

10 reasons to be hopeful about 2009, and 3 reasons to be terrified

By SARAH VAN GELDER

We're entering a new year at a time unlike any other in recent memory. Here are 10 reasons I'm filled with hope as I look ahead at 2009—and three reasons I'm terrified.

1. Young people are stepping up. They know that they formed the backbone of Barack Obama's presidential campaign and that their work infused the country with the "Yes, we can" spirit. Now that these young people know what success feels like, many will be in it for the long haul.

2. Election protection is working. Grassroots vigilance, successful lawsuits, and media exposure are making voter suppression efforts less successful. More remains to be done, but the trends are in the right direction. (One terrifying note, though, is the death in a December 19 plane crash of GOP IT expert Michael Connell, who many believe was poised to reveal secrets related to vote stealing.)

3. There is now overwhelming support for universal health care. This grassroots commitment coupled with Obama's leadership could make this the year when we finally overcome the roadblocks big insurance and drug corporations have placed in the way of progress. A majority of Americans favor a tax-supported single-payer system like Canada's. The Obama plan, while it's not single-payer, is nonetheless a good plan—as long as it retains the option for all Americans to join a public health insurance plan.

4. Corporate power is on the wane. Barack Obama ran for office without relying on corporate donations in a campaign that saw candidates competing to establish their tough-on-corporate-power bonafides. Even before the Wall Street meltdown, a majority of Americans thought corpora-

10 Reasons continued p. 8

A "Citizens' Oath of Office" for Inauguration Day 2009

By ROBERT JENSEN

As we celebrate the end of an eight-year disaster, we should recommit to the ongoing work required to create a truly just and sustainable world. With that work in mind, here's my suggestion for a 2009 Citizen's Oath of Office:

"I do solemnly pledge that I will faithfully execute the office of citizen of the United States, and that I will, to the best of my ability, help create a truly democratic world by

(1) going beyond mainstream corporate news media to seek out information about important political, economic, and social issues;

(2) engaging fellow citizens, including those who disagree with me, in serious discussion and debate about those issues;

(3) committing as much time, energy, and money as possible to help build authentic grassroots political organizations

that can pressure politicians to put the interests of people over profit and power; and

(4) connecting these efforts to global political and social movements fighting the U.S. empire abroad, where it does the most intense damage.

I will continue to resist corporate control of the world, resist militarism, resist any rollback of civil rights, and resist illegitimate authority in all its forms. And I will commit to collective efforts in my local community to help build joyful alternatives to an unsustainable consumer society."

Robert Jensen is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin and board member of the Third Coast Activist Resource Center (<http://thirdcoastactivist.org/>). Reach him at rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu. Find his articles at <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/index.html>.

Modesto Peace Life Center Annual Meeting

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2009
PEACE LIFE CENTER
720 13th ST., MODESTO

8:30 AM — Coffee and Conversation

9:00 AM — Business Meeting:

- Financial Report
- Committee Reports
- Election of Board Members

— Discussion:

- Action plans, ideas and strategies

12:30 PM — Adjournment

For 38 years the Modesto Peace/Life Center has been a meeting place for people concerned about peace, justice, equality, and a sustainable environment.

While the Center is most widely known for its opposition to war, Center programs have also provided education on government policies, and worked to make our community and world a more peaceful and equitable place.

The Modesto/Peace Life Center is only as strong and diverse as those committed to working together. Please join us!

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Create Peace Video Collection - Win \$1000 - deadline approaching

By KELLY GUINAN

The Peace Support Network is sponsoring a YouTube video contest. Create a short film based on the theme, "Create Peace." Show us your creativity and you could be given the grand prize of \$1000 or one of three runner-up prizes.

All ages, school classrooms, not-for-profit groups, as well as individuals are urged to participate!

For complete details please see <http://celebratingpeace.org/videos.cfm>

Post your vision of peace right away, but no later than February 28, 2009.

From the Peace Support Network, www.celebratingpeace.org; 402-426-5240.

A great reusable bag!

The Modesto Peace/Life Center has the perfect reusable bag — a tote bag with a graphic of the world surrounded by the word "peace" in 18 languages. The artwork was especially created by our own Peggy Castaneda! This large, U.S. made bag, is sturdy cotton canvas, sits upright, and is suitable for groceries.

Help stop the eco-created by disposable plastic bags. Be green and spread a message of peace. Pick up one bag for \$8.00, or buy three for the bargain price of \$21.00!

Get your bag(s) from Ken Schroeder: 526-2303, kschroeder70@yahoo.com



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- Send me CONNECTIONS. Here's my \$25 DONATION.
- 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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Mass March and Rally to end the Iraq War

By JASON FLORES

On Saturday March 21, 2009, there will be a bus trip to San Francisco for the Mass March and Rally to end the Iraq War.

Since the rally begins at 11 a.m., the bus will leave Merced little before 8 a.m. and will make a stop in Modesto. The cost for each person will be \$17. The charge covers the cost for fuel and bus maintenance. I will inform those who are interested in going on the exact pick-up and departure times closer to the date, and where the bus pick-up location will be. I am asking that those interested in going get me the \$17 a week prior to the date or make arrangements with me.

To get more information on the march go to www.actionsf.org.

I want to get some type of poetry slam going on the bus, so I encourage people to bring their art of expression with them, and to share that. I'm working on providing music as well because as most of us know that there is culture and spirituality behind the movement for change, an improved world, and the idea of revolution. I encourage youth and young adults to join us to express their voices and concerns about human policies. Concerns about the policies carried out by our government are not to be taken lightly or and looked down upon as being expressed by uneducated young people who are rebels without a cause.

ACTION: Contact me at wizmo16@hotmail.com, 5740 E. Olive Ave., Merced 95340, 209-201-8554. For those interested in going from Modesto, contact Shelly, 521-6304 or at shellys833@aol.com

Nicaragua college students need funds

By SHELLY SCRIBNER

The Merced-Somoto Sister City program raises funds for college students in Nicaragua so they can stay in school. We sponsor 10 students and send each \$65.00 per month, which comes out to \$780.00 a year per student.

Recently I traveled to Somoto and met some of the past and present college students. Two are now doctors who are working in the Somoto Hospital. Some students are studying engineering and computers.

At our recent delegation, we took pictures of the students and they wrote about themselves and what they are studying. We will have these translated and matched with their pictures. It will soon be possible to sponsor a single student yourself, if you choose. We have so much in our country, even with the economy doing very badly at present. However, Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the western hemisphere. A typical salary for a person is \$50.00 a month. The students usually stay in Nicaragua and help their country.

ACTION: We raise money by selling crafts, coffee and having garage sales. Some members sponsor a student, or families might share the cost. We need more people to help. If you are interested in sponsoring a student or making a donation please contact Shelly Scribner at 209-521-6304. Thank you all for considering helping.

Ken Medema benefit concert for Family Promise

By DIRK HOEK

On Saturday, February 14, 2009, Ken Medema, pianist, composer, singer and songwriter, will perform at the Modesto Junior College auditorium, for the benefit of Family Promise of Greater Modesto, a coalition of 11 area congregations that assist in providing shelter and assistance for temporarily homeless families with children. Ken Medema has been performing throughout the world for over 30 years.

Ken born blind, began playing the piano at age 5 and, at age 8, learned Braille music and to play by ear as well

as how to improvise in different styles. He majored in Music Therapy at Michigan State University and

began performing and recording his own songs in 1973. His favorite topics often include justice, poverty, hunger and issues related to homelessness, with an emphasis on spirituality.

Ken has recorded 26 albums and, in 1985, founded Brier Patch Music, his own publishing and recording company. He is well known for improvising full-length songs based on themes suggested by audience members. Audiences often say, "He made me both laugh and cry." One reviewer stated, "Calling Ken Medema a blind pianist is like calling Michelangelo an interior decorator."

The Executive Director of the local chapter is Sandra Franklin. The office is at 2301 Woodland Ave., Modesto. Karen Olson, Family Promise's founder, will attend the concert.

