

A DREAM FOR OUR WORLD

BY DAVID GERSHON

The time was 1983, the year the TV movie “The Day After” was broadcast nationwide to one of the largest TV audiences in America. In this movie, America was destroyed by a nuclear attack launched by the Soviet Union. The movie created shock amongst Americans as they watched tens of millions of people killed in their country. It was as if the country had a collective near-death experience.

It was a time when the two most powerful nations on Earth aimed their deadliest weapons at each other in a doomsday scenario of mutually assured destruction. Children were in despair of ever having a future and the smartest political strategists of the world could not imagine a way out. The world was enveloped in a profound psychological darkness.

Out of this despair a small, barely perceptible opening occurred in the American psyche. It was into this opening that I entered with a dream: To carry an archetypal torch, person to person, country to country, leader to leader – extending a band of light around the world. Igniting and uniting the people and political leaders of the planet in a shared vision of living together in harmony. Providing a pause in the fear long enough for our collective imagination and ingenuity to find stable footing. Creating an opening in the global psyche for something new to be born.

It was visionary, but the odds against it seemed immense. Who would help organize an almost impossible dream? Who would be willing to finance such a risky and unprecedented undertaking? What organizations could meet the logistical challenges? What political leaders would put their reputation on the line for such a wildly improbable idea? And if it could somehow defy all these odds, would it really make any difference given the monolithic forces at play?

While I clearly had a lot to learn about the world’s political complexity, I did have an interesting history. I had organized the Olympic Torch Relay for the 1980 Lake Placid Games and was a seasoned management consultant. I may have been naive, but I couldn’t be completely discounted. My first recruit, I hoped, would be a sure thing.

I had met Gail Straub three years earlier right after organizing the Olympic Torch Relay. She had short blonde hair, a radiant smile and a contagious *joie de vivre*. I had met my soul mate and we instantly fell in love. Within a few months we decided to get married and develop a training program that empowered people to envision and manifest their dreams. By the spring of 1983 when my vision for the world was coming into being, we had been leading our empowerment training program for two years.

I was hopeful my wife would not only support me in going for this vision, but would be willing to add her considerable energy and enthusiasm to helping make it happen. I told her it would certainly be a great adventure. I had had this vision since 1976 when I first tried my hand at large scale organizing by creating the Bicentennial Torch Relay. During this relay, a torch was passed non-stop by 32 runners for 9,000 miles through America’s 48 continental states, then runners flew the torch to Alaska and Hawaii. I created it to rekindle the values upon which America was founded which were receding into a post Vietnam War malaise.

I explained to Gail that this self-funded grassroots initiative had captured the imagination of the country, the media and the White House. Most importantly, I discovered that the fire had a

mythic power that touched people in a profound way. As the event was winding down at Federal Hall in New York City, the site of George Washington's inaugural, a thought came to me: Pass the fire around the world uniting the world in the spirit of cooperation. Let it serve as a symbolic way to recognize our common aspiration to live in harmony with one another. I felt this idea was so important, I was willing to dedicate my life to making it happen.

I told her I had tried to convince people and institutions to participate in this endeavor for three years. While I was able to create a core organizing team and had the good will of many, I was buffeted by multiple rejections from funding institutions. Having spent my meager savings, I was running out of options. Suddenly, out of the blue, I was offered an opportunity to organize the 1980 Olympic Torch Relay. I had developed an expertise in a most esoteric craft and essentially had cornered the market. I quickly redirected my team.

It was an experience of a lifetime. The President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, offered us Air Force One to get the flame from Olympia, Greece and bring it back to America. We were given permission by the International Olympic Committee to have a special selection process for the torch bearers. They were to be selected by how well they embodied the ancient Greek ideal of the whole person: An integration of body, mind and spirit. Over 8,000 runners applied for 52 spots representing the 50 states, Washington DC and Lake Placid. Wherever they carried the torch, they were hailed as Olympians. The runners themselves chose the teammate who best embodied this Olympic spirit to light the stadium caldron that opened the Olympic Games. And once again, I saw the fire's power to transform and uplift all who gazed upon it.

I told Gail, with my credibility from organizing the Olympic Torch Relay and the pervasive fear of our planet's imminent peril, I hoped people would now be more willing to embrace this vision. I cautioned her that if we went for this dream, we would need to devote the majority of our time to organizing, which might put our young empowerment training business at risk. We would also have to invest the small inheritance I had recently received from my Mother's death as the start up capital. Since no one had ever done anything of this global and logistical magnitude before, it would be very, very hard to do. But *if* we were successful, I felt it just could provide enough inspiration to nudge the world in the right direction. Was she up for it? If she wasn't, I assured her that I certainly would understand.

