

First House of Peace logo, Hue Thai, 1990

Winter Words from The House of Peace

*Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.
Look deeply. I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile,
learning to sing in my new nest,
To be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.
(Being Peace, Thích Nhất Hạnh)*

So much of our life at the House of Peace --- in fact, so much of all life --- has to do with arrival. And so much of the process of arrival has to do with the slowly fading pains of departure, the agonizing uncertainty of waiting, and the fearful, promise-filled moment of coming to a new place. It has been the story of the hundreds of refugees who have come through our doors these past 23 years making their way to rooms prepared for their stay --- as long or as short as it will need to be.

But there had to be a first one --- an archetype of arrival --- one that held in a unique way the trembling hope of the bud, the fragile smallness of the bird, the hidden radiance of the jewel within a stone.

His name was Cuong. And his coming held the first, prophetic sign of the dawning of the House of Peace. He fled from Viet Nam in 1979 over turbulent waters in a tiny boat ravaged by sea pirates. He was 16 --- a boat refugee--- the "collateral damage" of a war whose horrors knew no bounds. He left behind nine siblings and distraught parents who could not know where the destiny of their son would lead. He left behind a beautiful extended family and the home and farm and temple of his ancestors. For a year he suffered the stifling heat and hard labor of the Palau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia, until, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, he was brought as an "unaccompanied minor" to the Philadelphia area. Our family, deeply rooted in a Camphill Village in Kimberton, Pennsylvania living in community with adults with special needs, awaited this arrival.

It was a hot June day in 1980 when Cuong emerged from a social worker's car, took my hand, and perfectly recited his carefully learned words of English: "I am very happy to meet you, Mother." And so, a new family --- not of blood but of spirit --- was born. Cuong Chan Thai became son even as I forged an unspeakable bond with his own mother in Viet Nam, thousands of miles away from her eldest boy.

Cuong excelled in school; he enlivened our household with joy and creative energy that attempted to mask his grief at separation. Then in 1986 his older sister and two younger brothers followed the same perilous journey as "boat people", miraculously making their way to our Pennsylvania community. Finally, 6 years later, in June 1992 after 12 years of Cuong's tireless

efforts with mountains of forms, pleading phone calls to government agencies and late night planning sessions at our kitchen table, “family reunification” was granted and the remaining members of the Thai family arrived at Philadelphia Airport.

Tearfully my eyes searched amongst the streaming arrivals for the one I would recognize. Mother Thai emerged from the crowds. The eyes of the foster mother met the eyes of the birth mother for the first time. Human language does not yet have words for such a moment, such a meeting, such a merging of mothers’ love.

A bud in full bloom.... a bird flown round the world... the jewel recovered from hardest stone of pain.

It is a moment in an epic saga that needs full telling, somehow, sometime. It was the moment, amongst so much beyond, that was the seed planted for the future House of Peace. But for now, it is Cuong’s story of sonship, of unending faithfulness, of a brotherliness of unbounded love, eventually of Cuong’s fatherhood of Dan and Kim, a fatherhood selfless, wise, and strong, of a gentle spirit and a hard-working life.

Cancer crept into Cuong’s journey, as with so many American veterans and Vietnamese survivors, like a heavy, heavy weight upon his back, that broad back which had carried all of his large family to safety. How nobly he bore it, surrounded by those brothers, (all three now doctors supported throughout their college and medical studies by Cuong), by those sisters, all nursing him lovingly in his long final months, by his aging parents devoutly praying their heroic, beloved eldest son along, and by son, Dan, and daughter, Kim, gazing speechlessly upon the nobility of their father. And by that family of spirit, all of us, whose honor it was to share Cuong’s last journey.

Death came quietly at sunrise on Sunday morning, October 28, 2012 as Buddhist prayers were chanted, soaring above his bedside, as foster mother and birth mother held Cuong close to our hearts for the last time.

Was this then at last a departure? Or had another arrival dawned, even as the Sunday morning sky lit up with the radiant blaze of reddish/orange hurricane-impending light? Cast upon these shores by the storm of America’s long war upon Indochina, Cuong left us the morning the hurricane named Sandy approached Philadelphia shores. Could the ultimate leave-taking turn somehow into a reuniting, a reverberating chant of welcome and beginning, of newness and expectation, of “tiny bird... learning to sing in a new nest?”

Cuong Chan Thai has put out to sea once again, the light of the Moon upon the waters, the power of the sun calling him forward, the radiance of the Morning Star guiding him on his way.



