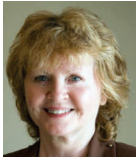


kids
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difference®

summer 2007

Finding Solutions Newsletter

VOLUME 12 Number 2



STARVED FOR CHANGE... By Marti Forman

**People Making
a Difference**

Lucky Me! My family had food to put on the table each day, but we always bought only enough to give each of the seven of us a single portion. My chore was to walk to the store and help select the seven pork chops or seven pieces of chicken that would be served that night. We were not poor but we were what we now label “food insecure,” meaning we carefully watched what we purchased so there would be enough. As a young bride, the last week of the month meant the money was gone and so was the food. The nun’s from the school where my husband taught delivered emergency food boxes to us the last week of each month, giving us tomato soup and peanut butter to coat our empty stomachs and relieve the aching we felt that fourth week of the long, long month. I have had these unpredictable food shortages throughout my life. Timing visits to the in-laws when they were off to church and raiding their bomb shelter food stock was an embarrassing survival tactic we used in the really lean times. So, while I never climbed into dumpsters or panhandled for my next meal, I do remember worrying about where the food would come from in the times when cash was short. A charge card helped buy baby formula the last week of each month. Because hunger was always a real threat for me, I have never taken adequate, nutritious, tasty food for granted. Today, I work in the hunger industry overseeing a daily hot meal program and a very busy emergency food pantry. No doubt, my job selection is tied to my hunger pangs and haunting memories.

I guess the real reason I am rambling on about my personal experiences with hunger is because I understand from a first hand viewpoint how a good person can get stuck without enough food to eat. Not because of poor choices, but because some career choices—especially in service work—are traditionally the lower-paying jobs. Many people will never have well-paying jobs, so food will always be a luxury item in their budget. As crazy as it seems, food becomes the dispensable item in a family’s budget.

Today, my refrigerator is full. CEO of a big-city emergency food pantry and kitchen, I recognize that the hunger that surrounds me on a daily basis at this job could return again and become my own personal nightmare. No one is really safe from hunger. Ask Katrina families about how quickly the presence of hunger entered their homes. Hunger is as close as

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About this issue...

This issue kicks off with the first of two articles in our “People Making A Difference” (PMD) series. Marti Forman (pg. 1) describes how “lucky she was” to go from a family where she was “food insecure” to CEO of an emergency food pantry and kitchen.

Dr. Stephen Bezruchka returns to grace our pages (Pg. 2) asking the question, “Why are we leaving the children of the U.S.A behind?”. A very timely article as this question is the subject of much attention by the media, Congress, citizens and is a part of Michael Moore’s new film.

A book came to the attention of Stephanie Kempf (author of the KIDS Teacher Guide) that impressed her. We decided to publish our first book review (pg. 4) and if the response is favorable, she has agreed to locate and review other books she feels are of interest.

Life as Origami is the second of our PMD articles in this issue. Lois Barber (Pg. 6) shows how life is similar to constructing an Origami. As you will see, she is still hard at work constructing “new folds.”

Sister Barbara Lenninger (Pg. 7) rounds out this issue describing the work of the dedicated folks at The Thorpe Family Residence as they provide services to help mothers prepare for a living wage job, find an apartment and stay off welfare.

Finally, this issue contains an insert by Carrie Kilman describing an article appearing in the fall issue of Teaching Tolerance magazine. KIDS is featured in the article. The article will appear in its entirety on our web site in October.

Enjoy

(Continued from page 1)

my next economic challenge, natural disaster or medical crisis.

Hunger is at epidemic levels in America today. In my community, more than 37.5% of families living here earn less than \$35,000. Of those families, nearly 89% admit that finding food is a very serious worry. I see the toll the stress of hunger takes on America's families. My office lobby is often filled with the crying of hungry children. A can of spaghetti can stop the tears but not my shame that I am so powerless to rid this community of the problem. The harder we work, the bigger the problem seems to grow.

Hunger, in this nation of great waste, is one of our most shameful realities. How have our policies allowed more food to go in garbage disposals, dumpsters and landfills than what is actually needed to fill America's hungry bellies?

I watch the grocery store shopper's eyes, squinting to make out labels, while exchanging one item for another looking

for that fraction of a cent savings. I observe the mother who puts the orange juice into the cart, puts it back on the shelf, and then puts it back into the cart again. I know what's going on there. I've danced that indecisive dance, wanting the "nutrition" but buying the "fill." We shouldn't have to make those decisions in a nation as great as our nation. Our children, our elderly, those with disabilities, the infirm, and the working poor—each should have the opportunity to have enough to eat.