Her answer was immediate. She said, "If it could make the kind of difference you describe, I'm willing to go for it." After an emotional embrace, my next question was, "Do you know anyone who lives in a foreign country?" Her response, "I know someone who used to live in England, perhaps she could help us find people." So began our odyssey to convince the world to participate in this mythic transformative act. What transpired over the next three years demanded more of us than we could have ever imagined.

CALL OF THE DREAM

One by one we began assembling the team. I honed my recruitment pitch to: "Long hours, no pay and no guarantee of success, but a vision that just might change the world!" It was right out the classic Japanese movie *Seven Samurai* where a small group of warriors were recruited to save a city under siege by an invading army. Each samurai was accomplished and masterful in his specialty. Each was willing to step out of his life and courageously dedicate himself to a very difficult and highly challenging assignment. It was moving to watch this heroic impulse come alive within people.

Soon we had graduated to convincing organizations to arrange for the passage of the torch through their country. One such organization was the Jaycees, an international organization of young leaders. I was invited to their annual international meeting in Cartagena, Colombia to present my idea. I made my speech to the entire group hoping for a great reception, but there was no immediate response. I wondered how in the world I was going to find representatives from the countries that I needed. My opportunity came a day later during the Jaycees' traditional parade through the city. Jaycees were lined up behind their national flag and a placard with their country's name on it. I realized this could be a bonanza! I darted from placard to placard giving my pitch and setting up meetings for the next few days. In three hours I had 8 countries identified, most of which proved fruitful.

On one trip Gail went to meet with a number of possible organizers in India, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. She gave herself 10 days to get 5 organizers. She came back 10 days later with many stories, dysentery and five organizers. The vision was becoming a reality: One country at a time, the world was demonstrating a desire to receive the flame.

Gail, serving as our International Director, created a 75-page "how to" manual which was distributed to each country's organizing committee. This was to be their primary organizing tool. The only long distance communications available were cables and phone, both of which were cost prohibitive. The manual explained how to organize the torch relay, finance it in their country, publicize it, create public ceremonies and select each community's three most successful self-help projects.

Called "What's Working in the World", these self-help projects were to be a celebration of the best of humanity's ingenuity, and replicate at the community level what was being created at a global level: People using their imagination in the spirit of cooperation to find solutions to important problems. It was also to be a collection of the best community self help strategies and practices from around the world. At each community ceremony, the torch would "shed light" on what was working in the world.

The relay team was a group of runners who served as keepers of the fire and escorts for the torch runners in each country. Our strategy was to divide the world into 16 major geographic regions. The dream, like a beautiful bird song, attracted runners from each of these regions who were willing to add their unique spirit to this epic. They came from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Hungary, India, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Russia, United Kingdom and United States. They were women and men, Hindus, Moslems, Jews and Christians, recreational runners and Olympians. The world's rich cultural and religious diversity was being assembled and would be placed together for 86 days.

The core responsibility of the relay team was to serve as emissaries – welcoming and accompanying each of the thousands of runners from around the world who would carry the torch. They were also charged with assuring the original fire stored in draft-proof miner's lamps always remained lit. They would face many challenges from helping runners safely navigate through the massive uncontrolled crowds, to convincing airlines that it was safe to fly with a live flame, to living with others who were so different from themselves.

ENGAGING THE WORLD

So how do you transport a multicultural group of people, a live flame and torches through a new country almost every day? How do you successfully guide people with limited experience to organize several hundred community ceremonies and millions of people? How does one go

about convincing dozens of heads of state to participate? How do you persuade airlines to go against their regulations and allow a live flame on board? The logistical challenges were unending. It was like mounting an expedition to scale Everest for the first time meets organizing the Olympic Opening Ceremony!

While these challenges were being confronted, a most daunting one still laid ahead: attracting the several million dollars of financing needed to make all this happen. I needed to provide assurances to the sponsors about our team's ability to pull off an event of immense global magnitude that had never been done before. While I had secured seed capital to pay some staff, with six months left to go there was still no major sponsorship. As the seed funding and Gail's and my financial resources were dwindling, a growing realization was occurring to me. We were persuading people all over the world to invest their time and hope, in some cases at the cost of economic hardship, and I might not be able to raise the money to actually do it. If I couldn't raise the money, I would be an outcast almost everywhere in the world. Our Japanese organizer Atsuo Shiga, described the situation: "How far can one run on an empty stomach?"

