

Peaceways

CENTRAL KENTUCKY COUNCIL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE September 2020

Back to school in a COVID era

by Margaret Gabriel

While many of us spent the summer in a state of pandemic-induced suspended animation, others worked feverishly during the summer months creating multiple plans that would assure that schools would be ready to begin in August.

In Fayette County, think tanks for each school were created to examine aspects of the education process, including academic, socio-economic and logistics (*i.e.*, ways to achieve needed social distancing in transportation and in school buildings and classrooms). Committees included teachers, administrators, staff, parents and high school students. CKCPJ member and 16 District PTSA President Penny Christian served on the academic think tank for Lafayette High School, calling it “Some of the best work I’ve done in a long time.”

Meetings were three to four hours long; surveys gathered input about people’s comfort levels with the options that were being discussed.

Penny was dismayed to see disrespect of teachers with little consideration given to those in high-risk categories or with compromised immune systems. “It was almost like parents were looking at teachers as if they were babysitters,” she said. “There was a rumor that a teacher had written her own obituary.”

Teachers traditionally take on more than their share of responsibility, but during these times they will also be on the front lines, assuring that students are wearing masks and maintaining the necessary social distance during the hours they’re in school.

Penny focused on how to keep

expectations high. “I don’t want to see people using COVID as a reason to lower the bar of what we expect of students,” she said, in the same way that people sometimes use food insecurity or lack of computer access to allow students to slide by.

“Do not lower expectations because of those barriers,” Penny said. “Actually, we should raise the bar.”

In her position with the state PTSA, Penny will be contacting principals with this message of the need to keep expectations high. She identifies this as a perfect time to engage with parents on levels they’ve never experienced. Like many others, she says that the pandemic is shining a light on gaps that have been present for many years but in the last six months have become “glaringly obvious.”

Fayette County students are, largely, well connected to the internet, allowing them to access the resources they need for virtual classroom involvement. “We have one-on-one devices; every kid can get access to a Chromebook and every area of the city is covered with wi-fi,” Penny said. “They’re using ‘Canvas’ as a standard platform for middle school and high school and ‘Google Classroom’ in elementary.”

Families are making differences in their routines, depending on the ages and abilities of their children. Emily Zan Spenbergh, a nurse, will be working two instead of five days a week, in order to stay home with her fourth grader at Tates Creek Elementary. For the other three days, she has hired a tutor. “I hope they’ll be in-person by October, but it could be January,” Emily said. “We’ll just have to wait and see.”

Emily’s older daughter is a freshman, living on campus at Eastern Kentucky

University. “She’s already called home for more masks, hand sanitizers and gloves.”

PTSA is helping with tech support in an effort to take some burden off parents, and every school has an information technologist in the building.

Lafayette has devised three plans: in-person, virtual and hybrid. The hybrid plan has half the student body in the school building one week, with the rest on devices. The next week, groups exchange places; and everyone is virtual on Friday. Other schools are alternating between in-person and virtual each day of the week, which Penny sees as lacking consistency.

The fear is that the situation will lead to greater gaps for marginalized students. “COVID could double the summer slide,” Penny said. “And how do we mitigate that, when we’re having trouble admitting there’s a gap in the first place? We’re already seeing schools that are lowering expectations and not holding students accountable. I can yell and stamp my feet, but I can’t do it alone. If parents don’t advocate now, whatever grade they’re in, kids won’t be college- or career-ready.”

Individualization will be tantamount for every student. Some will be more adept at working on their own, but others will need more individualized instruction. “There will be a routine, expectations for everyone,” Penny said. “We can’t let anyone slip.”

Volunteering with schools often falls off our “do-list” when our kids graduate, but volunteer opportunities are always available for community members and are now needed more than ever. For more information see <https://www.fcps.net/>. Click on “Community” and “Volunteering/Give Ten.”

Gun Violence In America as of 8-28-20 2020 (year to date)

Killed	11,847
Suicide	15,906
Wounded	24,306

2019 (annual)

Killed	15,208
Wounded	29,501

Source: www.gunviolencearchive.org



Lafayette High School

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A Letter from Abroad

by Richard Greissman

Twice now in the past year, I have been asked by a local Rotary Association chapter to be the invited speaker and lecture on the political landscape that is America under the presidency of Donald Trump. These Auckland Rotarians are honorable men and women. In this regard, they have much in common with those Rotarians I have known from my years in Lexington. On both sides of the great pond, they are chapter members devoted to a creed that commits them to service in support of a common good. And yet, my Rotarian neighbours in Auckland harbor a very unsettling suspicion, informed daily by events chronicled in the Auckland press, that Americans – and yes, even their fellow Rotarians in America – have gone mad.

