary, collaborative culture of the college, in its fabric of community, and its convivial cross-pollination. That vision was a shared vision, broad enough to encourage creative experimentation, expression and esprit de corps.

When an MJC colloquium galvanized the Central Valley cultural scene in 1993 by presenting lectures by California luminaries Gerald Haslam, Malcolm Margolin, James Houston, and Mas Masumoto, among others, historian Kevin Starr hailed the moment as one in which the Central Valley began to "assemble the materials of its identity." Many divisions contributed to the success of the series. When Ken White wrote a play about the Jamestown massacre, Jim Johnson galvanized the drama department to test the merits of the play and to collect the evaluative comments of the audience. I routinely take English composition students to the Great Valley Museum for a taste of place-based pedagogy and to the Art Gallery (most recently for Doug Smith's photography exhibit of abandoned houses and Robert Stevens "50,000 Words" exhibit) for students to practice inferential thinking. Forays to the refuges, museums, galleries, and agricultural units explode the narrow walls of the classroom to introduce thought-provoking experiences and learning opportunities. The content of a class is the least of what students learn at a college. And the most important components of their education will rarely be measured in completion rates or standardized student learning outcomes.

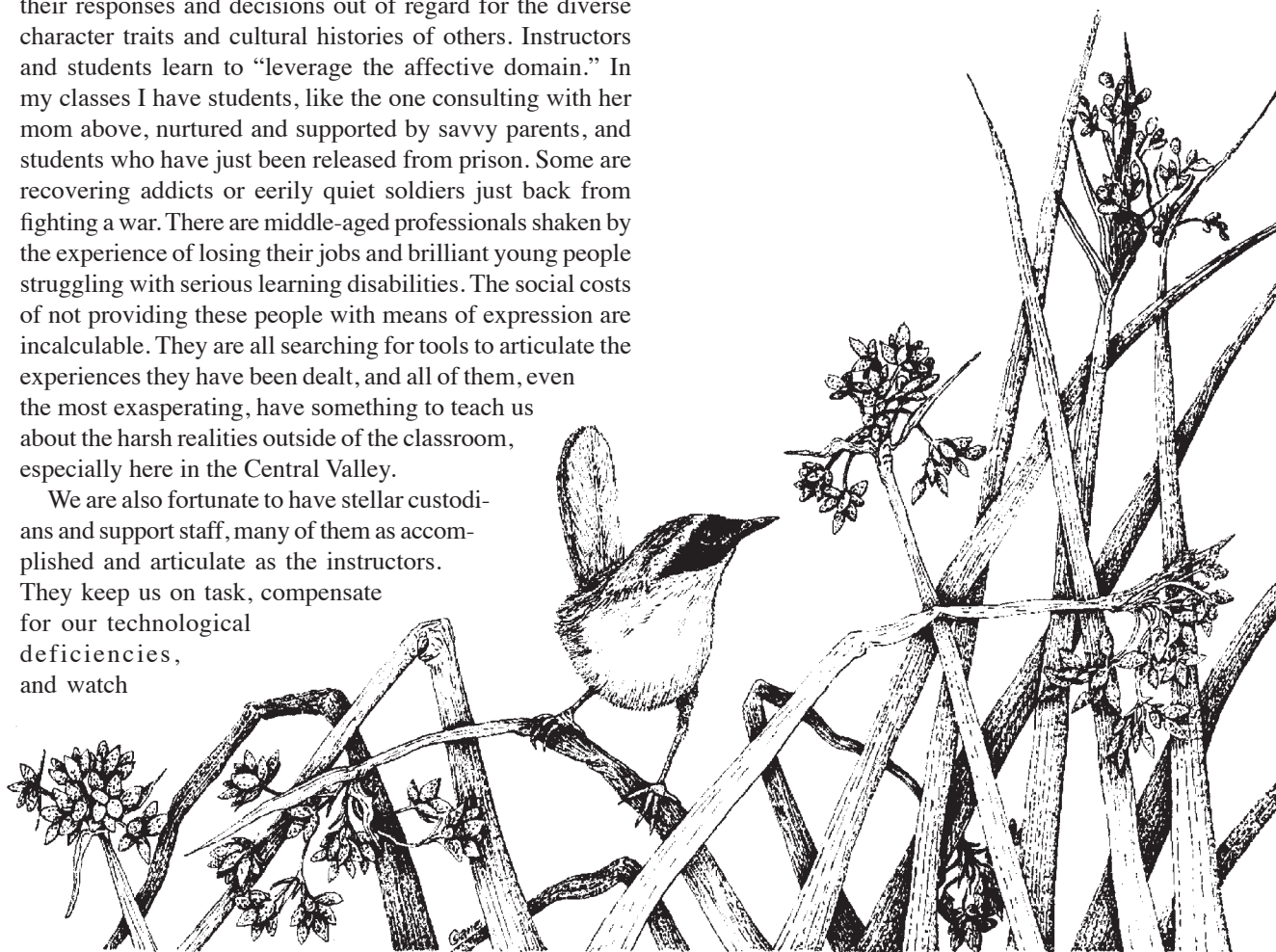
Critical to student success is a sense of belonging to a vibrant, but caring, academic community. Within that community students exercise their intelligence and learn to temper their responses and decisions out of regard for the diverse character traits and cultural histories of others. Instructors and students learn to "leverage the affective domain." In my classes I have students, like the one consulting with her mom above, nurtured and supported by savvy parents, and students who have just been released from prison. Some are recovering addicts or eerily quiet soldiers just back from fighting a war. There are middle-aged professionals shaken by the experience of losing their jobs and brilliant young people struggling with serious learning disabilities. The social costs of not providing these people with means of expression are incalculable. They are all searching for tools to articulate the experiences they have been dealt, and all of them, even the most exasperating, have something to teach us about the harsh realities outside of the classroom, especially here in the Central Valley.

