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Prize Winning Essays - 2010

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Citizens for Peace Prize Winning Essays – 2010

First Place Winner – High School Division

Amany Killawi Star International Academy

Domestic Violence: A Nonviolent Approach

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” (1)

Mohandas Gandhi

Domestic violence today is unfortunately the most common form of violence in families where one spouse attempts to control the other through intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and other controlling measures. For victims of domestic violence this can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and sometimes death. Annually, compared to males, females experience over 10 times as many incidents of violence by intimates. (2) In the United States, a woman is battered every 7.4 seconds, and approximately 3-4 million women are beaten annually by male partners. (3) Domestic abuse is not confined to a certain race, culture, or religion, but occurs in families from all walks of life. It is a significant problem affecting over 2.5 million people in the United States every year. (4)

However, domestic violence is a social issue like any other that can be addressed successfully through non-violent means. Communities have not been silent, and numerous organizations have sprouted in a commitment to end domestic violence against women, youth and children through support, advocacy, education and community organizing. One such organization is the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN). For over 30 years SPAN has provided specialized community training, violence prevention education, as well as anti-violence coalition building with individuals, agencies, and institutions. Another successful non-violent measure against domestic violence is the Men’s Nonviolence Project which seeks to encourage men to take an active role in ending men’s violence against women by promoting nonviolence among boys and men, and offering consultation and training. Also the Jackson’s Domestic Violence Court is one of about 30 such courts in Michigan that since its creation, the percentage of domestic violence re-offenders has decreased from almost 25 percent to less than 10 percent, as a result of court mandated counseling for offenders that teach anger and impulse control, and appropriate coping skills that help in the rehabilitation process. (4)

Quite clearly and without doubt, the only way to stop domestic violence is through non-violence means and based on the doctrines of Dr. King and Ghandi. It is extremely imperative and crucial that we fight domestic violence with the proven methods of these great leaders who have accomplished much using non-violent means. Domestic violence can never be stopped by beating up the perpetrators of the act and throwing them in jail, as this will not solve the problem and will only increase the conflict,

furthermore reinforcing the cycle of violence. Mohandas Gandhi was very much right when he once said, “an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.” (6)

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Second Place Winner – High School Division

Zeinab Bazzi Star International Academy

Peaceful Relationships Through Active Nonviolence

Is nonviolence truly effective? Using violence to solve a problem only makes the problem bigger. Debating, boycotting, and taking part in a strike, are all different ways to voice your opinion and get to solutions without the use of violence. Over the past years many individuals, recognized and not, have used nonviolence successfully to help people around the world. Carl's story is a marvelous example of how a calm and quiet man can change the lifestyle of someone who uses violence on a daily basis.

Carl was a retired man in his mid-eighties. A while after he retired he saw a flyer asking for someone to take care of the garden behind the minister's home. He immediately signed up and began working the next day. Carl was always alone and didn't really talk to anyone. His neighbors were worried about him due to the violence in the area. One day while he was watering the garden with a hose, a gang of three young men approached him. They looked like they were up to no good and had tattoos all over their arms. Nonetheless, Carol offered them a drink of water from the hose. They laughed and pushed him to the ground. He fell on the leg he injured in WWII. They took his retirement watch and his wallet. When they left, he immediately began to work again. The following week they returned again. Despite what happened the last time, he offered them a drink from the hose. They took the hose from his hand and sprayed him all with water. About three weeks later a young man came to Carol. He recognized him from the gang. He handed him a bag that had all of Carl's things that they had taken from him. The young man explained to Carl that by not reacting to their actions, he was influenced and that caused him to change how he acted. That winter, Carl died. Many people attended his funeral. The young man from the gang finished school and got married over this time. The next year the same flyer that Carl saw was posted. The young man, who was once a gang member, took the flyer to the minister and immediately began working at the garden. He remained working at the garden until his wife had a baby named Carl. Carl's reaction was so loving that it completely impacted the young man's life dramatically.

Nonviolence can teach people to have a more positive outlook on life. Harassing someone is not going to get people anywhere. Carl could have put a stop to the harassment by the gang through violence, instead he treated them with love and respect and he knew they would come along on their own. I can now see that not having a reaction at all can result in a positive outcome and relationship with the person on the opposing side. "Nonviolence is the weapon of the strong." (Mohandas Gandhi)

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Third Place Winner – High School Division

Doaa Al-Howaishy Star International Academy

Peaceful Relationships through Active Nonviolence

How do we define a word such as nonviolence? Can we go beyond the obvious meaning and find a deeper explanation for the term? Nonviolence, according to Webster's dictionary, is defined as, "peaceful resistance," but I think it deserves a greater definition. Nonviolence is not just an action in which we promote peace in a subtle manner, but it is a philosophy. Throughout the past century, there have been many people who used nonviolence tactics to promote cooperation and understanding. Two people who dedicated their lives to establishing peace amongst all aspects of life and worked to make our families stronger and more unified are Maya Angelou and Jane Addams.

