

Fall, 2017 Newsletter

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Ongoing Discussion

"I should sell my tongue and buy a thousand ears."

Rumi

Thursday morning -- one more day to find and listen to someone I might not agree with.

That challenge had come from a Beyond War group studying Bill Ury's book, The Third Side. We were practicing a guideline to listen much more than we talked, with an attitude of respectful curiosity. It seemed easy enough, until I imagined being reduced to tears with the clock set back to 1956, when I was required to wear dresses to school and do as I was told without question.

Protesters sat in lawn chairs outside Planned Parenthood, wrapped in

BWNW People



Kara Steffensen
Executive Director

blankets and sheltered from the rain by umbrellas. I had already inoculated myself by reading points of view different from my own, but those sources couldn't answer back. These people could.

"May I join you? I'd like to learn why you are here. I just want to listen, not to persuade you about a different point of view."

One of the protesters turned toward me; the other turned her back. "I used to think the way you do, that a woman has a right to decide what happens to her body...until I had children of my own. (And, yes, I can tell that's what you believe, or you wouldn't be here to listen to an opposing viewpoint.) My kids were too precious for me to even imagine anyone cutting off their lives before they began, and I realized that I needed to stand up for those who could not speak."

After she talked for a while, I touched the other woman's arm and asked whether she had been listening and if she had anything she would like to add. "I have and I sure do! Look at the pictures on this poster! What was done to the fetus at the top was child abuse, pure and simple. I want all babies to be healthy and smiling like the one at the bottom."

Kara grew up in Springfield and studied Spanish and International Studies at the University of Oregon. Her lifelong interest in creating a more peaceful world began in her childhood. It was sparked by the tensions of growing up between two brothers during the era of the Vietnam War, as well as from early experiences of meeting local leaders, such as Senator Wayne Morse. In the 1980s, Kara moved to Costa Rica, where she lived and worked for various environmental organizations for over a decade. She traveled throughout Central America during that period and witnessed the destructive impact of the region's civil wars and U.S. interventions. She has been active in peacework in Eugene since 2003, when she helped to create a neighborhood based peace group in Eugene, Friendly Neighbors for Peace. She has been collaborating with other local peace and justice organizations ever since. Kara also works as a Spanish/English interpreter in Eugene and serves on the steering committee of the Amazon Neighbors Association. She is married with two sons, who are also active in peace and justice work in their respective communities.

She had been a labor and delivery nurse for well over 30 years and knew her argument from the inside out. She had no doubts about her position, and wondered how any feeling person could support abortion. When I asked questions, she answered with statistics and anger at Planned Parenthood's policies.

The first protester then asked me how I could simply listen. How could I refuse to act, in the face of this evidence? How could I "meet my Maker" knowing that I had allowed such barbarity to continue?

I desperately wanted to have a civil discussion and consider more options than are on the table now. But I kept my mouth closed, other than to remind them that I was there to learn, and to practice listening respectfully. It felt deceitful to shelter my beliefs while asking for theirs, but it also felt important.

Before I left, the first woman complimented me. "We don't have enough people in the world who are willing to listen. Thank you. Please come back and talk with us again. We'd like to hear about you."

I learned something important that day. All of us have reasons for our beliefs. We cherish stories that point

Creating Dialogue to Move Beyond Political Polarization

"Yes, what we must fight is fear and silence, and with them the spiritual isolation they involve. What we must defend is dialogue and the universal communication of men."

Albert Camus,

1946

The Mission of Beyond War Northwest is to explore, model and promote the means for humanity to live without war. The nature of the work demands that we learn new ways to live together across cultures: letting go of alienated, polarizing behaviors, to learn anew how to build relationships with each other and to work together to address the needs of all. It is in this spirit, and given the political conditions that have arisen in our country, that we are now endeavoring to create a new outreach program focused on helping the public to engage in dialogue. Learning communication skills and actually participating in respectful dialogue can help reduce the current polarization which is threatening both our nation, and our efforts to create a more peaceful world.

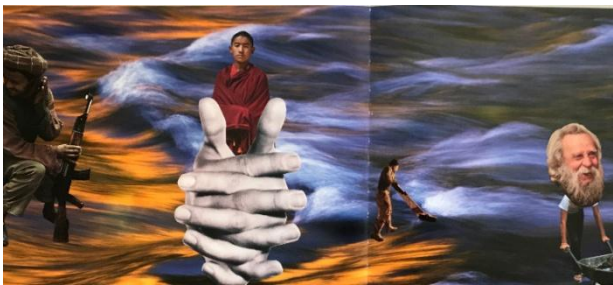
The idea for the program is to

**us toward our convictions.
Sometimes, all that is needed to ease
the door open for a broader
conversation is to first listen.**

By Rebecca Wolle

You can leave comments here:

<http://beyondwarw.org/listening/>



How to turn war into music

1. It will hurt, but listen carefully
(preferably with your non-dominant ear)
to the voices inside
that bone-splintering roar.
2. Sit quietly in the turmoil
make your hands into a cup
let them fill with whatever comes
let them empty.
3. Repeat until you feel clean.
4. Laugh and
keep doing the work.
5. Sing and

**host small group conversations
within organizations and the wider
community. The dialogues will be
organized and informed by conflict
resolution practices. Participants
will have a chance to learn and
practice skills that empower them
to engage more thoughtfully and
creatively in political conversations
and thinking. The need for these
kinds of opportunities was recently
asserted by a potential participant,
who stated, “We may not be so far
apart, but we need better
communication skills to share
ideas and listen to each other.”**

**The structure of the program
is being designed for a group of
people to gather and learn together
with the support of trained
mediators and facilitators from
Beyond War Northwest and the
local Eugene community. The
current ideal is a small group,
roughly 10 to 20 people, who meet
periodically for a series of
conversations over an extended
period of time. Participants will be
prepared to engage in potentially
difficult conversation through
educational materials,
communication trainings, and
conflict resolution skills and
practice. The format and the
content of the dialogue will vary
over the series of meetings, and
participants will get the chance to**

keep doing the work.

By Rebecca Wolle

Good Reading

In *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, Arlie Russell Hochschild concludes that the way southerners were shamed for their way of life during the Civil War and again during the Civil Rights era is influencing political views today.

On Tyranny, by Timothy Snyder is a short pithy book with 20 recommendations to protect against an autocratic takeover of our form of government, such as "Do Not obey in advance" and "Take responsibility for the face of the world."

Churchill and Orwell by Thomas Ricks is the story of two men from opposite political perspectives who both sought to protect democracy from authoritarianism.

To move on to action for positive change, Joanna Macy describes our need to mourn our pain in her book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*.

In *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, author Graham Allison argues that history does not have to repeat itself. (Remember the Peloponnesian War?)

practice new skills in the discussions, such as shifting from attempting to convince others, to listening more deeply for potential common ground in our diverse life experiences of being Americans. As the weeks unfold, opportunities for creative problem solving and reaching agreements will be explored. To be clear, this is not an attempt to achieve political consensus on entrenched national issues, but it is an effort to create space for respectful dialogue in order to help us think more clearly together about issues that currently concern and divide our nation.

If you, or an organization that you are involved in, would like to learn more about this new program as it develops, and potentially get involved, please contact Beyond War's Executive Director, Kara Steffensen, at info@beyondwarnw.org.

Upcoming Events

Beyond War Conversation, Tuesday, November 14, at 2:00 pm, Eugene-- We'll be talking about how the media influences public discourse, how "news" has become "entertainment" and the cost of this for civil society. This is not a Book Group *per se*, and there's no reading requirement for you to participate. The inspiration for the topic comes from the book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* by

Sol Invictus, Patron God of Roman Soldiers

Sides taken.

Below in dark recesses, trenchant life begins an upward assault.

Green Spring drinks in the light, staggers

as if drunken, moving in dizzying fits and spirals.

Enlisting as life begins; March is the month to march,

in uniform green spreading wide, conquering the land, the inorganic soil.

The sun beats the drum, speeding the sap, the blood, and the kill.

The land is taken by hot Summer colors that slowly scumble into Fall.

So soon an empire fades.

Red-spattered leaves chatter dry rumors of Summer's victory —

much thunderous battle and storm had shaken their resolve

still brightly upbeat in the Autumn breeze.

Home from war. Fallen and falling. Many souls parted.

Their mangled skins, booty of war blown into banks of gold.

The land, the country side, impoverished again.

Crows peck at lingering flesh.

Winter strips the barren land, weeping tears upon the red soil.

Pax Romana Aeternum. Another bloody year rolls round.

Sides taken.

Below, it starts again ...

Mike C. Rose 10/6/2013

Comment: This poem laments the unavoidable mindless warring that goes on in the annual cycle of nature. The metaphor was chosen to make commentary on the avoidable mindful warring that goes on the human side of nature. The Mithras tradition of Persia strongly affected ancient Roman religion. The Mithras deity in the Roman world was often referred to as "Sol Invictus," the "invincible sun," which was the patron god of many soldiers. The month of March (Martius) is named after Mars, the god of war, and was the first month in the Roman religious calendar. For Rome, March is literally the beginning of the war season as it is for much of the northern hemisphere; for example, the second Iraq war began in March 2003. In the Roman mythology, Mars fathered Romulus and Remus who, nurtured by a she-wolf, founded Rome. Fighting for god and country is a common battle cry even today. The paradoxical justification of continual war to create a lasting peace ("Pax Romana Aeternum") is both lamentable and illogical. These are human traditions that need to change.

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