Today, when I finish this article, I am going to write a letter to the editor of our local paper about hunger. When you finish reading this article, perhaps you will be compelled to write a letter of your own. We have to keep hammering away at this until something changes. People are hungry. Are we truly bereft of answers?

Marti Forman is CEO of The Cooperative Feeding Program in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She may be contacted at Mart4man@aol.com. For further information about the program, visit www.FeedingBroward.org



WHY ARE WE LEAVING THE CHILDREN OF THE U.S.A. BEHIND?... **by Stephen Bezruchka**

Sputnik's launch in 1957 during my youth was an obvious F on our nation's report card, a failure that propelled us belatedly into space. We were shamed to find our guidance system to be lacking as the Russians beat us and we as a nation determined to catch up.

The UNICEF Report Card Number 7, released in February, showed that the US and the United Kingdom have the worst child outcomes, including those for education, among rich countries. This, like the launch of Sputnik 1, should have been our call to action. But the media response in these two Anglo countries couldn't have been more different. Although the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and the Washington Post carried the AP report the next day, and the Los Angeles Times did its own story, it received only a tiny bit of attention on public radio. In England, however, stark headlines made the front pages, the news was all over the tele and radio. Discussion of the report continues today. Will "No Child Left Behind," the legislation that requires every child to perform at grade level for reading and mathematics on test scores by 2014, bring us up to speed so we no longer lag behind in the world? Let's explore our nation's report cards to discover how we should strive for something that will be even more challenging than the moon landing: to achieve acceptable outcomes for our children - that will

benefit all of us.

There was little interest in exploring space after the Second World War. The first satellite into space shamed us into faulting our educational system for not focusing on science. We played catch up. The media challenged us and vaunted our every step forward in the race. The cost was huge, the effort incredible, and we were successful: the moon landing helped establish the US as the key world power. Afterwards the incredible price of continued human presence in space was too high to continue.

Most of us have been schooled to rate how well we are doing by comparing ourselves with others. The February UNICEF Report put us at the bottom of all rich nations in children's outcomes. It summarized children's material, educational, and subjective well-being as well as health and safety, family and peer relationships, and behaviors and risks. While we are the richest country in the world, we rank highest in child poverty rates among rich nations. Our children's death rates are the worst as well. There is only one indicator in which we do well: the amount of money we spend on health care amounting to half of the world's health care bill. In terms of real health outcomes, there is not a single measure of our health status as a nation in which we

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rank among the top twenty in the world. Shame! Why are our children being left behind those of other rich countries? What do the top ranked countries do that we don't?

I studied medicine at Stanford Medical School in the early 1970s. I discovered that even back then I had highlighted similar points about our child well-being slipping. Our infant and child mortality rates, for example, had been some of the best among nations in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but by the time I entered medical school, we were being left behind by many other nations. Now we are doing much worse: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Health USA 2006" report presents our infant mortality rate (the proportion of newborns that die in their first year of life) rankings for selected nations, comparing 1960 with 2003. Forty-seven years ago we stood in 12th place for infant mortality, and now are 28th in that most sensitive indicator. If the CDC were to include more nations to the comparison, as the CIA does on its website, our ranking falls to 42nd. The CIA has a practical reason for tracking countries where infant mortality rates rise as that measure portends future instability. Forebodingly, ours rose from 2001 to 2002 for the first time since the 1950s. Why are even our infants being left behind?

I became interested in comparing our welfare with that of other countries in 1993 after learning of Sylvia Ann Hewlett's report for UNICEF "Child neglect in rich nations". It received no attention in the media in the US. I was unsuccessful in even finding the report in university libraries in the Pacific Northwest, and only located a copy through UNICEF in New York. The publication demonstrated that the US had the highest child poverty rates. Hewlett pointed out that we spend much more time earning a living and less time devoted to raising our children than we did a generation ago. Our children spent 25% fewer hours in school than their European counterparts. Family breakdown and absentee fatherhood contributed to educational underperformance and failure. TV was a surrogate parent. Housing policies and health care presented ways that public funding could make a difference in child well-being. English speaking countries had fallen behind those on the European mainland. In France, motherhood was regarded as a social function and heavily supported. Scandinavian countries had generous paid leave policies to allow parents to spend time with their infants and to encourage fathers to be more

involved in child-rearing. Divorce was shown to affect children and mothers adversely; in response some European countries managed to protect the economic interests of women and children after divorce, in contrast to what occurred in the US.