Carrie Schuchardt
February, 2013

Joseph Jacques
December 7, 1950 --- August 5, 2012

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.

Helen Keller

At its founding in 1990 The House of Peace was given a mighty task, a profound responsibility: look upon the pain of the world with the eyes of the heart --- know it as your own pain --- and give all you can for healing. What great teachers we have had along the way: children and elders, co-workers and guests, souls broken by war, laid open for healing. And of all these, has there been one greater than Joseph?

Joseph came in 1999, a year and a half after the death of his mother, with whom he had lived in near total isolation. His was a world without sight or speech, without a full range of social or intellectual possibilities. How is it then that in Joseph we discovered the “best and most beautiful”? Perhaps it was the heart-felt love he inspired in all around him. Even more likely it was his own heart-felt love for all who took his hand and walked with him.

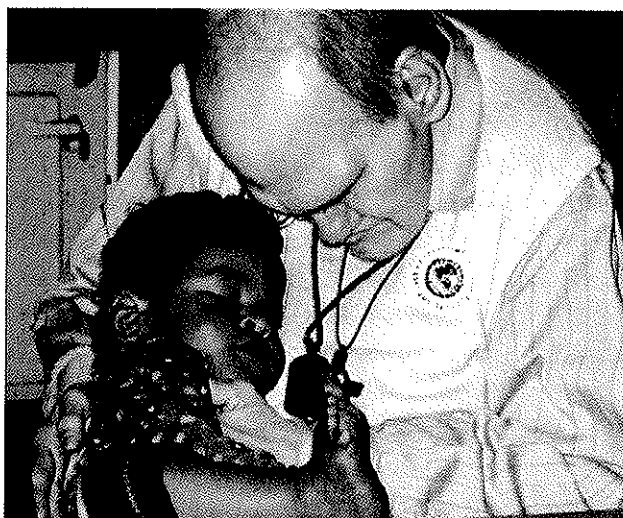
For thirteen years Joseph was our hearth-keeper. From his central place in our big, busy kitchen --- from his work-table at Coastal Connections (the program he shared every week-day), from his seat at Sunday Mass at the Sisters of Notre Dame, and from his favorite place at Zumi's Café, Joe lit it all up. It was always a matter for us of feeling with the heart.

At sunrise on Sunday August 5 the process came full circle. Joseph returned to the Source of all Radiance. The Great Heart took him home.

Breathtaking, sudden, only a few days in the hospital. Quiet --- the day so still in the hush of dawn. And wrenching, a sense of loss and sorrow. But then, like the pressure of his famous handshake, a squeeze of new recognition slowly dawned: He still lives among us --- he still presses us ---- he still surrounds us, permeates us with all that is “best and most beautiful.”

*A mighty being has lived among us.
Though he could not see,
he taught us much about true vision.
Though he could not speak, he taught us
much about true conversation.
Though he was bent and quite fragile,
he was filled with trust and humble, lasting joy.
And though he could not walk
without hands to guide him,
He has led us on into a wider, deeper world.
Dear Joseph, friend to so many, we are grateful.*

From Carrie's funeral eulogy, St. Monica Parish, Methuen



Editor's Note: In our Winter Words (2012) we described a new partnership between the House of Peace, Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, The Children's Room, and the Dever-McCormack School of Dorchester, MA. This team offers middle school students, grieving the loss of loved ones to urban violence, a space for dialogue and guidance, academic support and empowerment for leadership in the community. Ethna Riley, founding member of The House of Peace (aged 6 at the time), Waldorf School Graduate and now seventh grade teacher, established "Steven's Circle" in 2012. She described this endeavor in her Martin Luther King address to the West Parish Church, Andover, Ma. on January 20, 2013. We offer excerpts here.

..... For much of my life I was raised in the House of Peace, a shared living community in Ipswich dedicated to providing shelter and healing for refugees of war, in partnership with adults with disabilities. In this way, I had the privilege from an early age to be a part of an effort to live and breathe the idea that peace is not an abstract ideal, but rather a way of life, a daily practice of disciplined struggle and loving actions. Growing up with brothers and sisters who had suffered the loss of their families and homelands, the idea that war and violence were utterly abhorrent violations of the sacredness of human life was not a theoretical concept but rather a lived reality.

As a result, I was raised on the principles that Dr. King and the nonviolent resistance movement embodied: that we, as human beings have a moral and spiritual obligation to uphold the sacredness of humanity and stand against that which seeks to divide and destroy.....

