

CHARACTER

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WORDS

by Garrett Keizer

Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from the chapter, "Words," from Garret Keizer's book, The Enigma of Anger (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002).

One of the more notable customs of the region I have called my home for almost twenty-five years is that of refusing to talk to someone with whom you are angry. I don't mean avoiding that person, not returning his calls or answering his letters, sitting as far away from him as possible at picnics and wedding receptions, that sort of thing. I mean looking at his physical person from a distance as close as three feet as though he does not exist. I mean greeting his "Good morning" — not even with coldness or indignation but with the pretense of never having heard it. This is not the dirty look we're talking about here, but the you-are-dirt look — with "dirt" referring to nothing more remarkable than an earthly substance under your feet. This local version of the silent treatment works something like shunning among the Amish, except that for the Amish shunning is a communal thing, voted upon by the elders for reasons known by all, including the shunned, and reversible by some public act of contrition. Our type is all the more deadly for being completely informal, personal, and in many cases irreversible. Taboos become more, not less, nasty as they become less tribal.

The first time — and I'm happy to say one of the few times — the ban was imposed on me, I had no clear idea as to why. I had done no

more than exchange greetings, and those of a conventionally friendly sort, with the woman who suddenly refused to exchange even a glance with me. To this day I have no certainty as to the reason. My best guess is that the silence had to do with my remarks at a town meeting when certain individuals began to balk at the idea of paying tax dollars for "kids in special ed." The shunner was not one of these individuals, so I hadn't attacked any of her remarks, though it's reasonable to assume

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that I had attacked her sentiments. I should add for the sake of fairness that the ban is not reserved for spendthrift liberals, friends of "retards," or "flatlanders." I have heard of natives with impeccable pedigrees and respectable IQs who "never spoke a word to each other after that."

As with many peculiar customs, this one both invites and confounds an easy judgment. On the one hand, it strikes me as childish and absurd. You have to see it in action to get the full effect; when you do, you have the distinct impression that you're back in junior high, and the equally distinct impression that the silent

individual was never so happy as at that time of his or her life. Certainly the person does not seem happy now. What makes the practice so absurd is that the ill feeling is very likely the result of a breakdown in communication. So with all the self-assurance of a quack doctor bleeding someone to death in order to save his life, the offended person refuses any and all attempts to communicate.

On the other hand, one can't help but wonder if there isn't something rather civilized about this most uncivil treatment. The freeze on all communication is also a freeze on escalation. Tensions can hardly rise when two adversaries are not saying anything to each other. The ban represents a very strict and literal interpretation of that old adage, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." It also shows a respectful awareness of the relationship between anger and speech. I'm told that in the logging camps that once dotted this region, there were two rules in the cookhouse: prunes at every meal (to keep the bowels open), and no talking at meals (to avoid fights). I think of these rules as a kind of North Woods charm to ward off evil — bowels open and mouths shut.

When we talk about anger, we are never far from talking about language. Words incite anger and express it. If Seneca was correct in saying that anger rises out of a discrepancy between our wishes and the real world, then anger may also arise from the discrepancy between the worlds of our words and the

WORDS (continued)

world as it is. Our world, our language, and our minds – one can imagine them as three circles that overlap but never achieve perfect congruency. We do not say exactly what we mean. We do not hear exactly what was said. We are able to imagine but not to attain the kind of creative power that speaks our wishes into being, “Let there be light,” and there is light. So we become angry.

The relationship between language and anger would seem to be most acute at the high and low ends of verbal capacity. The man or woman of words, able to make his or her thoughts “perfectly clear,” grows angry when others seem unable to grasp such perfection. To these acutely verbal individuals, the world appears to be teeming with the block-headed and the perverse, which it most certainly is, though verbal competence has never formed a reliable exemption from either category. Once again, the phenomenon of road rage provides us with a metaphor. The greater the horsepower, the greater the potential for acting like a horse’s ass. The faster the words come to our mouth, the faster we expect the mountain to come to Muhammad.

On the other hand, anger can arise out of the frustration of not being able to make one’s mind known. I remember a broad-shouldered boy in my high school years, who once confided to me, “I don’t know what to do with words. Some guy starts throwing words at me – I just hit him.” Fortunately for my nose, he never perceived me as throwing any words in his direction. Someone who’s worked with a preverbal or nonverbal child knows the tantrums that can arise when the child cannot communicate his needs. These outbursts have

their counterpart in adults who grow angry as a way of saying what they cannot otherwise articulate. They may also grow angry because of the consistent success of those who can articulate. People who “know how to talk” also know how to get what they want. After

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physical attractiveness, the ability to use words may be the most reliable way of achieving one’s desires. I find it interesting that one of our regional expressions here in Vermont has the word *ugly* as a synonym for *angry*. *Ugly* accurately describes the effects of anger; perhaps it connotes one of the causes as well. If so, we might also use the word *inarticulate* as another synonym.

Perhaps I tend to look at things too much like a schoolteacher, which I once was and in many ways remain, but it seems to me that genuine “anger management” has a great deal to do with education – and not necessarily with education about anger. If we would inhabit a world with less fury, we should teach all our children to read, write, and speak. And to those who master rhetoric we should teach philosophy – especially those Eastern kinds that set great

store on keeping one’s mouth shut. If that isn’t simplistic enough, I can go one better: At bottom, much of anger has to do with the concept of a “fair share,” and with people getting more or less than their own. Trace anger to the most primal origins imaginable and what do you see but the verbal or physical grab for something that belongs by rights to another, to all, or to none. Take two routes to the understanding of wrath, one through psychology and the other through inequality, and the second will invariably prove the faster and more scenic route. But knowing that also comes down to a matter of education, and what it means in the deepest sense to be an educated human being.