For about a year, we had been having discussions with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) about a partnership. As our international organization grew and momentum built their interest was peaked. It culminated in a meeting with Jim Grant, UNICEF's visionary leader, who agreed to have his organization become an in-kind sponsor, using the event to celebrate their 40th anniversary. They would also be a recipient of any funds raised. In return, they would provide active support reaching out to heads of state through their international network, office space in their Manhattan headquarters, and state-of-the-art communication infrastructure. In the mid 1980s, this meant an in-house telex machine to receive cable messages. There were no fax machines or e-mail. Our team moved into wonderful new digs overlooking Manhattan's East River. We were motivated to keep running on an empty stomach.

Soon the media caught wind of the audacity and significance of this initiative. Stories began appearing in the *New York Times* and on the major TV networks for what was now being called the *First Earth Run*. One team member, Hal Uplinger, who had helped produce the mega rock concert fund raiser for famine relief in Africa, *Live Aid*, used his contacts at ABC Television to bring them on as the media sponsor. They committed to providing coverage of the torch's 12 week passage around-the-world every Wednesday morning on *Good Morning America*.

Then the political leadership support began falling into place, including US President Ronald Reagan, Soviet Union's President Mikhail Gorbachev, and China's President Li Xiannan. As the momentum built, requests started coming from many heads of state asking that the flame go through their country. One of the most meaningful requests came from King Birendra of Nepal. He wished the torch of peace to light an eternal flame he would erect at the pilgrimage birthplace of the Buddha in Lumbini. He said he wanted the millions of Buddhist pilgrims who come to Lumbini to be inspired by this act of peace building. The mythic power of the dream was generating a magic that was captivating all who heard it.

A member of the core team, Brooke Newell, a Vice President of the large multi-national Chase Manhattan Bank, had begun soliciting her company as sponsors from the inception of this idea. As the senior leadership heard of the growing support and momentum that was building, they became interested in sponsorship. They had come to the conclusion as described in a memo that, "this is one of the truly extraordinary activities of our time and is an unparalleled opportunity for our company." Soon we were negotiating in earnest for a multi-million dollar sponsorship. The only issues were how much they would pay and how they would promote it. Needless to say, this news gave everyone on the organizing team a collective sigh of relief.

Then one day about three months before the event, Brooke requested a meeting with me. We met frequently about the negotiations with Chase, but this day Brooke had an ominous look about her. She got right to it. After a hard-headed analysis at the highest levels of the organization, Chase decided to pull back from sponsorship. They determined this was too risky an undertaking. So many things could go wrong. They ticked them off one after the other. Without consistently professional crowd control the runners, spectators and team were at risk of bodily harm or even death. It was such a high-profile event that it could easily be hijacked by a fringe organization for their political purposes. The level of organization was uneven and in any number of countries the event could fall on its face with minimal participation. If it was used as a propaganda event by communist dictators it would reflect poorly on the company. The overall assessment was it was just way too risky a venture for them. They were unwilling to go forward.

It was definitely my moment of truth. What should I do? Should I thank my amazing team for their efforts and faith in me as a leader, but tell them there just wasn't enough time to find another sponsor? That we needed to call this off before more expectations were raised? I was in emotional turmoil. So many years of work. Such an extraordinary opportunity to make a difference. We were so, so close.

I sought support and counsel from my dear wife Gail, who had been there 110% at every step of the journey. She held me and advised that I pray for guidance and sleep on it. I followed her advise and when I awakened the next day, I was clear.

I called my core team of about 25 together in our United Nations offices. They assembled in the only location where everyone could fit – a corridor between our tightly packed offices. Calmly, but with my heart in my throat, I told them: "Chase Manhattan Bank has decided to pull out as a sponsor. We have no other prospects at the moment, as Chase had wished to be the sole sponsor. It would be extremely hard to find a multi-million dollar sponsorship on this short notice. Everyone's faith and dedication has brought us to this point and now we are all being asked where we stand. I have decided to go forward and I ask each of you to think hard about what you want to do. I will understand if you aren't willing or able to hang in any longer. After all, most of you have not been paid, and those who have, receive a survival level salary. Our workload is relentless – 10 to 12 hour days. For every logistical and political challenge we solve, two new ones appear. In spite of this major setback, I will do whatever it takes to find another source of funding."

The team did not hesitate. They unanimously decided to go forward. They determined they would keep running on an empty stomach.

I decided my best chance was to speak to UNICEF's Executive Director, Jim Grant and ask for his financial support. From several communications, I knew Jim had become a real partner. He told me he was in awe of the response this was getting from usually reticent political leaders all over the world. He said, that although he was getting some resistance from his country directors, the positive association of people and political leaders around the world toward UNICEF would make their work much easier in the future. He also hoped it would assist their fund raising efforts both through the event and in the future by the increased visibility. But his bottom line was this was the right thing to do for the world and that was why he was putting his organization behind it.