I could not overstate New Zealanders' fascination with all things American. Although cognizant of America's ignoble histories – chattel slavery and the extermination of indigenous peoples being first among those moral stains – Kiwis are nonetheless drawn to the narratives that speak to America's better angels. They hold Americans in the highest regard, which helps explain the depth of their despair over contemporary American politics.

New Zealand politics bear a striking resemblance to those in the States. Two political parties, Labor and National, dominate, although the

terms of a parliamentary system give minor political parties considerable influence as coalition partners. Labor's leanings for social welfare and public sector interventions mirror the posture of the Democratic Party; while the National Party's platform, with its beliefs in the primacy of the private sector and limited role of government, conforms closely with that of the Republican Party.

Against the background of this proximate symmetry there exists a discernible difference between the political discourse within the two countries. What constitutes the 'political center' – the point along the belief continuum at which most citizens fall comfortably and closely on either side – is disturbingly divergent.

Ask Kiwis of any political persuasion to understand the terms of the American debate on health care, and they cannot. It is unthinkable to New Zealanders to frame access to health care as contingent on what a country can afford to do, and not on what a country is morally obliged to do. Ask Kiwis of any political persuasion whether or not there ought to be limits on the gap between the least and most wealthy among us, and they will speak about fairness – not absolute equality, but fairness. Leave no one behind.

And, in the midst of the global pandemic, ask Kiwis of any political persuasion to accept some personal sacrifice for the benefit of the nation as a whole, and we will do so. We may be Laborites or we may be Nationals, but in the exigency of a public health crisis we are first and foremost Kiwis.

We look across the pond at our American cousins, at a country we continue to hold in the highest regard, and fear that the American center is a great chasm, its features indistinguishable, and that without the moderation of that center, the prospects for a vision of a common good have been marginalized, if not abandoned.

The Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice

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Peaceways is published 10 times a year by the Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice, 1588 Leestown Rd., Ste. 130-138, Lexington KY 40511. The next issue of *Peaceways* will appear in October 2020. Deadline for calendar items is Sept. 10. Contact (859) 488-1448 or email peacewayseditor@gmail.com.

White supremacy won't die until white people see it as a white issue they need to solve rather than a black issue they need to empathize with.

Calendar for Peace & Justice

The council seeks to promote dialogue as a path to peace and justice. Consequently, we announce events that we do not necessarily endorse.

Tues., Sept. 1

CKCPJ health care action team, 4:30-6 p.m. The committee will meet online *via* Zoom. To receive the needed link to attend the meeting, email Richard Mitchell at rjmq47@twc.com.

Tues., Sept. 8

CKCPJ peace action committee, 4:30-6 p.m. The committee will meet online *via* Zoom. To receive the needed link to attend the meeting, email Richard Mitchell at rjmq47@twc.com.

Tues., Sept. 8

PFLAG Central Kentucky, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Please go to the PFLAG Central Kentucky facebook page before the meeting and register to join and receive the Zoom link.

Mon., Sept. 21

CKCPJ steering committee meeting, 5 - 6:30 p.m. The committee will meet online *via* Zoom. To receive the needed link to participate in the meeting, email Richard Mitchell at rjmq47@twc.com

Mon., Oct. 5

Deadline, voter registration for the general election. Election Day voting, early voting and expanded absentee voting is available in Kentucky. New or updated registration available at govoteky.com.

Fri., Oct. 9

Deadline to apply for an absentee ballot in Kentucky. Go to govoteky.com to request an absentee ballot through the mail.

Fri-Sat., Oct. 23-24

Plowshares Lexington, Pursuing Peace, Gun Violence and the Church. Asbury Theological Seminary, 204 North Lexington Avenue, Wilmore. For information about cost and speakers: pursuingpeace.com.

Tues., Nov. 17

BUILD Team leaders at BUILD's 27 member churches are planning the listening process that initiates the BUILD process every year. Leaders will determine whether to meet their teams virtually or socially distanced, following all guidelines. The format for the Community Problem Assembly in November is still being determined and will be announced in *Peaceways*, timing permitted.

