

Desert Voices

NDE Newsletter

#4 winter 1989

children and nuclear pessimism

In their recent sociological study, "Attitudes Towards Surviving Nuclear War," Patricia A. Gwartney-Gibbs and Denise Lach of the University of Oregon studied college student attitudes toward nuclear war. They report the following:

1. Nearly 48 percent of college students think nuclear war likely sometime in their lives;
2. 89 percent believe the U.S. as we know it will not survive such a war;
3. 45 percent do not want to survive a nuclear war.

Such pervasive pessimism cannot help but have serious consequences on the psychic well-being of the nation's youth. It is no surprise then to learn that the spectre of nuclear war has been linked to nightmares, sleeplessness, and depression among younger children. Other researchers have found nuclear anxiety among young adults associated with lowered life satisfaction, less purpose in life, and feelings of powerlessness and depression. It has been argued that the threat of nuclear war inhibits the development of trust and security. Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach's study found that young men and women respond differently to the threat of nuclear war.

1. 63 percent of college females thought nuclear war likely, but only 51 percent of the college males;
2. 74 percent of the women thought it unlikely the U.S. would survive a nuclear war, while 65 percent of the men thought it unlikely;
3. 47 percent of the women, as opposed to only 24 percent of the men, did not want to survive such a war.

Why such dramatically different

attitudes on the part of college men and women? Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach tested "whether these findings could be due to females having different political orientations, ... more apathetic plans for the future, or different demographic and background characteristics than males." But they found no explanations in these variables. "No matter what their characteristics, plans, or orientations, females are consistently more pessimistic in their nuclear war attitudes than males."

Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach speculate that the powerlessness women experience in everyday life "may teach them that they are powerless to effect change" and that women's caregiving experiences may lead to more realistic attitudes towards the aftermath of nuclear war.

Because such marked patterns of pessimism demand explanation, Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach asked students to "write down their impressions of what life would be like after nuclear war." Their findings are striking:

Without exception, students who preferred not to survive wrote extensively developed and stark descriptions of total destruction, loss, hopelessness, death of loved ones, and desperation. On the other hand, students who preferred to survive wrote sketchy descriptions of "unavailable conveniences" and "a time of unparalleled opportunity."

This study and the few others which examine public attitudes towards nuclear war deserve our consideration. But as Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach point out, our policymakers have largely ignored the public attitude or wishes when it comes to nuclear war policy.

suffer the children

by Denise Stephenson

McMurtrie's poem (next page) ends with the children not being able to do anything about the situation and not seeing adults trying. I don't believe we are powerless. The very presence of children calls us to speak and act on behalf of life. People have created and allowed the expansion of the nuclear situation. People can stop it.

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The reign of God belongs to such as these." If we let the children go to Jesus, if we are as little children ourselves, then we must stop the nuclear proliferation. God does not work alone. We must en- flesh the spirit and live our faith.

The articles in this newsletter suggest that innocence has been stolen from today's children. They live lives of fear and hopelessness. And the more thoughtful the child, the more her despair. It seems we have built a world that hinders children from being with Jesus or part of anything that is compassionate, loving, hopeful. It is a situation we have created through our complicity, but we can recreate the world through compassionate action. We can stop hindering the children by:

- not buying war toys
- learning methods of conflict resolution that do not involve violence
- sharing information and working cooperatively with others
- working for a Test Ban

There are many, many things that we can do to let the reign of God be available to our children. Some of the organizations working to give hope and courage back to the young are:

Little Friends for Peace
4405 - 29th Street
Mount Rainier, MD 20712
(301) 699-0042

Educators for Social Responsibility
23 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 492-1764

The Center on War & the Child
PO Box 487
35 Benton Street
Eureka Springs, AR 72632
(501) 492-1764

Parents and Teachers for Social Resp
Box 517
Moratown, VT 05660

US/USSR ATTITUDES

(from LA Times News Service)

If the attitudes of American college students towards nuclear war (see p.1) strike you as pessimistic, even fatalistic, then results of a joint US/Soviet survey will seem even bleaker. According to the study, published in the NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE, 54% of American teenagers said they were "very worried about nuclear war," while 94% of their Soviet counterparts responded similarly.

Soviet youth ranked fear of nuclear war ahead of a parent's death as their chief worry, while American youth ranked war just behind death of a parent. The list of worries ranged from "getting cancer" to "people not liking me." The survey, conducted in 1986, covered 3370 public school students in Maryland and 2148 students in central Russia.

Ironically, the Soviet youth were more optimistic about the likelihood of nuclear war. Fifty-six percent said a nuclear war would never happen; fourteen percent of the Americans felt the same. And while only 9% of the Soviet young people thought there would be a nuclear war in their lifetime, 42% of American students expected such a war.

CTB AD CAMPAIGN

A coalition of organizations including NDE is sponsoring a signature ad campaign in the form of an open letter calling on President Bush to initiate a moratorium on nuclear testing and to immediately begin negotiations for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The goal is for such ads to appear in local newspapers across the country on January 20, 1989 - Inauguration Day.