ACTION: For tickets, call Family Promise, 209-549-9454, or Dirk Hoek, 209-523-2613. Tickets: \$20 (adults); \$10 (children/students); \$50 per family (4 or more). For information about Family Promise, visit <http://www.nihn.org/>



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Mailing address: P.O. Box 134, Modesto, CA 95353 209-529-5750.

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

Doctors Without Borders: 11th Annual List of 'Top Ten' humanitarian crises

From Doctors Without Borders

Massive forced civilian displacements, violence, and unmet medical needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, and Pakistan, along with neglected medical emergencies in Myanmar and Zimbabwe, are some of the worst humanitarian and medical emergencies in the world, the international medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported today in its annual list of the "Top Ten" humanitarian crises.

The report underscores major difficulties in bringing assistance to people affected by conflict. The lack of global attention to the growing prevalence of HIV-tuberculosis coinfection and the critical need for increased global efforts to prevent and treat childhood malnutrition—the underlying cause of death for up to five million children per year—are also included in the list.

"Working on the frontlines of crisis zones throughout the world, MSF medical teams witness firsthand the medical and psychological consequences people endure from extreme violence, displacement, and neglected—yet treatable—diseases and health needs," said MSF International Council President Dr. Christophe Fournier. "In some of these places, it is extremely difficult for aid groups to access populations requiring help. Where we are able to provide assistance, we have a special responsibility to bear witness and speak out

about intolerable suffering and draw attention to basic humanitarian needs—needs that are often largely ignored."

Many of the countries on this year's list illustrate the ever-shrinking space for impartial humanitarian action, making it extremely difficult to deliver aid to those most affected and vulnerable. Aid organizations now operate with increased security risks and in generally more hazardous and threatening environments. In highly politicized and volatile conflicts such as those in Somalia, Pakistan, Sudan, and Iraq, MSF—despite its neutrality and independence—is limited in its ability to directly address immense medical needs.

In Somalia, intensified violence, including direct attacks and threats against aid workers, meant that MSF had to curtail some of its operations in 2008, including the withdrawal of its international staff, significantly reducing the quality of assistance provided to an already weakened population. In Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of people fled air attacks and bombings from a counter-insurgency campaign in the northwest area earlier in the year. After aid workers in the country were threatened, attacked, and kidnapped, MSF restricted the number of international staff in its projects.

In places such as Myanmar and Zimbabwe—where governments fail to make health care a priority or view NGO interventions with suspicion—humanitarian organizations are either limited in the type of assistance they can provide or are left to deal with overwhelming health crises on their

own. In Myanmar, where MSF is the main provider of HIV care, hundreds of thousands of people are needlessly dying due to a severe lack of HIV/AIDS treatment while the government does far too little to help its own people.

Governments are also ignoring the crisis of childhood malnutrition. In Niger, the government in 2008 forced the termination of MSF's child nutrition program in the region of Maradi, where tens of thousands of children were suffering from acute malnutrition. As a result, they have not received proven and highly effective treatment. The closure came at a time when efforts to make progress in the fight against malnutrition globally are more possible—and more necessary—than ever.

"The reality on the ground is that the humanitarian community is unable to do nearly enough for populations in grave need of medical assistance," Dr. Fournier said. "With the release of this list, we hope to focus much needed attention on the millions of people who are trapped in conflict and war, affected by medical crises, whose immediate and essential health needs are neglected, and whose plight often goes unnoticed."

View the Top Ten Humanitarian Crises of 2008 at <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/topTen/>

Visit Doctors Without Borders at <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/>

POLL: One-Fourth of Teens say violent behavior is acceptable

"Findings underscore continued need for training in ethical decision-making," pollster concludes

From Junior Achievement and Deloitte

"While today's teens are learning the Three 'Rs' of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic in school, new research shows that many are justifying violence to practice a fourth — Revenge. In a youth culture where violence is often believed to be acceptable, these and other findings not only present disturbing implications for school safety, but for the workplace as well, say experts.

"A new poll of 750 teens from Junior Achievement and Deloitte and conducted by Opinion Research shows that more than one-in-four teens (27 percent) think behaving violently is sometimes, often or always acceptable. More students thought violence was acceptable than was cheating (19 percent), plagiarizing (10 percent) or stealing (3 percent). And fully 20 percent of respondents said they had personally behaved violently towards another person in the past year, and 41 percent reported a friend had done so.

"When the teens who agreed that violence was acceptable were asked more specifically about rationale for such behavior, most noted self-defense (87 percent) and to help a friend (73 percent). However, more than a third said violence was acceptable to settle an argument (35 percent) and for revenge (34 percent). Other justifications were dislike of the

person who is the target of the violence (22 percent), to gain respect (21 percent), peer pressure (14 percent), and simply for 'the thrill' of it (10 percent). Of considerable concern is that more than three-fourths (77 percent) of those who think violence is acceptable also consider themselves ethically prepared to enter the workforce....

"The poll also shows that teens feel more accountable to themselves (86 percent), than they do to their parents or guardians (52 percent), their friends (41 percent) or society (33 percent)....

"The results of the survey reveal considerable ethical relativism among teens and raises questions about their ability to make good decisions later in life,' said Sean C. Rush, President and Chief Executive Officer of JA Worldwide. We're understandably concerned about these results but recognize that they do point to a major learning opportunity.'



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"The survey results also show that many teenagers are lacking role models. Only about half (54 percent) cite their parents as role models. Most of those who don't cite their parents as role models are turning to their friends, or they said they didn't have a role model....

"Teens need training in ethical decision-making, practical tools and behavioral role models that help them understand not only how to make the right choices, but how those choices will impact their personal success and the success of the organizations they join,' said Ainar D. Ajjala, global managing partner, Consulting, Deloitte and chairman of the board, JA Worldwide...."

For the full press release, visit http://www.ja.org/about/releases/about_newsitem524.asp

Article printed from Ethics Newsline: <http://www.globalethics.org/newsline/2009/01/05/teen-violence/>

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Electric cars and clean air: what a concept!

By MIKE PARKER

Commuter Conversion Electric Car Class

Since 2005, I have been teaching a ten-day, private class in Turlock, California, twice each year called "C2EC2," or "Commuter Conversion Electric Car Class." During the class, we convert a stick shift, compact car from gasoline to Zero Emissions Electric.

The electric car class is perfect for California's Central Valley. We have lots of SMOG here in Turlock. We have issues with employment development. We are dependent on foreign oil. So, by creating Commuter Conversion Electric Cars through the recycling of used car bodies, we can:

1. Reduce air pollution.
2. Improve employment development.
3. Decrease our dependence on foreign oil.

Let's look at reason number one for creating zero emissions electric cars for the public in the Turlock-Modesto Region. Pure electric cars have no exhaust pipe and no exhaust, so they add nothing to our Valley atmospheric air pollution. The "fuel" for the pure electric car is electricity which comes to us in Turlock from the hydro-electric plant at Don Pedro Dam. Thus, the electric fuel is "clean." The whole process "reducing air pollution."

Reason number two involves training up mechanics to convert gasoline cars to electric cars. These trained electric vehicle mechanics can instruct others and even

open up conversion shops. The conversion shops will make pure electric cars available to the public. The price? Well, I hope some day to have Highway 99 billboards stating: "I'll convert any* car to electric for \$13,995." Sort of like Earl Scheib auto painting used to advertise, "I'll paint any car for \$39.95." As electric vehicle mechanics are employed converting cars to electric, the employment development in our region will improve. It's called job creation.

And finally, reason number three: Electric vehicles reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Reduced dependence on foreign oil means the USA need not go to war with oil producing nations to "protect" our vital oil supply. World War II saw Japan enter the war over the USA's denial of oil to Japan. The Iraq Wars were fought to defend our oil



supply, although our government will never admit it. We make peace by buying your clean electric fuel from Don Pedro via the Modesto and Turlock Irrigation Districts.

So now you have the basics on my electric car class. Why not make your next car electric?