Maya Angelou can be considered one of the most influential African American women of the past century. She is an autobiographer and poet who has used her writing talent to describe how it felt to live the life of an African American woman dealing with racism. Writing is an act of nonviolence; no one is being physically hurt, but nevertheless the effect of the writing on people is strong. Her writing made her a spokesperson for African Americans and women (Harlemworldblog). Her sixth autobiography, A Song Flung Up to Heaven, describes Angelou's experience after the assassination of Malcolm X. In this book, she also shares her hopes for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Angelou wants a world where people are treated equally regardless of race, gender, and other dimensions of difference. Thanks to Maya Angelou's contribution to society, we can all receive a little insight into the mind of an African American woman and mother in the mid 1900's.

Another influential figure of the twentieth century was Jane Addams, pioneer social worker and internationalist. She was a feminist who believed that women should make their voices heard in legislation. In Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy, the author describes Addams's cultural and political influence on society (Eishtain). In 1915, she became involved in the Woman's Peace Party and was elected national chairman; her role was to help find an end to WWI (Bettis). On, December 10, 1931 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her prestigious work.

With the works of people such as Maya Angelou and Jane Addams, an ordinary person like me can learn a lot about the past, the present, and possibly, the future. We need more people that promote the right message, the message of peace and equality in this world. Maya Angelou created an everlasting effect on the world of literature. Jane Addams was a feminist who expressed her ideas of a true democracy every time she spoke of equality for all, man and woman. Some people may not agree with the idea that public speaking or writing is an effective form of expressing one's thoughts. However, it is plain to see that the effects from the work of these two phenomenal women have greatly impacted the world we live in today.

Both of these influential women have contributed to the equality that exists in the world we live in today. By writing and speaking their ideas and aspirations for society, they made the world a different, more peaceful place. This takes us back to the definition of nonviolence, a simple word with a *significant* meaning. These women and many other individuals used nonviolence tactics such as speaking, writing, and rallying to promote peace in a way where the message remains in the minds and hearts of people everywhere.

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First Place Winner – College Division

Polly Anna Burnette-Egan Schoolcraft College

Nonviolent Relationships Through Cultural Relativism

In my experience conflicts, whether violent or nonviolent, derive from pride or an individual's attempt to save face, keep their honor and most importantly not appear to be weak. It is human nature to have conflict, but dealing with conflicts nonviolently is the challenge that this generation must meet. I believe we need to understand that culture plays a crucial part in one's feeling towards violence and nonviolence. Understanding a culture and giving the community a way to meet their own needs for nonviolence will empower a people towards peace building.

America has a culture that accepts violence as a norm of society. On the Student Peace Alliance's website there is a statistic cited which reports that the U.S. youth homicide rate is ten times greater than other leading industrial nations (www.studentpeacealliance.org). Violence as a mode of conflict resolution is something that is modeled on every level to America's youth. Violence is still very common in family life and is modeled in communities and on the national stage.

In the home one's culture will affect one's upbringing and consequently one's view and acceptance of violence. Domestic violence is still prevalent, and physical punishment, pain and fear are still acceptable forms of parenting in the U.S. In a home where violence is used and accepted, children will grow to believe that it's an appropriate way to handle a conflict. However, before we condemn families, we should strive to have an understanding of why this is common in homes. Many religions and cultures have taught that the man of the house has the right to use violence towards their families. Understanding this, respecting a culture, and approaching the issue of violence without ethnocentrism and intellectual superiority, will get those working toward social change in the door, where as condemning and blaming will get them nowhere.

We can use this same principle in approaching a community. What is the culture, religion or demographics of a neighborhood? Nonviolent education is crucial to curbing the violence, but it will not be successful if it does not recognize the reality of day to day life. The book *American Nonviolence: the History of an Idea*, describes how Martin Luther King Jr. tried to establish nonviolence in communities. King states, "We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We try to persuade with words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts." (Chernus p.172) Communities need models of nonviolence from their own people, because they will understand the cultural context of community and the families. As Woodrow Wilson put it, "The purpose of education is make the young as unlike their elders as possible." (McCarthy p.18)

Nonviolent relationships can be achieved when we strive to have a greater understanding of others and their reasons for turning to violence. If we can allow for everyone to save face, conflicts will not need to turn to violence. Nonviolent

relationships can be achieved through peace education and cultivating peace leaders in each community.

