

The Cape Cod Chronicle

Not Just Another Inspirational Book By Alan Pollock April 16, 1998

CHATHAM --- Happy angels and a gentle pattern of stars grace the cover of *Stone Soup for the World* (Conari Press, \$15.95), a new inspirational book edited by **Marianne Larned** of Vineyard Haven. But that feminine design belies the horsepower or the stories inside. Larned will be signing copies of the book Sunday in Chatham.

A few years ago, Larned had the chance to take part in a grassroots community effort or the best kind; she and other volunteers helped save the **Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society's** 139-year-old barn, which was due to be replaced with a more spacious, modern steel barn. Bucking the odds, a group of people circulated petitions and raised money, and eventually selected a three story barn which was trucked to the island from New Hampshire and reassembled. The effort gained national attention when singers **James Taylor and Carly Simon** reunited for a special concert to raise money for the project. Larned was among 10,000 others at that concert. "There was such a sincerity. That was what touched me," she said. "These people really felt a spirit of community." That experience inspired Larned to assemble *Stone Soup for the World*.

The book consists of nearly 100 individual stories, each around three pages in length, written by and about such people as **Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Richard Dreyfus, Bette Midler, Eleanor Roosevelt, Paul Newman and Gandhi**. Some of the names are familiar, but many are not. "The stories represent every culture, every religious tradition, rural life and city life," Larned said. The vignettes are tied together with a central theme: the familiar folktale, Stone Soup.

There is the tale of **Chris Gross**, a young financial analyst for a high-tech company in California. Like most Americans, Gross was deeply shaken by the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building

in Oklahoma City, but unlike most, he took action. "In Santa Clara, California, all Chris Gross could think about were the children. 'I kept seeking the building and the images of the children who died in the day care center' he said. He kept thinking about them and the others, the ones who had lost their parents. 'Imagine being one of them,' Chris thought. 'Put yourself in their shoes. They're going to be missing their parents for the rest of their lives.' Twenty-seven-year-old Chris wanted to give these kids a little extra something." Gross resolved to start a scholarship fund; with \$12,000 in savings and with no family to support, he decided to donate one year's salary--\$53,874--as seed money. After hounding his employer and more than a dozen Silicon Valley companies, he raised \$400,000. Some media exposure followed, and an additional \$300,000 in donations. Impressed with Gross' efforts, Oklahoma's governor made a \$3 million contribution to the scholarship fund, using money from the general fund. Because of the **Oklahoma City Scholarship Fund**, 207 children touched by the disaster are assured an education.

Gross' story is only one of many of the book's "life changing stories or kindness and courageous acts of service." The tales range from a little girl's efforts to get a playground built in her inner city neighborhood, to an adaptation of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s** famed *A Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. There is another story about United Farm Workers organizer **Cesar Chavez** and his work to improve the plight of migrant farm workers. "I'm always shocked to learn how many young people don't know who Cesar Chavez was," Larned said. "They think he's a prize fighter."

Perhaps as valuable as the stories are the tiny boxes at the end of each story, which give addresses and telephone numbers of related charities and foundations. There is also a resource guide at the end of the book, listing other worthy organizations. Larned's non-profit group, the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, is developing a teacher's guide and a youth leadership training to empower youngsters to make the world a better place. "I think our kids need role models and people they can look up to," Larned said. "It renews people's spirits."