

Heart to Heart

Wendy Kelly

When Beverly Boos, an internationally acclaimed photographer (who has photographed, among others, Pope John Paul II), went to Israel-Palestine in 2001, she knew she would be taking some compelling photographs, but after two months photographing people on both sides of the conflict she heard again and again from her visual subjects, "Please take our stories out into the world and let people know we too have the same dreams and hopes they have, we want peace, we want to be able to live in safety and raise our children without daily fear, we want to be able to live our lives with hope."

Says Beverly; "It was that day that I made my commitment to lead the team that would bring this work into all aspects of our community life."

The photographs are striking: a black and white picture of a young Palestinian girl with what looks like a headband: actually, it's a bandage from where a bullet is lodged in her brain. An Israeli survivor of a suicide bomb. There's the Jewish-American woman who sleeps in Palestinian homes at night, acting as a human shield. An Israeli father with his son. And the Palestinian father with his son. Picture after picture, what you come away with is that they are people like us, but where you and I may feel stress about having to deal with neighbours who may not keep their lawns as tidy as we would like, in these people there is a complete normalcy with an unsettling undercurrent of fatigue and trauma. At this rate, some of these adults have never known peace in their lifetimes. "Conflict starts as a seed, and grows," they seem to warn.

Beverly took this series of photographs and decided to transform them into something larger: something that would not only touch us deeply, but allow us to be taken through to a place where healing our own wounds can begin. She leads a team that is taking Opening of the Heart across the United States and soon into Canada as well. The

most ambitious project so far has been in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and soon, Opening of the Heart will begin in Chicago, Illinois.

In each venue, the Opening of the Heart team listens to the community and assesses the needs. From there, they implement a four tiered approach to introducing the process of opening of the heart to take the community to the next level to collaboratively create a program to meet

Because the intention of Opening of the Heart is to be inclusive, the organizers went to great lengths to make sure to include as many different members of the community as possible.

those needs. The photography exhibit is the first step, and perhaps the most immediate. As members of the community view the photographs, they are touched by them and are able to use them as a means to open their own hurts, their own suffering, and begin to relate, connect and heal. As the curriculum director for

Opening of the Heart has stated, "from their backyards to our own."

Whatever needs to be addressed in the particular community becomes the focus for the next three steps of Opening of the Heart:

The second step consists of community events that bring diverse groups together and can range from an interfaith night where members of the various faiths in the community gather to share and relate to one another as people to an arts and theatre festival which will be one of the components of the upcoming Opening of the Heart project in Chicago.

An organic, ever-evolving curriculum which fully meets state and national standards for K through 12 education is the next step. Opening of the Heart can meet the needs of teachers in the various communities by focusing on leadership, peace initiatives or other areas of training for that community that will enable students to access their deepest concerns and begin to relate to them in a way that ultimately brings an opportunity to express and

be heard, first to the individual student and finally, by extension, to the entire community. Beverly's vision for the curriculum is large: she has some of the best and brightest people working with her and this shows through in the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the lesson plans that go along with Opening of the Heart (see page 24 for an example of the curriculum).

Finally, there are a series of workshops tailored to the needs of the community. Facilitators specialize in conflict resolution and skills-training and depending on the needs of the community the schedule can address a range from leadership issues for business people to support for local youth programs to peace initiatives.

Its all about deepening communication skills and putting communities on a path to healing so they can take their various conflicts and own them, have closure.

In Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, the latest and most ambitious Opening of the Heart program recently took place.

Beverly is a tireless woman, someone whose energy shines through and takes you in: she manages to get past the important hurdle of including all segments of society to get everyone on board regardless of political persuasion, colour, creed, or temperament.

People like Dr. Greg Maass, superintendent of schools for Fond du Lac became avid supporters of Beverly's vision, and critical to its success. In his day-to-day life, he is up against some powerful stereotypes: he is a white, physically fit, middle-aged man in a position of authority. The expectation is that he's a member of the old boy's network; that when he's out having lunch with friends he's really making business deals. When people come to him for a meeting, they often see it as presenting their various arguments and then waiting for him to choose the best side. Sometimes when he comes out of a meeting where he senses a bias he says, "I wish they really knew me ... but how do you overcome that? Try to do the best you can and be who you are and let them go out and represent you."

For Opening of the Heart, he has only good to say. Using the exhibition as a springboard where individuals

start from a common ground can transform communities. Since it includes the kids in the communities from the start in the process; Greg speaks about the poetry contest as being especially moving. They were expecting maybe 50 people to show up for the awards ceremony. Instead, about 200. maybe 300 people showed up to see the winners receive a certificate, and their teachers receive a rose. The entire space at the Windhover Center for the Arts where the ceremony was held was full. And the kids were moved, as was hoped, to speak about their own lives and their own conflicts as a response to the conflict they saw in the photographs. (see page 64 for some of the winning poems)

"Students learn from what they see," he says. "The exhibit provides them with a first hand opportunity to see how relationships are impacted by differences. This exposure will allow them to understand the importance of human relationships no matter your cultural background, to witness professional photographic visual art, and finally to engage students in the discussion about the Middle East dynamics," said Greg.