We are also fortunate to have stellar custodians and support staff, many of them as accomplished and articulate as the instructors. They keep us on task, compensate for our technological deficiencies, and watch

out for our safety. As teachers, we spend our entire lives learning how to respond to the human beings in our institutions in highly calibrated ways, with respect for their humanity and wholeness. This is why good teaching is an art that we learn gradually, over decades. And we expect our administrators to act in the same way: to demonstrate creativity and a high degree of calibration in response to challenges and crises. We don't expect them to act like Captain Ahab, who sacrifices a limb (and eventually almost his entire crew) in pursuit of the white whale that hauls him down to its pit.

There can be no lasting reform without consensual shaping by faculty and staff. A key to buy-in, as every successful leader in an innovative educational institution knows, is a tremendous amount of communication and flexibility. Few will contribute quality work when forced to carry out an imposed agenda. Teachers need to be empowered to help design and create a true learning community.

The human spirit is not guided by raw numbers as much as by a sacred geometry, one in which an administrator can thrive even if she refuses a pay raise. I have heard countless instructors and staff members testify they are willing to give something up for the good of all. Wouldn't something really earthshaking begin to happen if the sacrifice began at the top and trickled down?



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# America is NOT broke

By MICHAEL MOORE

*Delivered in Madison, Wisconsin on Saturday, March 5th, 2011*

Contrary to what those in power would like you to believe so that you'll give up your pension, cut your wages, and settle for the life your great-grandparents had, America is not broke. Not by a long shot. The country is awash in wealth and cash. It's just that it's not in your hands. It has been transferred, in the greatest heist in history, from the workers and consumers to the banks and the portfolios of the uber-rich.

**Today just 400 Americans have the same wealth as half of all Americans combined.\***

Let me say that again. 400 obscenely rich people, most of whom benefited in some way from the multi-trillion dollar taxpayer "bailout" of 2008, now have as much loot, stock and property as the assets of 155 million Americans combined. If you can't bring yourself to call that a financial coup d'etat, then you are simply not being honest about what you know in your heart to be true.

And I can see why. For us to admit that we have let a small group of men abscond with and hoard the bulk of the wealth that runs our economy, would mean that we'd have to accept the humiliating acknowledgment that we have indeed surrendered our precious Democracy to the moneyed elite. Wall Street, the banks and the Fortune 500 now run this Republic — and, until this past month, the rest of us have felt completely helpless, unable to find a way to do anything about it.

I have nothing more than a high school degree. But back when I was in school, every student had to take one semester of economics in order to graduate. And here's what I learned: Money doesn't grow on trees. It grows when we make things. It grows when we have good jobs with good wages that we use to buy the things we need and thus create more jobs. It grows when we provide an outstanding educational system that then grows a new generation of inventors, entrepreneurs, artists, scientists and thinkers who come up with the next great idea for the planet. And that new idea creates new jobs and that creates revenue for the state. But if those who have the most money don't pay their fair share of taxes, the state can't function. The schools can't produce the best and the brightest who will go on to create those jobs. If the wealthy get to keep most of their money, we have seen what they will do with it: recklessly gamble it on crazy Wall Street schemes and crash our economy. The crash they created cost us millions of jobs. That too caused a reduction in tax revenue. Everyone ended up suffering because of what the rich did.

The nation is not broke, my friends. Wisconsin is not broke. Saying that the country is broke is repeating a Big Lie. It's one of the three biggest lies of the decade: 1) America is broke, 2) Iraq has WMD, and 3) The Packers can't win the Super Bowl without Brett Favre.

The truth is, there's lots of money to go around. LOTS. It's just that those in charge have diverted that wealth into a deep well that sits on their well-guarded estates. They know they have committed crimes to make this happen and they know that someday you may want to see some of that money that used to be yours. So they have bought and paid for hundreds of politicians across the country to do their bidding for them. But just in case that doesn't work, they've got their gated communities, and the luxury jet is always fully fueled, the engines running, waiting for that day they hope never comes. To help prevent that day when the people demand their country back, the wealthy have done two very smart things:

1. They control the message. By owning most of the media they have expertly convinced many Americans of few means to buy their version of the American Dream and to vote for their politicians. Their version of the Dream says that you, too, might be rich some day — this is America, where anything can happen if you just apply yourself! They have conveniently provided you with believable examples to show you how a poor boy can become a rich man, how the child of a single mother in Hawaii can become president, how a guy with a high school education can become a successful filmmaker. They will play these stories for you over and over again all day long so that the last thing you will want to do is upset the apple cart — because you — yes, you, too! — might be rich/president/an Oscar-winner some day! The message is clear: keep your head down, your nose to the grindstone, don't rock the boat and be sure to vote for the party that protects the rich man that you might be some day.