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Higgins-Hord to serve as chair of the CCLL Board of Trustees

Lisa Higgins-Hord, an assistant vice president at the University of Kentucky, has been elected chair of the Carnegie Center Board of Trustees. Ms. Higgins-Hord becomes the first Black woman to lead the board of the 28-year-old literacy and learning center.

Ms. Higgins-Hord, who works in UK's Office of Community Engagement, took her first writing class at the Carnegie



Center in 1996. She returned in 2013 for more classes, and soon after, joined the center's Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame Committee. In 2015, she was appointed to the 12-member Board of Trustees, and in June, she was elected chair by her fellow board members.

"From the first time I saw the building nestled in Gratz Park, I immediately felt drawn to this literary community brimming with energy," Ms. Higgins-Hord said. "Through the years, I've enjoyed its diverse and wide-ranging activities that support our children and adults throughout Lexington. It's a wonderful place and staff. I look forward to the chair-ship and all the opportunities to advance the Carnegie Center's vision and goals."

In addition to serving on the staff at UK, Ms. Higgins-Hord was recently named to fill the term of Angela Evans on the LFUCG council. She is currently co-chair of the Equity Fund at the Bluegrass Community Foundation; executive producer of mini-documentaries for the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame; and a committed member of Breaking the Bronze Ceiling Committee, which is recognizing the 100th anniversary of Women's Suffrage. She holds a master's

degree in early childhood education from UK's College of Human Environment Sciences.

Lisa has an adult daughter and spends most of her weekends writing, discovering something new at the Lexington Farmers Market, and identifying ways to connect with people in a socially-distanced environment.

The Carnegie Center was created in 1992 by the Lexington city government to address the city's literacy problems. The organization occupies the historic former Lexington Public Library building in Gratz Park. Its 15 employees carry out the mission of "empowering people to explore and express their voices" through after-school tutoring, writing classes for every age, literary performance, and more.

Afflict the comfortable; give comfort to the afflicted.

Up close and personal with the damaged Trumps

TOO MUCH AND NEVER ENOUGH: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man. By Mary L. Trump, Ph.D. Published July 14, 2020. Simon & Schuster, New York. 236 pages.

Reviewed by Jim Trammel

President Donald Trump's niece, Mary, holds an unflattering mirror to reflect a harsh light on her famous uncle and his nefarious father, in this sensational recap of the blighted family history of these poor little rich people.

We learn early that Donald Trump doesn't merely hold grudges, he hugs them. We're guests as he winces and scowls at a White House dinner, where his older sister and retired federal judge Maryanne tells an embarrassing family story about him being a bratty child and getting a bowl of mashed potatoes dumped on his head. He still feels the pain of a seven-year-old, seven decades later when he should have long gotten past it. (But, to be fair and balanced, don't each of us have an embarrassing family story our senior relatives tell every Christmas, while we fix a grin and mentally scream, "Good God, Dad/Mom, not this again!")

Donald grew up twisted in the lack of family warmth, as he watched his sociopathic business-only father, Fred, crush Donald's older brother, Freddy (Mary's dad). Donald used those tactics to in turn crush younger brother Robert. (Donald got the mashed potatoes over the head from Freddy because 14-year-old Donald wouldn't stop teasing seven-year-old Robert.)

Fred's perfidy makes him the true villain of the story. His lack of fatherly love manifested itself badly in all the Trump children, but in Donald Fred saw the brash, pushy success figure that Fred could only be behind the scenes, so Donald twisted in another direction under Fred's illogical indulgence.

Fred made his fortune as a Brooklyn builder of low-middle-class residences, aided by generous infusions of Federal housing-development grants. He yearned to cross the East River into Manhattan's glitzy real estate arena, and he financed Donald's brashness to make that happen. (Acumen was actually there, but it was Fred's behind the scenes.)

Fred was too far invested in the illusion of Donald as a successful businessman to

discipline him to less flamboyance when Fred's political and financial empire started crumbling in the mid-1980s. When Donald tried his own hand at Trump Tower, it was controversial and a bad investment. More failures followed in Atlantic City, where Donald launched three casinos that cannibalized one another's markets. The media fueled the myth through Donald's five bankruptcies, hangers-on burnished the image, and his cable-TV reality-show fiction further enhanced his façade of successful tycoon.

