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What do you do in the face of racism?

By David Pocock

Fighting to stay awake, I pretended to listen to a friend's story when suddenly a comment she made captured my attention: "I was leaving the bathroom, and because I thought there was only a native lady in one of the stalls, I shut off the light," she remarked indifferently.

At that, I jumped up and asked her how she could be so heartless, so incredibly cruel. Well... I wish I had. In truth, I did what many would have done—absolutely nothing. I attempted to convince myself that by being silent, I had done nothing wrong yet. At the same time, visions of a poster that hung proudly on my elementary school teacher's wall haunted me. The poster read: "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." With great regret, I realized just how long I have been a part of the problem.

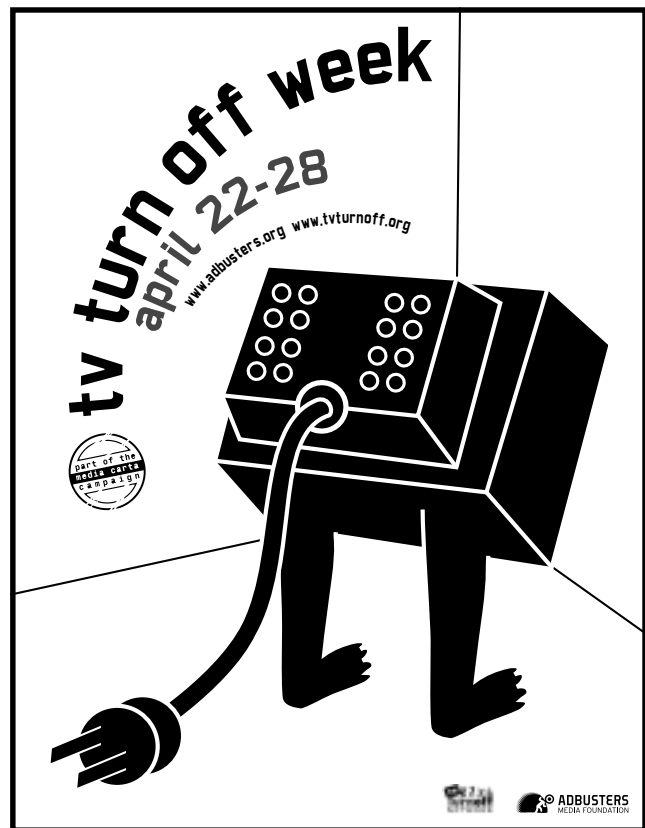
There are very few people, it seems, who are comfortable with someone confronting them about prejudice. Consequently, I often hesitate to comment on another person's hurtful remark. However, I am beginning to wonder if it is more harmful to an individual if one remains silent. We all know the importance of defending what is right, of championing equality and tolerance and all the rest. Yet how often do we stop a person in mid-sentence and suggest they reconsider their views? If you are similar to myself and the people I associate closely with, it happens far less than it should.

It's easy to think of the slave trade and the American Civil War, but right here in southern Alberta, the Japanese internment occurred. All of

these cases reflect racism, hatred, greed and, among other things, a lack of compassion.

When I think of the situation involving aboriginal people here in southern Alberta, something similar comes to mind. An exaggeration? Maybe. But when a girl does not hesitate to shut off a light and close a door on another human being, principally because of the color of her skin, there must be a very serious

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The following thought-provoking pieces were sent to Niska News by Suzanne Vandenberg, a grade 8 teacher at Tom Baines School in Calgary. Over the past few months, Vandenberg has been challenging her students with the theme of violence versus non-violence. After studying Barbara Smucker's novel *Days of Terror*, student Rahim Hassam wrote "The Best Way to Solve Conflicts." For another writing assignment, student Nalisha Kassam wrote a parody of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream." Niska congratulates and thanks Ms Vandenberg and her students. Niska's only regret is that there is not enough space to print all the excellent work written by the gifted writers in Ms Vandenberg's class.