2. They have created a poison pill that they know you will never want to take. It is their version of mutually assured destruction. And when they threatened to release this weapon of mass economic annihilation in September of 2008, we blinked. As the economy and the stock market went into a tailspin, and the banks were caught conducting a worldwide Ponzi scheme, Wall Street issued this threat: Either hand over trillions of dollars from the American taxpayers or we will crash this economy straight into the ground. Fork it over or it's Goodbye savings accounts. Goodbye pensions. Goodbye United States Treasury. Goodbye jobs and homes and future. It was friggin' awesome and it scared the shit out of everyone. "Here! Take our money! We don't care. We'll even print more for you! Just take it! But, please, leave our lives alone, PLEASE!"

The executives in the board rooms and hedge funds could not contain their laughter, their glee, and within three months they were writing each other huge bonus checks and marveling at how perfectly they had played a nation full of suckers. Millions lost their jobs anyway, and millions lost their homes. But there was no revolt (see #1).

Until now. On Wisconsin! Never has a Michigander been more happy to share a big, great lake with you! You have aroused the sleeping giant known as the working people of the United States of America. Right now the earth is shaking and the ground is shifting under the feet of those who are in charge. Your message has inspired people in all 50 states and that message is: WE HAVE HAD IT! We reject anyone who

tells us America is broke and broken. It's just the opposite! We are rich with talent and ideas and hard work and, yes, love. Love and compassion toward those who have, through no fault of their own, ended up as the least among us. But they still crave what we all crave: Our country back! Our democracy back! Our good name back! The United States of America. NOT the Corporate States of America. The United States of America!

So how do we make this happen? Well, we do it with a little bit of Egypt here, a little bit of Madison there. And let us pause for a moment and remember that it was a poor man with a fruit stand in Tunisia who gave his life so that the world might focus its attention on how a government run by billionaires for billionaires is an affront to freedom and morality and humanity.

Thank you, Wisconsin. You have made people realize this was our last best chance to grab the final thread of what was left of who we are as Americans. For three weeks you have stood in the cold, slept on the floor, skipped out of town to Illinois — whatever it took, you have done it, and one thing is for certain: Madison is only the beginning. The smug rich have overplayed their hand. They couldn't have just been content with the money they raided from the treasury. They couldn't be satiated by simply removing millions of jobs and shipping them overseas to exploit the poor elsewhere. No, they had to have more — something more than all the riches in the world. They had to have our soul. They had to strip us of our dignity. They had to shut us up and shut us down so that we could not even sit at a table with them and bargain about simple things like classroom size or bulletproof vests

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California is not broke either. Our state's economy is the eighth largest in the world.

for everyone on the police force or letting a pilot just get a few extra hours sleep so he or she can do their job — their \$19,000 a year job. That's how much some rookie pilots on commuter airlines make, maybe even the rookie pilot who flew me here to Madison today. He told me he's stopped hoping for a pay increase. All he's asking for now is enough down time so that he doesn't have to sleep in his car between shifts at O'Hare airport. That's how despicably low we have sunk! The wealthy couldn't be content with just paying this man \$19,000 a year. They had to take away his sleep. They had to demean him and dehumanize him and rub his face in it. After all, he's just another slob, isn't he?

And that, my friends, is Corporate America's fatal mistake. But trying to destroy us they have given birth to a movement — a movement that is becoming a massive, nonviolent revolt across the country. We all knew there had to be a breaking point some day, and that point is upon us. Many people in the media don't understand this. They say they were caught off guard about Egypt, never saw it coming. Now they act surprised and flummoxed about why so many hundreds of thousands have come to Madison over the last three weeks during brutal winter weather. "Why are they all standing out there in the cold?" I mean, there was that election in November and that was supposed to be that!

"There's something happening here, and you don't know what it is, do you ...?"

America ain't broke! The only thing that's broke is the moral compass of the rulers. And we aim to fix that compass and steer the ship ourselves from now on. Never forget, as long as that Constitution of ours still stands, it's one person, one vote, and it's the thing the rich hate most about America — because even though they seem to hold all the money and all the cards, they begrudgingly know this one unshakeable basic fact: There are more of us than there are of them!

Madison, do not retreat. We are with you. We will win together.

\*See [http://www.alternet.org/economy/149918/9\\_pictures\\_that\\_expose\\_this\\_country%27s\\_obscene\\_division\\_of\\_wealth/](http://www.alternet.org/economy/149918/9_pictures_that_expose_this_country%27s_obscene_division_of_wealth/)

Ed. Note: California is not broke either. Our state's economy is the eighth largest in the world. Yet, all of our public service agencies, from state parks to your local school districts, do not have enough money to run and can only be saved by cutting their budgets thereby destroying much of the very services they are supposed to provide. What is wrong with this picture?



