Barbara Bush, Hurricane Katrina and the Power of Words

Barbara Bush recently stated that the relocation of some of the Hurricane Katrina victims to the Houston Astrodome is “working very well” (1) for some of the thousands of poor people who lost their homes and livelihoods and had to relocate to Texas. She stated, during a radio interview with the American Media program that, “so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.” (2) Yeah Barbara, I’m sure that some of the 23,600 hurricane refugees and poor people forced out of New Orleans, their homes and livelihoods they worked all their lives for are having a great time starting all over again in Houston, Texas but it’s not very likely. Barbara’s unsympathetic comments were made public while she, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton were visiting some of the Hurricane Katrina refugees at the Houston Astrodome.

Barbara Bush’s comments regarding the victims of Hurricane Katrina got me all fired up … how could a first lady be so uncompassionate?? I started thinking about the power of words, how they can be used for positive change and inspiration or how they can be manipulated to instill fear, hate, apathy or dangerous emotions. Words are powerful, so potent, and they carry strong messages that can make you hate or love yourself, make you cry or laugh or sing or dance. Words can make people insecure or help an individual heal, depending on how a person uses them. I started thinking about strong media figures, both using words for good and positive things and those that are using words for control and hatred of people that are not like them. Here are some of the examples of positive and negative influences that I researched.

Pat Robertson is a religious right leader and seems to have caught the torch of bigotry from such diversity-haters as James Dobson and Adolph Hitler. These are strong words, but rightly so, because Mr. Robertson has used his platform from “The 700 Club” to reach out to millions of people and spread hate and fear of people who choose alternative lifestyles, through words and deception. You might be asking yourself, “but what can words do?” Words are weapons of mass destruction if used in a way that spreads fear and hate, 

The Holocaust of hatred that bigoted religious right leaders spread leads to anti-queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, etc.) hate crimes of queer youths residing in schools and more and more Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard cases across the country. When you invalidate someone’s very being, telling them that they are sick, wrong, morally corrupt, going to hell for who they are and then tell everyone else to hate and fear them, you cause a Hate Holocaust. Mr. Robertson reaches out to millions of people through his popular television show, “The 700 Club”, and tells them that gay people are bad and perverted. What kind of effect do you think this has on the parents of queer young people and indeed, the effect on queer young people themselves?

Pat Robertson once said that, “Feminism is a socialist, anti-family, political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.” (3) He also has been quoted as saying, “It is the Democratic Congress, the liberal-biased media and the homosexuals who want to destroy all Christians” (4). Pat Robertson was also quoted for saying, “I know one man who was impotent who gave sex to his wife and the only thing they did was kiss” (4). Mr. Robertson is blatantly planting seeds of fear, hate and lies! According to the American Red Cross, “The body fluids that transmit HIV are blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and saliva and are all likely to transmit HIV (AIDS) and spread this kind of misinformation is immoral and wrong.” (5) Pat Robertson tells millions of viewers and listeners that “homosexuality is an abomination” and that “It is unnatural.” He imposes his own discrimination and prejudices on millions of people who trust him, and that is wrong. The results of homophobia and misogyny are ugly, really ugly, really ugly, and yet Pat Robertson continues to spread his words of hatred in regards to queer people and women’s rights. The only cure to negative forces and words are positive energy and hopeful words.

A prime example of a first lady who cares about people, their struggles and visions is former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt was married to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Katrina Continued on Page 4

My Summer Experience in the Hospitals

Leon Sullivan health center. I wanted to do the camp but it interfered with my jobs. I worked everyday of the week except Sundays. This summer was fun but hard work at the same time. I was in a transition of moving from home into my own place. I had to save money to buy things for the house. I felt that I was doing too much work, but once you get older you have to do whatever it takes to make things comfortable for you.

I was happy to have worked at those two jobs, because I got to see what it was like to be NAC and a Recreational Therapist. At the VA I was partnered up with a NAC who did a great job everyday. I worked at this job on Mondays, Tuesdays, and sometimes Sundays. After days I was there, I learned how to change the beds, learned about the patients that my mentor worked with, and how to put the information in the computer. The days that I worked I would make the beds, fill the water containers, empty and refill the gloves cases, then around 12:00 I would feed a patient. The majority of the patients played cards and a few played on the television. We talked and joked and had a pretty mellow. Once a day we got a returning patient. They always sent them down before or after lunch. When we had a patient come back before lunch it was really busy because, I had to find them a room and make sure the beds are made up. Then, I had to bring in all their belongings and tell them the rules again. When I finished that, I had to put all the information on the computer. Then once it was really settled we put up files and answer call lights.