* * * * *

The ban of silence imposed by one neighbor on another in a small New England town has its counterpart in the silences of even more intimate relationships. One type of silence amounts to a game that might be called “Guess Why I’m Angry.” The other more subtle type might be called “Guess What It Takes to Please Me.” Both kinds have to do with the hypertrophied mentality we have discussed before: When my head becomes the whole world, I expect that everyone in the world ought to know what’s in my head. In Robert Browning’s poem “My Last Duchess,” a Renaissance duke explains to a visitor why he had his last wife put to death. Though she had done nothing dishonorable, he found her too indiscriminate in her attentions and too liberal in her gratitude toward others besides the duke. As the duke goes on to explain, the problem did not lie in her willful disregard of her husband’s jealousy; it lay rather in her innocence of it, and in his resolute refusal

continued on page 8

THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2002

JANUARY

A Foundation for Citizenship Through Character Education. The CAEC entered its third of a five-year federal grant project in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Education, Boston Public Schools, and the Hampshire Educational Cooperative in Northampton, MA.

FEBRUARY

What is Character Education Anyway? Keynote addresses given by Karen Bohlin at the River Plaza Elementary School in Redbank, NJ, and for the Knollwood and Sickles School PTAs in Fair Haven, NJ on February 21.

MARCH

ASCD Annual Conference. Bernice Lerner represented the CAEC as the Character Education Network co-facilitator and led a breakout session, “Building Character in Schools,” in San Antonio, TX.

CAEC Institute on Character, Integrity, and Ethical Leadership. The CAEC staff explored – together with educators from Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New Jersey – the context of character education, moral motivation, curriculum integration, and strategic planning.

VISAS for LIFE

Moral Courage in the Holocaust: Insights and Perspectives

by Karen E. Bohlin and Bernice Lerner

Editor's note: There are countless examples of moral courage among the Nazis' victims and those who acted on their behalf. Some examples can be discovered in books or other forms of survivor testimony, most we will never have a record of. Visas for Life is an exhibit displaying the moral courage exemplified by certain diplomats of the late 1930s and early 1940s who – against their governments' orders – helped to save more than 250,000 lives. This past fall, the Visas for Life exhibit came to Boston University. The following remarks are from one of three lectures that accompanied the exhibit. In addition to comments by Drs. Karen E. Bohlin and Bernice Lerner, Dr. David Bingham, the fifth of eleven children of the American diplomat, Harry Bingham, spoke about his father.

"There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark. They light the way for Mankind."

– Hannah Senesh, 1921-1944, a member of a secret underground resistance force, captured and executed by the Nazis

The *Visas for Life* exhibit introduces us to individuals most of us have thought little about. As Jeff Jacoby wrote, in a Boston Globe editorial (Oct. 20, 2002), "Who, thinking of heroes, thinks of diplomats? . . . The diplomat speaks for his government, not for himself. His job is to toe the government's line and enforce its rules, whatever that

line and those rules might be. If he has objections, he is expected to keep them to himself. If he can't keep them to himself, he is expected to resign." He goes on to say that "[d]iplomacy played a shameful role in paving the way for the Holocaust. In July 1938, facing a rising flood of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria, diplomats from 32 nations met at Evian, France to agree on a solution to the crisis." None of them would help. "The message to Hitler was clear: 'The world would do nothing to save the Jews.'" More than twenty diplomats did not, however, go along with this isolationist stance. They issued life-saving visas to both Jews and Christians fleeing the Nazis, embodying rare moral courage.

We were struck by the attitude and beliefs of Jorge Perlasca, the Italian-born Spanish Ambassador to Hungary who rescued thousands of Jews in Budapest. He explained his decision to help the refugees by saying, "Because I could not bear the sight of people branded as animals. Because I could not bear to see children killed. I think it was this. I don't think I was a hero."

Feng Shan Ho served in the Chinese Consulate in Vienna, Austria. He said of his rescues, "I thought it only natural to feel compassion and to want to help. From a human standpoint, that is the way it ought to be." He had a genuine concern for the Austrian Jews being cruelly abused. On New Year's Day 1947, he wrote the following poem to his wife:

"The gifts Heaven bestows are not by chance,
The convictions of heroes not lightly formed.
Today I summon all spirit and strength,
Urging my steed forward ten thousand miles."

Hiram "Harry" Bingham, American Vice Consul in charge of visas, who was stationed in Marseilles, France in 1940, defied orders (including a letter from Secretary of State Cordell Hull stating that under no circumstances was he to help the refugees), issuing visas (many falsified), safe passes, and letters of transit to Jewish refugees. He sheltered Jews in his home (including novelist Leon Futvonker who wrote a scathing indictment of fascism) and escorted others over the French-Spanish border. He worked closely with Varian Fry, a young American journalist whose top secret assignment was to help those on Hitler's most wanted list escape France. Included among the more than 2,500 Jews he had a hand in saving were painters Marc Chagall, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst; sculptor Jacques Lipchitz; poets Andre Breton and Walter Mehring; Nobel-prize winning biochemist Otto Meyerhoff, and other artists, intellectuals, writers and scientists. His son, David Bingham, an obstetrician-gynecologist in Connecticut, described how his father lived a life of integrity; how his career was ruined because of what he had done; how he nevertheless never wavered in his convictions and taught his children – by example and by way of sage guidance – to always seek to do what is right. He never spoke of his wartime deeds. He engaged in creative and intellectual pursuits and encouraged his children to travel, acquire an education, and serve their respective communities.