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## Assault on collective bargaining illegal, says international labor rights group

By JEANNE MIRER and MARJORIE COHN, *truthout* | News Analysis

The International Commission for Labor Rights (ICLR) sent a notice to the Wisconsin Legislature, explaining that its attempt to strip collective bargaining rights from public workers is illegal.

Anyone who has watched the events unfolding in Wisconsin and other states that are trying to remove collective bargaining rights from public workers has heard people protesting the loss of their "rights." (For more on the record turnout, see <http://www.truth-out.org/assault-collective-bargaining-illegal-says-international-labor-rights-group68423>) The ICLR explained to the legislature exactly what these rights are and why trying to take them away is illegal.

The ICLR is a New York-based non-governmental organization that coordinates a pro bono network of labor lawyers and experts throughout the world. It investigates labor rights violations and issues reports and amicus briefs on issues of labor law.

The ICLR identified the right of "freedom of association" as a fundamental right and affirmed that the right to collective bargaining is an essential element of freedom of association. These rights, which have been recognized worldwide, provide a brake on unchecked corporate or state power.

In 1935, when Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the NLRA, or the Wagner Act), it recognized the direct relationship between the inequality of bargaining power of workers and corporations and the recurrent business depressions. That is, by depressing wage rates and the purchasing power of wage earners, the economy fell into depression. The law therefore recognized as policy of the United States the encouragement of collective bargaining.

While the NLRA covered US employees in private employment, the law protecting collective bargaining in both the public and private sectors has developed since 1935 to cover all workers "without distinction."

The opening paragraph of the ICLR statement reads:

As workers in the thousands and hundreds of thousands in Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio and around the country demonstrate to protect the right of public sector workers to

collective bargaining, the political battle has overshadowed any reference to the legal rights to collective bargaining. The political battle to prevent the loss of collective bargaining is reinforced by the fact that stripping any collective bargaining rights is blatantly illegal. Courts and agencies around the world have uniformly held the right of collective bargaining in the public sector is an essential element of the right of Freedom of Association, which is a fundamental right under both International law and the United States Constitution.

The ICLR statement summarizes the development of this law from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through the International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions on freedom of association (that is, the right to form and join unions) and collective bargaining. It cites court cases from the United States and around the world. All embrace freedom of association as a fundamental right and recognize the right to collective bargaining as an essential element of freedom of association.

Some anti-union voices argue that since federal employees presently do not have the right to bargain collectively, neither should state workers. In fact, the argument should go the other way. The law cited in the ICLR statement means that denying federal employees collective bargaining rights - which they have had over the years when presidents have recognized them by executive order - is just as illegal as denying collective bargaining rights to state public employees. President Obama should take this opportunity to reinstate the rights of federal employees to collective bargaining.

Source URL: <http://www.truth-out.org/assault-collective-bargaining-illegal-says-international-labor-rights-group68423>





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## In defense of NPR

**BILL MOYERS and Michael WINSHIP | truthout Op-Ed**

Come on now: let's take a breath and put this National Public Radio (NPR) fracas into perspective.

Just as public radio struggles against yet another assault from its longtime nemesis - the right-wing machine that would thrill if our sole sources of information were Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and ads paid for by the Koch Brothers - it walks into a trap perpetrated by one of the sleaziest operatives ever to climb out of a sewer.

First, in the interest of full disclosure: While not presently committing journalism on public television, the two of us have been colleagues on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) for almost 40 years (although never for NPR). We've lived through every one of the fierce and often unscrupulous efforts by the right to shut down both public television and radio. Our work has sometimes been the explicit bull's eye on the dartboard as conservative ideologues sought to extinguish the independent reporting and analysis they find so threatening to their phobic worldview.

We have come to believe, as so many others have, that only the creation of a substantial trust fund for public media will free it from the whims and biases of the politicians, including Democratic politicians (yes, after one of our documentaries tracking President Clinton's scandalous fundraising in the mid-1990's, the knives were sharpened on the other side of the aisle).

Richard Nixon was the first to try to shut down public broadcasting, strangling and diverting funding, attacking alleged bias and even placing public broadcasters Sander Vanocur and Robert MacNeil on his legendary enemies list. Nixon didn't succeed, and, ironically, his downfall was brought about in part by public television's nighttime rebroadcasts of the Senate Watergate hearings, exposing his crimes and misdemeanors to a wider, primetime audience.

Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich tried to gut public broadcasting, too, and the George W. Bush White House planted partisan operatives at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in an attempt to challenge journalists who didn't hew to the party line.

But what's happening now is the worst yet. Just as Republicans again clamor for the elimination of government funding and public broadcasting once more fights for life, it steps on its own oxygen line. The details are well-known: how NPR's development chief Ron Schiller stupidly fell into a sting perpetrated by an organization run by the young conservative hit man James O'Keefe, a product of that grimy underworld of ideologically based harassment which feeds

the right's slime machine. Posing as members of a phony Muslim group, O'Keefe's agents provocateur offered NPR a check for \$5 million - an offer that was rejected.

