

“A MOTHER’S APPROACH TO PEACE”
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Thank you so much for inviting me here today to learn from you and to take strength from you. I look forward very much to the discussion period following my remarks.

And, thank you, Pastor Christianson for an introduction that is steeped in memory and love and friendship – the friendship that existed between you and my parents, and cemented by our mutual admiration and joyous appreciation/celebration of my sister Judy’s skill playing the piano.

You should know that I have a pin that shows I didn’t miss Methodist Sunday School for eight years. I am indeed fortunate; that instruction and discussion has stood me in good stead. I am certain that it is why I believe so deeply that we can create a world of peace.

Last night, one of my daughters who worries when I stay up most of the night preparing asked me to start saying, “NO” to speaking. She wanted me to “relax”. We must not relax, (I’m not saying we shouldn’t take care of ourselves), but relax? No, we are living in a pivotal time, a time of urgency, a time when each one of us must raise his or her voice in love and patience, but with a firmness never before so necessary. We must find

a way to deal with the inevitable conflict in our world with different tools. We have enough weaponry to blow up the planet. You have heard, I'm sure, the phrase, "If the only tool we have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail." We have to move beyond hammers

I also told my daughter that speaking is not only what I must do, I want to do it. I had been speaking out against this war before we illegally invaded Iraq. I prepared a resolution against going to war unilaterally, 18 Minnesota State Senators signed it with me, and on March 9, 2003, I tried to read it on the Senate Floor. I challenged Rumsfeld at a nation wide meeting of state legislators in Washington DC on the privatization of our armed forces and the use of no-bid contracts with Halliburton on the same day the Congressional Budget Office reported that Halliburton was over charging our government. After my son, Matt, died in Iraq (two years ago this coming Saturday), speaking wherever, whenever seemed more important than ever – in my heart, speaking on behalf of all of the mothers who are losing children in wars all over the world. And then, one day, something happened that made me know I would continue to join my voice with others all over the globe to establish love and understanding. Kamal Gindy was a Professor of Psychology at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. In fact, 7 of my children went to UMD and Professor Gindy taught 4 of them.

One day, I received a phone call from Kamal Gindy's wife, Adu. Adu said, "Kamal is dying; he has asked that you come to his bedside. He would like to talk with you." I was on my way to a meeting in St. Paul, I was almost there. I stopped, called to explain why I

would not be at the meeting, and turned around to drive the three hours to Kamal's bedside. Kamal said, "You have found yourself in a place where you have a voice for peace and justice; you must never stop using it. It will be very difficult many times, but you must keep speaking out. I am giving you my spirit to call upon to give you strength when you need it." I promised Kamal that I would never stop. And it is amazing, this source of strength he told me I could call upon. I have in the past prayed through the innocence of my three sons whom I have buried. But to do that requires long earnest prayer as I try to purify myself, to become totally honest with myself, before I seek guidance and direction from them. To pray through their spirits is powerful, it lasts for weeks, but I often can't get there, because they know all of my faults. It is so exhausting, I give up. Not so when in prayer I turn to Kamal's spirit. He gave it to me to call upon in spite of my many shortcomings.

Kamal believed, and I believe that critical masses of people make a difference. I've been reading about women throughout our nation and around the world who are forming circles of vision and determination to solve our urgent challenge to establish peace and preserve our planet. We are doing it right at this very moment. It is like throwing rocks in the lake each rock forms its circle, and as the circles widen they combine with the other circles until a critical mass is formed.

Critical masses are amazing and powerful. Let's think about the impact that large groups of people can have on our society. I remember that my husband and I were in college during the beatnik years – long conversations about changing the world. I'll share a

quick memory with you; my husband and I couldn't afford a car, so bikes were our mode of transportation.

I was taking a sculpture class and because we were plaster casting, I wore a huge grey sweatshirt of my husband's since I only had a couple of maternity tops and I didn't want them to get full of plaster. I was on my bike at the stop sign after class, jeans, plastered sweatshirt on a pregnant body, pony tail, and the woman in the car next to me said to her husband, "Oh look, there's a beatnik!" "Wow", I thought, and turned to find the beatnik, only to realize that I, Becky the Methodist from Little Falls, Minnesota, was that beatnik. So, I guess I was; but we were a small generation, we did not comprise a critical mass. It wasn't until the next wave, the hippy generation, came along, that changes were achieved because they were that critical mass.