I arranged a meeting with Jim the next day to explain what had happened. By the time I arrived, Jim had already heard that Chase had pulled out. When I asked him to consider funding the

whole thing, he was ready with an answer. He said, "We will make it happen!" I could not hold back my tears of relief and joy. Jim told his organization to find the money in the budget and UNICEF became the global underwriter and sole sponsor. A better sponsor for a global humanitarian mission of this magnitude could not have been found. This moment marked a phenomenon that had become a hallmark: each time we were faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge, help came. All concluded, this dream had grace!

THE DREAM ALIVE IN THE WORLD

With funding finally secured, the effort and response from around the world leapt to another level of intensity and scrutiny. I was summoned to meet with senior government leadership in both Moscow and Beijing. They asked me probing questions. They wanted to understand how something like this had happened, who was behind it, and what their motivations were. They wanted to know why I was really doing this. They wanted to know why they should encourage the people of their country to get involved.

I was able to convince them that my sentiments and the purpose of this global initiative were genuine. I told them my story and they seemed to believe me. Both countries committed to provide runners for the international team. The political leadership in the Soviet Union allowed 60 cities throughout the country to participate with huge events in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and Moscow. In China, they allowed events in Beijing and Shanghai and encouraged some two million runners to join the torch along the Great Wall. In both countries, the heads of state honored the flame's arrival.

Other amazing things were happening. President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, along with head of the guerilla group the Contras, his arch enemy, would declare a cease fire for the day and have their children carry the torch together through the capital city of Managua. Jewish and Arab children were going to carry the torch into the Knesset, the Israeli parliament building, in Jerusalem. In Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant runners were going to pass the torch from one to another. The President of Iceland wished the torch to be brought to Reykjavik to light a world peace cauldron outside the building where Gorbachev and Reagan were to have their historic first summit meeting. It was as though the geopolitical chessboard was given a second dimension to play on and many new moves were being invented.

The lighting and launch of the torch on its journey around the world was to take place at the United Nations in New York. The torch was to be lit from a fire created at a sunrise ceremony on the grounds of the United Nations by two Native American elders, Chief Shenandoah of the Iroquois Nation and Grandmother Caroline of the Hopi Nation. Among the native cultures, the Iroquois are the "keepers of the sacred fire." It is they who are charged among all the native tribes to provide the fire necessary to manifest dreams. The Hopi are the "keepers of the dream." They serve as stewards of the most profound belief on the planet: that human beings can live in harmony with each other and the Earth.

They are also keepers of the Hopi Prophecies reverently handed down from one generation to the next for over a thousand years. The most important of these prophecies states that when humanity is on the brink of self destruction the Hopi must deliver a message at the great hall of mica. If this message is received, the world would begin the "Great Turning" toward a thousand years of peace. If it was not received the world would continue its direction and enter into a thousand years of darkness and war. The prophecy stated that they would have four attempts to deliver this message.

The Hopi elders determined that the time described in the prophecy had come, and the great hall of mica was the glass United Nations building on Manhattan's east side. For the sake of the world, they diligently sought an audience with the leadership of the United Nations. They had been turned down three times already, so this was their final chance. The native cultures were closely tracking what they felt was a momentous opportunity for humanity.

It was a beautiful sunrise in Manhattan. It had been raining so the air was pure and the sky was clear. The sun was gleaming off the tall rectangular glass United Nations building and surrounding skyscrapers. Political dignitaries, rock stars and the UN Secretary General were preparing to participate. It was September 16, 1986, the opening day of the UN General Assembly – the international day of peace in the international year of peace.

The evening before, a ceremonial site had been prepared on the grounds of the UN by Chief Shenandoah. There was a little chill in the air that September morning as Chief Shenandoah of the Iroquois Nation, in the ancient ways rubbed two sticks together until a spark was ignited into kindling. The kindling was placed on combustible material until a small flame grew into a blazing fire. Many political dignitaries and media were on hand to hear Grandmother Caroline offer the prophecy the Hopi had been stewarding for a millennia.

A paraphrasing of what she said was: "Humanity is at a crossroads. To continue on this planet, we are being called to achieve a higher level of community, where we can experience that which unites us. The fire symbolizes the light within that connects us all. As this light goes around the world it will awaken in humanity a deep yearning to live in harmony with each other and the Earth. This will leave a lasting imprint in our memory and make possible the Great Turning that was prophesized. Learn to interpret the signs, they will be there."

Her profound message of hope inspired everyone in attendance. Over the next 86 days, it would be communicated in one form or another to the 25 million people and 45 heads of state in 62 countries who would directly participate in the passage of the fire. And to the hundreds of millions more participating through the media.