Hewlett's report spawned a range of report cards by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center that compared child health outcomes among rich nations. The first, in 2000, analyzed child poverty looking at rich countries belonging to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development. Only Mexico had more child poverty than the US. They estimated that to close our gap would cost less than one percent of our economy. Reports followed annually, presenting League Tables of child deaths by injury, maltreatment, as well as teenage births, and educational disadvantage. Despite our abysmal series of "Fs," these findings received little attention in our country - in stark contrast to Sputnik's launch and the Russian's beating us into space with manned rockets. Surely the consistent finding that we are far behind on all early-life indicators deserves at least as much attention as propelling a human body into space!

Behind the UNICEF reports is that reality that the bulk of our health as adults is determined by conditions in the womb and during the first two to five years of life, as our Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Institute of Medicine point out. But this critical fact doesn't get public attention. Socioeconomic status, especially the record gap between the rich and the poor, is the critical condition impacting our health and well-being. As we go from the womb to the tomb, it is in early life that relative poverty matters most. Students in my courses at the University of Washington find this difficult to believe. We have all been taught that we control our health as adults - that we can amend past transgressions with the right diet, exercise, or regular medical check ups. But there is clear evidence that these factors don't matter all that much. Instead the social and economic conditions of our early life have the strongest influence on later health, which is why we must focus on improving conditions for kids in the US now.

The No Child Left Behind act requires all students tested in reading and mathematics to be at grade level by 2014. We could take this goal, as the equivalent of the moon landing, and see what must be done to achieve it, and whether the

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**KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE® FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)**

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**Jane Finn Levine, Ed.D. and Larry Levine
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time required is adequate. The importance of early life impacting educational achievement guarantees that we will fail in this goal by 2014. Generational efforts are required to get an A on our report card. It is much tougher than a moon landing. But what better goal to strive for than improving our children's health! The standard should be comparing ourselves with that of other rich nations.

What are first steps, the equivalent of launching the Vanguard Rocket? Just as we learned from the Russians, we as a nation must learn from other countries that do things better than we do. Good baby steps might be to grant paid maternity and paternity leave for everyone, as many European countries do, to ensure that newborns have the best chance for healthy development during the most important period of their lives. The United States, Papua New

Guinea, Lesotho and Swaziland are the only countries in the world without a paid maternity leave policy.

We get what we pay for and we get what we measure. If we measure our standing in our children's health and well-being compared to other nations, and pay for what will improve it, then future generations will be healthier and will thank us. Other nations will look to us with more admiration than was achieved by the moon landing. It is a worthy prize.

Stephen Bezruchka, MD, MPH is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Health Services at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, as well as a board-certified Emergency Physician. He may be reached at sabez@u.washington.edu.



WORLD POT LUCK: A BOOK REVIEW... **by Stephanie Kempf**

What if you could sit down for a huge potluck with people from around the world, people from as far away as Greenland, Bhutan and Ecuador? What kinds of foods would fill the global table? How different or similar would you and your tablemates be? And if we are what we eat, what does our food—and the way we acquire and prepare it—tell us about ourselves?

These questions and many more are answered in the photos of an amazing book by photojournalist, Peter Menzel and writer, Faith D'Aluisio called, **HUNGRY PLANET: WHAT THE WORLD EATS** (Ten Speed Press). The authors made 30 families in 24 different countries an offer they couldn't refuse: they would pay the bill for a week's worth of groceries, go with the families to purchase or hunt their food, and then photograph each family in their home surrounded by their week's worth of food. The resulting photographs are mouthwatering, stunning, heart-breaking. Each family's story and photo are accompanied by a list categorized by food group, the price of a week's worth of food, a family recipe and a side-bar that provides information on the environmental conditions and socio-economic status of that country (including the number of McDonalds). Interspersed among the photos are fascinating essays by leading thinkers such as Francine R. Kaufman's "Diabesity" and Michael Pollan's "Food with a Face".

The families portrayed range from affluent ones in developed countries to some of the neediest in the most ravaged regions. Here are the two extremes: a family of six living in

the Breidjing Refugee Camp in eastern Chad whose food costs \$1.23 per week, and a German family of four whose weekly food budget amounts to \$500. The Aboubakars, a Darfur mother and her five children (ages 16 to two) are seated on an earth-toned rug in front of their tent surrounded by three small bags of unmilled sorghum, a corn-soy ration, white sugar, a quart of sunflower oil, four limes, some dried vegetables and beans, small amounts of dried fish and meat, a few condiments and water provided by Oxfam. Their family's recipe is for dried goat-meat soup requiring six ingredients measured in "handfuls" and teaspoonsful, cooked over a wood fire or hot stones. By sharp contrast, the Melander family of Bargteheide, Germany is photographed in their modern dining room surrounded by mounds of goulash beef, cold-cuts, herring fillets, pork, bacon, eggs, plastic containers full of butter, yogurt, milk and cheese, muesli, freshly baked buns, stollen and croissants from a nearby bakery, boxes of muesli and noodles, oranges, apples from the family tree, grapes, tomatoes, green peas, onions, lettuce, leeks, mushrooms, peppers and garlic, chocolate cake, pudding, pizza, soups--both frozen and canned—several bottles of beer, wine, soda and water and cartons of juice (\$70 worth). Their cooking methods include electric stove, microwave and outdoor BBQ grill.