ACTION: Contact the author at 1317 Colorado Ave. Apt 20
Turlock, 95380; 209-988-2487; mikeparker1940@yahoo.com

TRAVEL: To Dublin/ Pleasanton Bart Station

Monday though Friday only. Visit http://www.modestoareaexpress.com/bart_information1.htm

Two early morning trips and two late morning trips from Modesto Downtown Transportation Center and Sisk Rd. Orchard Supply Hardware. (Call 209- 521-1274 for schedule).

Two early afternoon trips from Downtown Transportation Center and Sisk Rd. Orchard Supply Hardware Note:

Afternoon trips departing from Modesto require an advanced 2-hour reservation. Phone (209) 521-1274 for reservations.

Two afternoon departures from Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station (5:00 PM and 6:30 PM). Two evening departures from Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station (6:45 PM and 7:45 PM).

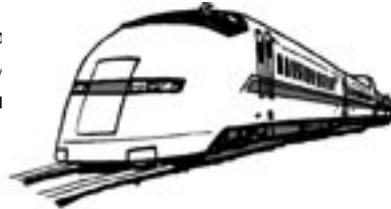
AMTRAK: Seven Amtrak trains daily from Modesto and six return trips from San Francisco locations. Call 1-800-872-7245 for schedules. Visit http://www.modestoareaexpress.com/amtrak_information.htm and <http://reservations.amtrak.com>

GREYHOUND BUS: Three buses daily from Modesto and three buses returning from San Francisco. Call 1-800-231-2222 for schedules. Note: The fastest bus leaves Modesto at 12:40 PM and arrives in San Francisco at 2:40 PM (one stop).

ALTAMONT COMMUTER EXPRESS (ACE) TRAIN TO SAN JOSE, etc. (Monday through Friday only). ACE Trains from Stockton, Lathrop/Manteca, Tracy to

Livermore, Pleasanton, Fremont, Great America,, Santa Clara and San Jose. Call 1-800-411Rail for schedule or Internet www.acerail.com and http://www.modestoareaexpress.com/ace_information-old.htm

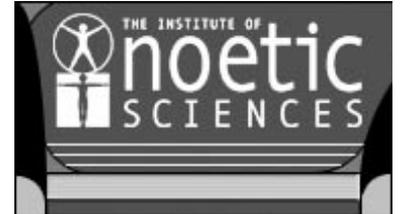
Note: Modesto Area Express (MAX) provides three trips in the morning from Modesto Vintage Faire Mall Park and Ride to the Lathrop/Manteca ACE train station and three return trips in the evening. Call (209) 521-1274 for schedules.



IONS to explore Mystery Schools

The local Institute of Noetic Sciences will explore Jean Houston's mystery schools from 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday, February 1.

What is IONS? Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) in 1973 after an extraordinary experience on his way back to Earth from the moon. Mitchell felt the separation of mind, matter, and spirit dissolve in an experience of oneness. As a well-trained scientist, he knew that someday science would come to fully understand the wholeness and interconnectedness



he experienced, but first we would have to learn how to access deeper levels of human consciousness and understand the powers of heart and mind.

Mitchell also recognized that an expansion of the scientific and social paradigms would be necessary to facilitate the shifts required to create a sustainable and peaceful planetary society. He founded IONS to pursue these objectives. Today, the Institute carries out his mission.

ACTION: Interested people of all ages are invited to attend. Donations are accepted to cover venue costs. Contact Dolores Chávez, (209) 505-7002, dolores.gloria@hotmail.com, for location or further information.





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

By Lillian Vallee

52. Bless Us, Ultima

I am working on a column about the sociobiology of insects when I hear that a book I have ordered for a spring class, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, has been banned from a local high school. The parental complaint centers on profanity and the purported anti-Catholicism of the novel. Since I have just read the book and am the product of a Catholic school education, I wonder why Anaya's work did not strike me as anti-Catholic (though it does critique the historical role of Catholicism), or at all threatening to a high school audience (there is violence and profanity, but it is not gratuitous).

On the contrary, this story of a young boy searching for a way to reconcile old mythologies and beliefs with his Catholic upbringing and family tradition struck me as a book rich with possibility in class discussion: it is steeped in oral tradition (New Mexico *cuentos* or stories), plant lore, respect for those who toil on the land, and the conviction that evil is no match for even the smallest good. It is a book about synthesis and healing, not opposition, and ends with a blessing from a dying elder to a boy struggling to be a man: "I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills. I shall be with you—."

Bless Me, Ultima first appeared in 1972 during a time when the Mexican American community was, in Anaya's words, "going through a civil rights struggle." The book tracks Antonio's spiritual development, his quest for truth, his questions about the origin of evil and his longing for an all-forgiving instead of a punitive deity. He is also searching for an inclusive identity, one that accommodates both family traditions, those of the stable and silent Lunas, his mother's family, working the earth, and the roving, freedom-loving Mares on his father's side. Ultima shows him that one side is incomplete without the other.

I ordered *Bless Me, Ultima* because, in the fall, my students had read Rose Guibault's *Farmworker's Daughter* and Rick Rivera's *Stars Always Shine*, both about the complexities of growing up Mexican American in California, and I thought the Anaya book would add deeper, mythical and spiritual dimensions to class readings about the cultural collision of two worlds. The book had been recommended by colleagues and, even more importantly, by my son, who urged me to read it.

Bless Me, Ultima is reminiscent of Leslie Marmon Silko's book *Ceremony*, which presents the indigenous ceremonial world as the only effective antidote to the violence and stress visited upon Native American combatants during World War II and in their subsequent return to reservation life. Anaya's novel has a similar texture and also takes place after World War II and the dropping of the atom bomb. It is often hailed as a masterpiece and "the most important and influential

Chicano novel ever written" perhaps because of the understanding that the surviving indigenous ways must somehow be reintegrated into the fabric of modern life to give proper burial to the dead, and to heal the grief and suffering of the living.

The opening sentences are striking in their description of how the arrival of Ultima, a traditional *curandera*, or healer, and family friend, quickens the seven-year-old Antonio's perception of the landscape in which he lives: "When she came the beauty of the llano [the open plain] unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood."

Ultima's role is not just to animate the landscape ("...there is no beauty like this earth," she says), but to teach Antonio to understand the older, "spiritual roots" of his culture. "She is a repository of Spanish, Mexican, and Native American teachings," writes Anaya. "With her guidance he [Antonio] begins to understand that the river, the open plain, and all of nature is imbued with spirit. Everything is alive; God is everywhere." Gradually Antonio becomes Ultima's apprentice; he learns the healing properties of plants considered sacred—blue corn, yerba mansa, and osho [Osha] root.

According to Anaya, the character of Ultima appeared to him and instructed him "to make her a character in the novel" (as apparently many of Anaya's characters do) in a "truly magical moment in the creative process." "Suddenly," Anaya writes in his 1999 introduction to the new edition, "a boy's adventure novel became an intense exploration of the unconscious."

And what, exactly, is in this *unconscious*? It is a fragmented yet recognizably historical world (often depicted in dreams in the novel) in which ancient spiritual beliefs in a diffuse deity (springing from place and tolerant of all good medicine) are at odds with an imported faith that relegates God to churches and church hierarchy and often works to supplant the old beliefs. It is a world of colonial violence and its consequences: rage, alcoholism, restless ghosts, grief, disrespect for life and land. Here, too, is the archetypal struggle between good and evil. It is a world in which the power to heal has not been surrendered to a physician caste, but is present in wise individuals with an extraordinary compassion for people expressed