Workshop attendees in Fond du Lac.

From Opening of the Heart, participants came to realize the importance of listening, really hearing what the 'other' is saying to them in their lives, and this translates into a shift in the way they deal with difficult issues that will hopefully persist.

Because the intention of Opening of the Heart is to be inclusive, the organizers went to great lengths to make sure to include as many different members of the community as possible. All the area schools were included, for example, and the various community associations. By and large, the Fond du Lac project has been deemed a success. Members of the Jewish, Islamic and Christian communities felt embraced by this process which includes the all-voices perspective, accepting that all parties to every conflict are wounded, and at the heart of every act of violence is an unhealed wound. One Jewish woman said she was able to go back to her roots and face the holocaust finally, after seeing that exhibit. What came through time and again was the people who were involved found that using the exhibition as a talking point, they were able to talk about

conflict and cut through barriers of mistrust and defense: without it being about winners and losers.

The Fond du Lac program has definitely not been a waste of human energy. The challenge now is to keep the spirit alive, for members of the community to remember what they have learned and keep using the skills they picked up for days and years to come. Beverly Boos knows this is possible. She has worked hard to make sure that the curriculum created for Opening of the Heart will be implemented and that what the community saw and heard will remain imprinted in their minds and hearts.

She is tireless in her ability to keep the fire alive. It is obvious in speaking to her that this is a mission more than a job for her. She believes in the power of these photographs to transform lives, but she knows, and she knows this deeply, that just seeing some photographs can't change society. That's why she has made sure that Opening of the Heart is inclusive, encompassing

many segments of society and supporting the participants with program offerings that support dialogue between parties and healing may begin. Virginia Duncan, Executive Director of the Sophia Foundation, who worked to build Opening of the Heart-Fond du Lac, feels strongly

that Opening of the Heart has changed Fond du Lac for good. The various pictures touched each participant differently. The picture of the woman who acts as a human shield, for example, especially touched Greg Maas. And Virginia Duncan was moved deeply by the photograph of the girl who lost her mother. At a deep level, she related to that girl's trauma, and felt she could connect to her as a sister. And

that's how it starts: we see these people in conflict, so far away but just like us as mothers, daughters, sisters, fathers, brothers. And then we can take them into our hearts, opening like a flower uncurling into its full nature. In this way, the process of healing can begin. ☐



Virginia Gilmore and Fond du Lac artist, Pat Reiher with her piece "Image of Compassion"

"In a sense, words are encyclopedias of ignorance because they freeze perceptions at one moment in history and then insist we continue to use these frozen perceptions when we should be doing better."

- Edward de Bono

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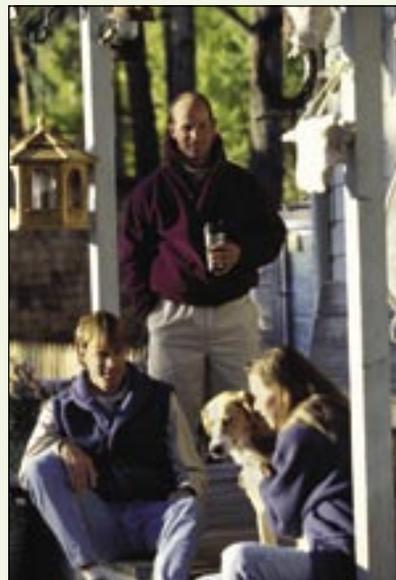
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Atta Jabber, Palestinian farmer, with his son Rajah

Opening of the Heart is a travelling photo exhibit that provides an educational platform for Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. This exhibit presents Compassionate Listening (see page 20) as a universal tool for conflict resolution—an experiential learning technique that bridges the mind to the heart.

www.openingoftheheart.org

All photos: Beverly Duperly Boos

David Haham-Herson, an Israeli, was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the occupied territories.



opening of the heart



Captain Peter Lerner, spokesperson for the Israeli Defense Forces in the West Bank



Rabbi Meanchem and Hadassah Froman of Tekoa settlement, West Bank



Irene Siegel, a Jewish American, sleeps in the home of of a Palestinian family



Iona Elishiva Maimon, Jewish Israeli girl, Jerusalem



Layali al -Tamimi, Muslim Palestinian girl, Hebron



Rabbi Dov Maimon, with son Nissim

Muhammed, age 15, gave harrowing personal testimony to Children's Defense International



Na'ama Didovsky, age 7, mourns the death of her mother Rina

Marwa Adel al-Sharif, age 10—a bullet from a nearby Israeli military camp is lodged in her brain



5

discussions about

PEACE

“Peace begins when the hungry are fed.”