What is moral courage? How is it acquired? How can we help young people respond to the call for moral courage in their own lives? The individuals whose heroic action inspires our discussion were not perfect. Yet the choices these diplomats made defy utilitarian logic – there was absolutely

continued on page 6

THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2002 (continued)

APRIL

Launched in the spring, the CAEC's new website receives roughly 15,000 hits per month, providing a rich array of resources for teachers, parents, school leaders, and researchers, including: book lists, lessons, units, professional development offerings, and information on graduate study.

MAY

First Steps for Educators of Character. Breakout session led by Bernice Lerner at Connecticut's Assets-Based Character Education Conference.

Virtue: The Heart of Citizenship. Keynote address given by Karen Bohlin at the Summit on Civic Learning at the Massachusetts State House.

JUNE

South Carolina Department of Education Character Education Initiative. The CAEC led its fourth year of Teachers Academies in collaboration with the SC State Department of Education. In 2002, the CAEC directed Teachers Academies at the USC – Salkehatchie, Coker College, SC State University, and Wofford College.

Plenary session topics included: *Critical Steps for Educators of Character, The Power of Story, The Responsibilities of Citizenship, Virtue Development in Eastern and Western Thought, Peer Pressure in Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair,"* and *The Eight Habits of the Heart.*

A Student's Reflections on the
VISAS for LIFE Exhibit

By Alyssa Brookland '06,
Boston University College of Arts and Sciences

The Ryan Library is open

9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday

through Friday as a resource to

the university community and the

School of Education, as well as

to the ever-widening circle of

national and international

contacts of the Center for the

Advancement of Ethics and

Character. *Please come visit.*

When few people were willing to risk their lives and sacrifice their jobs for the lives of strangers, the Visas for Life heroes did just that. An exhibit at 808 Commonwealth Avenue focused on the foreign diplomats who handed out visas to Jews and other peoples facing Nazi persecution during World War II. Walking through the exhibit and learning about the men who chose to stand up for their beliefs rather than follow the masses was truly amazing. After learning about all of the horrors and atrocities that the Nazis committed, and reading how those unaffected by Nazi persecution kept silent to protect themselves, it is refreshing to observe the alternative – leaders in foreign affairs saving strangers at the expense of their careers.

One of these diplomats, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese Consul, was dismissed from his post after issuing more than 30,000 visas in 1940. He said, "If so many Jews can suffer because of one person [Hitler], then one Christian can suffer for Jews." This man, among others, destroyed his career and died in poverty after saving so many Jewish lives.

I find it amazing how, when the world was telling these diplomats to look the other way, they instead used their positions to fight for the Jews. What really struck a chord in me, aside from the diplomats' bravery, were the photographs taken at various concentration camps. Reading about the terror victims faced in these camps is exponentially intensified seeing photographs. It makes you realize, beyond reading their stories, that real people were there, living every day with such cruelty. These photographs document their pain as well as their very existence. One photograph shows Hungarian Jews getting off a transport and walking towards one of the gas chambers at Auschwitz. We read statistics stating that six million Jews perished in the Holocaust. Looking at this photograph, one can see a line of individuals walking towards their death. These images remind us that individuals, not numbers or statistics, died at the hands of the Nazis. This exhibit gracefully juxtaposes both the hateful crimes of the period and the stories of heroic diplomats – saviors of so many lives.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2002 (continued)

JULY

Character Education and Teacher Preparation. Presentation given by Karen Bohlin for Canterbury Christ University College Faculty of Education, Kent, England, on July 10.

AUGUST

Character Education: Its Essence and Practical Strategies. Presentation by Bernice Lerner at the Abby Kelley Foster Charter School, Worcester, MA, on August 22.

OCTOBER

Visas for Life: An Exhibit of Moral Courage, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, Boston University Hillel, and the CAEC. Drs. Karen Bohlin and Bernice Lerner, and Dr. David Bingham, son of Hiram Bingham,

American Vice Consul in charge of visas in Marseilles, France in 1940, led a panel presentation, *Moral Courage in the Holocaust: Insights and Perspectives.*

On the **H O M E F R O N T**

A Focus on **F A T H E R H O O D**

by James B. Stenson

You are one person, not two. You are the same man, both on the job with your colleagues and at home with your family and friends. You cannot live two lives; you must be the same person in both spheres of responsible operation.

Men who are weak and ineffective fathers tend to split their lives between work and family. That is, they live as producers at work but consumers at home.

On the job they dedicate their powers to serious, responsible activity; but at home they rest passively in pleasurable recreation. In the workplace, their character strengths operate at all-out exertion – everyone sees and respects their sound judgment, sense of responsibility, tough-minded perseverance, and self-control. But at home, their inner strengths rest on idle, set aside (so to speak) for the day, and thereby hidden from their children's eyes.

Successful fathers do not live like this. They are smart, effective leaders at home as well as on the job. Their strength of character impresses their children as much as their colleagues at work. Their devotion to their family, in fact, gives meaning and purpose to their strenuous life of professional work. The main purpose of their work is the welfare of their family, and their children know this.

In short, *a successful father exercises leadership at home as much as on the job – and in roughly the same ways.*

What does this mean? Let's first look at how a man typically exercises effective leadership in the workplace, and then let's turn to see how the same attitudes and behaviors apply to leadership at home.