But Schiller couldn't leave it there. Unaware that he was speaking into a hidden camera and microphone, and violating everything we're told from childhood about not talking to strangers, he allowed the two co-conspirators to goad him into a loquacious display of personal opinions, including his belief that Tea Partiers are racist and cult-like. As the record shows, more than once, he said he had taken off his "NPR hat" and was representing himself as no one other than who he is. His convictions, their expression so grossly ill-advised in this instance, are his own.

Schiller is a fundraiser, not a news director. NPR keeps a high, thick firewall between its successful development office and its superb news division. The "separation of church and state" - the classic division of editorial and finance - has been one of the glories of public radio as it has won a large and respectful audience as the place on the radio spectrum that is free of commercials and commercial values.

If you would like to see how this integrity is upheld, go to the NPR web site and pull up any of its reporting since 2009 on the Tea Party movement. Read the transcripts or listen to its coverage - you will find it impartial and professional, a full representation of various points of view, pro and con. Further, examine how, over the past few days, NPR has covered the O'Keefe/Schiller contretemps and made no attempt to cover up or ignore its own failings and responsibilities.

Then reverse the situation and contemplate how, say, Fox News would handle a similar incident if it were the target of a sting. Would its coverage be as "fair and balanced" as NPR's? Would Fox apologize or punish an outspoken employee if he or she demeaned liberals? Don't kid yourself. A raise and promotion would be more likely. Think of the fortune Glenn Beck has made on Fox spewing bile and lies about progressives and their "conspiracies."

And oh yes, something else: remember what Fox News chief Roger Ailes said about NPR executives after they fired Fox contributor Juan Williams? "They are, of course, Nazis," Ailes told an interviewer. "They have a kind of Nazi attitude. They are the left wing of Nazism. These guys don't want any other point of view." When the Anti-Defamation League objected to the characterization, Ailes apologized but then described NPR as "nasty, inflexible" bigots.

Double standard? You bet. A fundraiser for NPR is axed for his own personal bias and unprofessionalism, but Ailes gets

away scot-free, still running a news division that is constantly pumping arsenic into democracy's drinking water while he slanders public radio as equal to the monsters and murderers of the Third Reich.

Sure, public broadcasting has made its share of mistakes, and there have been times when we who practice our craft under its aegis have been less than stalwart in taking a stand and speaking truth to power. We haven't always served well our original mandate to be "a forum for debate and controversy," or to provide "a voice for groups in the community that may be otherwise unheard," or helped our viewers and listeners "see America whole, in all its diversity." But for all its flaws, consider an America without public media. Consider a society where the distortions and dissembling would go unchallenged, where fact-based reporting is eliminated, and where the field is abandoned to the likes of O'Keefe, whose "journalism" relies on lying and deceit.

We agree with Joel Meares, who, writing for the Columbia Journalism Review, expressed the wish that NPR had stood up for itself and released a statement close to the following: "Ron Schiller was a fundraiser who no longer works for us. He had nothing to do with our editorial decision making process. And, frankly, our editorial integrity speaks for itself. We've got reporters stationed all over the world, we've won all sorts of prizes, we've got an ombudsman who is committed to examining our editorial operations. If you think our reporting is tainted, or unreliable, that's your opinion, and you're free to express it. And to look for the evidence. But we will not be intimidated by the elaborate undercover hackwork of vindictive political point-scorers who are determined to see NPR fail."

That's our cue. Come on, people: Speak up!


Source URL: <http://www.truth-out.org/in-defense-npr68389>



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## Dawn

When I arise, I greet the day,  
 Though there was a time it was not this way.  
 Not so very long ago, the rising sun was not my friend.  
 With each new dawn, I knew again, the nightmare that would not end.  
 Yet, as the days washed over me,  
 I learned to accept the life ahead of me.  
 I came to know, it was in my power,  
 To make the most of every hour.  
 And so it is when I arise,  
 I greet the day with wiser eyes.

## Bones

Bones  
 Bovine bones  
 Ghostly white  
 Scattered all around.  
 Bones  
 Backbones  
 Strong support  
 Lying on the ground.  
 Bones  
 Brittle bones  
 Left unburied  
 All alone.  
 Bones  
 Broken bones  
 Things unspoken  
 And unknown.

## An Old Jacket

An old army jacket tucked away  
 Discovered one wet and cloudy day  
 Memories rain down - tissue paper falls away.  
 Young men heading off to war,  
 Sailors taking to the sea,  
 Death and mayhem and misery.  
 Safe return to loving arms  
 Peace and family-  
 All life's charms.  
 Youth and days of long ago.  
 Where are those boys  
 We used to know?

## Dear Death

How long have you hovered near my door?  
 Always -  
 I just didn't know before.  
 You opened up my heart to fear  
 Of losing one I hold most dear.  
 When I sat alone  
 You were by my side.  
 There was no place where I could hide.  
 I saw you every place I looked.  
 You were with me for each step I took.  
 In the hospital, you were there.  
 You stood beside the chemo chair.  
 Even radiation didn't frighten you.  
 You stayed with me 'til it was through.  
 You went to bed with me each night.  
 We'd toss and turn 'til morning light.  
 With each and every dawn,  
 I'd check to see if you had gone.  
 Your memory, filled with dread and fear,  
 Grows weaker with each passing year.  
 Still, time is on your side.  
 You're never gone long from my mind.  
 What I didn't know before,  
 Is part of me, forever more.

