

Let There Be Peace On Earth

by Judy Howell, President MFCA

*Let there be peace on earth
and let it begin with me*

Let there be peace on earth

the peace that was meant to be

Sy Miller and Jill Jackson (1955)

It seems our world is engulfed in violence from the world realities of Iraq, the Middle East, Asia and South America to more local realities in our neighborhoods and even our University Campus. The media is plastered with pain, death and dying. The children in our families have often experienced the realities of violence in homes and families. Television, movies, and music cry out in the pain of the world as it spins round and round and round. Violence screams in our face - even in the beauty of spring-time. And yet pain, death and dying have always been a part of our humanity.

I look out in my gardens and see new shoots springing up among dead plants and grasses. The rain washes away the old and quenches the thirst for new life. I dry my own tears as I bask in the sunshine of memories of those so dear to me who have gone on to higher places - my wonderful husband, my father and now just recently my mother. Those three cherished people who still remain close to me. My heart is filled with the gifts they have given me in love. I can simply reach out into the memories of our experiences together and I smile. Each of these people in their pain, dying and death left a legacy and gifts for me.



My father walked in peace and would have adopted the world. He was a people person and not afraid of differences. He embraced life. He would open his arms to those in need. Our family table was often shared with individuals who simply needed friendship and a hot meal. He didn't miss a minute of life. He skied for the first time at sixty. Whatever life offered he would try it. He did an incredible job loving and being wonderful to four daughters and a wife. His grandchildren were the world to him. He taught me that each human being is important, that we are all special in our own ways and what I see on the outside may not be what is the reality on the inside. He taught me to love people in peace.

My husband raised an umbrella of protection over my life as I raised children with complicated life histories. His smile and sense of humor cut through even the most difficult times and brought peace to our household. His strength and structure gave the children we cared for a sense of security. He walked a peaceful walk in building bridges of hope, care and understanding. Today I walk strong because of the strength he left me with. The shy, quiet housewife has moved boldly into advocacy for children in out-of-home care and the families who care for these special children. I still laugh at the memories and experiences we shared. I realize that through his pain, dying and death I am a stronger person who will persevere to accomplish what needs to be done for the good of the future. I realize that peace begins in my heart, in my mind and through my voice.

Just recently amidst the hustle and bustle of the Minnesota Foster Doll Project, I received a call that my wonderful mother

was very, very ill. The greatest gift I could give to each of us at that moment was my presence and nothing in all earth mattered more to me in those final days than being together. During those last days I realized all the times my mother de-stressed my days with her voice and her actions of love and how important it is for me to carry on traditions she placed in my heart.

My mother was the glue that held our family together. She instilled in us things like "life is too short to lash out, there are other ways to deal with things." That family is the center of the universe - our family and God's family. My mother taught me to be a strong Christian woman, she had an unwavering faith in everything she said and what she did. Mom showed me how to be a friend through the friends she had. She showed me how to fight over personal issues. She had a rare lung disease. She always fought and she always won. Until now. But as she lost her fight she passed on the baton to each of her daughters to fight over our own personal problems and shortcomings to give hope and strength to others. She challenged me to be independent and strong - and when she went on to higher places she left a legacy of peace that lives on in each of her children, her grandchildren and all the children she touched in my family (which is now over 350 children). My mother 'let kids be kids' and saw the sunshine of a child's personality even in the mess of complexity. She who did not experience the 24/7 of treatment foster care, lived it vicariously through my family's life. She was there to provide a shoulder to cry on when my rope was too short to cope. She was there to offer support when a child crisis came into play. And even in her death she remains there for children in out-of-

home-care through the "Leola Kaisershot Memorial Scholarship."

My husband, mother and father provided me with comforting rituals I still carry on to provide peace in my mind and my household. They taught me what real trust was, even when there were times I could not trust myself. These loving caregivers taught me to care more than I dreamed possible. They taught me to say "I hear what you are saying" and "what you are feeling is important". They taught me through their lives,

but also through their pain, dying and death that one cannot expect perfection in humanness and one must take each day as a single day and enjoy moments to play. They taught me that peace begins in me and through me and by me and within me. That what I say or do matters and that I can start or stop conflict with my words and actions. My three wonderful caregivers may have left me technically a widow and an orphan, but because of the family we chose to build and have they have never left me alone. Their great strength in caring taught me to

give care and still lives on in me and all the others they cared for. They taught all who touched their lives that PEACE begins in family.



God Bless

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*We need more foster, kinship and adoptive parents as members.
Get your friends to join MFCA and keep up the great job Minnesota!*

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