1

- How is this a true statement?
- How can poverty promote conflict?
- How can alleviating poverty reduce the amount of conflict in the world?
- How can you go about reducing poverty in your own community?

“No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.”

2

This statement was made by Dorothy Day in reference to peace activism and humanitarian work.

- What work is there to do for an advocate of peace?
- Where does one begin in his/her attempt to promote peace?
- What are some good resources to use in order to find direction in one's attempt to become a peace activist?

“Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You must not only refuse to shoot a man, but you must refuse to hate him.”

3

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Have you experienced “internal violence of spirit?”
- What are some forms of “internal violence of spirit?”
- What are some things that influence us to feel unnecessary “internal violence of spirit?”
- What is the best way to overcome such influences? Does anyone ever commit external violence without first feeling internal violence?

4

“Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster.”

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche shared this thought with the world.

- What did he mean?
- What “monsters” are there to fight today?
- How might you “become a monster” by fighting a monster?
- How can you avoid “becoming a monster” and still overcome current monsters?
- How do you determine who “the monsters” are?

5

“You must be the change that you wish to see.”

Mahatma Gandhi

- What does this mean to you?
- If you wish to see peace on earth, what must you do to promote that? Be specific in your answer.
- What will you do TODAY to start this process of change?
- How can you convince others to become involved in being makers of peace?

Opening of the Heart Peace and Community Building Unit

- What is “collateral damage?” Where did the term come from? Why do you think the term was invented to describe harm inflicted on civilians in military attacks?
- Who was Timothy McVeigh? When Timothy McVeigh blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, many children were killed. McVeigh referred to them as “collateral damage.” The children’s family members responded with anger and pain when he applied this term to their loved ones. Why do you think they were angry and hurt? Do you think Timothy McVeigh was responsible for killing their loved ones?
- How might some people relate the crime of bombing the federal building to an attack on Iraq?
- How do we judge moral responsibility for an act? For example, let’s say that you are throwing rocks at a telephone pole. That’s your target. And let’s say that cars are parked near the telephone pole. You throw a rock that misses the telephone pole and hits a car, shattering its windshield. Are you responsible for breaking the windshield?
- What are “anticipated consequences?” Are you responsible for the anticipated consequences of your actions? In the example above, who should pay for the windshield? The person who owns the car or the person who threw the rock?

Source: The above lesson was adapted from the work of Keitha St. Clair. St. Clair’s intention is to share this activity with students of the United States in hopes of strengthening aspirations for living within a world that embraces peace as an alternative to violence and war.

Reference site to help facilitate this lesson:

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
www.wagingpeace.org.

The site is rich with resource material. Issues of the Foundation’s bulletin, *Sunflower*, are available as PDF files which can be used as resource material. In addition, there is an entire section of the website dedicated to Youth, including a 84-page guide for the classroom, *Teaching Peace*, and an extraordinary section on peace heroes.

POeMs

... three winning poems from the Opening of the Heart Poetry and Art contest. You may go to the home page on the web site to see the article about this contest: www.openingoftheheart.org Opening of the Heart is taking steps to move all of this forward in their partnership with *Poetry in Wartime*, a soon to be released film about common humanity and war through the eyes of the poetry!

Subliminal Prayers

Eyes reflecting, pain, poverty, unspeakable loss,
love, light, and tender soul.
Fingers tracing tears, scars, faces of children washed
over with fear, distorted bodies whose hands tremble...
unable to trust.
ShalomPeace consent to equality
longing for...
Hands delicately part frayed curtain edges covering
windows to a world without hope, creases of light passing
through to an inner darkness that will not be lifted by
the dawn.
preservation of memory elementary rights
longing for a hug...
How shall I read this? Word by word, district by district,
face by face, prayer by prayer?
How will I recognize these souls on the other side of this
earthly plane? Will it be by creed, color, or some subtle
memory? How will we all connect on the eternal plane?
human dignity miracle of God
longing for a hug and a kiss...
Listening, I hear a heart in prayer.

Ellen A. Harwell
Marian College

True Pain

When complete sadness is commonplace,
and you see a look of pain on every child's face,
the sights you see make your heart cry,
seeing more sadness as the days pass by,
you see children who know nothing but war,
you think just living, for them, is the hardest chore,
you know they all share a dream
that would raise their self-esteem,
but all they can do is wait
and live through the hate,
spending each day through heat and rain,
cuts and bruises are nothing – this is true pain.

Jason Geidel
8th Grade

Hope & Peace

What is the price we pay for war?
What do we gain?
Do we gain any more?
A son, a daughter,
A husband, a wife?
We lose all these things
In the battle and strife.
When will it end?
When will it cease?
After all war is just
A struggle for peace.
What do we gain?
What do we lose?
Nothing to gain
But still war we choose.
Yet hope still we have,
Though it seems rather small,
Maybe some day there'll be
Some hope for us all.
Still war will always come,
It can never end.
Yet hope will remain,
Till peace does God send.

Julia Lemke
8th Grade