

# Michigan Peace Team

**Theme:**

In this newsletter we share both challenges and positive experiences in peace team work.

**Inside this Issue**

<b>Becoming Human Beings</b> Peter Dougherty	1 - 2
<b>Thinking Outside the Box</b> Mary Hanna	3
<b>MPT's 2009 Fall Peace Team</b> Tom and Mary Mechtenberg	4 - 5
<b>A Vision of Hope</b> Julie Slowik	5
<b>Life Changing Moment</b> Annette A. Thomas	6
<b>Success of Steadfastness</b> Kim Redigan	7
<b>Angel Woman</b> Paula Marie Deubel	7
<b>Core, Staff, Office</b>	8
<b>Newsletter Committee</b>	8

**MPT Vision:**

To pursue peace through active non-violence in places of conflict

MPT seeks a peaceful, just, sustainable Earth Community grounded in nonviolence and respect for the sacred interconnectedness of all life.

**MPT Mission:**

- Provide training in active nonviolence designed for the specific needs of participants.
- Recruit and mentor individuals seeking experience with violence reduction teams.
- Place violence reduction teams in domestic and international conflicts.
- Convene, support and participate with local peace action groups.
- Educate the public to the vision and practice of nonviolence.

## Becoming Human Beings

### Peter Dougherty

*"It cost so much to be a full human being, that there are very few who have the enlightenment or the courage to pay the price." -- Morris L. West*

*"If those in charge of our society – politicians, corporate executives, and owners of press and television – can dominate our ideas, they will be secure in their power. They will not need soldiers patrolling the streets. We will control ourselves." -- Howard Zinn*

The movie Freedom Writers tells the true story of a middle class neophyte teacher who had a passion to teach in an inner city high school. She was totally naïve about the reality of her students' lives. Her classroom exactly replicated the world outside, divided up by the ethnic neighborhood gangs - Black, Cambodian, Hispanic, and White. They acted out their hate for one another.



She was courageous, creative and tenacious. She introduced creative teaching methods, especially daily journaling. That got them to tap into their own fears, hates, pains, hopes and dreams. They began reading their entries aloud, and each discovered that every other student was just like themselves. They grew, through her strong, loving guidance, to trust and love each other. They were transformed human beings in that classroom.

That is what we must do with our planet earth, before we destroy it and ourselves in the madness of our supposed higher civilization with arrogant

attitudes like "We're the best" and "We're Number One."

A first step is facing our illusions, like those students had to face their own.

We are acculturated to believe our American way of life is superior. We live the illusion that we have the right to tell other people of the world what to do, and we will make them do it. In history, one empire supplants another. They are all based on the same thing: massive violence made sacred by the state, religion and education. What is covered over is the violent accumulation of wealth and power wrapped in terms like "spreading democracy," and "protecting our vested interests." Our gang is right, their gang is wrong.



Goring, the Reichsmarchal in Nazi Germany, said "The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce

# Becoming Human Beings continued

the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.”

It is about power and greed, two sides of the same coin. Many Americans living in this illusion foster policies that are against their own best interests. One percent of the American people have as much wealth as the bottom 95%! More sink into poverty each day. And the propaganda of government and advertizing goes on and on.



In undergoing our healing – recall those high school students - we have to face our denial and see how our own fears, prejudices, addictions, play into the systems of violence. The Dali Lama does it; Buddha and Jesus did it; Sojourner Truth and Teresa of Avila did it.

We must refuse to accept the fear, blindness, hate and greed in the global classroom. We must refuse to divide the planet into “our turf” and “their turf.” It is time to dismantle the global gang systems.

We have to stop pretending that we only need to make some adjustments, and we can go on with our American way of life, and the world will be ok.

There are many growing signs of people waking up. One area of concerted concentration is the environmental crisis. Many realize we cannot go on in with our delusional lifestyles as time is running out. People are starting to grow some of their own food. Many are shopping for locally grown food. Many are saying no to corporate junk food. Some are exposing the horrible environmental destruction and inhumane animal treatment in our food production methods. Some are driving their cars less and turning off lights more. Some are founding alternative energy businesses.