## Paper or Plastic

Paper or plastic?  
 Recycle or throw away?  
 Hankie or Kleenex?  
 Save for tomorrow or live for today?  
 Simple questions that matter.  
 What do you say?

## Old Calendars

Old calendars stack up  
 In the steamer trunk drawer.  
 What's one to do with 'em  
 When they're no good anymore?  
 The days are all gone now.  
 The parties are, too.  
 Will I still remember  
 When they're out of view?  
 How can I toss 'em?  
 They're full of my years.  
 Destroying those memories  
 Would bring me to tears.  
 So they wait in that drawer  
 Til the day that will come  
 When my heirs will pitch 'em,  
 Every last one!

## For Don

Seashells scattered on the sand.  
 Seashells picked up by tiny hands.  
 Little footprints on the beach.  
 A day full of memories within my reach.  
 Seashells scattered in the yard.  
 Seashells collected in big glass jars.  
 Little footprints make me cry.  
 A boy grown to manhood in the blink of an eye.

## Under the Shade Tree

Under the shade tree  
 In our back yard  
 Swings a hammock retreat  
 For when times are hard.  
 Under the shade tree  
 The green grass grows  
 When you walk barefoot,  
 It tickles your toes.  
 Under the shade tree  
 Is the place to nap.  
 If you're lucky, you'll wake  
 With the cat in your lap.  
 Under the shade tree  
 Is the place to play  
 A game of croquette  
 On a hot summer day.  
 Under the shade tree  
 Our friends gather  
 And fill our home

## To Dye or Not to Dye?

Fire in the heart  
 Snow on top  
 Badge of honor  
 This full gray mop.  
 Years of experience,  
 Life and love.  
 Shimmering glory  
 Like a snowy dove.  
 Gray hair, gray hair,  
 Earned every one.  
 Not by my stylist  
 To be undone!

With love and laughter.  
 Under the shade tree  
 Is the place to be  
 Swinging to and fro  
 Just you and me.



## Poet: Noel Russell

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

Noel Russell moved to Modesto with her husband, Jim Lydick, more than 25 years ago. Both long-time members of the Modesto Peace/Life Center, they volunteer for the John McCutcheon Concert and the Pancake Breakfast. In addition to her personal services business, Two Can Do, Noel works in the after-school program and as a Home and Hospital Teacher for Ceres Unified School District. She mentors walkers for Memorial Medical Center's Team Triumph and Team Challenge and participates in their Garden Club and Writing Through Cancer Program. An avid environmentalist, she is a positive example for others. A regular attendee at Second Tuesday Poetry Readings at the Barkin' Dog, she says, "If you enjoy what I write, you can write poetry, too!"

WE GET  
LETTERS



## Watch Animal, Vegetable, Miracle make the rounds

John McCutcheon fans and people working to make our community better have something to celebrate. When McCutcheon performed his annual Modesto Peace/Life Center benefit concert in January, he started a copy of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, a book about one family's effort to grow its own food, rounds among volunteers in Modesto.



Now there's a special blog page at <http://www.squidoo.com/singer-john-mccutcheon-gives-modesto-non-profits-networking-tool> dedicated to watching the book make its rounds, celebrating our volunteers and the organizations they nurture. It's a way of making connections between what we do here and what goes on in the nation and the world. It's a way of bringing fun and a sense of mutual caring to our shared dreams of a better place in which to leave our children to.

I started this page because I didn't want a community-organizing tool like this book and its symbolic value to go gently into a quiet sleep. It's not perfect, and with your contributions it could become very much alive, very much a tool for us to express the difference we'd very much like to make.

Hope to see you there!

**Don McMillan aka Don McCyclist**

*Modesto*

**DEADLINE to submit articles to CONNECTIONS:** Tenth of each month. Submit peace, justice and environmental event notices to Jim Costello, [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org) Free Calendar listings subject to space and editing. To access updated calendar items, see <http://stanislausconnections.org/calendar.htm>

# OPINION: How many times? – How much longer?

By MIKE KILLINGSWORTH

How many times have we had to save the “free enterprise system” from itself?

How many more times will we have to save it from its own gluttony and greed, its own hypocrisy, its own sleazy ethics, criminals, and immoral corporate and elected officials whether it is Ryan Paul or Barack Obama? Why must we constantly be reminded of the great superiority of the, so-called, “free market” by those at the top? Shouldn't that be self-evident, needing no promotion from those it elevates and protects most?