There are critical masses right now on this planet that make our resolve for peace and preservation so intensely urgent. It is a fact that huge groups of desperate people do desperate acts. Therefore, it is obvious that we must create a society, a world, where there are no huge groups of desperate people – and we will all be safer, happier!

I love the title I was given for my time with you this morning – "A Mother's Approach to Peace". I truly do believe that the way we moms use diplomatic skills, caring about all the kids on the playground, as we try to get them to play together nicely is the same way we should deal among nations. What are the playground rules? Share, play nice, respect each other, don't tell lies – tell the truth..... this brings us to the lie part:

Consider all the “reasons” we are given for continuing this war?

1. self-defense against weapons of mass destruction
2. Iraq is the front line in the war against terrorists: “better there than here”
3. stay the course
4. the best way to honor the lives lost is to keep fighting (to that I say, “Two wrongs don’t make a right”)

But, I want to spend these next moments examining number 2: **Better There Than Here**

Better there than here? What does that mean exactly? Does it mean we have no empathy for one another? What does the bible say on this issue? In Genesis 4, when Cain killed Abel, and God asked Cain where his brother was, Cain replied, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Many agree that the point here is that we are our brother’s keeper in that we are supposed to be looking out for each other.

Another scripture that I believe is powerful in its lesson and guidance is Matthew 25: 34-40 New International Version.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes

and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

How is it then that we as a nation buy into “better there than here”?

This is an attitude we must prove false and dangerous. It is a reason used to instill and enhance the fear in our hearts and minds. And that is an easy thing to do because **fear of not surviving** is instinctual. Therefore using fear is an intensely powerful tool; it causes a population to give up its civil rights, to allow torture, to be devoid of empathy.

Textbooks tell us that survival is a base instinct; love and empathy are higher learned emotions (hard for me to believe actually since I believe that true happiness comes from loving one another). Still, when there are not enough resources, when massive disparity exists, survival becomes part of our sub-consciousness at the very least. At the most, it controls our conscious actions.

We are in the middle of a multitude of global conflicts: not merely the United States’ military involvement in Iraq, but conflicts all over the planet. Some of them involve the United States directly, others only indirectly. As we speak, in addition to Iraq there are

major conflicts in Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Columbia, Israel/Palestine, the Ukraine, Haiti, Somalia, Indonesia and any number of other places on the planet. Some involve overt warfare, some do not. All of these conflicts, like virtually every conflict of the past century, and maybe every armed conflict in the history of people on this planet are because: **someone had what someone else wanted.** Often these conflicts are couched in terms of security, but it seems that almost every war that the planet has ever experienced has been about **resources:** about who occupies or controls land which is capable of growing food, of providing water, of producing valuable materials such as gold or silver, or iron, or copper, bauxite, or timber. Or, primarily in the past century, those resources which are the drivers of every modern industrial economy, the hydrocarbon energy resources of coal, petroleum, and natural gas, what we refer to as fossil fuels.

Which brings us to consider The Project for the New American Century. In 1997, a new conservative Washington think-tank called The Project for the New American Century was established. Vice President Dick Cheney, at the time Chairman of Halliburton, was a founding member, along with former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Defense Policy Board chairman Richard Perle. Former Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz was the ideological father of the group, which also included T. Lewis Libby, Richard Armitage, William Bennett, and Bruce Jackson, who served as a Pentagon official for Ronald Reagan and is now with the weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin. William Kristol, conservative writer for Ruppert Murdoch's Weekly Standard is its chairman, and Jeb Bush the President's brother and former Governor of Florida is also among the founding members. Soon after its founding, The Project for the New American Century

produced a White Paper entitled "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century." Published in September of 2000, **three months before George Bush became President**; it outlines what is required of America to create the global empire they envision. According to Project for the New American Century, America must:

- Reposition permanently based forces to Southern Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East;
- Modernize U.S. forces, including enhancing our fighter aircraft, submarine and surface fleet capabilities;
- Develop and deploy a global missile defense system, and develop a strategic dominance of space;
- Control the "International Commons" of cyberspace;
- Increase defense spending to a minimum of 3.8 percent of gross domestic product, up from the 3 percent currently spent.