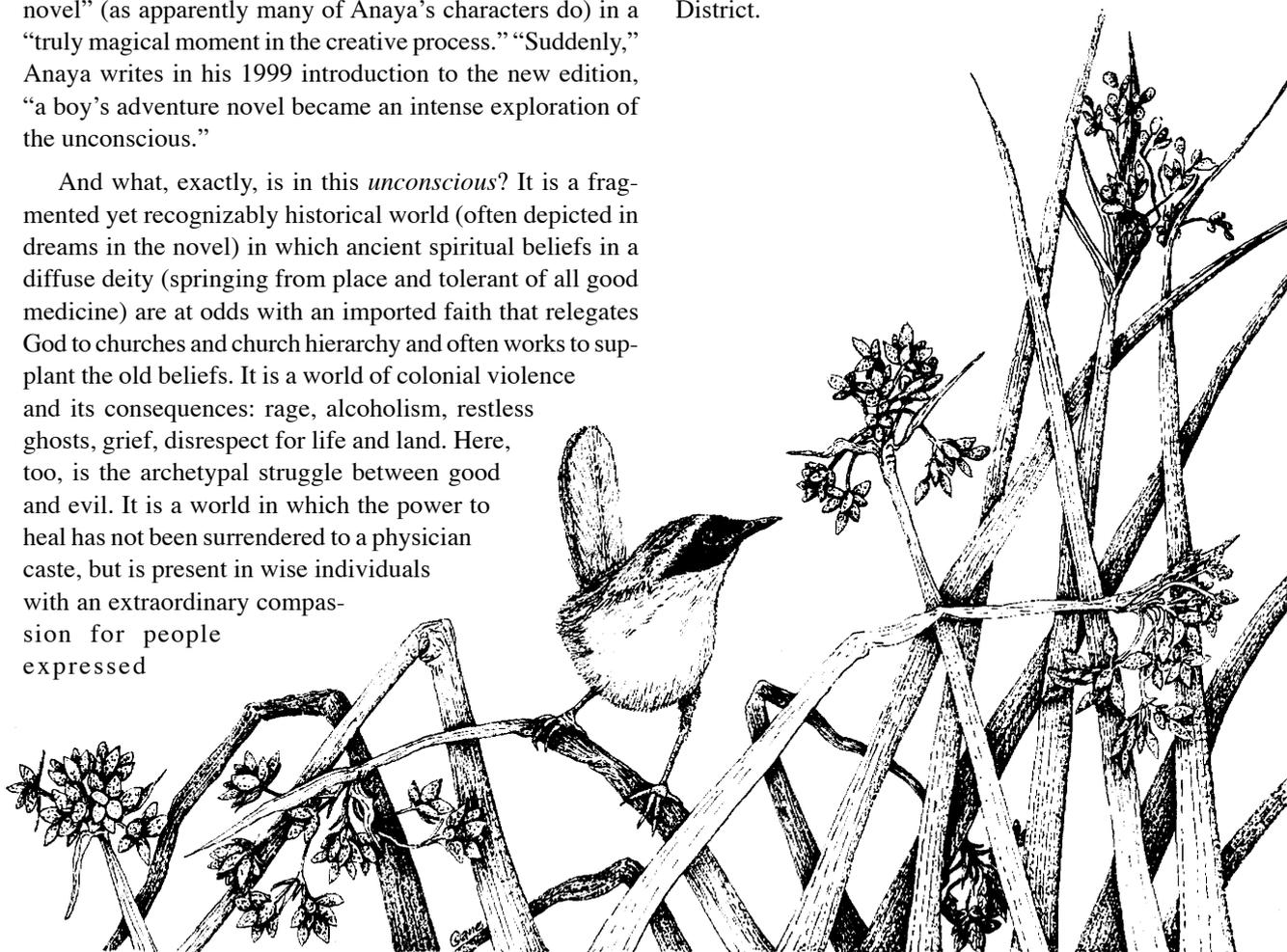
through ritualized but non-institutionalized prayer and ceremony.

And here in the boy's unconscious is the archetypal wise woman, whose knowledge informs the landscape and instructs the boy in reverence for all living things: "For us Ultima personified goodness, and any risk in defense of goodness was right. She was the only person I had ever seen defeat evil where all else had failed." Ultima puts it this way: "I was to heal the sick and show them the path of goodness. But I was not to interfere with the destiny of any man. Those who wallow in evil and *brujeria* [witchcraft] cannot understand this. They create a disharmony that in the end reaches out and destroys life." Ultima is friend and teacher, the one who comforts and heals and undoes curses.

She knows how to give a proper burial to the desecrated dead. Her totem or the embodiment of her spirit, which she calls her *espíritu de mi alma*, is the owl, emblem of keen vision in darkness.

At a time when many young people are struggling alone with fear and confusion, poverty and violence, we could do worse than to provide them with a novel offering them a benevolent, healing presence. Bless Us, Ultima.

ACTION: For more information regarding the fate of the book and the next Board of Trustees vote on February 2, contact the Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District.



How citizens lead the way, giving consent for governments to follow

By LIBBY AND LEN TRAUBMAN

Either war is finished or we are.

— Herman Wouk, *War and Remembrance*

ONE

Maha Mehanna lives in Gaza, and her friend Deb Reich lives in Israel. Despite war, the two friends are determined to stay in touch, and support one another. Like most Gazans, Maha is staying inside with her family, huddling around candles while the bombardment continues.

Deb and Maha talk about how they met, and how both women worry about the fate of Mohammed who is sick, needs outside medical attention, but cannot leave Gaza under siege. Deb calls Maha nearly every day to check in on Maha and her family and distract Maha from her fears.

Friendship Without Borders, WUNC-FM - North Carolina Public Radio - 13 January 2009. Story by Dick Gordon. Distributed by American Public Media. LISTEN http://thestory.org/archive/the_story_688_Two_Friends_Gaza.mp3/view

TWO

Despite the current war with Gaza, a new science workshop connects Israelis to their Palestinian neighbors, with a bigger purpose - providing everyone with water. Palestinians, Israeli Arabs, Israeli Jews, and American researchers meet face to face to address the shared problem of water scarcity and new science that could address the growing lack of water in their shared land and Middle East in general.

“These are not supposed to be conventional workshops where people talk about advances in science in their specialty,” says the executive director. “We designed them around a topic of regional importance.”

“It’s not just for science in general. We are aiming that the people will sit together and start to talk...” The crisis with Gaza has not affected progress. “These are the first ever workshops of this kind,” he says. “It’s part of the general tendency to get people closer together to work in science.”

Palestinian and Israeli scientists unite to help the region by Karin Kloosterman, January 06, 2009. READ <http://web.israel21c.net/bin/en.jsp?enDispWho=Articles%5E12408&enPage=BlankPage&enDisplay=view&enDispWhat=object&enVersion=0&enZone=Democracy>

THREE

Even during war, Israeli and Palestinian teen youth sustain relationships born at BUILDING BRIDGES FOR PEACE, their 15-year-old annual summer program in the Colorado. More on this Denver-based program of Seeking Common Ground at <http://s-c-g.org>

Peace through understanding, cooperation, ABC-TV News - Denver, Colorado - 05 January 2009. To watch: In the lower

Tunnel vision

By KATHY KELLY

Arish, Egypt — As I write, we can hear the dull thud of explosions in the distance. Israeli airstrikes continue to blast targets in southern Gaza. Merciless bombing of the small Gaza Strip continues into a third week. I heard some people here in Egypt wonder if the Israeli Air Force must be running out of places and people to target. But perhaps the surveillance drones we heard and saw flying over the Rafah border crossing today hunted down more spots on which bombers could fix their cross-hairs. Perhaps they spotted underground tunnels. The Israeli government has, reportedly, already destroyed 80% of the tunnels that connect Gaza with the outside world. It’s common knowledge that a vast network of tunnels, some say as many as 1700, were constructed, many from outside Gaza’s territorial borders, leading into the Territory. Israel claims the tunnels are legitimate targets because the Hamas government can use them to import weapons. But the buildup of the tunnel industry was fueled by desperation for needed goods, within Gaza, a desperation caused by Israel’s decision, over the past 16 months, to tighten the thumbscrews of its blockade on Gaza. If the blockade continues, and if the tunnels are completely destroyed, besieged Gazans will be cut off from secure supplies of food, medicine and fuel, yet another terrifying prospect for people who are desperate to protect their children from any greater harm.

Supposedly concerned for Israeli security, the United States supports the Israeli government’s objective of eliminating Hamas’s capacity to fire primitive rockets into Israel. The extensive tunnel industry may be used for weapons transport. I believe it’s wrong to transport weapons, and it’s wrong to develop, store, sell or use them. Distant thuds reinforce this belief, but if the U.S. and Israel believe importation of weapons via underground tunnels is wrongful, then the U.S. transfer of sophisticated weaponry to Israel must, seen in perspective, be abominable, given the slaughter Israel has inflicted on Gazan civilians since the airstrikes began on December 27th.

