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Teaching Tools: Giving Youth a Foundation for Leadership

By Marie C. Franklin

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If you looked closely at the photograph on the front page of the Aug. 29 *Boston Globe* - the one of **President Clinton** holding hands with civil-rights activists at a Martha's Vineyard ceremony celebrating the 35th anniversary of **Dr. Martin Luther King's** 1963 march on Washington - you can barely see **Marianne Larned's** right hand and left forearm.

But make no mistake. The limb is hers, clasped tightly to the hand of **Democratic US Representative John Lewis of Georgia**, a colleague and friend of King.

"I suppose, that as a human being, to see that my hand was the only thing to make the picture, I said, 'Hey, wait a minute, there's no one in that picture from the Vineyard, they are missing half of the story,'" Larned said recently in her Vineyard Haven office, where she is the director of **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, the nonprofit education foundation that organized the event.

"Honestly, we didn't care, because it was a magnificent day and there was a strong message of hope, with children singing 'We Shall Overcome,' a young boy delivering a speech he wrote as if he were **Dr. Martin Luther King**, the president and **John Lewis** speaking and standing together on stage," Larned said.

"It was a powerful reminder of the power of one person to make a difference and change the future," said **Vineyard resident Randy Vega**.

Stone Soup Leadership Institute is committed to empowering young people to become leaders in building a better world, according to Larned. Its first project is a curriculum based on "*Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Kindness and Courageous Acts of Service*," a collection of 100 stories of ordinary and extraordinary people who overcame obstacles and went on to help change the world.

The book, which was edited by Larned, includes stories about **Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter, Bette Midler, and Marian Wright Edelman**. A dozen stories highlight the work of local residents, including Boston street artist **Sidewalk Sam**, the founders of **City Year**, and **Aaron Feuerstein, owner of Malden Mills**.

Earlier this year, when a story on the Institute appeared in the *Cape Cod Times*, Larned said she was inundated with phone calls from teachers. "Many of them wanted to see the book and said there was nothing like this in the schools," she said.

Diane Troy, a teacher at St. Francis Xavier Prep School in Hyannis, wrote a letter to Larned suggesting she and Larned collaborate on a teacher's guide to accompany the book. That guide, which has been reviewed by other educators and school librarians, will be available in October.

"The **Educational Curriculum Leader's Guide** pulls out the values and the lessons learned from the 100 stories and gives field trips, classroom activities, and teaching tools to use the stories to teach literature, science, social studies," Larned said.

The book, which is carried by Scholastic Books and is available in bookstores, is also filled with teaching and community service ideas. For example, at the conclusion of a story about a young girl from New Orleans who started a food drive for hungry children, readers are encouraged to organize a food or clothing drive in their communities.

Last week, at an event in Chatham, Larned reached out to Cape Cod educators to introduce the foundation's back-to-school campaign. Teachers, principals, and school librarians attended, as did **Chatham school Superintendent Vida Gavin**.

"All you need is a couple of people in the schools like Marianne Larned imparting the message that it's important for young people to learn that they have to give back to their communities," Gavin said. "All the better if it's a classroom teacher who can be a very powerful role model."

But back to August on the Vineyard and the other part of Larned's story.

Planned as a healing ceremony for Vineyard residents troubled by the July, drug-related death of a young, black man who lived on the island, the August event turned into something more. First, Larned realized that the planned date, Aug. 28, was the anniversary 35th of King's march on Washington. Then, she invited **President Clinton**, who was vacationing on the Vineyard, to attend. Soon after, Larned learned that **John Lewis** - the only major speaker from the Washington march who is still alive - was on the island to promote his new book about the **Civil Rights Movement**. Larned invited Lewis.

"A few days before the event, we got word that it was likely they would both attend," she said. And because presidential politics supersedes grass-roots organizations like **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, what started out as a small gathering of year-rounders turned into a large media event. More than 2,000 people attended the service, although only 300 fit inside the **Union Chapel in Oak Bluffs**. Many of the people listening to the ceremony from outside were Tourists hoping to glimpse the president.

What came as a surprise, however, is that the president used his time at the podium not only to recall King's work, but also to ask for forgiveness for his marital infidelity. "All of you know I'm having to become quite an expert in this business of asking for forgiveness," Clinton said.

"It is important that we are able to forgive those we believe have wronged us, even as we ask forgiveness from people we have wronged," he said.

That night, national news broadcasts led with a story on Clinton's talk. Across the country, newspapers carried the photograph of the president singing "We shall overcome," arms crossed and holding hands with Lewis and **Harvard Law School professor Charles Ogletree**. At the core of the coverage was the president's apology. And, cut out of the news and cropped from the photograph, was **Marianne Larned** and the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**.

No matter, said Larned. "What started out as a healing for our Vineyard community became a healing moment for our country with president Clinton's moving speech," said Larned, a former teacher. "Our country needed to hear what he had to say. Learning forgiveness is a great lesson that we all need and that we need to teach our children.

"Our hope is that through the back-to-school campaign we will pass on the dream and legacy of service to as many children as possible and inspire people to build a better world - with and for our children," Larned said.

Readers interested in more information on **Stone Soup Leadership Institute** and its work, or in receiving a copy of the Leader's guide to "**Stone Soup for the World**" stories, should write to **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, PO Box 4301, Vineyard Haven, MA 02568, call 508-696-8514