



## THE PEACE CANDLE

By Denise Gallupe

Peace. Children hear the word at home, at school, on television. We all strive for “peace”, but what does it really mean to our younger generation of today? There are so many dos and don’ts in our society, however we must look within ourselves and actually *feel* in our hearts the difference between right and wrong. Where do we start to show our naive children this adverse difference?

In a small community called Porter’s Lake in Nova Scotia, Canada, many members of this close knit “family” have begun a tradition of celebrating the true meaning of peace in a very meaningful way. Many members participate, the parents and children are foremost, however the schools have made this issue a vital part of their curriculum, incorporating regular activities that require everyone involved to reflect and self evaluate their own actions and strive to “make a *positive* difference in someone else’s life.

A cross section of service providers from the Tri- Community Interagency Council, (TRIAC), originally formed a group to respond to violence in these communities. From there it all starts with a celebration of peace that occurs during the “14 Days of December” which comes out of respect and recognition of the fourteen women who died in the Montreal Massacre years ago. December 1<sup>st</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> coincides with dates related to events, which include Advent, Hanukkah, the United Nations Human Rights Day and Police Week. All of these are related to peaceful living in one way or another. The Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia has made a commitment to continue this quest of peaceful living throughout the year. Here are some ideas of activities that take place to bring this community and their families closer together during this time.

A white candle with a purple ribbon tied in a bow at the bottom is handed out to each child in the school. What is the relevance of these colours? Well, white is the universal colour for “peace”, and purple is the colour of advent. The children bring these candles home with much pride and enthusiasm every year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. They promise to follow a community tradition for the next 14 days, which will enrich their lives in many ways.

At suppertime during these 14 days, the family's try extra hard to put aside outside distractions and sit together at the table with the candle placed as the centrepiece. The candle is lit and then a child or parent takes the candle carefully (younger children will need help or you may opt to leave it at the centre of the table for them). While holding the candle, the child talks about one "act of kindness" that they themselves did towards a classmate, friend, sibling . . . Then the candle is handed to the next person until everyone around the table has had a chance to reflect and share their experiences of the day.

. . . As the peace candle reaches Brett's small hands, he proudly says, "*I helped Kyle put his jacket on today!*"

Cory takes the candle from his brother and says with enthusiasm, "*I helped J.R. with his math at school and I'm going to do it again tomorrow!*" . . .

The meal is served and it is a wonderful way to initiate a very inspiring conversation about the meaning of "peaceful" living. Some families have extended this activity throughout the year so that for one evening meal every week, perhaps on a Sunday, the whole family gathers to participate, except the discussions extend to events that happened that week as opposed to only referring to that particular day. Any candle will do. It is the ritual and it's meaning that is important.

The schools have special assemblies focusing around the theme of "peace" during this time. As well, the children strive to obtain "RASKAL" awards, which are handed out to all students who are caught, doing a "Random Act of Sincere Kindness and Love" towards someone else! These awards are put on display in a centralized spot in the school for everyone to see.

A recent activity, which became very successful, was the making of "peace cranes" with the older Book Buddies. After doing some research on the Internet, it was discovered that a little girl named Sadako Sasaki, who was 2 years old at the time of the bombing in Hiroshima, grew up with a wish for peace. She attempted to fold 1000 paper cranes believing that she would get well by doing so. There is a Japanese legend that states that if one can fold 1000 paper cranes, the gods will grant that person a wish. Unfortunately, Sadako died of leukemia before her dream was realized, but her dream has become an inspiration for the children at O'Connell Drive Elementary School. They busily fold paper cranes and suspend them in the large foyer in memory of the children who suffered so needlessly, and of course with hopes of a better tomorrow.

On display at Lakeview Elementary School are beautiful quilts handmade by the children, teachers, and parents, which hang on display in the hallways for everyone to see. Each of the sections of the quilts is made to represent a symbol of peace. It is interesting to see from a child's viewpoint how simply these messages can be expressed in this manner. A large colorful garland decoration is hung outside of the building with each color representing something special. Each child

in every class gets an opportunity to tie a ribbon on the garland and many valuable discussions follow this activity.

It must be noted that as with all worthwhile ventures in life, a gift of the heart is the most valuable. Volunteering a few moments in any community to help such events take place gives one a truly uplifting feeling and sense of self worth.

Teachers wanting more ideas on activities on this topic should read the book titled Peace in the Classroom, written by Hetty Adams. This book is certainly used as a “classroom bible” for many of us!

### **Why should we bother to do this?**

Here are some valid reasons why:

- To try to address the problem of family violence that occurs everyday in *everyone's* community behind closed doors.
- The necessity to spend “quality” time with our children, really listening to their concerns and desires.
- Establishing a focus in our schools that stresses the importance of living with one another while respecting individual differences and needs.
- The hope to build better self esteem, allow for leadership roles needed for many of these projects, and to give the children a sense of pride and willingness to further help members of society as they grow older.
- Helping our children to feel loved and confident that their actions, no matter how small, affects many people around them.
- HOW CAN WE AFFORD NOT TO???