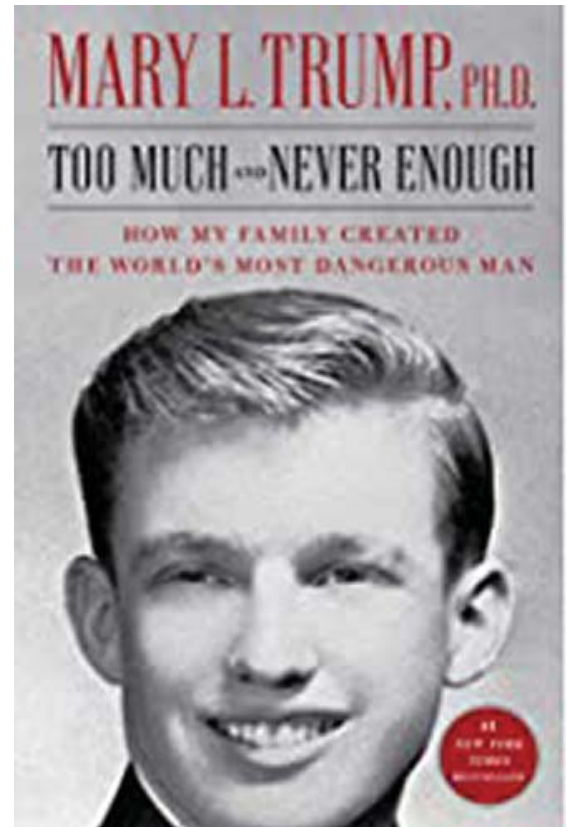
Because I've reviewed several bios that could well be described as hatchet jobs on a Chief Executive of which, after all, about 38 percent of the electorate still approve, I wanted to examine this one at least partially from the probable point of view of a typical Trump supporter.

Indeed, once Dr. Mary dissects the sad details of Fred Trump's tyranny (which as good as killed her father, Freddy, as well as warping second son Donald), it's impossible not to feel a tug of sympathy for Donald's arrested development. Poor guy never had a chance to become normal.

Money can warp families. Maybe it's inevitable. When a family lives hand-to-mouth, with no savings or cushion against emergencies, there's no time to indulge optional personality conflicts and petty status struggles. But let families get flush enough so they don't have to worry about day-to-day threats, and suddenly they're conspiring, plotting, high-hatting, shunning, feuding, backbiting, and fighting each other for a larger slice of the family pie. (Sounds like "The Lion in Winter".)

So it was with the Trumps. Freddy battled a losing war for Dad's approval and sank into alcoholism, Donald benefited beyond anything he deserved, and Mary buried her father and contained her resentments until now. (No, wait – she turned over the Trump family financial lies to the Times; her payback started there.)

Imagine the hatchet job your most long-seething relative could do on you if you became rich and famous, and allow what you imagine to temper your condemnation of Donald, for a moment. Then remember



the pain and suffering, the perhaps lasting damage to our nation, and the 180,000-plus COVID-19 deaths (25 percent of the whole world's tally), abetted by his ineptitude and worsened by his self-absorbed inaction, and let your forgiveness evaporate like the bubbles in a stale Diet Coke.

The book is an average writing effort – highly readable, chatty in tone, told with properly outraged passion driving the narrative. I bet the audiobook would be even more colorful, in Dr. Trump's controlled but seething voice.

It's not great literature, to be sure, and after November it will be consigned to the dusty shelf with the other tell-alls. But it's a fun read, and while it doesn't tell us anything really new, it does fill in with authority and immediacy some of the speculative reasons we've all banded about as to why Donald Trump turned out the way he did.

If you want to be glad you don't have a big pile of money and the family troubles it brings, you'll enjoy what you find here.

If bunches of ready money are a plague, reviewer Jim Trammel is the healthiest guy in town.

Martin Acres Is the Place to Be

By Lee Morgan

Twin brothers Irucka Ajani and Obiora Embry approach farming in an unconventional way. Instead of relying on the usual row crop methods or the use of pesticides to give plants a leg up, they instead look to ancient history and a loving, symbiotic relationship with the land that has been long forgotten in many parts of the world. And while it is too early to judge the results of this experiment, there are reasons to believe these guys are on to something.

Nothing about their Muhlenberg County farm is typical. It's not just the farming methods they employ, but also the story of how this land called Martin Acres, came to be in the possession of a black family — years before the Civil War — that makes this farm singular and interesting.