The best way to solve conflicts

By Rahim Hassam

There are many methods used to solve conflicts in our community today. These include fighting, yelling, talking, ignoring and many more. These conflict resolutions can be split into two main categories: violence and non-violence. But without question, non-violence is the most effective method of solving your disputes.

Violence is all around us. You may not realize it, but violent acts are steadily increasing in our society today. On top of physical violence, which occurs often enough, there is also verbal violence. This type of violence is a lot more common, especially in households. However, neither of these methods needs to be used to solve problems.

Non-violence builds character. When you do not use violence to solve your problems, you have to stand up to who you are facing. This is exactly what Gandhi did in order to fight for his rights as a Hindu, and I quote him: "There is no better way to show your presence than non-violence." He did not have a big army to use violence with, so he stood up to his opposition and he got his way. Another great example of this would be bullies. Have you ever been bullied before? Well, I know that when I had a bully, I had to stand up to him using non-violence before he stopped bullying me. Bullies like to pick on people smaller than them, so usually violence is not an option. Until you stand up to these bullies using non-violence, they will keep harassing you.



Non-violence is the best way to get what you want in any situation. Hurting someone with violence isn't going to make him or her want to help you. You have

to talk things out to get what you want. You can solve conflicts with people without making them your permanent enemies. In fact, the best way to overcome disputes is to become friends afterwards. Then, if you ever need help from that person for any particular reason, they are there for you. For instance, the book *Days of Terror* showed this very well when Otto used violence to protect the Mennonites. He then had to sneak across the border on his journey to North America whereas the rest of the Neufelds kept things peaceful with the Russians and were allowed to cross the border safely to Canada.

Violence is a never-ending cycle of hate. When you hurt someone, they are mad at you, and when they hurt you, you are mad at them. Even if one of you were to die, the victim's family and friends will be mad and will seek revenge. This revenge is what causes the never-ending cycle of violence. Non-violence promotes compromise and inclusiveness for both parties involved as well as no enemies. It involves discussions to make peace and harmony between both sides without causing unnecessary bloodshed. Not only that, but causing this bloodshed is against the law, making violence an illegal process both physically and verbally. Even if you have won a war, many people have died, and the land that you may have been fighting for will have been ruined by the war anyway. The three main causes of many wars are nationalism, imperialism and militarism. These can all be prevented with peace negotiations.

This world would be a better place if people would consider non-violence before violence, thus preventing unnecessary violence. We do not need to resolve conflicts with our weapons if we could talk things out like human beings because non-violence is always more effective in resolving conflicts than violence.

Rahim Hassam is a grade 8 student at Tom Baines School in Calgary.

I have a dream

By Nalisha Kassam

I say to you today, my friends, that even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in our hearts that could have changed our past, but will change our future.

I have a dream that one day this Earth will be flowing with the mellow, cool waters of peace. And every being's soul will be washed over with joy, making us appreciative and content with our lives and our world.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that the battlefields of war and old grudges are no longer or have never been. And the time to seek revenge and to kill is demolished and forgotten. So all countries can work hand in hand to carry us into the future.

I have a dream where every being is soaring the blue and grey skies of this Earth with happiness. And the unhappy frightful and moments of tragedy are left behind to be destroyed with the fire of love and forgiveness set by the angels in heaven.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream where the eyes of every being are glistening with truth, not shocked and dull with guilt and lies. So everyone may live depending on each other as a team. And the glory of truth is revealed and all flesh shall see its wonders.

This is my hope. This is the dream I believe we cannot do without fulfilling. With this dream we will be able to appreciate our world. With this dream we will forgive and forget. With this dream we can destroy our fears and soar. With this dream we can live happy lives, working in unison to see rivers of peace flow beginning with our hearts.

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Facilitator training

If you are interested in being trained to facilitate workshops from the Toward a Safe and Caring Community workshop series, then register for the facilitator

training session in Grande Prairie on May 5, 2001, 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, at Muskoseepi Park Pavilion. The featured presenter is Barb Maheu, program manager for the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project.