LEADERSHIP ON THE JOB

What are the traits found most commonly among successful business and professional leaders? I ask you here to think about the best bosses you've ever worked with or met in your line of business, whatever it may be. What attitudes and actions characterize an outstanding leader, maybe the sort of leader you aspire to become?

Here are some traits that I think you'll recognize...

- An outstanding professional leader has a clear long-term vision about the company's future success, and he communicates this goal, at least occasionally, to everyone who works with him. He thinks 5 to 20 years ahead, and this goal-setting drives him and his team forward – for he knows that people's efforts are only effective when they're focused on some future achievement.
- He maintains a strong sense of teamwork. He looks mostly for strengths in people and sees his job as coordinating those strengths toward the team's collective endeavors. He helps his colleagues, especially subordi-

nates, develop their strengths and skills as they carry out clear-cut responsibilities.

- He constantly sets priorities and sticks to them. When faced with a problem, he asks, "How important will this be a year from now, five years from now, or later?" Within this framework, he shrugs off or ignores unimportant snarls and minor setbacks.
- He tends to see problems as challenges, not just hassles. He has a kind of sporting spirit about his work, and he knows that any sport involves occasional bruises, mistakes, and disappointments. He learns from mistakes, his own and others', and helps his subordinates do the same.
- If resources are scarce, including time, he works smart. He makes the most of what he has available, including slivers of time here and there. He doesn't procrastinate; papers don't just sit cluttered on his desk. He thinks before he acts, then acts intelligently and decisively.
- He takes personal responsibility – no excuses, no alibis, no whining, no "victim complex," no shifting of blame. He accepts the consequences of his free decisions and actions, including mistakes.

continued on page 9

THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2002 (continued)

OCTOBER

The Core Virtues Program: Schools for Moral Excellence and Academic Growth. The CAEC entered into a four-year grant project with Pueblo County School District #60 in Colorado, and the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, Washington, DC).

Character Education: Overview and a History Lesson. Breakout session led by

Bernice Lerner and Deborah Farmer at the Educational Records Bureau Conference, New York, NY.

The School's Oldest Mission or Latest Fad? Keynote address given by Kevin Ryan, CAEC director emeritus, at the Massachusetts Elementary School Counselors conference in Worcester, MA.

NOVEMBER

CAEC Institute on Character, Integrity, and Ethical Leadership. CAEC staff explored – together with educators from Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, and New Jersey – the context of character education, moral motivation, curriculum integration, and strategic planning.

DECEMBER

The Odyssey of Adolescence. Keynote address for parents given by Karen Bohlin at Buckingham, Browne & Nichols Upper School, Cambridge, MA.

VISAS for LIFE (continued)

nothing in it for them. Their extraordinary deeds open the way to important inquiry about what we, and our children, are capable of doing in the face of injustice, cruelty, and senseless discrimination. More importantly their stories restore our hope in humanity and its potential for greatness, particularly at a time when courage and integrity seem to be in short supply. They weren't scheming to become heroes, make a buck, or build their image in the media. They were single-minded and undaunted, noble in their purpose and courageous in will and action.

The following definitions, by the psychiatrist and author Dr. Robert Coles, are instructive: Courage is

"...the capacity to put oneself on the line willingly, with apparent carelessness (no matter what takes place deep within oneself) on behalf of what one believes, what one wants to protect or ensure as possible for oneself and others... Courage... may be defined as a determination, no matter the obstacles or dangers, to live up to one's values rather than a capacity per se to face danger with apparent self-assurance."¹

Our colleague, Steven S. Tigner, professor of education and philosophy at Boston University, points out that there are two preeminent elements in our psychological makeup with which we need to learn to deal in order to achieve moral maturity and strength of character: fear on the one hand, and temptation on the other. The Greeks, in explaining the virtue of courage, emphasized the importance of knowing what is to be feared and what is not to be feared. Courage is that disposition of action and feeling that lies between two vices: a deficiency of fear, or recklessness, and an excess of fear, or cowardice. Courageous action is guided by a noble purpose, a clear understanding of what is right and just in a given situation.

Aristotle explains that

The man [...] who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and from the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave; for the brave man feels and acts according to the merits of the case and in whatever way the rule directs.

As a virtue, courage is a disposition involving choice. Our choices reveal who we are – our habits, principles, convictions, and attitudes. The diplomats leveraged their power, position, and privilege to save lives. They did not allow themselves to be threatened by the loss of money, reputation, and a job. They gave witness to what is perhaps the ultimate weapon against violence and injustice – living virtuously, in accordance with one's informed conscience and convictions. Our goal as educators is not simply to acquaint students with individuals who lived admirable lives, but to challenge them to reflect on what it took to live that way, and to inspire them to forge their own paths of noble aspiration and action.

The Holocaust is a crucial context; however, the central educational importance of this exhibit is its focus on moral courage. And its importance is only exceeded by its aspirations – to inspire just action in the face of injustice – to promote courage, heroism, and respect for the value of life in all spheres – not just the political sphere but the social and academic world of schools. The diplomats were individuals of diverse family backgrounds, cultures, faith traditions, and life experiences, yet they shared a singular commitment to defy injustice and risk their own reputations, economic security, and lives for the sake of saving those persecuted by the Nazis. How can we help students develop such moral courage?

Example, guidance, and coaching. Our students need help to learn to use their freedom well. They need practice, practice, practice. As Aristotle wrote, "We become brave by doing brave acts." Good teachers seize opportunities to

help students practice courage. And they are met with practical challenges daily, because children carry many fears with them. Bullying, exclusion, teasing, gang violence, peer pressure, substance abuse, and even the temptation to cheat to stay in National Honor Society all stem from fear – fear of social rejection or not fitting in, fear of failure, fear of speaking in front of a group, fear of losing face.