Unlike other places around the Deep South, slavery had a few unique contingencies in this commonwealth. Lourenza Dow Martin, the great-great-grandfather of the twins, “was born into slavery somewhere in this general vicinity,” Obiora said. “In Kentucky, enslavement was different than it was elsewhere. Here you could work for other people to gain money outside of working the plantation for your master. He saved enough money to buy his own freedom, but then told his master he didn't want it yet.”

Martin had met and fallen in love with a woman named Minnie Melvina Reynolds. Unwilling to leave the plantation and buy his way out of bondage alone, he informed his master that he would remain a slave and work for him until he had saved enough money to buy her freedom as well. And that's what he did. The couple was married shortly after leaving the plantation and they settled on the land that is now Martin Acres, farming it and passing it on to future generations.

Herbert Martin (1896-1968) was in charge of the farm during the height of its success; he was a well-respected farmer once featured on the cover of *Progressive Farmer* magazine. His death, in the late 1960s, marked a transition for the land. Many family members who had been active in farming life began trickling north to work factory jobs, letting others lease the land. By 1980, there was no more agricultural activity happening within the family, although some land remained leased and other parts were under a conservation reserve program throughout the 1980s. The farm, more than 1,000 acres in its heyday, was also used for strip mining, timber, and gas and oil extraction.

But now, agricultural pursuits have

returned, thanks to the twins. In 2012, Irucka, an environmental engineer, was attending a presentation at grad school when his eyes were opened to some ideas he hadn't previously considered. He learned about the concept of an edible forest garden, a polyculture method of farming that uses multipurpose perennial plants mutually beneficial to one another. He also saw the 2009 documentary short film “A Thousand Suns,” which explores the sustainable farming methods and culture of the Gamo people of the Ethiopian Rift Valley and how they approach agriculture and spirituality.

“I called my brother and said, ‘This is what we're going to do,’” Irucka said. “An



Obiora Embry and Irucka Ajani

edible forest garden. [The Gamo] had been farming the highlands of Ethiopia for 10,000 years on the same plot of land. And still, the soil is black and fertile. They grow well over 100 different varieties of food. Polycultures. They'll grow 20 different varieties of millet, of this grain, of that plant.

“You don't need external input of water or fertilizer. It's all right there. If you feed the microbial communities in the soil, you have everything you need in terms of nutrients.”

So Irucka and Obiora set about the task of taking two acres of land on the family farm and creating an edible forest garden. “We were expecting two acres of regular land,” Obiora said. “Not something that had been recently cleared and looked almost like a war zone ... My brother and I just said, ‘Let's just go with it,’ though.”

Obiora started trying to create a forest garden from scratch, planting apple, pear, peach, black cherry, sugar maple, and hickory trees. Soon, all of them had died. “What do we do now?” Obiora asked. “We spent all this money and have nothing to show for it.”

Determined to make it work, the brothers figured out what would grow in the clay soil and with the help of a nearby nursery

they began planting with more success. Two years ago, the brothers started seeing the literal fruits of their labor.

“I started off making jellies and jams,” Obiora said. “I make my own pectin, too. We started small with the jellies and we'd do posters and postcards that we made from my photography business.”

From there, Obiora got creative. In addition to making salsas and interesting syrups made from hickory, he started using the diverse plants growing on their two-acre project to develop products such as dandelion jam, a concoction that is reminiscent of honey with a balanced bitterness that might surprise you.

Part of the equation for the brothers is multiple plants on the same plot that complement one another and have multiple uses, whether as food, for medicinal purposes, etc.

The Martin Acres product line is always in flux, changing with the seasons and with the whims of this unique farm's owners. It's the ultimate in creative farming.

On their website, gettingback2nature.com, you may find an appetizing tea, a fruit jam, a plant that will help purify the air in your home, some of that sweet dark hickory syrup, and more. Offerings may change at any time, so if you visit and see something you like, you'd be well-advised to get it now.

Irucka and Obiora are taking their knowledge and philosophy and putting it to work in order to make their sustainable operation a model for what they believe should be the future of farming everywhere.

The brothers thank the land for what it gives them, literally. They talk to their plants like old friends. They make it clear that they love the land that produces for them and they give verbal encouragement to grow and remain healthy — something they value far more than any pesticide available at the farm supply store.

“From early on, our goal was to heal the energy in those two acres by putting out vibrations of love,” Irucka said. “Vibrations, whether positive or negative, hurt or heal.”

“It's an experiment,” Irucka said. “It's been a progression of success and failure. We choose to build upon those successes and not focus on the failures.”