There is hope for us. Hope is an underpinning of being alive. It is living and acting in spite of the

evidence, and sometimes watching the evidence change. It is planting the seeds that others after us will harvest.

I am inspired by courageous young activists in Delhi, India, who are struggling to help empower the homeless. They are teaching them their rights. They are nonviolently resisting the police effort to move thousands from an area of the city for “development.” They take abuse and are beaten by the police. When I explained our nonviolent peace team work, they asked if we could send an international peace team to help protect them, so they can continue to help empower those homeless. It is exciting to bring this to our Michigan Peace Team



*our Global Classroom*

to see if we can pull together the resources to do this Shanti Sena – Gandhi’s idea of a nonviolent peace army.

In the state of West Bengal in India, poor residents at Haripur learned that the government intends to build a nuclear power plant next to their village. Within a few days 2,000 nonviolent resisters did a sit down on the proposed

power plant site and demonstrating that they will not tolerate the building of that plant. Soon after, word came that the government will probably not build the plant there. They give me hope.

We must and we shall move the world from our delusional systems of violence that favor the rich and powerful and starve the poor. People power is ever present, moving toward the overthrow of hate and violence and demanding some rationality based on the solidarity of the human family and the earth community.



We shall overcome.

## Thinking Outside the Box: “Virtual” Protective Accompaniment

### Mary Hanna

Last January, when the onslaught of Gaza that is now known as “Operation Cast Lead” began, we at Michigan Peace Team received an urgent appeal from a reporter in Gaza City. Sameh Habeeb, a noted photojournalist and reporter, was trying desperately to relay the news of what was happening in the Gaza Strip to the outside world during the Israeli-enforced news blackout. Using only his cell phone and a laptop, during the small pockets of time when Gaza actually had spurts of electricity to power them, Sameh was sending out pictures and narratives of what was actually happening to the vast majority of the population in Gaza: innocent civilians. When he began to receive anonymous death threats unless he stopped reporting, Sameh contacted Michigan Peace Team and asked for Nonviolent Protective Accompaniment.

Now this kind of request – Nonviolent Protective Accompaniment – is not new to MPT. Last year, reporters from the *Michigan Messenger* and the *Southern Poverty Law Center* were sent death threats as they continued to report on the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a certified hate group on Michigan State University’s campus. When YAF planned on hosting a speaker (known for his racist rantings against immigrants) on the MSU campus, the reporters contacted MPT and asked for this kind of accompaniment...a version of nonviolent body guards.

Yet when MPT received the email from Sameh begging for help, we didn’t quite know what to do. How could we help, when we couldn’t even get into Gaza? And that’s when the idea was born: electronic international protective accompaniment!

#### Here’s how it worked:

MPT staff posted a Facebook Cause. We entitled it the “Sameh is Safe” Project ... An international form of Protective Accompaniment, and we gave a



Sameh Habeeb doing press work in a bullet proof vest

brief narrative of what was happening:

“Conditions right now are dire. Very little food/water, and minimal electricity. Outgoing calls from Gaza are nearly impossible. However, for those who don’t know, incoming calls are free in Palestine/Israel. Sameh has asked that, once a day, someone from the international community call him to ensure that he is still alive -

then post it to this page. We can’t physically be with Sameh, but we can let anyone that threatens him or his family know that “THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING” as he attempts to continue to blog from the war zone in Gaza. If you sign on to this cause, we ask that you contact Sameh on his cell, then post here when you’ve verified he is okay. THANK YOU for joining this international form of Protective Accompaniment.”

Then we sent invitations to join this Cause to every one on our Facebook Friends list...and it caught on and spread like wildfire from there. Within days, people from all over the world signed up for the cause, called Sameh to check on him, then posted to the Facebook page not only that he was safe, but also the current news from Gaza.

By thinking a little outside the box, **MPT was able help facilitate 932 “nonviolent body guards”, from countries all over the world**, to help keep this journalist safe. It was a wonderful lesson for us. We are never powerless when it comes to helping prevent violence – no matter where it is.