The taxpayers of the U.S. provided Israel with F16 fighter jets and missiles to carry out these attacks. From 2001 – 2006, the United States transferred to Israel more than \$200 million worth of spare parts to fly its fleet of F16s. Last year, the United States signed a \$1.3 billion contract with Raytheon to transfer to Israel thousands of TOW, Hellfire, and “bunker buster” missiles. In July 2008, the United States gave Israel 186 million gallons of JP-8 aviation jet fuel.

U.S. donations of jet fuel enable Israel to fire missiles into Gazan homes, streets, schools and hospitals. Meanwhile, ambulances drivers in Gaza, also directly targeted, don’t have enough diesel fuel to bring injured and wounded people to the Rafah border crossing, where patients might be allowed to enter Egypt for critically needed care.

Within Gaza, even before December 27th, civilians lacked essential fuels to power the main power plant, which operated at about 2/3 capacity. Now, it’s inoperative. When trucks don’t have fuel, this means that rubbish can’t be collected. Hundreds of tons of rubbish went uncollected in Gaza because of the blockade. 77,000 cubic meters of raw and partially treated sewage were dumped into the sea. Farmers couldn’t operate 70% of their agricultural wells. Power cuts affected hospitals, water pumps, sewage treatment plants, bakeries and other facilities dependent on back-up diesel generators.

Editor’s note on Gaza

Last month’s article, “Israel’s ‘Crime Against Humanity’” by Chris Hedges, generated a response from Connections reader, Ken Kohler. Kathy Kelly’s article, “Tunnel Vision” on this page, prompted comments by Tina Driskill and Tom Gough. These letters are found on page 7.

At press time, a ceasefire in the Gaza fighting instituted by Israel and Hamas, was in effect. While the articles and responses were written before the ceasefire, the issues they raise are very much alive. These various viewpoints are offered to Connections readers to consider.

Now Gazans not only face the consequences of a destroyed health care system and rising sickness due to water-borne diseases, they also face the reality that Hamas could be forced to sign a cease-fire that doesn’t allow for opening the Rafah border and which insists that Egypt assume responsibility to prevent usage of underground tunnels. In exchange for relief from covering under bombs fired by sophisticated weapon systems, Gazans would be required to endure slow motion death through systematic cutoffs of their access to food, medicine, and potable water. This is why it is so important for people all over the world to insist that Israel not only stop attacking Gaza, but also end the brutal and lethally punitive blockade imposed on Gaza.

Here in Egypt, the government has stated that it will undertake responsibility to be an effective partner in negotiating a cease-fire.

Israelis expect Egyptians to stop the tunnel industry. Egypt would be responsible to assure that no one enters a tunnel, builds a tunnel, or is an accomplice to maintaining a tunnel. Already, any Egyptian caught inside a tunnel faces 15 years in prison. How much better for all concerned if the cease-fire negotiations asked the Egyptians to maintain an open border with Gaza, to lift the punitive blockade, and to assist in the immediate and ongoing transport of goods and services that could help Gaza rebuild and assume responsibility, above-ground, for maintaining its citizenry and its sovereignty.

Egypt, the second largest recipient of military aid from the U.S., will be encouraged to use threat and force to curtail the tunnels, supposedly in the name of insuring security for Israel. But who will challenge the obscenely bloated so-called “defense industry” that allows elite gangs, some comfortably occupying the board rooms of major corporations, to supply a repressive, immoral and illegal occupation force with the disproportionate capacity to kill, using conventional weapons against civilian people who have no means to escape?

U.S. support for hard-line, extremist Israeli government policies again represents tunnel vision by choice. U.S. foreign policy makers can begin a cure for this dangerously impaired vision by recognizing the basic human rights of all Palestinian people, and at this crucial moment, by caring for the survival and dignity of Gazan people, especially those for whom meeting basic needs depends on what might come through a tunnel.

Kathy Kelly is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence Email her at kathy@vcnv.org. Voices for Creative Nonviolence: www.vcnv.org



To the editors:

As a former editor of Connections I cannot tell you how appalled I was to find that Connections has now become a propagandist paper for HAMAS.

The article you printed entitled Israel's Crime Against Humanity was highly offensive to anyone who knows the facts of this case. Facts well-documented in the media. HAMAS is a terrorist organization that has vowed to fight to exterminate Israel. Since the cease-fire ended it has sent rockets into Israel, yet I saw no article condemning HAMAS for crimes against Israel. HAMAS not Israel is the aggressor, yet Israel is always being made out to be the bad guy in this conflict while HAMAS is given free reign to wreak terror on Israel. HAMAS has for years, through suicide bombs, killed hundreds of Israeli civilians in order to create an atmosphere of fear yet it rarely receives the criticisms that Israel does. Israel unlike HAMAS has ethically tried to shoot at only military targets and targets where HAMAS's leaders are known to be. In fact the ground offensive that is currently going on is to try to cut down on civilian casualties, something HAMAS would never consider doing. Israel has the right to defend itself. It has the right to go after the terrorists and stop the rockets. Sadly in a war civilians are always killed, however HAMAS, not Israel, is responsible for each and every Palestinian death. All HAMAS had to do was stop sending the rockets into Israel. How many more deaths there will be is in the hands of HAMAS not Israel.

Israel has tried to allow humanitarian aid into the war zone, however, let's not be naive. In these trucks with bandages and medicines are probably also arms and weapons for HAMAS. It is in the hands of the Palestinians to stop the violence. Israel has a right to live in peace and until that is guaranteed by all violence will continue. A state has the right and duty to defend its citizens as it sees fit. Even the Dalai Lama has said that self-defense may be necessary. In a war, if someone throws rocks, it is unrealistic to expect the other side not to respond with something more powerful. How long would Americans tolerate what the Israelis have tolerated? For years, all Israel has wanted is to live in peace with its neighbors, however, its neighbors have not welcomed its overtures.

We must condemn the actions of HAMAS for the cowardly self-serving actions that they are. Terrorists are not martyrs; they are cowards. Put the blame for this war where it belongs on HAMAS and its Arab allies.

A permanent peace must be obtained and the Modesto Peace Life Center should adopt a resolution that calls for peace and for all sides to cease hostilities and support U.N. monitors. The Peace Life Center must never take sides in a conflict; the only right side is the side of peace and non-violence.

Peace,

Ken Kohler
Modesto

Letter to Kathy Kelly in response to "Tunnel Vision" article

Your "Tunnel Vision" article shows the ongoing side-taking of the US "peace" community.

You say the people in Gaza are just trying to exist and protect their children. The same can be said for the Israelis. The blockades were used, in my estimation, to avoid the bombing, which is far over the top.

The non-stop message from Hamas, and other Middle Eastern peoples, is that Israel should not exist, followed by the outrageous overreaction of the Israeli/US-backed government, is not ever going to find a peaceful solution. Both are acting from fear-based motives and using violence (plus manipulated martyrdom on the Palestinian side) to force the other side to surrender. It only fuels the fire in support of anti-Israeli sentiment.

If people are going to truly work for peace, then the focus of writing and funding and negotiating needs to be toward those grass roots people of all ages who are trying to live together as one people with common culture and histories, who existed on the same lands for centuries prior to foreign rule.

We must also be cognizant that Israel is of a Holocaust survivor mentality of "Never Again."

It is not poor Palestinian or big bad Israelis... It is warrior on both sides, both thinking they are in the right and the others are in the wrong and out to destroy them.

When will we, as a human race, evolve and take the energy away from "It's not my fault. They started it!" Sounds kinda juvenile, don't you think?

I do believe Obama has the mature insight to come in as a wise parent and work with the situation. We, as peace activists, need to open and focus our energy toward a long-suffering negotiation, which will have to include tough love in most every aspect.

Thank you for considering my words.