We are often reminded by those of immense wealth that we live in a republic, that is, a country of laws and certain principles, not a democracy where those in the majority rule. Yet the laws are written by the wealthiest who act for the miniscule numbers of American society, who chastise the rest whose needs are scarcely met for not meekly accepting their rule. And when those who suffer for lack of means ask for a fair shake and simple opportunities to share in the bounty, it is labeled as “class warfare,” while the super rich give no credibility to the idea of class warfare waged by them against those whose jobs are being outsourced to countries with cheap labor, poor environmental and labor laws, whose health benefits are being reduced or eliminated, whose ability to organize and unionize are attacked, and whose hopes for a better future are dashed.

America's middle class reminds me of a punch-drunk fighter who has been so battered and beaten that he is no longer able to sufficiently defend himself. How much longer can middle class people allow themselves to be pummeled before they see the need to mobilize and become a tidal wave of change that saves not only themselves, but also saves those who dominate them? How much longer will they be blinded to the divide-and-conquer tactics of those who dominate them? How much longer will they be motivated by the propaganda of fear? How much longer will they be seduced into sending their young to fight and die for the system that has been created and managed to make that choice seem to be the most logical for them?

How many more intrusions into the lives of Americans by an Orwellian “big brother” government can be tolerated? What will it take to awaken, within the population, a deep concern that too much of their precious privacy has been taken from them? How many more of their constitutional rights to freely demonstrate and to speak their minds regarding grievances against governmental rule, that is perceived as favoring the rich and handcuffing the poor and middle classes, must be lost before action is taken? How many more court cases, like giving corporations the free speech rights of the individual but not treating them as individuals when they break the law, will it take before they rally against such nonsense. How many more violations of labor law, environmental regulation, and social justice will be allowed before both those affected say “no more” and take action?

Americans who sit idly by because they feel they are not empowered to bring about positive change will get little of

it. Democracy is mortally wounded in this country and will only survive if there is a groundswell of energy against the plutocracy that sees this country as their own to do with what they please.

George Carlin said that there are two groups in America, the “ins” and the “outs,” where the “ins” are the wealthiest few and the “outs” are the rest of us. We are never going to be a part of the “ins.” Our representatives of both parties serve the “ins” and allow just enough crumbs on the table of abundance to fall to the floor to keep the rest of us from demanding systemic changes to bring about a fairer system of government.

America, according to author Naomi Wolf, is perilously perched on the edge of Nazi totalitarianism. Her book titled *The End of America – Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot* is a citizen's call to action to save this country from the dangers Americans currently face. Conservative pundits are the current henchmen of those who seek to silence all disagreement with the powers that be. They use falsehoods, innuendo and propaganda to protect the powers of the richest against the rest of Americans. The audience they speak to most powerfully is the most susceptible to an argumentation that seeks gut reaction, which reduces its ability to perceive facts. In other words, to those with poor analytical skills.

So, how many times and how much longer can our democracy survive the events occurring which undermine it on a daily basis? Who will revive this ailing concept called democracy while holding the autocrats to the same laws that we are obliged to obey? Who among us will exhibit such courage?

## Mistlin Gallery Events

### A Celebration of Fiber Arts Exhibit

Country Crossroads Quilters and Central California Art Association present “A Celebration of Fiber Arts Exhibit” from March 22 to April 30 at the Mistlin Gallery. 25 artists showing 50 quilts and 15 wearable items. Beginning Quilting class Saturday, April 16, 12 to 3 p.m. for small fee. Third Thursday Art Walk, April 21 will have hands-on demonstrations on designing art quilts, hand painted fabrics, photographs and appliques. Mistlin Gallery, 1015 J St., Modesto, 529-3369. Hours: Tues. – Fri. 11:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Sat. 12 to 4 pm.

### 58th Annual Spring Art Show

The Central California Art Association requests submissions for the 58th Annual Spring Art Show. There is a \$500 Best of Show Award, along with several other place and merchandise awards. Jpeg files on CD due along with the entry form on Sat., April 9. Receiving art work will be June 3 and 4. Opening Gala, Saturday June 11 and Art Walk, Thursday, June 16. The Show runs to July 14. The prospectus available at The Mistlin Gallery, (209) 529-3369, [ccaagallery@gmail.com](mailto:ccaagallery@gmail.com) and <http://www.ccartassn.org/>

# Of tennis rackets

By DANILE NESTLERODE

The rise of the personal computer is often cited as a significant factor in the decline of western civilization. There is one way in which I think I might agree. Computer graphics have made toy representations of musical instruments possible, and processing power has made faux musicianship possible as well. In short, it is a lot easier now than it used to be to pretend to play music.

These days you can go to a local drug store and purchase a pantomime guitar made of plastic or cardboard. And you can buy more than one computer game system that will allow you to pretend to play guitar with a very guitar-like game controller. The problem with these developments (as I see it) is that kids use much less imagination than their parents did, and they are ever more dependent on visual cues to both manipulate and understand the world.

But for me, in 1978, both imagination and intent listening were deeply important to my enjoyment of music. I did not have the ability to buy a toy guitar at the drug store, and computer games systems were limited to "Pong." So in order to pretend to be in a rock band I had to find a suitable guitar-like object with which to play along with my favorite albums.