**December 31, 2009**

An international march to end the siege on Gaza. Click on:

- gazafreedommarch.org
- mchiganpeaceteam.org

## MPT Fall 2009 Peace Team Doing the Work

### Tom and Mary Mechtenberg



MPT Fall 2009 Team to West Bank

Five persons of different backgrounds and stations in life made up the 2009 Fall Team in the West Bank: Martha Larsen, team anchor from Lansing; Lois Mastrangelo, a long-time peace activist from Massachusetts; Abby Schlaff, U of M student from New York, between courses; Fred Elmore, high school counselor and summer camp director from the Traverse City area; Tom and Mary Mechtenberg, married couple, retired social worker and nurse from southwest Michigan.

#### Here are examples of what we experienced:

We were present at a home invasion in Bil'in when five squads of Israel commandos forcefully entered the home of a leader of the weekly non-violent demonstrations in that city at 1:00 a.m. in an attempt to arrest him. MPT members joined Palestinians and other internationals documenting the event on film.



We came to the assistance of a farmer in Burin who found that settlers from a nearby settlement had cut down 97 olive trees in his grove. We helped publicize this incident and also assisted the farmer in salvaging his crop.

We went to support the al-Gahwe family in East Jerusalem who had been evicted by city authorities to make way for Israeli settlers and who were now living in a tent nearby. We

documented the incident when Israeli soldiers arrived, tore down the tent and removed all the family's possessions forcing them to go to a neighbor's home for temporary shelter while settlers living in their former home looked on.

#### As we prepare to conclude our time in the West Bank, we offer these thoughts:

The 42-year-long occupation leaves Palestinians feeling like they are "living in a cage" unable to make a living or even move about within their own territory. In the past, out of frustration, some have resorted to violence. However, in our experience, most Palestinians are warm, friendly, sincerely religious and committed to nonviolence in their opposition to an unjust and illegal occupation.

The single biggest obstacle to a peaceful solution is the large and growing number of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. By United Nations count in 2009 there were 172 full settlements and 97 outposts containing almost 500,000 settlers living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As a result, the settlements, including restricted and private highways, dominate more than 40 percent of the West Bank. Also, there are 67 full checkpoints and 23 partial checkpoints which control all travel, along with the building of a barrier wall (which is about 60 percent complete) around the West Bank. (See UNOCHA West Bank and Gaza Strip Closure Maps, June 2009)

There is some evidence that the world is losing patience with Israel. The Obama administration is pushing for negotiations. The European Union is considering a policy of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. International Courts are considering trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity. If the ordinary people back these movements, Palestine may yet become an independent state bringing freedom and opportunity to its citizens.

The 2009 Fall Team is proud to have represented the Michigan Peace Team by bringing the tools of nonviolent third party intervention to Palestinians who are non-violently resisting the occupation of the West Bank. Now we join in praying for, and actively supporting, a swift and just resolution to this illegal and inhuman situation.

## A Vision of Hope

**Julie Slowik**

Tragedy upon tragedy has plagued Juarez, Mexico since January 2007. With thousands of assassinations, extortions, car robberies, and kidnappings due to the grave problems of drugs and organized crime, then followed by abuses of the military, this fear-gripped city heard a message of hope from Medellin, Columbia – which in the 1990's was noted as the homicide capital of the world. Sergio Fajardo, a university mathematician and former mayor of Medellin, was invited by the mayor of Juarez to speak of the transformation of his city - now known internationally as the "miracle" of Medellin.

The project centered on this leading edge idea: to understand violence is to relate it to social inequality and the lack of opportunity. Drug trafficking and other forms of violence enter through a wide open door due to these social deficiencies. This door must be closed. If not, the conflict will continue forever.

For the then Mayor Fajardo, closing the door of social inequity meant opening the door to opportunities for youth. "Medellin the most educated" became the slogan. Thus began the building of a dozen large and modern schools as well as cultural centers, trade apprenticeships, even a museum of science and technology on

building of a dozen large and modern schools as well as cultural centers, trade apprenticeships, even a museum of science and technology on top of the former garbage dump. "Parks-libraries" were established. Fear-ridden families emerged from their homes to enjoy beautiful and secure parks with open libraries of computers for learning.