Children rely on our moral courage when they lack the experience and judgment to exercise it on their own. This is clear in instances of fighting and bullying; sometimes children need to enlist the support of adults who can intervene swiftly and effectively when issues of safety are at stake. Older students need to be challenged to stand up to injustice and to distinguish courage from recklessness and impulsiveness from intelligent choice.

Teachers are in a wonderful position to foster courage as they help students make sense of disappointments they encounter in school. While teachers cannot and should not protect students from failure, they can help young people respond constructively in the face of difficulty instead of escaping into sham comfort or self-destructive behaviors, such as cutting, eating disorders, and drugs. They can introduce students to individuals whose courageous action is worthy of committing to memory. Why, after all, do young people hang posters of their favorite band, artist, or celebrity on their wall? Because they like to keep present before them the people they admire and want to be like.

Exciting the moral imagination is important to fostering moral courage. Effective education nurtures the imagination and memory. Children tend to take their cues from images they retain. The goal of exciting the moral imagination is to build a rich storehouse of images, narratives, exemplars, and memories for children to draw insights and inspiration from.

¹ Coles, Robert. *The Moral Intelligence of Children* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1997) p. 120



Some **IDEAS** for bringing **VISAS** for **LIFE** to the classroom

The *Visas for Life* exhibit nurtures the moral imagination. The French writer A. D. Sertillanges describes the certain spell that memorable lives cast on us as the "ring of a soul": "Many saints, great captains, explorers, scholars, artists became what they were for having met an outstanding personality and heard the ring of a soul." One of our central messages to teachers and certainly one that resonates with the power of this exhibit is that the greatest education in character comes not from a lesson but from a life.

Despite serious obstacles each of these diplomats worked with fortitude, swiftness, sagacity and savvy. Perhaps they heard, in their own lives, the "ring of a soul." What is certain is that we can, in learning about their attitudes and actions, draw vital lessons.

Conclusion

Visas for Life gives us a compelling vision of the courage within our reach. What gives people the ability to step up to the plate so courageously, to put their lives on the line? It is the principles, dispositions, and habits that have become a part of who they are and what they are ready to live and die for every day.

Dr. Nechama Tec, author of *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, was one of 150 Polish Jews who survived the slaughter of Lublin's 40,000 Jews. A sociologist, Dr. Tec eventually decided to devote her time and energies to researching the qualities of rescuers. What could she learn about individuals (like those to whom she owed her life), who risked their own lives to save Jews? After analyzing data from interviews with scores of individuals who displayed such moral courage, she found a cluster of characteristics that all shared to various degrees: individuality (independence), modesty, universalistic perception (Jews were simply people in need), and a personal history of doing good and helping others. This habit of doing good was established long before a moment of moral crisis turned the ordinary individual into a "rescuer."

Tragedy casts a spotlight on extraordinary behavior. But it also reminds us that virtue and heroism are within our reach daily. We can honor the memory of these diplomats by responding to the call for moral courage in our daily lives, and by example, inspire our students to do the same.

I. RESOURCES: *Visas for Life* on the web:

United Nations website feature
www.un.org/events/highlights/visa.html
A host of the *Visas for Life* exhibit; includes welcoming address of Secretary General Kofi Annan

Yad Vashem website feature
www.yadvashem.org.il/exhibitions/temporary_exhibitions/visas/home_visas.html

Foreign Service Journal June 2001 article on Hiram "Harry" Bingham
www.afsa.org/fsj/jun02/Bingham.pdf
(Requires Adobe Acrobat to view)

Visas for Life Virtual Exhibit
motlc.weisenthal.com/exhibits/visasforlife/
Highlights Chiune Sugihara, Japanese Consul General in Kovno, Lithuania in 1939 and 1940

II. PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSION

"The universe exists on the merit of the righteous among the nations of the world."

— *The Talmud*

"I would rather be with God against man than with man against God."

— *Aristides de Sousa Mendes*

"In those times, one climbed to the summit of humanity by simply remaining human."

— *Elie Wiesel*

"They first came for the Communists and I didn't speak up — because I wasn't a Communist

Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up — because I wasn't a Jew

Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up — because I wasn't a trade unionist

Then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up — because I was a Protestant

Then they came for me — and by that time no one was left to speak up."

— *Pastor Martin Niemoeller*
(Nazi victim)

III. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What prompted these individuals to act so courageously, so selflessly?
- Were there pivotal experiences in their upbringing that prepared him/her to respond the way they did?
- What are the sources of courage in an individual's life? (What does his/her personal life story reveal?)
- What motivates a person to act nobly under pressure?

WORDS (continued)

to enlighten her.

Even had you skill

In speech – which I have not –

to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

Or there exceed the mark" – and if she let

Herself be lessened so, nor plainly set

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuses –

E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop.

So much for the confessions of one who has no "skill in speech." Beyond the pettiness of the duke's jealousy, one is appalled at the pride of his reticence. One is more appalled to think of what he might have learned about another person's heart, or what reassurance he might have found for his own, had he made some attempt to share his insecurity with his wife. But in his

eyes that would be "stooping." Apparently, having her murdered was not. The whole situation strikes us as the extremity of evil – yet most of us have probably acted in our own versions of the same drama. Someone "ought to have known" what angered us, and we would not stoop to tell him. But we would stoop, perhaps, to some form of ostracism or vengeance.

