

Selected passages from a letter from Stephanie Heuer to Evelin and the conference participants

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Message 20th June 2008

My dearest Evelin!

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I have received many requests for my seminars, and I will be doing my DignityRocks! - Be the Arrow, dignity themed seminars next year at several high schools and middle schools.

The last 'Be the Arrow' seminar I did was at Andrew High in San Jose .This high school has had 7 killings of students related to gang violence in the last two years. The student body, and community has been greatly impacted. My idea in the conference is to give these young people alternatives to violence with a message, a tool, and a rock. I have a small pouch I give to each student. In the pouch is a copy of the human rights mandate for child, a small rock, and a card with a picture of an arrow and a handwritten message that says 'Be the Arrow'. I explain the importance of human rights, dignity , and the preservations, protection, and promotion of each. I then talk about the arrow concept (which, by the way I got from you in Costa Rica when you wrote on a white board mind sets of violence, then mind sets of peace on the right hand side, then you drew the arrow from one to the other. I thought to myself at that moment, 'I want to be that arrow', thus it was born). The third thing I give the students is the 'rock'. The rock represents taking mindful moments before you drop your rock in the pool of life's consequences. For example, if you are angry, choosing to do nothing, choosing to yell, choosing to write a cruel email, or choosing to pick up a gun, are all choices. The idea is the larger the rock, the larger the consequence. I tell them to drop little pebbles for the bad things, and big boulders for the good things.

I am bringing to our conference two T-shirts from the students of Andrew Hill who wrote their names on them as a symbol of committing to the concept of peace. The T-shirts have our slogan, Be the Arrow, and they all signed it with the idea in mind that I would come and tell the story of their school and their individual commitments to non-violence. It is with great pride and honour that I do this.

I met with Betty Williams last year in Dallas for a Peace Conference. She said many things that resonated with me, but one in particular... “There cannot be peace without justice, and the path to justice is restitution”. Restitution can come in many different packages, dear Evelin, and the tricky part isn't building bridges to peace. The tricky part is finding the right materials to build those bridges.

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Much love.

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Message 21st June 2008

Dearest Evelin,

I share with you the simplest things that have made such differences in my life. Your work has guided me along my path, and for that, I am most grateful.

I'll tell you a little story...

I went to Andrew Hill High School early in the year, to present the seminar on DignityRocks (the little pouch, etc, with rocks, and all that). I met a young man, Nikko. His brother had been shot and killed three days earlier for a gang related matter. Nikko was stunned, in a state of mind chaos, and shock. All I could do really, was just hold him. He told me of his brother, his brother's hard life, the home life. I just sat, listened. I couldn't really say much. He sat through my presentation, and took the pouch with him (which had a rock in it). I saw him perhaps four times after that. He attended every presentation I did, and I worked with a group of students on some anti-bullying dialog for a school presentation. The last presentation I did incorporated the "Be the Arrow" (inspired from our Costa Rica meeting- dedicated to you and Don's memory in my opening notes). I had the blank T-shirts there. When I finished, I asked the students to come up only if they felt they could commit to some form of non violent values, and I would pass their commitment on. To my surprise, dear Nikko stood up from the audience of 140 high schoolers. He came down in front of all them. They all knew who he was, and what he and his family had been through. He came down and held the pen high, and said, "I will be the first to sign". This was a significant commitment to not retaliating against the gang. There were opposing gang members present. I thought he was so brave, so wonderful of a gesture. With that, I had almost all the kids present sign the shirt. I feel it is an important document, symbol for that community.

When I left that day, I went out to the parking lot. It was the last day of school for them. As I was pulling out, Nikko came running out, like he was looking for me. I stopped the car and got out. He came running across the parking lot with this huge smile on his face. He had just found out he had passed all his finals, and he would be indeed graduating with his class. He wanted to share that with me. We hugged for a long long moment. Perhaps, one of the most touching moments of my life. And then, dear Evelin, he stepped back, and took out from his pocket the rock I had given him months earlier, when his brother had just been killed, so senselessly. He took it out and he said, "he's the rock you gave me, I carry it with me always". Evelin, it is just a rock, just a simple rock. We must find simple tools to build simple bridges.

Much love to you dearest Evelin...