Where did all this occur? It occurred in the poorest neighborhoods around the periphery of the city, where before, no one dared to tread. Fajardo's motto: THE BEST FOR THE POOR-EST. The logic: to build within the children and youth a sense of dignity and self esteem in order to learn more readily.

Initially, Fijardo and his 50 companions knew they had to win the mayoral seat, the place where decisions were made as well as to act with honesty and transparency. And so it was. There were no political pay-offs, nor interventions by political interests. Monies received for education went directly to the building schools.

May this vision of hope become a reality in Juarez. There are some small signs beginning. May the political will continue.

**"The miracle of Medellin"**

**"The project centered on this leading edge idea: to understand violence is to relate it to social inequality and the lack of opportunity."**

**"May this vision of hope become a reality in Juarez."**



## Brief Update on MPT's Exploratory Peace Team to Juarez, Mexico

Michigan Peace Team sent an exploratory team to Juarez, Mexico November 1 - 19, 2009 in response to an invitation by CENTRO DE DERECHOS HUMANOS PASO DEL NORTE, A.C, a renowned Mexican human rights center. The four-member team included Berta Betanzos, Jose Lopez, and Renee Richie, OP, and Liz Walters, IHM.

Working in Juarez, our team documented in a 34 page report, the extent and complexity of the violence, the misery it brings to the people of Juarez, specific invitations from groups, and ways MPT might help reduce violence.

Now the MPT Juarez committee is discerning ...

## Life Changing Moment

Annette A. Thomas

In the summer of 2003, I sojourned into the Occupied Territories on a quest for understanding and enlightenment. It became so much more than that.

The interrogation at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv until the wee hours of the morning caused my weary driver (appointed by an NGO to greet me at the airport) to assume I had never arrived and he turned back to Jerusalem without me. I was forced to take a service car into the city. Refusing to drive into the Arab section for fear, he explained, of being harmed, the taxi driver then took me on an endless tour of the city until finally, hours later, I was able to convince him that taking me to a hotel in East Jerusalem would not endanger his life. After what seemed an eternity of searching, he was finally able to locate a hotel that had opened, and to his utter amazement, was greeted at the door with a warm smile by a young Palestinian man. Visibly delighted by his new experience, the driver slowly pulled away.

Early the following morning, the driver who had given up hope on me at Ben Gurion, picked me up at the hotel and dropped me off at the Kalandia checkpoint near Ramallah. There, I was to meet a man from the NGO who would then take me to the Jenin Refugee Camp, which had been the target of a massacre just the year before. It was imperative, I was told, that I witness the devastation and share what I would see. Showing his pass, Mohammed was able to easily pass through the checkpoint and soon we were on our way to Jenin. Heading towards Nablus, we encountered a roadblock, at which point our car was forced to pull off the road and a brief questioning followed. After having been detained for what seemed like hours, we were waved through and took a short detour to Kafr Qadum, the birthplace of close friends, where I felt obliged to take photos to share with the family who would never again be able to return to their home in that village. A soldier at the top of the hill saw my camera and quickly radioed ahead to the men at the to the men at the previous roadblock.



Annette Thomas and the children

Wasting no time intercepting us as we made our way back, a barrage of questioning ensued, the camera was confiscated, along with our passports and we were told to follow an Israeli jeep to a military post. As we passed through the foreboding gates, they were quickly locked behind us. I studied Mohammed's face for signs of distress but his calm demeanor quickly soothed my

own anxieties. We were taken to a detention center until it was our time for questioning. Being placed inside a truck, we were moved every 30 minutes from building to building until it was decided we were non-threatening. Mohammed was able to call an Israeli soldier, whom he had befriended at the Kalandia checkpoint, and he drove the distance to the military base to assist us. As he climbed into the front seat, he looked back and asked what caused us to end up there.

Neither one of us had the answer. We would now be able to go, but before our release, something unexpected took place. Near the gate, Mohammed offered the soldier his card, inviting him to stay in touch. As the soldier accepted, Mohammed referred to the apartheid wall, which had begun construction close to this site. As he spoke, he declared, "Five years from now, you and I will be dismantling the wall – you from the one side, I will dismantle from the other". That moment transformed the encounter from one between an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian detainee to that of two human beings forming a bond through dialog and caring. For me, it was a profound, life altering moment – for them, a step towards mutual understanding and peace.