The 86-day journey of the fire around the world was an extraordinary moment on the planet. Wherever the flame arrived, conflict stopped and adversaries cooperated. The anticipated fear of crowds being out of control did not materialize. While they were enthusiastic, they were respectful and in awe of the fire they were seeing. There were no injuries and no one was even burned. On more than one occasion, it was raining when the flame arrived, but when the ceremony began, the rain ceased and the sun would shine. Airline pilots welcomed the flame onto their planes as a distinguished quest. Inspired art, music, dance and poetry were created that touched the spirit and united. The flame arrived on time for every scheduled ceremony. Each community proudly shared success stories of how their citizens had cooperated for the common good and achieved something great. For 86 days, wherever the flame went there was peace and cooperation. These "signs" were noticed by all.

When the flame arrived back at the United Nations in New York, a special session was held in the United Nations General Assembly Hall. Delegates from around the world shared story after story of how the people of their country had been moved and elevated by the power of the fire. They described in many different ways how they had been inspired and provided hope that we can create the world we want. That our dreams and aspirations for our world can be realized. That everyone around the world wants the same thing and when given the opportunity, fully embrace it.

INITIATION OF THE DREAM

On a personal level I had an experience similar to that described by one of the astronauts seeing the awesome beauty of the Earth for the first time from a distance. He described himself as a “sensing mechanism for humanity.” In this case I was humanity’s sensing mechanism on the Earth, experiencing our beauty up close. I experienced the depth of our common humanity and our wondrous diversity. Our ability to rise beyond that which separates us and find ways to cooperate. Our courage to risk believing, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that we can create a better world. I also came to the belief that yes, anything is possible!

What had inspired the world to act in this way? And did it change in any demonstrable way? An important place to look is where it started: the titanic death grip between the United States and Soviet Union of mutually assured destruction as their best chance for survival. A story will illustrate the mysterious effects of the fire on a few of the mortals playing out the great drama of the time.

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, had been reluctant to participate, thinking this was all a waste of time. But when the groundswell of political support had grown to include Presidents’ Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, Ronald Reagan of the United States, and Li Xiannan of China, she finally accepted the invitation to participate. Children from each of the major ethnic groups in London were invited to 10 Downing Street for a short candle lighting ceremony.

The flame was carried in by a runner and each child was offered a candle to light from the torch. One by one, as they lit their candle, each child became transfixed. They could barely move. It was as if the fire had taken on the collective presence and sentiments of all those people who had transported and witnessed it. The entire room was transformed. What had been planned as a simple 10-minute ceremony evolved into a two-hour tour. She told them of the many tales and important decisions that had transpired in those chambers. How it was so important that we had opportunities like this and they should use this flame to inspire others in their communities. The powerful presence of the fire had touched the “iron lady”, allowing her momentarily to shed her armor.

A few weeks later, she was to be the first Western political leader to meet with Gorbachev. Her assignment was to determine if he could be trusted and the world could be brought back from the precipice. Knowing that the flame was coming to Moscow, she shared her candle lighting experience with one of the meeting organizers. When she arrived for her historic meeting, she was invited to participate with Gorbachev in a similar candle lighting ceremony in the Kremlin with Soviet children representing the country’s many ethnic groups. The flame once again created a similar transformation allowing these two cold warriors to relate to one another from another vantage point. The distrust softened in both of them, allowing for intelligence to transcend political posturing. Her communication to the world after their meeting was, “We can do business with him.”

Another example of the alchemical power of the fire and dream occurred when it penetrated what was then called the “iron curtain.” When the flame arrived in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it released an intense emotion amongst the hundreds of thousands of participants. It was palpable. It was like they were smelling for the first time in their life a fragrance in the air. What had been an airtight container was now being permeated with the freshness of new ideas. They were breathing in what free will could achieve. They were breathing in common cause with the world community. They were breathing in hope and possibility for their lives.

So did the fire and the dream cause a demonstrable change in the world? Thousands of people around the world with whom I have shared the video documenting the story have weighed in with their opinions. Some said it helped catalyze the shift in thinking from division to cooperation the world was desperately trying to achieve. Some said it created a powerful sense of hope and possibility that empowered many to invent new solutions. Some said it created the *non sequitur* needed to allow the two super powers to find new footing in their relationship. Some said it empowered the thought leaders in Eastern Europe with hope and new ideas so that the velvet revolution could occur, culminating with the symbolic tearing down of the Berlin Wall. Some said all this would have happened anyway.

Ultimately no one will ever really know if the fire's influence on the hearts and minds of the many around the world translated into these events. What is certain is that the world poised on the precipice of nuclear war somehow miraculously survived. That people under communist oppression miraculously rose up and with minimal bloodshed threw off their bondage. Were these signs of the Great Turning foretold by Grandmother Caroline?