The white paper expressed the conviction that, and I quote, "while the unresolved conflict in Iraq provides the immediate justification [for US military presence], the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein." It goes on to say that, quote, "Over the long term, Iran may well prove as large a threat to U.S. interests in the Gulf as Iraq has. And even should U.S.-Iranian relations improve, retaining forward-based forces in the region would still be an essential element in U.S. security strategy given the longstanding American interests in the region." End quote.

The Project for the New American Century group observed that it would be difficult to get the American public to go along with the necessary military actions in the Middle East, quote, “**in the absence of a galvanizing event such as Pearl Harbor.**” Obviously, on September 11, 2001 they got their galvanizing event. Interestingly enough much of what President Bush laid out as the "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" on September 20th 2001, nine days after 9/11, parallels or directly borrows from the Project for the New American Century document.

After Matt’s helicopter was shot down while he was coming to the rescue of his troops, I was given a copy of a documentary film, “The Oil Factor” to view. My friends who gave it to me worried that I would be angry when I saw the straight forward documentation which made it clear to me that oil was a factor in this war. It is interesting, because my overwhelming disappointment was that we as Minnesotans and Americans didn’t get to have the true debate about WHY we were going to war. We live in democracy guided by constitutional law, thus the oil barons have a right to argue in their self interest. But they didn’t give us the chance to respond. Would we have said, “Yes, we will go to war for oil?” Maybe so. But imagine where we could be now if we had had that debate four years ago. I believe we would have said lets reduce our demand for energy use; let’s use wind, sun and biofuels to preserve the planet on to the 7th generation.

But I digress.

Instead, we were overcome by fear BETTER THERE THAN HERE.

My friend, Ann Wright, says this is a good topic to mull over. First, do we have to fight? Next, who are we fighting? We should be talking instead. This scare tactic presumes and articulates that our enemies hate us:

1. for our freedoms
2. for our way of life
3. for what we are

Not so; it is occupying their country, it is trying to take their stuff. We now have over 700 bases in more than 130 of the world's 191 nations (and that is not even counting the mercenary private contractors of Blackwater). My son said repeatedly, "Mom, we are occupiers over here." And at his funeral, 8 officers came to my husband or to me, each privately, and asked us to do what we could to stop the privatization of the Army.

Let me tell you about Ann Wright. I met her at Camp Casey. Ann ran Camp Casey. She ran a tight camp with no fooling around; the local deputies loved her. Listen to her bio:

Ann Wright retired from the US Army Reserves as a Colonel after 29 years. Ms. Wright served in Grenada, Panama, Greece, the Netherlands, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, and Mongolia. She was on the small team that reopened the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in December 2001. She resigned from the US diplomatic corps in March 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War.¹

¹ Wright, Ann. "Biography." Truthout http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/02/12/07B.shtml.

She believes the papers written by the Project for a New American Century about Iran; that is why she wrote an editorial for *Truthout* appealing to US pilots. I will read you some pieces of that editorial starting with her appeal, and then some of the support for that appeal:

The appeal: “I appeal to the conscience of US Air Force and US Navy pilots and military personnel who command cruise missiles and pilot bombers and those who plan the missions for the pilots and missile commanders. I ask that they refuse what I believe will be unlawful orders to attack Iran.”

Ms. Wright refers us back to the Nuremberg Principles:

“The Nuremberg Principles provide for accountability for war crimes committed by military and civilian officials.

“Principle IV of the Nuremberg Principles states: “The fact that a person acted pursuant to an order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.

“Principal VI of the Nuremberg Principles: The following crimes are punishable as crimes under international law:

- a) Crimes against peace: i. Planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or

- assurances; ii. Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the acts mentioned under (i).
- b) War Crimes: Violations of the laws or customs of war which include, but are not limited to murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave-labor or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war, of persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity.
- c) Crimes against humanity: Murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhuman acts done against any civilian population, or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds, when such acts are done, or such persecutions are carried on in execution of, or in connection with any crime against peace or any war crime.”