Figuring out how this looks in one's own life, of course, is the essential challenge. After many years of studying and working against our nation's most recent and disturbing incarnation of slavery and racial injustice—namely, the prison industrial complex—I entered into teaching. I did so with the goals of approaching the problem of deliberate mass incarceration from a preventative standpoint, and doing what I could to interrupt the "school to prison pipeline" that is so blatantly obvious where I teach, as it is in many urban communities across the US. Not long into this work, my childhood experiences of accompanying people through the process of healing from violence and making their way back to peace became particularly relevant for me when, as an educator in Dorchester, I found that many of my seventh grade students were needing much more than the academic education which the school was theoretically set up to provide. It seems an obvious conclusion that a twelve or thirteen year old child who had just lost a best friend, a cousin or a brother, would need intentional and structured support if they were to be successful in school. And yet, from the time I started teaching six years ago until last February, no such support existed at my school, despite child after child demonstrating the need.

It ended up being my mother, the same woman who has dedicated her life to caring for victims of war via the House of Peace, who kept insisting that I should not wait for others to step forward to care for the victims of violence in my classroom.....This was clearly a moment when there was work to be done, and with Howard Zinn's wisdom of "you can't be neutral on a moving train" ringing in my ears (as it often does in dealing with student support issues in my school) I set out to outline an actual program of student support groups designed to address most pertinent issues that I saw to be distracting my students from their learning. Several months later, with the guidance of my mother, the commitment of the amazingly dedicated folks at the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute in Dorchester, and the financial help of a member of your fabulous congregation, Steven's Circle was born. The goals of this group were first, to offer a time and place in which students who have suffered loss due to violence can receive support in dealing with the impact of violence on their lives through discussion, art, projects and other activities. Second, to allow students to create a community of solidarity and understanding with other students who have had related experiences, and third, to empower these students to be leaders in peace-building, conflict resolution, and violence prevention within the school community and our home communities as well.

In this way, my own journey as of right now is caring for this particular group of students in an effort to begin to rebuild peace in their lives and in our school community. Although I fully intend to expand this humble endeavor into a much larger force and presence in the years to come, I must constantly remind myself of that which I came to share with you: I must start where I can, while mapping my course according to the ultimate task of transforming the ways my country and community have become entrenched in the evils of racism and violence. That said, I cannot allow myself to become incapacitated by the daunting tasks ahead. It is all too easy to forget that we are part of a greater movement, that despite the efforts of those that would continue the oppression Dr. King and others fought to the death against, the call for justice and unity does not, in fact, go out into an empty abyss. Instead, this call is echoed again today at a moment when it does seem that people are responding, arising, and moving in our own communities and in different corners of the world. Today represents a particular moment in time, in which we stand witness to this ongoing and worldwide struggle to put an end to the suffering, to insist on all humans treating each other as equals, with love and respect, and in recognition of our shared humanity.

So, what is my role, what is your role, what is our role in this struggle?

This is ultimately the question that I believe Dr. King would most want us to be asking on this and every day. Given your own circumstances, given this moment in our history, what role can each of us play in carrying forth a legacy that, despite being paid endless lip service, has in fact encountered unending opposition. Please do not be fooled into thinking we have achieved that which Dr. King and others set out to accomplish. Rather, the war rages on. Our schools continue to be largely separate and shockingly unequal. Our prison population is swelling with the ranks of the poor and people of color as we pretend that Jim Crow has ended, and it is purely coincidental that our so-called justice system continues to legally enslave and disenfranchise brown people across our nation (for anyone who is interested in an explanation of how this circumstance is an intentional program rather than an unfortunate accident, I invite you to read Michelle Alexander's brilliant analysis *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*). In the words of Dr. Vincent Harding, a close friend and colleague of Dr. King, speaking to the notion that we have progressed past the era of racial injustice,

“We are now in a creative new position for the next stages of our movement toward a more perfect union, and the battle is still in our hands. For the bastions of racism, poverty, materialism and militarism that have been created over centuries will surely require at least decades of courageous, committed, spiritually grounded work to transform into the scaffolding of a new and beloved community...”

I firmly believe that in embracing the essential task of seeking out and holding fast to the truth of the fundamental unity of all creation, and affirming our own commitment to engage ourselves in the work it takes to materialize this vision, that we can become much more than we realize, and in fact allow this so-called work to become that which feeds us, strengthens us, and allows us to benefit ourselves, our families, and our communities in profound and exciting ways.....