In peace,

Tina Arnope Driskill

Member, Modesto Peace Life Center

Internet resources on Gaza

From Interfaith Peace-Builders

Detailed tips on taking action are available through <http://www.ifpb.org/resources/default.html>

Other resources:

1. The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation has put together these talking points, http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/gaza_talking_points.pdf

2. Harvard Economist Sara Roy's background information on the siege and Gaza's economy, in the Christian Science Monitor at See <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0102/p09s01-coop.html>

3. The Electronic Intifada has published a short synopsis and "Diaries" for on-the-ground reports from the Gaza. See <http://electronicintifada.net/bytopic/687.shtml>

4. B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories details the legal status of the Gaza Strip and Israel's obligations as an occupying power. See http://www.btselem.org/English/Gaza_Strip/

5. Other Voice is a group of Israeli residents living in Sderot and surrounding areas that have been targeted by

[Ed. Note: The following letter is a response to the letter written by Tina Arnope Driskill (see p. 11) from Tom Gough, a knowledgeable and respected member of Congregation Beth Shalom in Modesto.]

I believe that what is going on in Israel is deplorable. I just wonder if Hamas didn't get the results they wanted. Pushing Israel into invading their space will ultimately bring world censure to Israel when they can least afford it. Otherwise, why has Hamas continued to barrage Israel with rockets for so many years? In any event, the loss of one life, be it Israeli or Palestinian is one too many.

I do agree that both sides are right and both are wrong. However, there will never be an easy solution to this problem. The two cultures are so opposite that there can be no middle ground for them to stand.

As long as the Palestinians hold on to the tribal mentality, that the leaders have all the power and everyone in the tribe has their place with no latitude, and the Israelis have a quasi democratic government, the two sides will never be able to talk.

As long as the Muslims care little for human life, i.e., suicide bombers, and Judaism puts life above all, where will they meet? It is also the 21st century against the 12th century. How will the two ever agree?

As long as one side sees the solution as total destruction of a country and a people, while the other purports to want to get along with everyone. How can they agree on a solution, when one side wants their religion to dominate the world, (all non believers should be done away with), while the other side sees themselves as a nation of priests to set an example for the rest of the world?

Where is the common ground? It is still more complicated than my simple mind can grasp, but this is my take on the situation.

Tom Gough

Modesto

Palestinian missile fire from the Gaza Strip. The group is calling for an end to the violence – both Palestinian and Israeli – and is one of the organizations which Interfaith Peace-Builders meets with regularly in Sderot. Visit them at <http://www.othervoice.org/welcome-eng.htm>.

One of the Other Voice organizers co-writes a blog with a friend in Gaza and was interviewed by National Public Radio on January 6. See <http://gaza-sderot.blogspot.com/>

6. Gazan bloggers in and out of the Strip are writing about their experiences. Because Israeli bombing and shelling has greatly damaged telecommunications systems in Gaza, many bloggers are not able to update their sites regularly. Some blogs to watch:

[www.a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com;](http://www.a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com/)

www.fromgaza.blogspot.com;

www.sunshine208.blogspot.com;

www.nagyelali.blogspot.com;

www.kabobfest.com/2009/01/for-tenth-night-in-row-israeli.html

10 Reasons to Hope

... from page 1

tions had too much power. The economic collapse is further eroding goodwill towards corporations and big finance, showing instead how both were instrumental in concentrating wealth, creating unsustainable bubbles, and putting our way of life at risk. After the trillions of taxpayer money paid out in corporate bailouts, the American people are looking for more fair and sustainable alternatives.

5. The failing economy is giving us lots of reasons to be terrified (see below) but also reasons to be hopeful. That rip-roaring economy we're all supposed to be trying to bring back was tearing through the world's rainforests, mountaintops, aquifers, fisheries, soils, and other resources, driving thousands of species toward extinction, changing the climate, and leaving billions behind in the rush for "economic growth." So, painful as it might be, this downturn represents a chance to build a different sort of economy—one that offers dignity, livelihoods, and a future for our children.

6. We're finally getting real about the urgency and scope of the climate challenge.

The incoming Obama administration takes science seriously, which means taking climate change seriously, too. The nay-sayers have quit denying the existence of global warming, and have resorted to random delay tactics. Many now see the conversion to a climate-friendly economy as a major opportunity, with new jobs and investment needed to weatherize buildings, re-tool factories, develop renewal sources of energy, and rebuild transportation infrastructure (see below for the terrifying flip side).

7. Social movements are building people power. Nonviolent civil disobedience is back. Climate organizers conduct "die-ins" and climate camps to shut down coal plants. Workers at Republic Windows & Doors occupied their factory when they were abruptly dismissed without severance and vacation pay. President-Elect Obama backed the Republic workers, implicitly inviting others to stand up for their rights. He also continues to organize people at the grassroots—right now through health care discussion groups. Thousands of these meetings being held across the country could build a health care reform movement with enough clout to overcome entrenched interests and move forward. (We may wind up calling Obama, Organizer-in-Chief.)

8. DIY (do it yourself) communities are piloting the shift to a people-centered society. These folks understand that real security during tough times is found in the "social capital" of community. At the same time, they are creating experiments in "green" and more just ways of life. They aren't waiting for policy changes or bailouts, instead, they are helping each other now and getting on with the most extraordinary project of our time: building a better world.

9. International cooperation is now possible, and it's none too soon. The day of the lone wolf is over. Likewise, the day of the sole superpower that could bend the rest of the world to its will. Climate change, nuclear proliferation, failed states, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the collapse of ocean fisheries, outbreaks of genocide, environmental and human rights refugee crises, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics—all require international cooperation. That means everyone has

a seat at the table, no one gets bullied, and the solutions have to be real ones.

10. Obama! It's true, he hasn't lived up to all our hopes with his cabinet picks. On the left-right scale, he's been pretty centrist, and especially his choices for foreign policy and agriculture posts suggest he may repeat the mistakes of the Clinton and Bush appointees he is surrounding himself with. But on the people-versus-big-money scale, he leans towards people and the common good, as the examples above illustrate. And he has elevated the national dialogue, setting a new standard for intelligent, inclusive, nuanced leadership.

Not bad to be coming into the new year with 10 reasons to be hopeful. That's as good as it's been for awhile. **But there are also some good reasons to be terrified:**

1. Runaway climate change. The biggest question of the 21st century may be whether policies can catch up to the dangerous realities of a rapidly changing climate in time to avoid disaster. Will we come together to stabilize the

climate? Or are we be the last generation to live on a planet that can support complex civilization?

2. Loose nukes. We are all in danger from "loose" nukes, the spread of nuclear materials around the world, and nuclear warfare between India and Pakistan or other nuclear-armed adversaries. Ridding the world of nuclear weapons may be the only way of avoiding a nuclear catastrophe; figures across the political spectrum support such proposals, including former Secretary of State George Shultz. Will we have the political will to rid ourselves of this danger?

3. Mad Max world. Disruption of life-as-usual could come from economic collapse, runaway climate change, war, peak oil, pandemics, or some unforeseen combination of these and other factors. What makes these prospects especially terrifying are potential human responses to them. We could see either societal breakdown, in which each person turns on others in a battle for dominance or survival, or fascism, in which people allow all-powerful leaders to run things out of fear of chaos.

So which will it be? Are you hopeful or terrified by the coming year and by what we face in the coming decades? What I keep coming back to is this: we humans have the free will to make choices that assure our collective survival. We do have the creativity, compassion, and intelligence to build on the best possibilities while averting the worst. This historic moment will test everything we have built and everything our ancestors have passed down to us. The answers are readily available, embedded in all the world's spiritual traditions, in all the mothers and fathers who have sacrificed to make a good life for their children, and in all the peacemakers who have worked to build a better world for everyone. Will we make the choices for a just and sustainable world? We know, as Obama says, that, indeed, Yes! we can. But will we?

Sarah van Gelder wrote this article December 31, 2008, for YES! Magazine, where she is the Executive Editor.

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=3184>



Manolin "Manny" Moreno: realization of a dream

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

Many years ago, Manolin "Manny" Moreno, a member of the Yaqui/Tarascan tribe of American Indians, announced his dream "to those who would listen, those who would not and those who were too drunk to hear." He would have his "words in books, to preserve our family and community stories." His dream unfolded in the spring of 2008 with the publication of a volume of poetry entitled "The Bridge is Gone." He is currently writing a novel.



