

Culture of Peace: Bridging peace by connecting with others

By Bob Morse Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

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“Our country is divided because we talk less to each other,” says Megan Carlisle, manager of the local Seed to Skillet Program. “I struggle to know how to calm down enough to have a conversation and bridge to the other side.”

I met over coffee at Pony Espresso with Carlisle and several other Ashlanders in their 20s and 30s. We explored how they focus on peace in our politically separated and war-torn world where differences in opinions have recently, and sadly, led a gunman to open fire on a congressman. House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R-LA) was critically wounded when shot at by an assailant at a baseball field in Alexandria, Virginia.

Ben Morgen, a performance artist who has been involved with a number of community initiatives in Ashland, referenced a former illusion of peace in the U.S. “Our country has tended to export all its war. Now science is supporting (the notion) that we’re all connected. We are now seeing the repercussions of all our good and bad actions.”

Morgen continued, addressing the human toll of war. “Societies that have endured atrocities have it in their bodies and their DNA whole lineages of violence.” Not just their actions, says Morgen, but their thoughts and self-image can be so violent.

Elisha Hayden, who teaches social artistry and Science of Mind, echoes Carlisle’s perception. “There is so much ‘not peace’ present that I’m getting an idea of what peace is (from its absence). Peace has to start as an internal culture of peace.”

Morgen agrees. “Nelson Mandela even in prison found peace inside.”

To Morgen, peace is about our mental state. To Hayden, it's a shift in culture: "Because we live in a culture of fear, it's almost a revolutionary action to build a culture of peace."

Carlisle pondered whether such a shift in culture is engendered by small changes and relationships made along the way. "I'm heartened by activists who have dedicated their whole lives for a peace they won't see in their lifetimes, but they still made a difference."

"Activist movements have been more about the problem than the solution," Carlisle continued, "And a lot of the dialogue expresses shame about privilege. It is more respectful to have gratitude than shame for having what everyone wants. We need to talk to others without dismantling their worldview."

Morgen recognizes that he and his Millennial peers are the leaders of tomorrow. "We're learning the strengths and weaknesses of our society's history. To move culture forward and really challenge the modalities in front of us, we need to allow ourselves to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."

Morgen offered a quote attributed to Uncle Ben. "With great power comes great responsibility." Morgan asks, "What would it be like to get out of your comfort zone, to share your house, to share your means?"

Carlisle picked up the thread. "What would happen if we were fed images every day of oppression instead of pushing our problems elsewhere — the polluted rivers, the factory farms, the hungry homeless? It would be huge to approach Muslims and honor their courage and to not just support homeless people but to buy them dinner."

By way of potential solutions, Hayden explained how his peer group is building a culture of peace. "We're going against the norm in ways that get people thinking about how they live. We're growing our own food, standing up for what we believe in, and building connections with each other."

Carlisle dedicates herself to what she calls "food activism," changing our food culture as a step toward creating a culture of peace. "Growing food connects us with the earth and fosters internal peace," an antidote to stress. "My peers dedicate themselves to ethical decisions around food." Social pressure impacts friends who are eating unhealthily.

Ryan Heart joined our conversation in its eleventh hour, just as we were discussing personal contributions to a culture of peace. “My worldview is to literally meet everyone as if they are a part of me and necessary for my own well-being. I know the peace and suffering of the man in a wheelchair is my own peace and suffering. When I embrace the suffering, it becomes the treasure and the raw awakening to a culture of peace.”

Hayden described his increasing acknowledgment of the significance of interconnectedness. “When I’m about to eat a meal, I think about the whole chain of things and people that’s about to become a part of me. This stream (of thinking) permeates every decision, constantly reminding me that everything I do to me, I do to you and the planet.”

—Bob Morse is an ambassador of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; 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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