Mother's Day for Peace Walk, Dorchester, MA

A Reflection

The rhythms of the year with their rich seasonal festivals wonderfully sustain us. Our celebrations and work intersect with partner communities and the vast array of relationships that results is a strengthening force for our tasks. We continue to facilitate a Study Group at the Cape Ann Waldorf School and to host events, both small and large, of the Anthroposophical Society of Cape Ann. Other groups are also hosted here: the North Shore Coalition for Peace and justice, Veterans for Peace, and ad hoc gatherings of colleagues whose efforts are centered on bringing about a true moral awakening.

Helpers and interns fill the house! Summer volunteers have tended the land and its gardens and firewood as well as the lively kitchen and all who gather at our table. A highly committed team to support our fragile friends here with increasing medical needs has been an inspiring and energizing joy. Student groups have made their retreats here, often contributing a miraculously effective work force. Friends from Ipswich continue to sustain a protective sheath around us, always solicitous for our needs and creative in resolving them. From near and far all kinds of help come, as do all kinds of cries for help. There is a delicate balance between giving and receiving, needing and helping, strengths and seeming weaknesses, overwhelming pain and inestimable healing. We know we rest in that balance --- but we experience daily those Beings who hold the scales in which all is weighed. Perhaps it all becomes a way of recognizing:

“...as we develop as individuals, raising individual life more and more out of community life, we must in turn become conscious of a higher form of community, founded in the freedom of love among sisters and brothers, as a breath of magic that we breathe in all our groups.” (Rudolf Steiner)

Tareq

Our continuing welcome of children from the wars of the world humbles us with its revelations. In earlier “Winter Words” we asked: “What greater power of warmth can ray upon the ice dams of despair than the holy powerlessness of children? At the House of Peace, so often filled with the burned limbs, scarred faces, and broken bodies of Iraqi children, we know the awe-inspiring strength of that humble, mysterious force of the little ones who come to us for healing.”

Such a one is Tareq. He is a victim of “collateral damage” --- wounds of war’s by-products: lack of electricity, dangerous cooking fires, absence of water... Tareq’s needs for multiple surgeries at Boston Shriners’ Burn Hospital have kept him here, accompanied by his father, for many months. Again we find a teacher in a most unlikely form! Courage, long-suffering and unbounded enthusiasm for any new adventure ray out from the captivating eyes of this child. The road through his early childhood has been flooded with pain. The hopes for his future in Iraq, which has been stripped of the most basic medical support, are uncertain. But with the devoted commitment of our partners in the Iraqi Childrens’ Project and our own efforts to accompany Tareq from afar, we harbor a trust that his indomitable spirit will carry him safely on.

In Memoriam

*Hear the prayer of our soul.
There speaks our truth and faith:
To fulfill our task on earth we need
Powers great from lands where spirits dwell,
Strength that comes from friends who have died.*

Death has come close to this House of Peace community in recent months, guiding the passage of dear and mighty beings into the spiritual world. Our souls' prayer, our truth and faith reaches out to these bearers of great powers in spirit-land. Be it in the pre-dawn hush of our Thursday morning readings and verses, or in the November Festive Evening of All Souls, or in the daily tides that carry us in a conscious communion with those who have died, we experience a special strength --- a profound accompaniment from the other side. How we miss them all, our Joseph and Coung, our Elders and brother witnesses for peace, Paul Brailsford and Tarek El Heneidy... our close neighbors and friends, Frieda Arkin and Ann Hobson...and many more.

And yet how grateful we are that their forces for the hard work of healing entrusted to us here are so present to us. In the dying, the death, the remembering lies the mystery --- and we, through sad, are grateful.

Help from This Side

Just as we carry deep thankfulness for the strength that comes from the other side, we live with a sense of overwhelming gratitude for all the gifts we receive that make our work here possible. All contributions directly support the vulnerable and wounded lives of our community of individuals in need of special care and healing, and are enabling us to serve a wide and ever-growing circle of those in great need. Thank you.

Enclosed is my gift for The House of Peace:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount _____

House of Peace, Inc is a therapeutic community serving victims of war, in companionship with adults with disabilities and offering education for peace and moral awakening, incorporated in Massachusetts in 1990 as a 501c3 tax-exempt charitable and educational corporation supported by voluntary contributions. (Attorney General's Division of Public Charities Account 027187)