Of course, reticence is not always the result of pride – and Browning's poem hints at that too. Sometimes the things that anger or otherwise hurt us seem too strange for words. They do not strike us as worthy of mention. Along with codes of acceptable speech, society maintains a code of acceptable pain – a code that pain seldom honors. I spoke with a psychiatrist once who told me of a woman he knew who was plunged into a profound depression because she had broken her grandmother's hairbrush. Psychiatrists will hear confessions of that sort,

and sometimes priests, but how does one tell such a thing to a husband or sister? Even if they heard you with all the sympathy they possessed, how would they understand that sensation of a fissure opening in reality itself merely because a hairbrush lies broken on the floor? Of course, it is precisely the insignificance of the accident that gives it its power to mock and to maim. Mourn a child and the angels mourn with you; mourn a hairbrush and your dearest friends shake their heads.

If my own meager experience as a priest has taught me anything, it is these two principles: First, more people are in pain than you can imagine; and second, the causes of the pain are also unimaginable. In speech and in silence, in the experience of my anger and in my experience of the anger of others, I try as

continued on page 12

Garret Keizer maintains his own "code of speech" – for, as he says, "I don't have to listen to someone else's offensive speech if I don't want to, but unfortunately I do have to listen to mine. What is more, I have to live it, in consequence and memory." Some examples from his code are the following:

- *Speak less.* Treat speech in the same way as your doctor has advised you to treat food. "Try to leave the table one-third less than full."
- *Make your needs known.* Never be upset for failing to receive what you never asked for.
- *Complain for the sake of change, or for the sake of camaraderie,* but never to get attention or to put on airs. Complaints are not credentials.
- *Never take offense – or give it –* over matters of taste.
- *Speak nothing but the truth,* but seldom all of the truth. "Telling it all" is tedious in small matters and cruel in large.
- *Speak your heart* only to those dear to your heart. "Cast not your pearls before swine."
- *Listen* as though it were a sacred obligation.
- *Coax the quiet and the shy,* but do not badger them. Have an eye out for those who look for an invitation to speak, and give them one. But do not cater to those who coyly wait for repeated invitations.
- *Ask more questions than you answer.* Refuse questions that are impertinent or that tempt you to appear more knowledgeable or convinced than you are.
- *Call no one by an epithet...* Names are sacred.
- *Say nothing about another person* that you would not admit in that person's presence. It will probably find its way to his ears anyway.
- *Explain yourself* to the degree that others wish to understand, not to the degree that you wish to be understood.
- *Never use knowledge or vocabulary to exclude another person.* This is no different from eating bread in the presence of the hungry.

On the **HOMEFRONT** (continued)

- He's conscious of his authority, and comfortable with it. He has rights because he has duties. He knows his rights come with the job.
- He rewards good effort, making praise as specific as blame – and just as sincere. He affirms and encourages his people, pressing them to put out their very best regardless of shortcomings. He sees part of his job as keeping obstacles out of his people's way, eliminating whatever holds them back from their best performance.
- When he must correct others, he corrects the fault, not the person. He comes down on the foul-up, not the one who did it. He corrects people privately, never in public. If he goes too far, he apologizes. He puts fairness ahead of his ego.
- When he thinks about his people's professional development, his frame of reference (consciously or intuitively) comprises the virtues: sound judgment, responsibility, perseverance, self-discipline. He wants and expects his people to grow in these areas. His company depends on it. He knows his business is only as strong as the people who work for it.

If you are now this kind of professional man (no matter what kind of work you do), or if you aspire to this ideal for your future leadership at your job, you can be a great father. The attitudes, values, and behaviors described above – effective leadership on the job – apply as well to life in the family. *A great father is a great man, a man of integrity, and such men do not live divided lives.*

LEADERSHIP AT HOME

Having looked at leadership on the job, let's turn to see how these same traits apply to a father's leadership at home with his family.

Here's what we see...

- *He has a constant spirit of team collaboration with his children's mother.* She is his partner in a collective team enterprise. Together they endeavor as much as possible to present a united front to the children. They check with each other about decisions, large

and small, that affect the children's welfare. They draw on each other's strengths and, in different but complementary ways, they support each other.

- *He works with their mother to set and maintain a long-term vision (20 years ahead) about the children's growth in character, no matter what they later do for a living.* Both parents think of their children as grown-up men and women, adults with virtue: conscience, competence, responsibility, self-mastery. This distant but clear ideal forms the basis for teaching, practice, and correction now.
- *He corrects his children's faults, not them personally.* He "hates the sin, loves the sinner." He combines correction and punishment with affectionate forgiveness, understanding, and encouragement. He is neither weak nor harsh but rather affectionately assertive. He loves his children too much to let them grow up with their faults uncorrected.
- *He's not afraid of being temporarily "unpopular" with his children.* Their long-term happiness is more important to him than their present bruised feelings from correction. He's confident that their present resentment will soon pass, and that someday they will understand and thank him for his principled efforts.
- *He goes out of his way to listen to his children, and he pays close attention to their growth in character.* He monitors and guides their performance in sports, chores, homework, good manners, and relations with siblings and friends. He knows what goes on in his home and inside the growing minds of his children.
- *He respects his children's freedom and rights.* He teaches them how to use their freedoms responsibly, and he exercises only as much control as they need. He sets limits to his children's behavior, draws lines between right and wrong. Within those limits, the children may do what they think best; beyond the lines, they begin to infringe on the rights of others – and this he will not permit.

