

Half Moon Bay Review

Sept. 26, 2001

Stone Soup – A parable the world is eating up

Out of the 16th century comes the following folktale: A weary traveler arrived at a village and knocked on doors seeking food. At each door, he was turned away, until one villager offered him some water.

Saying he could make stone soup with that water, the traveler heated the water in a pot and added a "magical" stone.

Curious villagers gathered and asked what the soup tasted like. Well, answered the traveler, it might be better with some onions.

A villager immediately brought a few onions. Then the traveler said the soup might be good with carrots, which another villager brought. Then still another brought potatoes.

Soon, many villagers offered various ingredients, and the traveler used them all to cook a delicious soup that fed the whole village.

This parable of individuals combining resources to create something good for all, became a metaphorical main dish of inspiration, chez coastal resident Marianne Larned.

A vivacious and energetic Coast-side newcomer, Larned leveraged that concept - the efforts of everyday folks serving as beacons to a better world as president of **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**.

The non-profit educational foundation presents avenues in which people can serve " and rebuild communities, and empowers young people to build a better world.

She is also the executive director, of the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, editor of the book "*Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories*

of Kindness and Courageous Acts of Service" and developer of the **Stone Soup Educational Curriculum**, which is used in scores of communities nationwide.

Recently, she served up a second course of stone soup: the new Youth Leadership Campaign, which will develop education and community service projects involving youth and culminate in a second book, "*Stone Soup for the Teenage World*."

Like the ingredients in the folkloric stone soup, a lot of time went into the growing stages for Larned's work.

She spent 20 years living and working in communities around the world and hearing a common longing for a better life for families and a stronger sense of community.

"Most people, young and old, wanted to help, yet they didn't feel connected and didn't know where to begin," she wrote in the introduction to "*Stone Soup for the World*," which has been called a "handbook for humanitarians".

"*Stone Soup for the World*' reminds us that with a little imagination, cooperation and goodwill, we can make the world a better place. We each have a magic stone: the power to give and get others to join us in building a world that works for everyone.

The book contains 100 stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Many of the names aren't familiar. Others are: **Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Wynton Marsalis.**

The stories share this common denominator: one person taking a first step to make a difference in his or her community or the world.

"Working together ... we can revitalize the tradition of service to others that has been so much a part of our history and national character," wrote **Ret. Gen. Colin Powell** in a message that begins the book. "We invite you to join us."

The first Story is of 4-year-old **Iris Johnson of New Orleans**. At 4, she wanted to send her family's leftover food to hungry children in Ethiopia but, upon being told that it was impractical, went door-to-door to collect food for hungry kids in her own

neighborhood.

By, age 13, she was running the nonprofit Iris Johnson Foundation that feeds and clothes those in need.

Other stories touch on the **AIDS Quilt; Oskar Schindler; Steve Mariotti**, a New York businessman who turned a mugging into a "mini-MBA" program teaching street kids to run small businesses; a Target stores program for disabled workers; an Ethiopian who brought a medical program to the sick in his country and others.

At the end of each story is the address or phone number of related aid organizations.

Larned promoted the book's message through the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute** and its two-year educational curriculum, which summarizes the stories, presents reflection questions, exercises identifying values and suggests avenues of community service.

The curriculum has been used in schools, service programs, volunteer centers, community and faith based groups, and similar programs throughout the country.

The message of service has always been vital Larned said, especially now with war coming.

"If there is a silver lining, we are reminded how human it is to want to give back and how important it is, mentally and spiritually, to do things together, she said.

She learned that for herself early.

A Massachusetts native and the eldest of 10, she became a Girl Scout volunteer at age 12, tutoring kids in reading. Her mother, Margaret, was a Girl Scout leader.

That "gave me and anchor" and showed her the importance of adults working with kids, she added.

Age-wise, she says she's from the sixties."

"I feel very blessed that I lived in a period of great heroes," she said, citing **Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy and Cesar Chavez.**

I want to pass the legacy on and inspire others to become the next Chavez, the next Martin Luther King."

While still in her teens, she worked in education and leadership in the Philippines and in Europe. Then she spent time in Hawaii and saw the effects of drug and alcohol abuse among the young.

"I tended to go to places where I could learn," she said.

In Hawaii, she said she learned that "helping others is the best antidote for drug and alcohol involvement."

In the Philippines, she learned the concept of "bayaninhan," or "hero."

"That was what our country was hungry for."

She also felt that in America people are recognized for doing good for themselves, not so much for others. "I had felt for years that I needed to lift up the everyday person doing good," she said.

She expressed that to her friend en Jack Canfield, co-author of "**Chicken Soup for the Soul.**" His response: go do a book of her own.

Encouraged, she spent two years compiling: "**Stone Soup for the World,**" publishing it in 1998 during **National Volunteer Week in April.**

The next year, the curriculum was published in the same week as the Columbine High School shootings.

Her next goal: "I want to find stories of kids out there who are doing good." To that end, on Aug. 21, the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute** launched a **Youth Leadership Campaign** with a gala party at the Douglas Beach House in Miramar.

The campaign encourages young people to take action in their communities. It also includes the new book "**Stone Soup for the New World**" (Crown/Random House).

The gala began with music by local flutist Viviana Guzmlin and drew guests from around the country.

"Today there is talk about how awful kids are. We

don't hear that," said Jenny Girard, who works with youth services at the **Volunteer Center of San Mateo County**. "This is why we do this work."

Just like "*Stone Soup for the World*," the new book will have 100 stories, all of young people doing good, said Stephanie Higgs, editor with Crown/Random House, who was visiting from New York.

Young people "may seem angry, but they're also dying to know what to do," Higgs said.

A featured speaker was 16 year old Kedar Shah of San Carlos who is on the International Youth Council for "*Stone Soup for the New World*," and is gathering stories and researching service projects for the campaign.

"It is a myth that my generation is apathetic and decadent," Shah said. "Sixty percent of American teenagers do community service."

Also part of the Youth Service team with the county volunteer center, he is co-organizing a rally of culturally diverse kids in San Mateo on Oct. 27, which is **Make a Difference Day**.

He said he hopes to include a phone conversation with a Palestinian youth group during the rally to promote tolerance.

In his speech, he said, "Things are getting better, not worse, in the world." Nearly two weeks after the New York terrorist attacks, he hadn't changed his stance.

"It's hard to say that this week," he said. "But I think that youth have a lot of idealism and a lot of tolerance, especially in the Bay Area. I think that tolerance and open-mindedness can help" now.

Larned agreed.

"I think about what Gandhi would do" in light of the recent tragedy, she said.

"With the (new) book, we'll try to help people understand different cultures and what they're living with.