The rest of the families fall somewhere in between these two extremes; some, like China are on the cusp, in transition from a diet of poverty to one of affluence. China is represented in this book by two families—one rural, one urban. Food for the Cuis of Weitaiwu village is mostly raw and

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minimally processed. It is purchased from small village vendors or plucked from the family's hens or garden. The Dongs of Beijing, on the other hand, can spend three times what the Cuis spend and have access to food markets where they can purchase packaged meats, vegetables, fruits, French baguettes, beer, chips, Maxwell House instant coffee, Haagen-Dazs ice cream and Kentucky Fried Chicken (there are more than 100 KFCs in Beijing alone!). And lest you get the impression this sounds like the typical industrialized city, food stands here also sell skewered scorpions, crickets and deep-fried starfish.

Some surprising observations:

- The Filipino family eats Cheese Whiz with their breakfast of rice and eggs.
- The Italian family smokes twenty packs of cigarettes a week.
- Kool-Aid and Coca-Cola are everywhere!
- 98% of Kuwait's food is imported and they have higher obesity and diabetes rates than any western country.
- There are forty-six McDonalds in India, and, of course, none of them serves beef.
- There are 13,491 McDonalds in the USA (they purchase 1 billion pounds of beef and 1 billion pounds of potatoes annually) and 8.8% of US citizens age 20 and over suffer from diabetes.
- The Madsen family of Greenland eats dead sea birds, seal, polar bear and walrus meat, plus Heinz ketchup and Pringles.
- Mr. Madsen, mobile phone at his ear, guides his dog sled across the endless, frozen tundra hunting for seal with his entire family in tow. When they return days later the children watch MTV.

Nothing brings people together like food—glorious food! Once you've been "invited" into a family's home for din-

ner, they are no longer strangers in a distant land. This is the charm of the book. My favorite photos are the ones taken in rural villages like those in Bhutan, Ecuador and Guatemala where food still looks like food—vegetables with their roots, stems and leaves still attached, mounds of ripe yellow plantains, mangoes, juicy oranges, plump tomatoes, deep purple potatoes, chili peppers, green onions, burlap bags heavy with grain, fresh tortillas wrapped in linen and blocks of coarse brown sugar.

The authors saved the US families for last and as you have probably guessed, the three of them, (from California, Texas and South Carolina) are surrounded by shrink-wrapped, heavily processed foods, chips, cereals, pastries, bologna, candy, soda and lots of take-out pizza. It is obvious from all these photos that the more money a family spends on food the fewer fresh, raw, regional and seasonal foods they consume and the further they get from the source of their food. They are eating more, but are they also getting more nutrients? (Is this why the well-fed German family feels it necessary to purchase \$90 worth of vitamins each week along with all their food?)

This book would make a wonderful classroom tool. Students of all ages could keep a list of what they eat in a week and compare it with a family's list in the book. The photos are the perfect visual for demonstrating what happens as societies lose touch with the source of their food. What are the nutritional, environmental, social and moral implications? Simply asking students "Who's healthier?" after they page through the book would make an interesting discussion.

Closing the book, I couldn't help wonder what my family's week's worth of food would look like and what surprises it might reveal to the world.

*Stephanie Kempf is a teacher and writer. She is the author of **Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make a difference**. Stephanie is a member of the KIDS Advisory Board and Chair of the Caedmon School Board of Directors. She may be contacted at stephaniekempf@mac.com*

**Look for Teaching Tolerance magazine article at
www.kidscanmakeadifference.org in October!**



LIFE AS ORIGAMI... by Lois Barber

People Making
a Difference

I have a theory that life is like Origami—without the directions. A decision here, a fold there, another fold back on itself, openings, closings, tucking in edges, moving forward yet not quite knowing the final shape you are aiming for. It is not until the figure is pretty well completed that you can see what you have created. Then it all makes sense as you look back and recognize the twists, turns, decisions and guidance along the way—the hidden directions—that have brought you to be who you are, where you are.

I recently looked back at the folds, decision points, and influences in my life that have created the Origami of me.

My parents encouraged my questioning and explorative nature. I would ride my bike to Newark Airport to watch the planes and hear the names of faraway cities over the loudspeakers. These early experiences made me feel connected to the wider world.