The process of selecting a guitar-like object was both important and detailed. My "axe" needed to be roughly the shape of a guitar. It needed to be proportional in its dimensions, and it needed to be light enough to allow me to fly around my

bedroom. Lack of sharp edges would also be an important factor. So I scoured the house for a suitable instrument. Closets, cabinets, and storage spaces could hold no secrets from me. Tools, cleaning supplies, and sports equipment seemed the best sources of guitar-like shapes.

Long-handled garden tools have the right basic shape but they are poorly balanced and a long to be suitable for a guitar. Take an example. The length alone forces you to stand north of the end up waving your hand over the spot where the metal meets the wood rather than over the blade of the thing. The act of strumming the "neck" ruins the illusion. Plus, I could imagine knocking over a lamp in the middle of a screaming guitar solo and blowing a fuse. The shovel stayed in the shed.

I left the hoe and the rake alone. I had the wisdom at 14 to know that guitars should not have blades or tines on them. I was prepared to bleed for my art, but only figuratively.

So I went into the house to investigate the cleaning supply closet. The broom is a definite improvement on the garden tools. It weighs less than the shovel, lacks a blade, and the bristles are much softer than tines. But the length is still wrong and the proportions are off. The neck of the guitar would be impossibly long and skinny. (Broken lamps returned to my imagination.)

Plus, it would be just my luck that someone would come home in the middle of my (OK Jimmy Page's) solo on "Whole Lotta Love" and need to sweep. Utter embarrassment and deep frustration at the imposition of reality would have been compounded by a parental order to use the broom for its intended purpose. I could hear my mother saying, "If you're going to keep the broom in your room, you'll have to do all the sweeping." The broom stayed in the closet.

Mops, both dust and damp, stayed in the closet too. In the first place, I'm allergic to dust. I did not want runny eyes to interfere with my macho posturing, and sneezing ruins all but the strongest comedic moods. In the second place, ... Eww. No.

Moving into the coat closet where the sports equipment lurked, begging for the light of day, I found a golf club and a baseball bat. The club lacked enough body to serve well as a guitar, even though it was a wood. But the bat was much closer to the right length than any of my previous guitar-like objects had been. I was getting warm.

The baseball bat got a full 3-song try out. By the end of the third song, "Toys in the Attic" by Aerosmith, my left hand

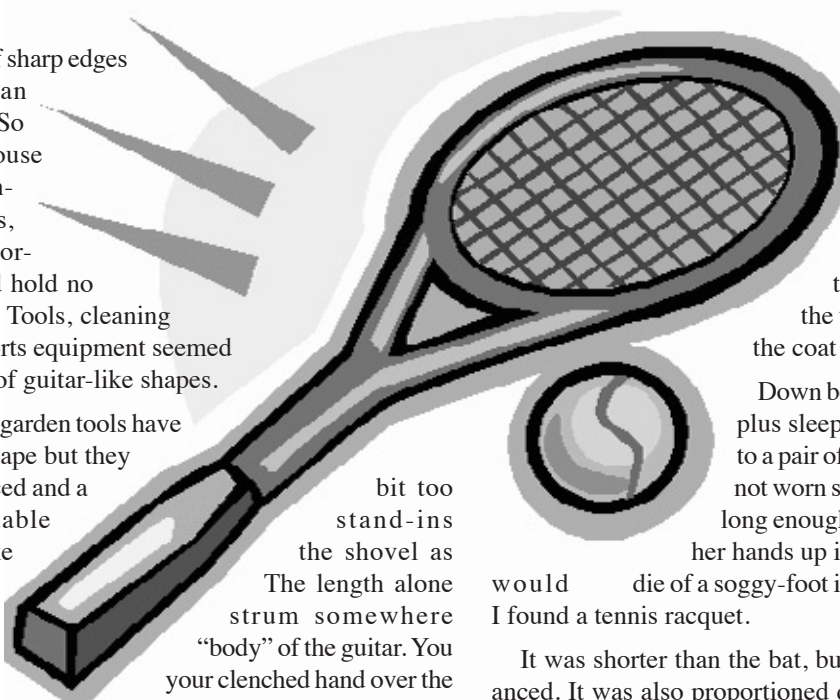
was tired from holding the bat at a guitar-like angle. Further, I had realized that it was too rounded to work well. A guitar has a finger board that is flatter than the back of the neck, a bat is round all the way around. Nope. Back to the coat closet.

Down behind decades old army surplus sleeping bags, hanging out next to a pair of rubber overshoes that I had not worn since I had learned to squirm long enough to make my mother throw her hands up in frustration and fear that I would die of a soggy-foot induced bout of pneumonia, I found a tennis racquet.

It was shorter than the bat, but it was light and well balanced. It was also proportioned decently when viewed as a guitar. I tried a couple of poses there in the front hall: success!

The tennis racquet passed the audition easily. Size, proportion, balance, and weight all made this the perfect guitar-like object. But it had an added dimension of being strung. I found the strings made the tennis racquet and the guitar conceptually sympathetic. The final advantage was that my parents' tennis playing days were long over so no one would interrupt and embarrass me by looking for the missing racquet.

Tennis racquet in hand, I was prepared for the next few years to return home from school and blow off steam by rocking out with my favorite rock bands in my bedroom.



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