Progress through traditions of the distant past while bucking the status quo is a fitting description of this farm, considering its origins and how it continues to survive, and the theories being employed here seem to be working. There is a wealth of information to be learned from the farming methods and ideology of these brothers who are as unique as the land over which they preside.

Reprinted with permission from Local Table, a guide to food and farms in middle Tennessee. See the link at localtable.net

Submissions to *Peaceways*

Articles submitted to *Peaceways* should show an awareness of and sensitivity to the CKCPJ's mission and concerns.

Feature articles should be no longer than 500 words, unless you are willing to have the piece cut to fit one page of *Peaceways* text. Pieces will be edited for clarity.

Please include references in the text for all quotations, statistics, and unusual facts. End-notes or footnotes are not used.

Please query submissions to peacewayseditor@gmail.com before writing a feature article intended solely for *Peaceways*.

For all submissions, the author's name, address, and phone number should appear on the body of the submitted text.

If you submit material that has been published or that you are also submitting to other publishers, be sure to indicate this.

Also include information about your relationship to any organization or issue mentioned in the article, for inclusion in a biographical reference at the end of the story.

Submissions should be made in Word format *via* email. Book reviews are usually solicited by the editor, but we welcome inquiries from potential reviewers.

Submission deadline is the 10th of each month. *Peaceways* is published monthly except January.

Support CKCPJ by linking
your Kroger Plus card
to #16439 at
krogercommunityrewards.com.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Check with website for times when meetings are resumed

CKCPJ Steering Committee Meetings, third Monday, 5 p.m., Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave. More info: (859) 488-1448 or peaceandjusticeky@gmail.com. All are welcome.

Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace, every Thursday, 5:30 - 6 p.m. at Triangle Park (corner of Broadway and Main Street) in downtown Lexington. Contact Richard Mitchell, (859) 327-6277.

Migrant Network Coalition, first Monday, noon - 1:15 p.m., GLOBAL LEX, 1306 Versailles Road, Lexington. Contact Lindsay Mattingly, lmatingly@lexpublib.org, (859) 231-5514.

PFLAG Central Kentucky, second Tuesday, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. LGBTQ individuals of all ages, family members, friends and allies are welcome. St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 2025 Bellefonte Dr., Lexington. Visit info@pflagcentralky.org or (859) 338-4393. Speakers followed by confidential support group meeting.

Bluegrass Fairness of Central Kentucky, second Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Lexington Public Central Library, 140 E. Main St., Lexington. Contact Craig Cammack, chair, (859) 951-8565 or info@lexfair.org.

Wednesday Night GLSO "Heart to Heart" discussion group, 7 p.m., Pride Center, 389 Waller Ave., Lexington. GLSO operates Kentucky's only Pride Center, where they have quietly provided services to the GLBTQQA community for decades. More info, Pride Center hours, and other links at www.glsso.org.

Humanist Forum of Central Kentucky, first Thursday, 7 p.m., Great Hall of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 3564 Clays Mill Rd., Lexington. The Forum is a Chapter of the American Humanist Association. Meetings are open to people of all beliefs willing to express their opinions in a civil manner. Child care is provided. Contact President Staci Maney, staci@olliegee.com or (859) 797-2662.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, third Thursday, 7 p.m., Episcopal Diocese Mission House at Fourth St. and MLK Blvd, Lexington. Contact Beth Howard, (859) 276-0563.

NAMI Lexington Support Groups, every Sunday, 2:30 - 4 p.m. Participation Station, 869 Sparta Ct., Lexington. Call (859) 272-7891 or visit www.namilex.org.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue Program, fourth Saturday, 10 a.m. - noon. All are welcome. Locations vary, call (859) 277-5126. The Christian-Muslim dialogue promotes understanding and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims. By exploring moral, cultural and political factors shaping the current context, the program promotes personal and collective responsibility to build a more just and peaceful world.

Dance Jam, every Tuesday, 5:30 - 7 p.m., Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave. Move to the extent you are able. Sponsored by Motion Matters, \$7 per session to cover space rental. Contact Pamela, info@motionmatters.org, (859) 351-3142.

Movies with Spirit, second Friday of every month. Unitarian Universalist Church, 3564 Clays Mill Road, Lexington. Potluck at 6 p.m., film at 7.

National Action Network, third Thursday each month, 7 - 8:30 p.m. at the Central Library, Lexington.

Showing Up for Racial Justice, second Tuesday of the month, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Wild Fig Coffee and Books, 726 N. Limestone, Lexington.