So what is the legacy of the fire and the dream? While there are many aspects that affect people, one universally emerges every time I tell it: the simple fact that this seemingly impossible dream for our world overcame the immense odds against it and actually happened. If this could happen, why not other acts of transformation? The story fuels the fire within to act for profound transformative change for our world.

One such example was told to me by a Dutch delegate who participated in the evolution of the European Economic Community from a trade organization into the politically and economically integrated European Union. During one of their crucial meetings, its opponents had enumerated the reasons why real cooperation could never be achieved. They said: "We will lose our individuality and unique cultures. We will have to depend on others who may not be economically and politically reliable. There is just no way we will be able to put aside all our past history and animosity." When the arguments had been laid out, it was obvious there was no rational counter argument to these fears. A fundamental leap of faith was required that could not be made with logic. A continent was being asked to trust that something better could work in spite of prior experiences to the contrary.

It was at this moment that a leading advocate for the European Union reminded everyone about the story of the flame. He stated: "They too faced immense resistances that seemed impossible to overcome. Yet they overcame these formidable obstacles and birthed an experience of cooperation unprecedented in modern history. That given the opportunity, people were willing to see the world differently and transcend their historic differences."

The delegates realized that a moment had come for their countries to trust without proof. They could not get to their next level of evolution without it. The story of the fire helped build a safety net of trust in their fellow human beings and the possibility of profound transformation. The advocates for the European Union prevailed. It did come into existence and while cooperation is not easy, they are making it work.

There are many stories large and small of how the world coming together for 86 days to receive the light has provided trust where transformation was needed. I was inspired to tell the full story of the fire and the dream because we are once again facing a time of great separation and fear in our world. I have learned when the world contracts it creates great pressure for expansion. The small opening I observed in 1983 is once again in the global psyche beckoning us to step

into it. It is my fervent hope that this story will strengthen the courage and confidence of many to step into this opening. If enough of us make this choice, the Great Turning described in the Hopi prophesy, is inevitable.

So where to begin? I offer seven actions that have the potency, if done by enough people, to further the Great Turning. They all operate from the empowerment premise that it is us who must create the world we want, stated so well in the phrase, “when the people lead, the leaders will follow.” They carry into present time themes and strategies that allowed the world to respond so powerfully to the First Earth Run. They are created as a menu of choice, with some quite simple and others requiring more commitment. And each invites us to carry on the ancient Hopi tradition of the DreamKeeper – one who stewards the profound belief that humanity can live in harmony with each other and the Earth.

7 ACTIONS TO CHANGE THE WORLD

ACTION 1: A CRITICAL MASS OF DREAMKEEPERS – PASS ON THE STORY TO YOUR E-MAIL NETWORK AND INVITE THEM TO DO THE SAME

The starting point for the Great Turning is a critical mass of people who believe it is possible. As I took my tentative first steps to create the First Earth Run, I certainly encountered my share of cynics who said there was no way we could pull this off; people just don't care about such things. And even if we did succeed, the world was too far gone to make any difference. It was painful to experience such hopelessness. Fortunately that was not the norm. Most people were very positive. They told me this vision gave them hope and many wished to help in some way or other. Their hope and enthusiasm strengthened my confidence and provided me the courage to take more steps. Each step I took strengthened my resolve and ability to empower others with my growing conviction that a change was possible.

With the historic opening in the global psyche, this story of possibility can help prepare the soil for belief in the Great Turning to take root. This first action is so simple it can be done in less than 15 minutes. Yet it is profoundly powerful as it creates a worldwide platform for transformation. With the amazing global communication tool of the Internet, we don't need to run around the world with fire to connect and empower a critical mass of humanity. In your e-mail cover letter invite your network and others of influence to read the story and take the actions at www.empowermentinstitute.net/dream.

If enough of us take this action, within a short time, many around the planet will be connected and inspired by the transformative power of this story. This will help seed in the global psyche the new belief that a Great Turning toward peace on earth is possible. It will help generate the genuine hope needed for wholehearted action. It will also provide those to whom you send it an opportunity to participate. As each of us takes the first step, we become more hopeful and create momentum to take another step. Magnify this by many around the world and one can imagine the momentum that will build for the Great Turning.

ACTION 2: EMPOWER THE CHILDREN – PASS ON THE STORY AND INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GREAT TURNING TO THE NEXT GENERATION

The slogan created by UNICEF which hung in the UN General Assembly Hall during the closing ceremony was: "Give the World a Chance: Children Need Peace." The First Earth Run was dedicated to the children of our world and their future. It was the children who opened the hearts of the political leaders with their plea to give them a peaceful world in which to grow up. Many children I met in war-torn parts of our world had lost one or both of their parents to war. All too many had also lost a leg to land mines. I was touched by how emotionally they responded to the torch. It seemed to provide them hope that adults just might be able to create a different kind of world.

