

Up ‘yOur’ game for a Culture of Peace

By Marilyn King

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What does an Olympian know about a culture of peace? While all Olympians are different, I had a life-altering experience of peace that I refer to as “my Olympic Village experience.”

I squeaked on to my first Olympic team as a pentathlete through hard work, a great coach and fortunate timing. I was what you might call “an also ran,” but I was profoundly moved walking through the Olympic village seeing world record holders, gold medalists, athletes from every country after years of training, primed and ready to perform at their best. They were men and women, rich and from impoverished conditions, of every race, every religion, every political persuasion. I was stunned to see 7-foot-tall Japanese basketball players in line next to tiny 72-pound Romanian gymnasts; athletes in every size, shape and color.

But it was a conversation in the dining hall that was life altering. As two men from countries that were at war with one another struggled playfully to find a common language to translate, “Where did you find the peanut butter?” my question became “How was it possible for highly competitive athletes with such diverse backgrounds and competing beliefs to live side-by-side in peace?” My answer came instantly.

Everywhere I looked, standing in the cafeteria line, riding buses and dancing in the discothèque, throughout the village, all I saw was respect and curiosity. We had respect for one another because of what it took to be there and curiosity about one another’s journeys. I wondered if people could have an “Olympic Village experience,” the experience of living in a culture of peace by adopting the same two attitudes I experienced as an Olympian?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated a bold goal when he said, “I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, freedom and dignity for their spirits.” Since returning from my second Olympic team I have been privileged to be inspired by people who have been envisioning the goal, thinking globally and systemically about the elements that are present when people live in the kind of peace Dr. King described.

You heard in a previous post from Dot Maver, Founder of the National Peace Academy and pioneer in the interfaith peace movement. You will be inspired by Gene Sharp’s lifetime of research on successful nonviolent revolutions that is impacting regime changes in countries around the world. If you feel climate change is a key issue, Paul Hawken’s book, “**Drawdown**,” details the most effective strategies positively impacting climate change.

Decades of United Nations summit conclusions identify educating women as the key to peace and prosperity. Among all these global initiatives, I have followed Transparency International because I believe the increasing transparency and accountability across all sectors is having a profound impact on peace.

These global systemic change initiatives are a tapestry to be woven with local activism. I was delighted when David Wick, my colleague from a five-year think tank on the role of business in peacebuilding, co-founded The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission with Irene Kai. Whether you are working in Ashland to create a culture of peace or working globally on the UN Sustainable Development Goals to end hunger or extreme poverty, you are part of a global team.

People around the world want to live in peace and are willing to do something when they know what to do and believe that it will make a difference. Unfortunately most people base their beliefs and actions on old, outdated information. A friend said, “You don’t know enough to be a pessimist.” It’s time for all of us to up our game.

In 1984, thanks to Pathways to Peace, I saw that the International Day of Peace could be a day to celebrate the history of peaceful people and societies throughout time. Peace Day can inspire people by telling the whole truth about

the status of peace; a day to share the stories and strategies that inspire people who want to live in peace ... to up their game.

Perhaps in the spirit of the culture of peace in the Olympic Village, we can help each other to “find the peanut butter.”

*—Marilyn King is a two-time Olympic Pentathlete, a peace enthusiast, founder of Beyond Sports (applying olympian thinking in the areas of business, education and peace; _____), and an ACPC Adviser. The ACPC website is _____; like the commission on Facebook at _____;
follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC’s Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.*



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