Now, the other internship was more of a fun job. It was a nursing home setting but with people who can walk and talk more. I was a recreational therapist who does activities and gets to know the residents on one on one. It was fun just hearing them laugh and talk to you about their life stories. Everyday we did something different. That was a pretty busy job too. The hardest working days were Fridays because every Friday we had some kind of party. The residents loved Fridays. One Friday we had Hawaiian and birthday celebrations. On this day we gathered all the residents and brought them down to the basement, where it was all decorated, and we had food, ice cream and cake. We sang happy birthday to those who had a birthday in that month. We played games, danced, and ate. By the end of the day everyone was tired and ready to sleep.
Letter from the Editor

This issue of the Mockingbird Times is another amazing example of the passion, resilience and brilliance of the youth reporters. One of our main goals is to raise public awareness regarding the youth who are in foster care or have experience with homelessness and dispel the many myths about who these young people are. In this issue you will see Misty’s article on the power of words particularly when they come from individuals in authority positions. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard survivors of abuse refer to the difference between physical land emotional harm almost always referencing the fact that the physical bruises go away but the deep wound associated with verbal condemnation remains. Misty closes her essay with “…I believe that love is powerful, one of the most powerful forces of energy…and that it can heal, transform lives, inspire, bring hope, laughter, singing, and dancing.” And then there is Jamie Henderson’s piece on her determination to create not just a job for herself but a career. She worked the entire summer including internships at Seattle based health care facilities where she learned new employment skills while giving fresh energy to the patients she cared for. She did all of this during following her June high school graduation and transitioning into new housing. As she so eloquently states: “…I felt I was doing too much, but once you get older you have to do whatever it takes to make things comfortable for you”. Zachary’s articulate and songwriting, Jacob’s reminder to value the innocent play and fun of kids being kids and the other articles in this issue are full of powerful words and reminders of youth demonstrating their passion for life, commitment to humanity and willingness to work hard and take responsibility. I would like to give a very special welcome to Dietra Clayton our very special Americorps worker who will be working with our Youth LEAD program. I also want to add my own Thank You to Representative Jim McDermott and the entire Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute for Mockingbird Society being selected as an Angel in Adoption. The honor is just that: an amazing honor and the events in Washington D.C. were truly fantastic! In closing I offer a heartfelt thank you to all of you who donate to the Mockingbird Society which allows us to continue to support these brilliant young people and their chosen path.

Let’s all make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society! Thank you for helping us give young people a safe place to start.
I got the chance to interview Zachary Prillhart, a green-mohawked 22-year-old young man who is a homeless poet whose works that people are more likely to care about. Zach was involved in The Poetry Project as a core player. The project’s name is simply The Poetry Project and was a collaborative effort with the Sanctuary Arts Center, a safe space where youth can go to express themselves creatively. Partnership for Youth, an advocacy and social service agency, and 6 homeless young adults. The poetry project lasted for 6 weeks and the final result was a solid product: 12 poems published in a chap book and a spoken word CD which is amazing. Youth involved in the poetry project will get half of the proceeds from the chap book and the CD. The other half of the proceeds will go towards funding more workshops for other homeless youth.

Zach has been seriously writing songs and poetry for 3 years. “Most of my songs are based on real life stuff that could happen to people – I hope that my songs will inspire people to not do bad stuff like suicide drinking. I would like to learn how to write poems better and add more detail to them so the reader can actually see the poem like they are there.”

Zach is also instrumental in helping homeless youth in the Seattle community. For example, Zach organized a fundraiser for Sports for Life which raised close to $300. Sports for Life is the name of Partnership for Youth’s (PFY) sports activities program, including the open gym and outdoor games. The open gym is a basketball program that Zach started for homeless youth, which was featured on King 5 TV as a program called Homeless Hoops. Zach mentioned jokingly, “I’m famous on TV! I’m the Open Gym was instrumental in helping homeless youth move on and get jobs. Rick Eberhardt, the head of PFY stated, "we are trying to provide opportunities that homeless youth would not get to experience otherwise." Sports for Life was the name of Zach’s PE class in high school, that’s how he came up with the name for PFY’s sports program. According to Eberhardt the three hundred dollars will be used to “create more opportunities for youth on the weekend and when you are bored you are less likely to get in trouble – at least that’s my experience when I was living on the streets.”

