

A House where peace abides

In the quiet, seaside town of Ipswich there is a house that looks like many others, but whose walls — if they could talk — could tell you stories not only of our local history, but of the lives and histories of people from all over the world.

Over the past 22 years the House of Peace has been home and haven to more than 400 refugees from 30 countries. Seeking physical and spiritual shelter, children, young adults and families arrive from around the globe: Haiti, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Viet Nam, and most recently Iraq, Sudan and Congo.

Though these people each follow a unique path, their stories share a common refrain of tragedy. Most of the recent guests at the House of Peace are children with war-related illnesses and injuries. They come to Massachusetts with a family member to receive critical medical treatment and surgeries. At the House of Peace they regain their strength in a safe and intimate environment that restores their joy as well as their health.

The House of Peace is the living vision of John and Carrie Schuchardt who are the founders of this small but far-reaching non-profit. This husband-and-wife team is at the center of the humanitarian efforts, but they are quick to acknowledge the deeply



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collaborative, community-based network of generous organizations, supporters, and volunteers who make their work possible.

Individually and then together, the Schuchardts have lived their lives walking paths most people never tread, literally and metaphorically. Their travels to war-torn countries have revealed to them the profound and irreversible ravages of massive violence. They understand deeply that wars do not end. The economic, cultural, and emotional suffering continues long after troops have withdrawn. Though it would have been easier to either turn a blind eye or despair at the enormity of the problem, the Schuchardts chose to do what they could to make a difference.

Guests to the big, white house near the sea receive compassionate and respectful hospitality not only from the Schuchardts, but also from the other permanent residents, some adults with special needs. During her 17 years of service in the Camphill Movement,

a worldwide network of homes for people of all ages with special needs, Carrie witnessed the special gifts of people typically labeled “handicapped.” She saw how their unconditional and tender care allowed them to connect with and heal the hearts of others. The House of Peace is a unique community that weaves together the strengths and vulnerabilities of diverse people to create everyday magic that makes the world a better place.

At this time of year, as we gather together with our friends and families to express our love and gratitude for all the blessings in our lives, I am thankful that there is such a place as the House of Peace.

I am thankful that there are people in the world and right here in Ipswich with such a deep capacity for empathy, tolerance and fortitude in the face of what seems an insurmountable measure of tragedy.

I am thankful that the House of Peace serves not only the refugees who shelter temporarily within its walls, but also our community — giving us a priceless opportunity to open our hearts, expand our perspective and connect more deeply with the world around us.

The nature and quality of our connections with other people define the nature and quality of our humanity. At the hands of greed and war and atrocities of injustice

and cruelty small and large, many global relationships have broken down. The effectiveness of large-scale communication has diminished, severing the connections so vital to our humanity. At the House of Peace, those connections are being reformed and relationships reestablished, one person at a time. It may seem a futile effort to try and repair such a vast rift one stitch at a time, but that is the only way it can be done.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all connected. Whether we acknowledge it or not, each action we take and each choice we make has repercussions that ripple out through our families, our communities, and ultimately around the world. Nineteenth-century poet Francis Thompson expressed this truth most eloquently: “All things by immortal power, near and far, hiddenly to each other linked are, that thou canst not stir a flower without the troubling of a star.”

As we assemble around hearth and harvest to begin this holiday season, I wish everyone joy and comfort and, most of all, peace.

Jamie Wallace is an award-winning copywriter and marketing strategist by day, an aspiring author by night, and a mom and hopeless romantic 24/7. Find her at suddenlymarketing.com or on Twitter @suddenlyjamie.

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