- *He sets aside his fatigue, anxiety, and temptations to slack off – putting his fatherly duties ahead of self-interested pursuits.* He sets aside the newspaper to help with homework. He goes without television to set a good example. He lets his kids work with him around the house even when they mostly get in the way. Like a good boss, he's always available to help and advise; consequently, his children sense he would drop anything if they really need him. He's willing to put off a life of leisure until his children have grown and gone; now, while they're still at home, their needs come first.
- *He is open to his children's suggestions, their "input" about family decisions.* When matters are unimportant, he accedes to their preferences. But larger, more important matters are decided by the parents. He'll let his children decide what dessert to have or what game to play, but he and their mother will decide which school the children attend and what television programming is allowed in the house.
- *When he has caused offense, he apologizes.* He puts justice ahead of his ego.
- *He knows that time passes quickly and he hasn't much of it.* So he makes smart use of scant resources. He makes the time, even small slivers of it here and there, to live with his children.

Children with a father like this, wholly supported by their mother, have a fighting chance of becoming great men and women. They grow to honor Dad and Mom, live by lessons learned since childhood, and pass these on to their own children whole and intact.

Have confidence. Other normal men have become fathers like this, and so can you.

James B. Stenson is an educational consultant and speaker. This piece is an excerpt of his article, "A Father's Unity of Life." For the full text of this article, please see James Stenson's website: www.parentleadership.com

From the **TRENCHES** **MORAL VALUES** in the **ODYSSEY**

by Scott Travin

Editor's Note: This issue's "From the Trenches" article features the insights of an eighth grader from his study of Homer's Odyssey.

In *The Odyssey*, a strong moral message is hidden under the many layers of deep and entertaining adventure: CHOOSE WISELY. Although these two words do not appear to be morally significant, they have a great impact in *The Odyssey*.

For instance, the great King Agamemnon may have had his morals slightly confused. Before setting sail for the Trojan War, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, to ensure favorable winds for his army. What kind of morals must a man have to sacrifice his daughter for safe passage of a group of soldiers?

After a victorious campaign in Troy, Agamemnon returns home. One day, Aegisthus, the secret lover of Clytemnestra, invites King Agamemnon to his palace for a banquet. While Agamemnon is feasting, his own wife Clytemnestra stabs him to death. As Agamemnon talks to Odysseus in the Underworld, he describes the bloody scene. "You, Odysseus, have witnessed the death of many men in single combat or in the thick of battle, but none with such horror as you would have felt had you seen us lying there by the wine bowl and the laden tables in the hall, while the whole floor swam with our blood." (X, 416-421) As a result of Agamemnon's bad choice, his life is cut short. Had he made the choice not to sacrifice his daughter, Odysseus would not have met him in the Underworld in Book X.

I believe that the reason I was able to easily identify a moral message in *The Odyssey* is because of my everyday surroundings. Each day when I come to school, I am reminded to be moral, to be conscious of the effects of my choices, not only on me, but on those around me as well. As a result of a strong ethical focus at MKA, being able to identify moral choices and act ethically has become second

nature to me. Small "hidden" messages, such as those in *The Odyssey*, are presented to me every day.

Last year, I was in the seventh grade at MKA. The year was 1999, and the Yankees were in the World Series. Through my dad's job, he somehow managed to get tickets to the last

Each day when I come to school, **I am reminded to be moral**, to be conscious of the effects of my choices, not only on me, but on those around me as well.

game at Yankee Stadium. I was ecstatic! I love baseball, especially the Yankees. I was all set to go, and then came the problem. The game fell on a Thursday, which just happened to be the day that a friend of mine was coming for a sleepover. That Thursday was a conference day for our school as well. In his haste, my dad had only gotten two tickets.

This was my main problem. How could I abandon my friend and just go to the World Series? There was something deep in my gut telling me that leaving my friend alone with my mother while I went to the Series was wrong. So, as I sat and thought about what I should do with my tickets, I remembered a teacher who had made a great difference in my education. This teacher loved baseball as well, and I knew he would love to have these tickets. So that's what I did. I gave the teacher my behind-the-dugout seats, and I never felt a second of guilt or self-pity. I knew that I had made the right choice, and that feeling is better than the feeling I would have had at the baseball game.

In fact, I believe this is the best feeling in the world.

These small messages, though sometimes seemingly insignificant, have played a major part in my being able to make smart choices throughout my school years, and I hope they will be present throughout my life. I wish some of the characters in *The Odyssey* could have been educated in the study of ethics as well as I have been.

One of the other dead people Odysseus speaks to in Book XI is Achilles, the greatest warrior of the time and virtually invincible. Achilles could defeat any enemy and was seen as someone close to a god. When Achilles was young, he was given a choice of whether he wanted to live a short, glorious life or a long, yet dreary one. Achilles chose to live a short and glorious life. As prophesied, Achilles died while fighting in the Trojan War.

When Odysseus visits Achilles in Hades, Achilles reflects upon his life and the choice he made. "I would rather work the soil as a serf on hire to some landless, impoverished peasant than be the king of the lifeless dead." (XI, 489-491)

I find this statement to be utterly astonishing. Which life would the average person choose? Which would I choose? I am honestly not sure. I am certain that the humbler of the two choices is the servant, who never seeks fame or fortune. I can most certainly understand this, but doesn't the glorious and short life sound more enjoyable? If I were given this choice, I can honestly say that I have no clue what my answer would be.

Despite many other strong messages in *The Odyssey*, I believe that one must always make choices that benefit other people in the end, not just oneself. If everyone were to make wise decisions, no one would end up like the fallen heroes of *The Odyssey*.