Moreno, now in his early 50's, says his teacher, Rosemary Eismann, "set me straight, encouraging my creative writing. I remember saying to her, 'You mean I can write anything I want without getting in trouble?'" There was so much freedom in that. I began to write everything."

Eismann wrote, "Manuel Moreno was a member of the Upward Bound program sponsored at the time by Stanislaus State.... He always was a poet, even as a young man."

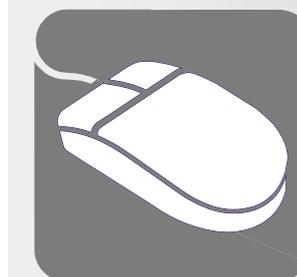
The artist, photographer and author traveled a rough road to realize his dream. As a youth, he woke up behind bars more than once -- sometimes warranted, sometimes not. Much of his troubled past was influenced by the deaths of his father and mother when he was very young, and by his ethnicity.

For the past 12 years, he proudly calls himself a recovered alcoholic and addict, as he continues "walking on the Good Red Road. Through the Native American Church, the sweat lodge and ...Sundance Ceremony in South Dakota," he has "found the strength to live a sober life."

Manolin has worked in the fields and in seasonal manual labor jobs, as a counselor for San Joaquin Juvenile Probation and juvenile group homes, and with a Native American alcohol and substance abuse facility.

His experiences have helped him realize, "that it doesn't matter if a person is purple or green, there are persons of true character in every race; those are the ones I call friends."

The highly respected man of words has been interviewed many times on radio and TV, and has spoken at Modesto Junior College as part of a feature on Native American Literature. Purchase "The Bridge is Gone" from <http://back40publishing.com>. View Manny's art work, photography and writing at <http://www.myspace.com/mannydoink> <http://www.authorsden.com/mannyamoreno> <http://back40publishing.com/manny.html> <http://monolinmannymoreno.synthasite.com/index.php>



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

I Dread

Grandpa Hawk perched in a tree
looked down at me
on a stump gazing
at fields being primed
for the advancement of the times
and asked unassumingly:
What is in your heart?
And so I began to speak:

I dread this alien rat race
mirrored in congested
big city phlegm
manifest destiny all over again
mixing into this country world
like oil with water
strangers with shark-like expressions
convoluting the landscape
in Hummers Volvos SUVs
along with their collective wannabe's
I dread this transformation of
new homes and buildings
expanding like popcorn
no locals can afford
I dread this attack of the new-age Borg;
Resistance Is Futile-You Must Assimilate
I dread these pimps of poorly planned
progress for pathetic self-profit
I dread taking scenic drives
in the country thundering
with traffic thick as bees on honey
being forced to find places
away from familiar places
where technology yet has targeted
its thoughtless tentacles
and capitalist clowns have yet
proclaimed their arrogant game
of eminent domain
places where open spaces
still be free of idiot boxes
blasting gangster obscenities
where no yuppies have fenced off
areas once always open and free
of eyes of steel and robotic gates
and fortresses of concrete
high as prison walls
And grandpa Hawk looked at me
with eyes of wisdom and said;
listen,
listen
to us
winged ones
four leggeds
insects
trees
rivers
as we sing
our death
songs,
Then grandpa Hawk
flew off into the blue
and I rose from the stump
for a bulldozer was coming
and I could no longer stay.

Behind the Lodge

The tin door to this
matchbox ramada on flat tires
swings open west
where ancestors having crossed-over
journey to their eternal rest
from here behind Three Rivers Lodge
I observe center nerve of an infinite
universe:

An almond orchard
shielding ghostly California Coast Ranges
A hogan we ceremony in night long
around the fire with medicine and songs
a sweatlodge where steam the breath
of Grandfather purifies
our common pitiful bodies
minds and spirits
a pow-wow arena alive only
4th of July weekends
here through Indian eyes
I observe this tiny world dawn to dusk
where no wars wage
and there aren't drive-bys or road-rage
where no dope dealers poison
for pathetic profit their own people
where no theologians solicit
theories of apocalypses
where no political piranhas propagate
ideological deceptions
where no manifest-destiny build fences
fashioned
from blueprints for genocide
no
here I observe
tiny country world where Indian men
in a Recovery Center smile sober
here I observe
top of arena's center pole

a redtail hawk perched
scoping for dinner
squirrels dashing underground
here I listen
to a band of coyotes
invisible but close
howling their bellies
desiring chickens or goats
or both
here I observe
sky shed its blue
into hues of reds and purples
as a laughing moon balloons up
to its temple
and harmonic stars robe around it
as San Joaquin Delta breezes purge
through whispering ol' trees
swaying in mild-mannered dance
as warrior magpies kamikaze the hawk
and crickets and their tiny cousins
riot across sacred grounds
as evening's ceremony blooms into
night song
here from an abalone shell
a stick of sage is lit and I smudge
giving thanks for another day
lived and gone
and I step into the trailer
hit the sack a tired cat
prepare to journey into
dreamworld where
anything and everything is possible
but before that
peep out tiny window
observe a dozen spirits
dance around the arena
like they always do
behind the lodge.



Shadows In The Fields

Hearts webbed in lace
Souls carved from steel
Toilers of earths face
Shadows in the fields

Bamboo bodies bending
Rising in the wind
Sand storms savage roaring,
Back and forth again,

Like a ballet
In rapid fluid motion
Dragging sacks of onions,
Without much notion:
No fortune,

Room makes it's entrance
Onion fields bare,
Mothers cradle infants
Chorizo stings the air,
Coffee brews
Tortillas steam
Children cry fatigue,
Beans bubbling
Sun's shining
Soreness in my knees,

Countless sacks
Of onions stand
Lifeless on the barren land
Staring only for a moment
In quiet lament
Shadows in the fields.



Unembedded Poetry: A Review of David Smith-Ferri's "Battlefield Without Borders"

By RYAN CROKEN, *truthout* | Review

On the eve of the invasion of Iraq, as our political figures and talking heads wrangled over the best way to babysit the cradle of civilization at the barrel of a gun, American poet and peace activist David Smith-Ferri had a different idea: he would go to Iraq and ask the people who lived there how they felt. "I wanted to interview Iraqis," he writes, "about the threat of war. Surely, I reasoned, it should matter to us what people in Iraq think."

This presumption, startling in its seeming innocence and radical common sense, underpins the poetic and humanitarian mission of his book, "Battlefield Without Borders: Iraq Poems." Culled from Smith-Ferri's experiences as a writer and importer of contraband medical supplies on three separate trips to the Middle East between 1999 and 2007, "Battlefield" is a staggeringly eloquent portal into the for-

On the eve of the invasion of Iraq,
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gotten human dimension of our engagement with Iraq, and an exercise in the project of person-to-person diplomacy. As an unembedded storyteller, Smith-Ferri reinserts Iraqi civilians back into the generally depersonalized conversation we are having about them and without them. Through the uniquely equipped medium of poetry, Smith-Ferri delivers hard-earned insights and reflections that broaden our emotional framework for understanding Iraq, and lend heart-wrenching individuality to an otherwise undifferentiated mass of "irrational people / masked terrorist tribes, hands around throat s." It is in this spirit of reporting not just what is happening, but also who it is happening to that we lift off with the poet on his first visit to Iraq.

It's 1999, and after nearly a decade of military and economic warfare, the nation is in bad shape. Sanctions have decimated Iraq's ability to provide clean water and a functioning medical system. Children are dying by the tens or hundreds of thousands from diarrhea and easily curable diseases. Smith-Ferri and his co-workers drift through pediatric wards that seem more like preludes to morgues than centers of healing. As the same contaminated waters that gurgle in the rivers outside pour from the faucets of hospital sinks, Smith-Ferri pauses to take stock of the situation in meditations that blur the genre lines between field notes and elegy:

Daily, like a sorcerer, the sun warms Iraq's sewage-laden rivers,
conjuring cholera and typhoid and E. coli
that are killing children in this hospital ward,
slowly draining juice from their tiny bodies.
Here lies the desiccated fruit of a generation.