In the Seattle region, an all-day sports mini-camp at the UW Intramurals Activities Center and an upcoming Seahawks games. The Seattle Foundation also recently awarded PFY a grant to be used for purchasing athletic equipment like footballs, athletic shoes, towels, etc.

The Sanctuary Arts Center had a music program for awhile and one of Zach’s poems was put to music. (Zach smiles big while he talks about this) There is hope for the future that this can be done with more youth’s work. Zach’s poems have been described as having melody. Zach said the poetry project was fun and interesting and it was a good experience getting the chance to say what you liked about other people’s writing and write more than you normally would. Zach says he “really hopes that another poetry project will happen again.”

Some of the youth involved with the project were writers who begin to write. Writers got paid a stipend as recognition for their work because “writing is valuable! Your work is important! Writing is work!” In the eyes of Rick Eberhardt, this is the reason there was a stipend, but nobody really needed an incentive to be there because they wanted to be there and write.

Verse 1: Living on the streets you always could use some help. Other times you feel like you want to end it for yourself. People may ask you how you gonna do it my friend? If I’m having a bad day I’ll answer, I’ll take myself out of this world.
Mockingbird’sAmericorps Says Hello

For all those involved in the production of the Mockingbird Times and on behalf of the staff of Mockingbird Society we extend our deepest condolences for the families and individuals affected by Hurricane Katrina. The disaster separated thousands of families, as well as left devastating effects on the already disadvantaged youth and parents in the child welfare system.

Please visit the following websites to find out how you can help lessen the pain, suffering and loss that adolescents and adults are feeling due to the hurricanes destruction. Families are now faced with separation and death of loved ones, homelessness and the loss of their homes. We reach out to those affected by the devastation as they begin to repair the damage and rebuild the communities that once supported them.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice & Permanency Planning, at the Hunter College School of Social Work
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/sowcr/nrcfcpp/disaster_relief.html#funds

National Foster Parent Association (see Hurricane Relief Efforts)
http://www.nafpa.org
1-800-557-5238

Mockingbird Society working with youth that were disenfranchised through foster care and homelessness and I decided that was perfect. Being an avid writer myself with a lot of drive and complete openness to hearing and directing the voice of young people made this opportunity an excellent fit. The placement further struck me, because I would be given a chance to inspire youth and adults through art (which is also a strong point of mine). I’ve never held a job I didn’t love coming to, but even being here at Mockingbird Society this short time has surpassed my expectations.

I began myAmericorps service here at Mockingbird the second week of September and have only been given 11 months to contribute in as many ways possible. Many of my goals while working with Mockingbird Society are to help support staff with public speaking via spoken word events as well as assisting with development of Mockingbird’s “pencil & paper” community youth to harbor “verbal” voice. Also, I hope to increase Mockingbird’s visibility in the community through multiple community/school activities and various multimedia events. We will be visiting local public schools and higher learning institutions in order to enlighten people and raise a unified sense of awareness about the reality of foster care, homelessness and their impact on youth in our communities. Again, I am extremely excited to be here and look forward to what is ahead of me this next ten months. Thank you for reading my blurb and I look forward to an amazing year here at Mockingbird Society via Americorps and hope to cross paths with some of you along the way.

I was asked to introduce myself, and in all honesty I don’t know where to begin. My name is Dietra Clayton a self identified ally to every minority. The previous job endeavors I have had been from working with women who have been brutalized to working with homeless teens identified as queer, sexual minorities find there place with jobs, shelter and theirselves. Another big part of my background is serving undeserved portions of society as a mentor that taught AIDS awareness and STD prevention. I’ve also done a lot of traveling for the last three years; I actually started here in Seattle for two months. I adore Seattle and it’s commitment to and richness of various creative platforms.

When I decided to look in to becoming anAmericorps member, in all honesty there weren’t many programs that struck me. Then I was mentioned on opening at the Mockingbird Society working with youth that were disenfranchised through foster care and homelessness, and I decided that was perfect. Being an avid writer myself with a lot of drive and complete openness to hearing and directing the voice of young people made this opportunity an excellent fit. The placement further struck me, because I would be given a chance to inspire youth and adults through art (which is also a strong point of mine). I’ve never held a job I didn’t love coming to, but even being here at Mockingbird Society this short time has surpassed my expectations.

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