Ann goes on to say that, “Attacking Iran will be a crime against peace, a war crime. Those conducting military operations will be violating the Nuremberg Principles, the Geneva Conventions and the Laws of Land Warfare. Prosecution for commission of war crimes is possible.”

Ann points out that, “Accountability for one’s actions is finally becoming possible under the New Congress. While refusal to drop bombs may initially draw punishment and the

loss of one's military career, those who refuse will save their soul, their conscience and will prevent another criminal action in the name of our country by the Bush Administration.”

She closes her editorial with a reminder: “A Reminder: The oath for commissioned officers is to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic and not to a particular person or political party.”²

Almost two months before this editorial, Ann wrote one entitled *Five Years of Infamy: Close Guantanamo* which was published in *TRUTHOUT* on December 23, 2006. In this editorial talking about detainees at the prison in the US Naval Base, Guantanamo, Cuba (where she points out, by the way, that in a study of 500 detainees, only 5% were captured by US forces, the rest were sold to the United States often for thousands of dollars), Ann states:

“While co-authoring memos on torture, presidential legal advisor Alberto Gonzales, now attorney general, advised President Bush in January 2002 that a benefit of not applying the Geneva Conventions to detainees coming from Afghanistan, and imprisoning the detainees outside the United States, would be to make it more difficult to prosecute US personnel under the US War Crimes Act.”³

² Wright, Ann. “An Appeal to Conscience to Those Who Would Bomb Iraq.” *Truthout* 13 Feb.2007 http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/021307.shtml.

³ Wright, Ann. “Five Years of Infamy: Close Guantanamo!” *Truthout*.23 Dec. 2006 <http://www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi/67/24674>.

This administration is using its power to break our laws, and it is using its influence to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into the hands of its friends.

Let me quote from David Strand's editorial in the Aitkin Independent Age:

“The Walter Reed Hospital debacle has been found out. In their privatization frenzy, the Pentagon sought bids for hospital administrators who assist our military wounded to receive the treatment they were promised. The government employees who had the jobs were allowed to bid for the contract, and they won. So they got the job? Wrong! The Pentagon overruled and awarded the contract to a subsidiary of Halliburton. Soon the 600-person staff was slashed by more than half, and the administrative cesspool that ensued was the logical outcome. (Take that, you ungrateful wounded soldiers!)”⁴

And on top of this, hospital personnel don't dare speak out. When questioned about Marine Jonathan Schulze' suicide, St. Cloud Veteran's Hospital spokespeople should have said, “Our budgets have been hopelessly cut by the very people who sent these veterans into war.” No, they said, “He never mentioned suicide to us.” Never mind he came with his parents searching for help after having been turned away from yet another veteran's hospital.

We must start feeling as afraid for a war to happen to people in other countries as we are for a war on our own soil. And it starts with us. Susyn Reeve, author of “Choose Peace & Happiness” leaves us with this advice:

⁴ Strand, David. “When Dogs Won't Eat the Food.”: Aitkin Independent Age, 17 May 2007.

“ violence is all thoughts, words and actions that fail to honor our divinity as children of God and our inter-connectedness as a global family.” She adds it is easy to identify violence out in the world but, “It is our ability to see and acknowledge the practice of violence in our ordinary daily activities that provides us the greatest opportunity to transform and transcend our judgments and prejudices. It is our fear-based judgments that serve as the starting point for us to commit acts of violence. Until each of us can truly free our minds from beliefs that separate and divide the human family, we will continue to practice violence.”⁵

Long time Holocaust survivor and prisoner in bestial concentration camps where his father, mother, brother and wife died or were sent to gas ovens, Victor E. Frankl describes for us in his book, “Man’s Search for Meaning” the ultimate freedom that is the ability to “choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances”.⁶

Frankl, a man who faced fully the forces of evil, died hopeful that we have the capacity to transcend our predicament and discover a guiding truth.

We are connected to one another – and the truth we must discover is

BETTER WAR NOWHERE!!!!

⁵ Brooks, Carolyn. “A Season for Nonviolence.” Quoting Susan Reeve’s Newsletter. Lake Superior Interfaith Community Church Newsletter, March 2007.

⁶ Frankle, Viktor. Man’s Search for Meaning. Simon & Schuster, 1985.