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Second Place Winner – College Division

Christa Mann – Davenport University

Finding Peace After Rape

There are many ways to violate a person's basic human rights, one is rape. A victim might blame herself. A victim of rape may feel many emotions, some of which she may have never felt before. Recovering from rape is a long process that requires acceptance, counseling and support.

Accepting that you have been raped is one of the first steps to reconciliation. For survival, a victim may take her mind to another place and leave her body behind. "I separated my mind from my body. It was as if the rape were happening to someone else, somewhere else-not to me in the bed where I spent each night with my husband and sometimes played with our children." (Baker & Newsome, 2003, pp. 90, 92, 94) This separation is a way of coping, mentally making it through what is happening to her. For a victim, it is hard not to feel guilt or blame. Finding inner peace is necessary for reconciliation.

Another important step to reconciliation is to see professional counseling. Counseling may help a victim of rape handle the feelings or physical changes and bring understanding of what has happened. Sometimes, a victim becomes consumed with hatred towards the person who violated her, not allowing her to move forward. According to Stepanek (2006), hate is a very descriptive, strong word: one that expresses a lot of anger, hurt, and pain. A conflict can be worked past or through but "hate...it can never be taken back, even with an apology." (Stepanek, 2006, p.65) A professional counselor may be able to help the victim avoid the hatred, moving to forgiveness, toward reconciliation.

A victim may need to surround herself with a strong support system to help regain personal strength and reconcile the incident. A rape victim loses trust and confidence in those that she is unfamiliar with. Surrounding herself with those whom she trusts and confides in, will assist with reconciliation. Having the support of those who care is necessary for the victim. "Peace, of course, cannot be achieved in a single prayer, but it can be built; and a multitude of prayers would be a very good place to start." (Hunt, 2002, p. 340) A strong support system can help a victim build her inner peace.

When bad things happen to a person, it is hard to find peace. A victim of rape may have a hard time dealing with the emotions or psychological barriers that arise after the violation. Such an event can cause the victim to build up hatred towards a specific group of people (i.e. gender or ethnicity that committed the crime). A victim may find that through acceptance of what has happened, professional counseling, and a strong support system she can work towards reconciliation. Reconciliation can happen for any person who is willing to work towards inner peace, and find a positive in such a horrific event.

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Third Place Winner – College Division

Rebekah Terry Davenport University

Peace and Domestic Violence

After watching a close friend try to find her way out of a domestic violence situation, I began to realize that there are a few things a person needs to have in place within his or her life in order to break free or bring reconciliation back into a relationship. Bringing peace into a home that has experienced domestic violence might include developing communication, finding a support group or system, and calling on a higher power.

First, communication is the key to any relationship and reconciliation. One way to stop anger from building may be to learn to express one's feelings and to talk about those feelings. In return, the one learns to control anger. Communicating feelings might stop a person from holding on to anger and exploding. In the poem "Searching for the Words," David Krieger said: "But the language, the language must be of the heart's pulse, and the rhythms must be those of the wind and tides. A poem of such magic cannot be found in books or in ancient scrolls. Such a poem cannot be written in stone, or ink or even blood. It can only be lived." (Krieger, 2007, p. 16)

Secondly, support from family, friends, or support groups can come in many forms. "In my experience, a person will resist what we request if they see us as only interested in getting our own needs met, and if they don't trust that we are equally concerned with meeting their need. Genuine cooperation is inspired when participants trust that their own needs and values will be respectfully addressed." (Rosenberg, 2005, p.2) Finding a person or support group that an individual can talk to about what he or she is facing may lead to peace and reconciliation within the home.

Lastly, a higher power can come in many different forms. A person needs to find something that he or she is able to draw strength from. By having faith and finding hope and peace within, a person may find peace in his or her home. In order to have peace in one's life, one must have peace within him or herself. Louis Diamond talks about how some things in life can damage a person. Until a person finds "inner peace," the person is not able to truly heal. He has found that "inner peace is fundamentally a state of spiritual connection." (Diamond, 2000, pp.44-45)

By finding a way to use communication, support, and a higher power, a person may be able to begin to heal inwardly and outwardly. A person may be able to find peace and reconciliation within the home that at some point was filled with domestic violence. Not only would a person find peace in his or her home but also find peace and understanding as a person. I believe that peace starts on the inside. Only after healing oneself can a person begin to heal the home and find peace.

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