

**INTERNATIONAL NIGHT WITH BUFFALO (IFSEA) AND TORONTO (CAFP)
APRIL 28, 2009**

When the lovely Lorraine Drexel called several weeks ago to tell me she was chairing a revival of the International Night.....she asked, "Could I come." I of course, answered affirmatively....as I had been to many of these occasions in the past. That was the "wind up"....then came the fast ball pitch...."O Good, will you be our guest speaker?". Now tell me, did anyone ever say "No" to Lorraine? So here I am.

In the weeks since then, I have given much thought to this night and what does an International Night really mean. I determined that it really means...**FRIENDSHIP, REACHING OUT.....BECOMING A PART OF THE LIVES OF OTHERS.**

In essence it begins with individuals doesn't it? You and me!

There is a song that says:

I'd like to build the world a home and furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow white turtle doves
I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony
I'd like to hold it in my arms and keep it company
I'd like to see the world for once all standing hand in hand
And hear them echo through the hills for peace throughout our lands.

In today's uncertain world with the many problems and turmoils we face.....that seems a bit jaded doesn't it? Or does it? Perhaps it is a wish, devoutly to be desired.

Perhaps you received the same email I did recently entitled "Breakfast at McDonald's" Let me share it with you.....

I am the mother of three (ages 14.12.3) and recently completed my college degree. The last class I had to take was Sociology. The teacher was absolutely inspiring with the qualities I wish every human being had been graced with.

Her last project of the term was called "SMILE"

The class was asked to go out and smile at 3 people and then document their reactions. I thought this would be a piece of cake.

Soon after we were assigned this project, I went with my family to McDonald's one crisp March morning. We were standing in line, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away....even my family.

I did not move, an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside me, as I turned to see why they had moved. As I turned around I smelled a horrible “dirty body” smell and standing behind me were 2 poor homeless men.

As I looked down at the short gentleman, he was smiling. His beautiful blue eyes were full of God’s light as he searched for acceptance. He said, “Good Day”, as he counted the few coins he held.

The second man stood behind his friend and I realized he was mentally challenged and the blue eyed gentleman was his salvation.

I held my tears as I stood there with them. The young lady at the counter asked them what they wanted. “Coffee is all, miss” because that was all they could afford. If they wanted to sit in the restaurant to warm up, they had to buy something.

I felt a compulsion so great I almost reached out and embraced the men. That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were on me....judging my every action.

I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me 2 more breakfast meals on a separate tray. I then walked around the corner to the table the men had chosen. I put the tray down and laid my hand on the blue-eyed gentleman’s cold hand. He looked up and with tears in his eyes said, “Thank You”

I leaned over, patted his hand and said: “I did this because God is working through me to give you hope.” I started to cry as I walked away to join my family. My husband said that is why you were given to me....to give me hope.

We held hands for a moment....and realized that only because of the grace we had been given, were we able to give. We are not church goers...but we are believers. That day showed me the pure light of love.

I returned to college on the last evening with this story in hand. I turned in the project, the instructor read it...looked at me and asked if she could share it. I nodded.

She got the attention of the class and began to read. That is when I knew that as human beings we share this need to heal people....and to be healed.

In some way, I had touched the people at McDonalds...my family....the instructor...and every soul in the classroom. I graduated with one of the biggest lessons I would ever learn:

UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

We must learn how to love people and use things....not love things and use people.

Many people walk in and out of our lives.....but only true friends will leave footprints on your heart. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

To handle yourself use your head.....to handle others, use your heart.

Perhaps this story is a bit too saccharine for you. But it embodies the essence of the meaning of an International Night. It really begins with each of us as individuals doesn't it? Peace...harmony....love....acceptance does not lie within the walls of our government buildings...or by the dictates of our elected rulers. It is within each of us...as we reach out in unconditional acceptance of our fellow human beings, regardless of their status in life.

Another familiar song comes to mind:

**Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
Let there be peace on earth, let this be the moment now
With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow
With God as our Father, humans all are we
Let us walk with each other, in perfect harmony
Take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally...
Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.**

My wish is that each of you will go from here tonight with the real meaning of International Relations on your mind and in your soul.

And remember, It doesn't matter whether it is across the ocean....or across the street...or across the table.....A true friend reaches for your hand.....and touches your heart.

Thank you for allowing me to share this evening with you.

Don McIntosh