Smith-Ferri and his delegation wander through a malignant landscape where bombings more routine than rain have stolen countless limbs, and fields of depleted uranium have created "nuclear children ... slowly roasting, / leukemia a fire in their bones and blood." Leaning over the deathbeds of these victims, Smith-Ferri and his fellow activists ask an Iraqi doctor - "a grim, tour-weary guide" - what he does to try to provide hope for the patients' parents. The doctor, helplessly flanked by his empty medicine cabinets, responds plainly, "like a metronome," as if bolstered by the authority of his incapacity, "There is no hope. This child will die ... That child will die ... They're all going to die."

Amid this assault of visceral information and a sense of powerlessness that is omnipresent and "pathologic," Smith-Ferri has to struggle to maintain his balance. His encounters with the Iraqis leave him breathless, speechless and existentially "immaterial." He struggles to preserve a sense of identity amid the vast expanses of the desert and the surreal "timelessness of war." Smith-Ferri stands, spectral, beside an innocent young victim in the aftermath of a capricious US missile attack. What words of condolence could he offer to a child whose arm has just been severed by shrapnel, without warning or purpose? The poet has nothing to say.

A one-armed, seven-year-old boy looks right through you.

His black-robed mother,

standing behind his bed,

won't even look your way.

Smith-Ferri's verse is characterized by a tremulous poise that reflects his search for composure, order, justice and an alleviation of suffering. We can almost imagine him taking a break at the end of each line, gathering himself together before proceeding down the page. But his linguistic command of these narratives is as refined as it is raw; these are chiseled, elegant stanzas: cutting, measured, smooth and confident in their authenticity. With empathy and precision, Smith-Ferri fluently translates a foreign trauma into language that is both accessible and unfathomable. Like the blank space that follows a bomb, these words point to the wordless, hinting at the incomparable kind of experience that can only be lived in, and expressed by silence.

But "Battlefield" is full of voices, and not just the author's. With titles such as "Walid's Story," "Amal Speaks," "Ahmed Speaks" and "Suad's Words," many of the poems in this book are either dedicated to, or written in, the voice of the people Smith-Ferri meets. At hospitals and bombing sites, inside a record store, at a dinner party, while kicking a deflated soccer ball with a child on the brink of invasion, Smith-Ferri works tirelessly as a poetic journalist, documenting the mood of the nation, asking Iraqis to share their thoughts, fears, ideas and aspirations. Their responses are seamlessly woven into the text, and are often nestled into a narrative context that

Smith-Ferri and his co-workers drift
through pediatric wards that seem
more like preludes to morgues than
centers of healing.

endows them with enormous weight and emotive punch. Their voices ring in your ears long after you've turned the page. "If you can heal my child, please take him with you." "What is the mood in the United States? Will they attack?" "Your president is a coward, / fighting a coward's war, / attacking unarmed people ." "You like it here? Why not buy a home in Baghdad? / Prices have never been better!" "I want to show you something. / My left ear does not work, thanks to a car bomb." "The US will find a pretext to attack. / It will either be weapons of mass destruction / or support for terrorism. / No proof will be given." "Five hundred varieties of dates ... One huge one is called donkey's balls."

While these characters express a range of sentiments - anger, valor, resilience, desperation, uncanny hospitality - they share one thing in common: they are all undeniably human. In working towards, as Kathy Kelly, author of the book's foreword, puts it, dispelling "the dangerous notion that only one person live(s) in Iraq, the notorious dictator Saddam Hussein," Smith-Ferri transforms a hazy crowd of very foreign foreigners into a collection of individuals who are extremely relatable and very much "like us." In the world of "Battlefield," people have been turned back into people, and, consequentially, the doors to empathy and communication are swung open. Suddenly re-humanized through the thoughtful deftness of Smith-Ferri's art, the crisis flares in our hands. Iraq is no theoretical quandary. It becomes personal, intimate, active. As the poet continues to bring Iraqi voices to American ears, we realize that these are not conversations to be overheard, but to be absorbed directly. "Tell the American people we are not their enemies. / Tell the American people we love them, / but we must have our lives back!" The message is clear: if you are an American person, these people are speaking directly to you.

"Tell my story ... tell my story ... tell my story ... " After hearing "these same three words" over and over again while traveling around Iraq and through neighborhoods in Jordan where uprooted Iraqis struggle to survive in exile, Smith-Ferri becomes explicit in his intention to relay the insights, appeals and agonies of a deeply misunderstood country.

Here on this page I spill Suad's words,

jagged obsidian chips that lacerate this paper,

its blood marking the hands of everyone who reads this book.

All of this storytelling begs the question: how do we listen? Thusly marked by Suad's bloodied words, how do we respond? "Battlefield" does not answer these questions for us. It is a window, not an instruction manual. It invites us to contemplate our interconnectedness with another people in a world where borders - cultural, linguistic, geopolitical - have been erected to prevent the recognition of a shared

Smith-Ferri continued

humanity. Literally and literarily, Smith-Ferri crosses these borders and bears witness to previously inaccessible realities. After visiting a bomb shelter that became a tomb for over 400 Iraqis after two "very smart" American missiles slipped into the ventilation shaft and incinerated everyone inside, Smith-Ferri is slammed with an inter-culture shock of such bare-faced enormity that it kindles a sudden dark enlightenment:

My eyes were never meant to see this,
to flare like torch, sudden with knowledge,
like windows, to open on this illuminative dawn,
but like tinder in its box (named *American*,
middle class)
to remain cold, untouched,
and far from flintstone truth.

Smith-Ferri's "flintstone truth" burns at the heart of his stories, whose ultimate lesson is perhaps that we ourselves are a part of them. This realization of suddenly being a part of the plot destabilizes the cozy illusion that there are vaguely bad things happening somewhere way over there in a strange land that many of us can't locate on a map. The battlefield has come home. The wounded are laid bare before us. "Fighting them over there so we don't have to *think* about them over here" loses its absurd currency. Distance is capsized, walls are torn down, and we find ourselves fighting this war not only on our shores, but in our own hearts and minds. What is our obligation to Suad? Where do complicity and culpability lie? "These poems strip us of our innocence," Kathy Kelly observes. "David prods us to be uncomfortable"; he prods us

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to become sensitized actors in a drama that is already difficult to observe from the air-conditioned mezzanine.

"Battlefield Without Borders" offers brutal, vivid and tender portraits of the fallout of the modern American-Iraqi engagement. Its lessons should be at the forefront of our minds as we try our best to figure out how to respectfully assist in the reconstruction of a country whose history and future have become inextricably linked to our own. More information about the book can be found at its Web site, www.battlefieldwithoutborders.org

All proceeds from the sale of the book are donated to Direct Aid Iraq, a grassroots humanitarian relief organization providing medical care to Iraqis displaced by the sanctions, the invasion and the occupation. Information about Direct Aid Iraq is available at <http://www.directaidiraq.org/>

Ryan Croken is a freelance writer and editor based in Chicago. Reach him at ryan.croken@gmail.com

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Copies of David's book are available at the Modesto Peace Life Center. Email Ken Schroeder for information at kschroeder70@yahoo.com

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Citizens Lead

... from page 6

left corner, search for the "Peace through understanding"
<http://www.thedenverchannel.com/video/index.html>

FOUR

As war fails again, news journalists increasingly seek citizen-examples of life beyond war. The 16-year-old Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue in California is seeing that it's public peace process activities are reported not simply as "human interest" but hard news.

KGO Radio News (3 min) - <http://traubman.igc.org/kgonews.mp3>

NPR's Weekend America - <http://traubman.igc.org/weekamer.mp3>

More at http://www.crosscurrentsradio.org/features.php?story_id=1086

Or Google "Jewish Palestinian Progress."

FIVE

History shows the power of people-to-people contact, by Daniel Noah Moses and Aaron Shneyer, The Christian Science Monitor, 14 January 2009: <http://csmonitor.com/2009/0114/p09s02-coop.html>

Edited.



Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

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