The daylong session, hosted by Grande Prairie & Area Safe Communities, will train facilitators to deliver community workshops that support and complement the school programs in the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project. The workshops are designed to help adults who work with children and teens model and reinforce positive social behaviors at school, at home or in the community.

The cost is \$80 per person (including lunch and materials). Participants should have experience presenting to adults.

For more information or to register for the facilitator training, please contact Dauna Grant, program coordinator for GP Safe & Caring Communities, at (780) 402-3723 or <dhkgrant@hotmail.com>.

The registration deadline is April 13.



SACS resources on the move

The resources of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) Project are being transferred to the Learning Resources Centre (LRC).

To order SACS resources on or after May 1, 2001, please contact the LRC at 12360 142 Street NW, Edmonton AB, T5L 4X9, tel: (780) 427-2767, fax: (780) 422-9750, email: <lrccustserv@gov.ab.ca>, website: <www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca>.

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problem. I would suggest this same individual wouldn't have the heart to lock a dog or cat in a bathroom with the lights out. I would almost guarantee it.

When I had my hair cut recently, I asked the hairdresser, who is native, if she is ever treated differently because of her race. My question seemed to catch her slightly off guard as she was likely anticipating a comment regarding the weather or the newest sitcom. She told me she is very rarely discriminated against in an outright fashion, but rather, she detects an underlying distrust and lack of respect. I cannot fathom what this must be like for her.

I am aware this complex situation cannot be cured easily or quickly; however, everyone can do their part. If, for example, a cab driver complains about the obnoxious customer who just stepped out of his/her car, placing great emphasis on the customer's skin color, be sure to ask if he/she has ever given a ride to an intoxicated member of a different race. I assure you the answer will be yes.

There are some people who are not afraid to express their opinions openly, but for those of us who have a tendency to disregard others' ill-mannered comments, consider the following passage which I found to very helpful: "What you are is revealed by what you do. What you do reveals what you really believe."

David Pocock is a grade 12 student at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute. He is president of the National Honour Society, a student leadership and community volunteer organization. David is hoping to pursue his heart by training to become a doctor next year at either the University of Lethbridge or the University of Alberta.

Source: *Lethbridge Herald*, 8 January 2001, Youth section. Reprinted with permission.



Notices

The International Youth Co-ordination Council–Nepal will hold the **International Youth Conference** November 4-6, 2001, at Tigertops, Meghault, Chitwan, Nepal. The theme of the conference is Youth, Leadership and Development—Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century. For more information, please visit the conference website at <www.iycnepal.org>.

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And this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to rest in absolute peace. And in their last moments of life "Let inner peace twinkle in their eyes."

And if our Earth is to be a great place to live, this must come true. So let inner peace twinkle in the eyes of those who know tragedy! Let inner peace twinkle in the eyes of those who have forgiven and forgotten! Let inner peace twinkle in the eyes of those who are content! Let inner peace twinkle in the eyes of the beings that can see peace flow in a strong, vibrant river of life! From every living being let inner peace twinkle!

And when this happens and when we allow inner peace to twinkle in the eyes of the people in this world, we will let it twinkle from every town, every city, every country and every continent. We will speed up the day when all of God's children will be able to feel the river of peace that flows through our hearts and see the glistening reflection of truth in every pair of eyes and blink at its glorious light.

Nalisha Kassam is a grade 8 student at Tom Baines School in Calgary.

Niska News is a newsletter produced by the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) Project for school and community members. The goal of the SACS Project is to encourage practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviors so that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment. Achieving this goal requires the involvement of not just parents and teachers but also all the important adults in a young person's life. This newsletter is designed to provide timely, up-to-date information about the project. For more information, contact the SACS office by phoning 447-9487 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta). Copying and distributing Niska News is permitted as long as the source is credited. The newsletter is available online through the SACS Project website at <www.teachers.ab.ca/safe/index.html>.