Scott Travin was an eighth-grader at Montclair-Kimberley Academy in Montclair, NJ at the time this essay was written.

Upcoming **EVENTS** in **CHARACTER** **EDUCATION**

quotes on

SELF-MASTERY

"By constant self-discipline and self-control you can develop greatness of character."

– Grenville Kleiser

"What lies in our power to do, it lies in our power not to do."

– Aristotle

"No man is free who is not master of himself."

– Epictetus

"Self-respect is the root of discipline; the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to himself."

– Abraham J. Heschel

"Self-discipline is holding your ground when you'd rather run away; counting to ten when you would rather lash out; keeping a smile on your face when you'd

rather cave in; working hard when you would rather give up."

– Unknown

"Self-discipline is when your conscience tells you to do something and you don't talk back."

– W.K. Hope

"Without discipline, there's no life at all."

– Katharine Hepburn

"Loving a child doesn't mean giving in to all his whims; to love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult."

– Nadia Boulanger

"To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it."

– Mother Teresa

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books on

SELF-MASTERY

The Fox and the Crow, Aesop

The Secret Garden, Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Incredible Journey, Sheila Burnford

The Whipping Boy, Sid Fleischman

Why Work?, Judy Jennings

A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle

Uncle Jed's Barbershop, Margaree

King Mitchell

The Little Engine That Could, Wally Piper

The Boxcar Children, Gertrude Chandler Warner

A Chair for My Mother, Vera Williams

movies on

SELF-MASTERY

Finding Forrester, rated PG-13

The Rookie, rated G

Little Women, rated PG (1994),

not rated (1933)

Pollyanna, rated G

Groundhog Day, rated PG

WORDS (continued)

best as I am able to remember those principles. Even if the neighbor giving me the silent treatment were to speak, she could or would not tell me everything that's wrong. She may not even know it herself, and some of what she knows she would find impossible to confess. Nor could she tell me everything she "heard" when I offended her. This is not a reason to refrain from speaking my mind in her presence. I am willing to stoop in ways that Browning's duke disdained, but I will not stoop to be governed by another's subjectivity. The worst tyranny imaginable is a state where everyone is entitled to file a grievance and no one is required to give an explanation. I will try to

remember, though, that I always exist in the presence of the ineffable and the invisible, which, after all, is the essence of religion. I am in the world like a rescue worker. My work requires me to move the debris of Eden using the tools of language. But with each movement, I must not forget the survivors who may lie hidden underneath the debris. And when I happen to be among the injured, I must not be too proud to announce my presence with a cry.

Garrett Keizerth is the author of No Place But Here (Hanover, N.H. University Press of New England, 1988).

PUBLICATIONS in the PIPELINE

Practices for Teacher Educators Committed to Character: Examples from Teacher Education Programs Emphasizing Character Development (Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership), a study completed by Karen Bohlin, Susan Dougherty, and Deborah Farmer and published by the Character Education Partnership is available through CEP's website.

Kevin Ryan is developing a high school character education curriculum for the Boy Scouts of America's *Learning for Life* program.

Bernice Lerner's book, tentatively titled *Stories of Triumph: Seven Holocaust Survivors' Lives*, will be published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 2004.

Karen Bohlin is completing a book for secondary and post-secondary teachers of English: *Teaching Literature: Awakening the Moral Imagination* (London: Routledge-Falmer Press, 2004).

Great Lives, Vital Lessons. The CAEC is finishing its resource guide on teaching great biographies in middle school. The contributing authors are elementary, middle, and high school teachers of literature and history. Karen Bohlin is editing the guide and will complete the project by June 2003.

Upcoming **EVENTS** in **CHARACTER** **EDUCATION** CONT.

October 16 – 18, 2003. Arlington, VA.

Character Education Partnership 10th National Forum.
Pre-forum: Workshop, *Educating Mind and Heart: Building Character in Schools*. Karen Bohlin and Bernice Lerner.

Contact Character Education Partnership
Telephone 800.988.8081
Fax 202.296.7779
Website www.character.org

March 20 – 24, 2004. New Orleans, LA.

59th Annual ASCD Conference.

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FOR EDUCATORS:
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The **Internalizing Virtue Framework**

The Internalizing Virtue Framework

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 2. Inspiring Understanding
 3. Developing Habits of Action
 4. Fostering Reflection

Awareness: Are students aware that virtues such as respect, compassion, and diligence are important? What virtues or ethical principles will your lesson/unit explore?

Understanding: Narratives, books, history units, musical pieces, works of art, quotations, and other curricular materials can illustrate for students the difference between good and bad choices. What materials will you use to inspire your students' understanding of good character?

Habits of Action: Activities, behavioral expectations, or projects can invite students to put virtue into practice. What opportunities will you create within this lesson or unit for students to develop good habits of action?

Reflection: What questions within your unit/lesson will help students evaluate the impact of individuals' choices? What projects, discussions, or writing assignments in your class will foster habits of reflection?

Please send your submissions to:

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To our **READERS**

We want to hear from you!

The strength of this newsletter depends on the active contribution of its readers. Our readers need to hear what's happening in your school or community. (That's what our "From the Trenches" section is all about.)

We welcome submissions of any kind: letters, articles, anecdotes. What has worked in your classroom, home, or school? What has inspired your dedication to character education? We also encourage recommendations for our Selected Bibliography, Movies, and Character Quotes.

The next issue will spotlight **GRATITUDE**. The deadline for our next issue is **July 31**. Please address all correspondence to:

Newsletter Managing Editor
Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character
621 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215

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