For more information contact:
Carolyn Cottom, Committee for National Security, 1601 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 745-2450.

NDE NEWSLETTER welcomes letters, articles, information, announcements, biographical sketches, poetry and humorous pieces. Send to: NDE Newsletter, Box 4487, Las Vegas, NV 89127

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POEM FOR PUBLIC HEARING by: Mary McMurtrie

Twelve and thirteen year olds file into my classroom everyday.
A hundred and fifty or so of them.

We study words, ideas and ideals.
We look at the world around us, past and present.
We try not to look at the future.

A simple unit of study called, "Earth Is Home,"
Required for the seventh grade.

Yes, they say, it is our home.
But we're afraid to live in it.
Yes, they say, we know we share it with the creatures.
But they don't seem to be surviving.
And what of us, they ask?
Can we survive?
Is this really home?

They ask the questions, but not too loudly.
They turn, instead, to the newest hair-do and shade of denim.
They talk of movies and music and parties.

Want to take the pulse of America tomorrow?
Live in an adolescent classroom today.
Notice the skeptical expression of a distrusting generation.

We teach them about the Constitution and The Bill of Rights.
We read to them from the great thinkers and writers of the world.
We ponder the poetry of visionaries.

They look up from their books and ask,
Why then do we build the bombs to blow it?

We stand with lesson plans at the ready -
Ready to move on to the next chapter -
We dare not stay too long to ponder these questions.
We don't have the answers.

They see and smell our fear...
Then they turn back to the hair-do, the movies, the music.

They do not believe in preparing for the "real world."
It is too fantastic.
They are not concerned with the future.
They are not convinced there is one.

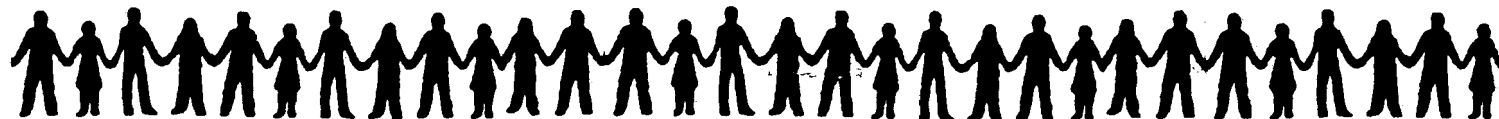
And all this time
They know there is nothing they can do about it.
It doesn't matter how many spelling words they memorize,
The isotopes still are separated.

The algebraic formulae seem to be quite clear,
But what difference does it make compared to water we can't drink?

They listen to our lectures on drug abuse and overuse,
Then turn to see us pollute their home.

They know there is nothing they can do about it,
And they don't see that any of us is trying.

I recently gave testimony
at a public hearing in
Boise concerning the DOE's
proposed Super Isotope
Separator to be installed in
southern Idaho. Neither
Idaho nor the world needs
another plutonium production
facility for the manufacture
of nuclear warheads.
I am sending a copy of the
poem that I read at the
public hearings.



THE NONVIOLENCE PROJECT IS LAUNCHED

by Louie Vitale

Our initial retreat, "Nonviolence and the American Dream," was held in Las Vegas during the Thanksgiving weekend. About twenty people shared their interests and involvement in the nonviolence movement. I presented analyses of our culture and ways it utilizes violence at home and abroad to foster its economic greed. Peter Ediger led scriptural reflections on the Beatitudes and Revelations. We also went to the Nevada Test Site for prayer and reflection.

The retreat ended with the question, "Where do we go from here?" The group recommended having more retreats, perhaps every two months, and developing a local reflection group.

We feel we are off to a good start.

Possibly the most frequently asked question of NDE's resistance work is whether or not it is effective. The following quote comes from an article by Starhawk after she was involved in an action at the Test Site last Spring:

"Any action, like any act of magic, is in some sense an act of faith.... Maybe we have already saved the world, several times, without even knowing it. Maybe we will continue to save it again and again, until the latent power of the hills, the teepee, the animal human body and spirit prevails over the bombs. I've seen the desert in bloom, the flower that emerges from the barest hint of water, and I know that the power of life will rise, stubborn and persistent to be renewed. May our actions be the wind that brings the rain."

(from "We Are the Hope That Will Not Hide,"
WOMAN OF POWER, #10, summer 1988, p.90)

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A TIME TO BE SILENT --
A TIME TO SPEAK
Lenten Desert Experience VIII
Feb 8 Catholic Bishops
Feb 10-12 Seminarians
Feb 17-19 Franciscans
March 4 Las Vegas
March 11-12 Friends & friends
March 16-17 Methodists
HOLY WEEK
March 19 Palm Sunday
March 20-22 Nonviolence Workshops
March 23 Holy Thursday
day - nonviolence preparation
evening - liturgy
March 24 Good Friday
worship & action at Test Site
March 26 Easter
worship & action at Test Site
(Complete schedule details
available upon request.)

Desert Voices

Nevada Desert Experience

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