A cherished Jewish friend here in Michigan, who had married a Palestinian woman, eloquently stated, **"There are humans who ardently believe in the deeper equality of peoples and actually work towards those ends. In being human, some give inspiration to the rest, showing them, by example, all the good that can be wrought through a hand extended in friendship."** We could all try to live our lives by his words - the words of knowledge, compassion, wisdom, love and understanding.

## The Success of Steadfastness, An Excerpt

**Kim Redigan**

As I reflect on this issue's theme of success stories, memories stir my mind. The memory of fellow team members, Barb and Hasan, convincing young Israeli soldiers at a dusty road block to release the scared young man they were detaining in the back of a military jeep. The memory of settlers, intent on intimidating Palestinian shepherds in the Hebron Hills, reversing their course in the presence of international human rights observers. Memories of peacemakers positioning themselves between religious zealots with their violent hate language and people, some inebriated, leaving the 2009 Michigan Gay Pride Picnic. Memories of peace team members using humor to transform intractable minds and hearts and to humanize situations in which one party is demonizing and denying the human dignity the other. I do not have

to reflect for long to recognize the efficacy of non-violence and the success of trained peace teams to diffuse violence by creating a space for people to resolve their differences and seek just solutions.

**Clearly, from the Westside of Detroit to the West Bank of Palestine, nonviolent intervention works and has an impressive, albeit grossly under reported, track record – a string of success stories that should be studied and celebrated ...**



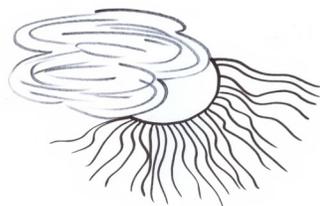
## Angel Woman, An Excerpt

**Paula Marie Deubel**

One of my most lovely (and unexpected) memories of Palestine happened in East Jerusalem directly after a crisis. I had an hour to myself so I wandered over to an outdoor food stand.

Instead of getting a sandwich, I found myself witnessing a very disturbing event, during the only time I was alone without other MPT members. Israeli Police were harassing Palestinians at the Damascus Gate and overturning vendor carts so that cactus fruit, watermelons, and cucumbers were rolling all over the street. I was angry at myself because I did not have my camera to document the incident. Instead I could only quickly scribble notes of the event.

While I sank down on the old steps near the ancient wall, feeling totally powerless an elderly Palestinian woman approached in drab peasant clothes, so old her back was bent nearly parallel to the ground. Her rough skin was lined with the cracks and the worries of years, but a light shone through her



face that felt kindly, angelic, and warm.

The stranger, ancient-looking and enchanting as the old olive trees, was smiling and never took her eyes off my face. It was as if a golden sun had come out from behind dark clouds, while she continued to look deeply into my eyes for a very long time. We were, perhaps, both seeing the other's bare spirit, and the moment was standing still. I will never forget the love on that dear woman's face. There she lingered, radiant with the most beautiful inner light, still smiling at me a complete outsider. I don't know why I deserved her special smile.

**Then I heard her softly murmur, "Shukran (thank you)," and I knew her voice sounded like an angel's voice.** As she graciously walked past me, disappearing forever, I was stunned.

I'll never know why this certain woman thanked me as she did, since I had done nothing "heroic," except to be nonviolently present, but she gave me the strength to arise and continue on; it was as if she had spoken directly to my soul. After that, all the horrors of the day could not keep me down.

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Special thanks to our readers, donors, and volunteers for helping to keep the dream alive! We are grateful your continued support of the vision and mission of MPT.

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**Special Note regarding newsletter artwork:**

For the 2009 and 2010 editions of the MPT newsletter, **Nancy Ayotte** creates all the artwork. Her creations are pure gift to MPT and to our readers. This gift is yours to freely use in other peace work.



November 2, 2009, members of MPT's exploratory team to Juarez, Mexico ...

- Berta Bentanzos
- Jose Lopez
- Renee Richie
- Liz Walters

meet at the border fence with potential peace partners.

Presently, Juarez is regarded as the most dangerous city the world.

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