To include a regular meeting of your organization in this space, contact Margaret Gabriel, peacewayseditor@gmail.com.



The Central Kentucky Council
for Peace and Justice
1588 Leestown Rd., Ste. 130-138
Lexington KY 40511
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*We are the United States of America.
There's not a single thing we cannot do
if we do it together.*

— Joe Biden

A Facebook posting by Emma Patterson

Hopefully, you don't think much about it when you hold a door open for someone or give an elderly person a seat on the bus. Small acts of kindness should be no-brainers, reflexes that barely register in the moment. All too often, people get wrapped up in their own lives, forgetting to pay kindness forward.

When this happens, it becomes clear just how important little acts of love truly are. No one knows this better than Robert Risdon, a soldier who, upon walking into a Taco Bell late one rainy night, saw firsthand how much of a difference a small act of kindness can make.

Army Lt. Col. Robert Risdon was heading home from work when he realized he was hungry. It was late, so he pulled into a fast food restaurant for a quick dinner — a decision that would affect more people than he knew.

He walked into the late-dinner rush. Thanks to the pouring rain, everyone looked wet, cold, and miserable. Because of this, when two soaking wet figures walked in, they weren't welcomed by smiles.

Robert watched the duo go from table to table, mumbling something to each annoyed customer, all of whom brushed them away. The closer they got to Robert's table, the more curious he became.

It became clear that the mysterious strangers were young boys. Robert watched as the taller of the two shoved his hands into his pockets. It was dinner time, but it was obvious that they weren't there to eat.

Robert had no clue what the boys had asked the other customers, but by their annoyed expressions, it must not have been a pleasant interaction. Even the cashier looked nervous. Still, as they got closer, he felt one thing: empathy.

"I can't even count the number of times I was cold, wet, and hungry in the Army," he

said. Having been stationed in Saudi Arabia, he was no stranger to hunger or extreme cold, and it was clear that these boys had felt their share of both.

These boys weren't in a foreign country. They were in rural Alabama, in need of some help. It wasn't until they got to Robert's table that he found out what they were asking everyone.

"Do you want to buy some candy?" They asked him. Robert was stunned. Of all the questions they could have asked, this was the least expected. He could tell by their slumped stances that they were exhausted.

He dreaded giving them his answer. "I don't have any cash," he said honestly. He watched the boys nod and walk away, then asked them a question that stopped them in their tracks.

"Can you boys finish off 10 tacos?" he asked. They both nodded, and Robert took the boys to the counter. When he started talking to them, he learned how they ended up soaking wet and selling candy.

The boys were trying to raise funds for their church by walking and selling all the candy they could door to door. When he asked if they had eaten, the older boy shook his head.

Robert was touched by their intentions and admired them for working so hard. These were kids who were determined to help others, even if it meant skipping meals and getting wet. As a soldier, Robert had been in similar situations.

Unknown to Robert, another customer in the restaurant caught on to what was happening. Jason Gibson knew he was witnessing a good deed, so he quickly grabbed his phone and started to record the interaction.

The younger boy tried to salute Robert with one hand while clutching his taco in the other. The older boy just kept saying thank you, all while Gibson filmed.

It wasn't long after Gibson posted the video that it went viral. Thousands of people were inspired by Robert's actions, and by the happy grins on the boy's faces. Clearly not everyone had had Robert's impulse to help the boys.

According to Robert, his reason for helping reflects how he was raised. "Throughout my childhood I was around people who taught me there's more to life than taking care of yourself," Robert said. As a father, he's raising his kids with the same mentality.

Being kind and helpful is second nature to Robert, so the praise he's received about the video feels strange. "I'm kinda embarrassed and humbled by the praise," he said. He believes that such an act should be second nature to everyone.

"It seemed like a very small gesture I could do for two kids who were trying to make some money in the rain on a school night," he said. Before parting, he gave the boys advice that they will probably never forget.

"When you're older and you're in a position to help someone out, don't pass it up," he told them. Although Robert was the one helping out this time around, the boys touched Robert's heart in a way he didn't expect.

"They inspire me as much as I may have made them feel good by just filling their bellies a little bit," Robert said. If you're wondering how to inspire a soldier like Robert, it may be as simple as showing others respect and gratitude.

Robert and the boys are living reminders to pay kindness forward. "I am a believer that we live in the best country in the world with the best people and that acts of kindness happen every day," Robert said.