The pervasive violence in today's world has caused many of our children to lose hope for their future. Without hope they lose heart. We cannot allow this. The short-term goal of this action is to open our children to hope. The long-term goal is to help them sustain hope by becoming part of the solution. This action helps them directly reduce a major source of conflict in the world: fear of others who seem different from themselves. As children all over the planet begin taking this action, they will discover the power they have to create their immediate world. This will start them on their path of contributing to the Great Turning. The torch will have been passed to the next generation.

As a parent, aunt, uncle, teacher or spiritual guide, invite the child or children in your life to read this story or read it to them. If your computer permits, with your children view or download the 15-minute First Earth Run video at www.empowermentinstitute.net/dream. Also suggest that they view the photo gallery that shows the world in all its beauty and cultural diversity receiving the light. Invite the children to open their hearts and let the story in. To get the full depth, after they have taken in the story, video or photo gallery, have each child tell how the story made them feel. This process opens the heart to our shared humanity and hopes for our world.

Then invite the child or children to contribute to the Great Turning by befriending and learning from those who are different from them. Explain that a major reason for the conflicts in the world is the fear we have about those who are different from us. If we want to create peace in our world, we need to overcome the fears that separate us. As more and more children in the world take this action, these fears will naturally fall away. Invite the child to befriend and learn about schoolmates or others in their community of different cultures, races, religions, or those who are excluded. She or he will need coaching – that is your role. Create time to talk regularly about challenges, successes and learning. When the child has built up confidence and has success stories to share, invite him or her to pass the torch to friends to take this action.

ACTION 3: BEFRIEND THE OTHER – LEARN FROM THOSE DIFFERENT FROM YOU

For the First Earth Run to succeed many people of different cultures, races, religions, and political ideologies had to work together. This was not easy because our differences at times caused us to clash. Each time I was willing to expand my way of thinking and doing things, I felt myself getting bigger and evolving as a human being. I was learning how to include more of humanity's experiences into my world. I also discovered that although there were many differences, there were also many similarities. We each wanted to make a contribution with our lives. We each wanted to create a better future for the children of the world. We each were excited by the possibility to do something important. In the end, it was learning how to combine our differences and similarities that allowed us to succeed.

Our world, separated by cultural, racial, religious and other differences, needs many signing up for the great adventure of learning from those we might otherwise exclude. For the human

experiment to succeed, will require us to stretch beyond our comfort zones and allow in other ways of thinking and doing things. We may not agree with the person's thinking or approach to life, but we and the world will get bigger and evolve through the effort. Do it for your own evolution, as a role model for the children in your life, and as your personal contribution to the Great Turning. As our fear of the other recedes, the world evolves – one person at a time.

This action invites you to befriend and learn from the people who are different from you. Look for them throughout your life: on your block, at work, in your community – or if you are more adventurous – in another part of the world. You can take this action on your own or with a group of friends. If you involve friends, send them to this site www.empowermentinstitute.net/dream to read the story, view the Photo Gallery and discuss this action. If your computer permits, view the video at your gathering. To get the full depth, invite people to tell how the story made them feel. As in the action above with children, allowing the heart to speak about our shared humanity and hopes for our world is deeply healing and empowering.

Then invite each friend to write their answers to two questions: “What can I do in my life to befriend and learn from those who are different from me? What commitment am I willing to make to act on this?” When everyone has finished writing, give each person the opportunity to talk about what they wrote. After all have spoken, ask them to tell what they learned. Periodically invite your friends back to discuss what everyone is learning and to provide one another support.

ACTION 4: FOR THE COMMON GOOD – SHED LIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING IN THE WORLD

We must transform the root of our conflicts if we are to create peace in our world, but that is not enough. We must also learn to consciously envision and create the world we want to live in, rather than be a victim in the one we've inherited. To help catalyze this vision-based approach to change, we honored the people who were inventing solutions for the common good in each community we visited. We called it shedding light on “What's Working in the World.” Some projects were large, some were at the block scale. They ranged from women in a tiny West African village hand-building a dam to irrigate the farms of their community, to a mother in a drug-ridden inner-city Philadelphia neighborhood turning her home into a recreation facility as a safe haven for her son and his friends. Each required vision, determination, skill and cooperation. What it took to succeed was rarely known by anyone other than those directly involved. Turning this hard-won knowledge, one of our planet's greatest and most underutilized resources, into a community legacy was one of our greatest sources of satisfaction.