Being co-captain of the cheerleaders at Irvington High School was my training ground for becoming a social and political organizer. Cheerleading was a remarkably similar process to organizing a citizen lobbying campaign. For both, I had to learn the rules of the game, know the players, pay close attention to every move, craft the right messages, and motivate people to collectively send those messages to the right players at critical times. And despite the setbacks and losses, be ready and optimistic about the next game. After graduating from Indiana University, I had the good fortune to spend eight amazing years living in the wilderness in northern British Columbia, Canada. Every day it was an awe-inspiring event just to wake up, and the beauty of the place got in my bones. It was here that I literally fell in love with the natural world. It was this passion for place and love for my children that led me to spend my time and energy organizing others to protect our planet.

While we lived in the woods, the government of BC decided to build a railroad through our valley to haul coal. I was only 25 but I created the Nass Valley Communities Association and set about to stop the railroad. Within a year the government changed its plans.

Later, we lived in Vancouver where I taught art and organized Teachers for Peace Action to bring teachers together to work for peace.

Shortly after we moved to Amherst, Massachusetts in 1983, the Air Force announced it was planning to build a 300-foot communication tower in our town. We soon learned this was part of the Ground Wave Emergency Network (GWEN) system to enable the US to “fight and prevail in a protracted nuclear war.” I spent the next three years organizing local and national opposition to GWEN. Responding to citizen leadership, Congress cut \$80 million for GWEN from the defense budget and the system was never built.

During that campaign I experienced the power of well-informed, engaged citizens. This led me to create 20/20 Vision, a service for busy people who agree to spend 20 minutes a month sending a message to a policymaker facing a critical peace or environment decision. 20/20 now reaches over 30,000 people every month and has a long list of successes. Last year it celebrated its 20th anniversary. I’ve been told that it was one of the inspirations for MoveOn.

In 1992 I co-founded EarthAction, a global network of over 2,500 organizations in more than 165 countries. EarthAction has carried out 83 global campaigns mobilizing millions of people to take action on the world’s most critical issues. Among other successes it has helped to save several rainforests, prevent a civil war, and establish the International Criminal Court. Recently, I have helped to create the World Future Council based in Germany, a global council of ethical leadership that will be a voice for future generations. Plans are underway to create a similar Council here in North America.

A love of the natural world, a passion for justice, curiosity, creativity, and a strong desire to bring people together for the common good have helped create the Origami of my life—and I still have a few folds to make.

Lois Barber is Executive Director of EarthAction. She may be reached at lois@earthaction.org. This article originally appeared in Kosmos Journal vol 6 #2, 2007

KIDS IN TEACHING TOLERANCE MAGAZINE

THE THORPE FAMILY RESIDENCE...

By Sister Barbara Lenninger

Thorpe Family Residence is a transitional shelter for homeless mothers and children in the Bronx. The program is sponsored by the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, and funded by the New York City department of Homeless Services. The dedicated staff provides services to help the mothers prepare for a living wage job, find an affordable apartment, and stay off welfare.

One day in 2005, a mother was sent to us directly from the hospital with a four-day-old-baby girl. She had absolutely nothing and to complicate matters was a victim of domestic violence and undocumented. I wondered how much money we had for emergencies in our donation account. I decided to call on a benefactor who was a friend of one of the Sisters. He always said he would do anything he could to help us, but didn't like to be interrupted at work. At first he was angry, but later he told me he soon felt guilty and called his wife. Later that day, he arrived with his car full of pampers and baby clothes.

He asked to see the baby and wanted to hold her. He promptly fell in love with her and asked to have his picture taken with her. He is the same person who has provided Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for the sixteen families in our temporary shelter, as well as the twenty families in

our permanent, supportive housing program.

He directed his son to have a second-hand shower. Soon they returned with another car full of baby items: a used crib in good condition, high chair, stroller and other needed articles.

The story of baby Viviana and her mother's dilemma spread. Soon gifts were coming from several of our donor friends. Baby Viviana went from having nothing, to being one of the best-dressed babies in the Bronx. We received enough to share with other babies in our program.

After a year, with help overcoming the difficulties of securing an apartment as an undocumented person, this small family is now living in a nice section of the Bronx. The mother was able to secure part-time employment.

This is one of our success stories. It gives us hope as we see some of the results of our ministry helping to improve the lives of this vulnerable population of mothers in need. It also makes us very grateful for the ongoing support of our friends and benefactors.

Sister Barbara Lenninger is a Dominican Sister of Sparkill. She is Executive Director of Thorpe Family Residence and Park Avenue Thorpe.

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

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