This action allows you to do the same in your community. Imagine turning your community or neighborhood into a living laboratory where young and old envision how they want it to be and then act on it for the common good. Where each success spawns the knowledge and inspiration to create the next and the next. Where the ethic is: “Everyone helps, that's the way we do things here.” As communities around the world learn how to translate the imagination and good will of their residents into action for the common good, we will create the world we want...one community at a time.

Because we have spread this action successfully to many communities around the world already, we have a wonderful how-to resource for creating a “What's Working in the World Program.” It outlines the criteria for project selection, a community event to honor the projects, promotion to the media and developing the organizing team. You could take this action as part of an existing community-based service organization, neighborhood group, faith-based group,

business, or create your own group. To download this resource go to the “What’s Working in the World” section at www.empowermentinstitute.net/dream.

ACTION 5: UNITIVE IMPULSE – CREATE EXPERIENCES THAT HONOR OUR SHARED HUMANITY

One experience that was indelibly imprinted in my soul was watching the millions of people around the world respond to the fire. Whether they were Masai warriors from the East African savanna, presidents of countries, business leaders, or young children, each reacted with a palpable sense of awe. Witnessing the fire that was encircling the world provided each a moment of connection with our shared humanity. For almost everyone, it was deeply emotional and uplifting. I have come to call this experience the “unitive impulse.” It is that yearning for a connection with other human beings with whom we share this planet.

The key to enabling this connection is providing a way for people to feel connected with one another around the world. This can be done through the arts, ritual, ceremony, education and the media. The First Earth Run was coded with the unitive impulse in every way possible. This included torch passing rituals, candle lighting ceremonies, musical concerts, dance, poetry, and poster competitions, following the journey of the torch around the world through the media and in classrooms. Even speeches of heads-of-state about our human connection and their aspirations for peace on earth. Several heads-of state commented that they had never been asked to talk about such things and how ennobling it was for them.

This action creates an opportunity to help our community, place of faith, service organization, school, or any group with which we are associated, experience the unitive impulse. As more and more people around the world have this experience, it will create the connection so needed to live together in harmony.

A perfect day to have such an event is the United Nations International Day of Peace now commemorated on September 21st. On that day, millions of people around the world participate in activities dedicated to world peace and the celebration of our shared humanity. What better day to celebrate the unitive impulse and our common aspirations as a human family. To learn more about the UN International Day of Peace activities, visit www.internationaldayofpeace.org.

ACTION 6: HELP THE WORLD – CONTRIBUTE TIME AND MONEY TO ISSUES YOU CARE ABOUT

While there is much we can do personally to further the Great Turning, there is much that can be done only by specialized organizations with trained staff. This action invites you to seek out organizations that further issues you care about, and contribute both your time and money to these causes. During the First Earth Run, an organization whose work moved me was the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The First Earth Run drew attention to UNICEF’s work in eradicating preventable childhood diseases and death in the poorest countries of our world. This heightened visibility helped them attract greater financial and volunteer resources. It was a privilege to contribute to UNICEF’s great work. What was unexpected, was how much this contributed to my self-esteem. I was so proud of my association with their important cause.

We have dug ourselves into a hole as a human species, and over the next several decades we will need to work very hard to dig ourselves out. This work must be done at every level, from the local to the international. Accomplishing this goal will require the efforts of all of us. Because of the severity of these problems, I anticipate a new planetary ethic will soon emerge. Our service,

not just our money, will be the price of admission we pay to be able to live on this planet. It will also become the principal way we receive the esteem of our fellow human beings.

This action helps you express or take further the ethic of personal contribution. If you have found an issue that speaks to you, consider offering more of your time and money. Or, broaden your horizons and find other issues for self-expression. If you have not found such an issue yet, look for one that speaks to your heart, inspires you and makes you proud to be associated with it. As you learn about what's going on in your community or the larger world through the media, notice where you are touched. Move toward this and explore what is causing you to have this feeling. This is cue for you. Act on it. Seek out opportunities to contribute your time and money to the issue. Fortunately, most issues already have vehicles through which you can contribute. If one does not exist, consider creating it. As more and more of us step forward, one day we will hear a mother tell her young child, "Everyone helps, that's just the way we do things on this planet."

ACTION 7: THE WORLD HEART – PRAY FOR PEACE ON EARTH

A number of people I approached to participate in the First Earth Run spontaneously began praying for my success. In one country, a woman created thousands of peace candles with the First Earth Run torch logo and gave them to people to use in prayer. She invited them to put these peace candles in their windows to inspire others with their prayers. I am convinced that the many people praying for our success around the world contributed to the grace we experienced. A torch of peace encircling the planet with a fragile band of light was itself a ritual act of prayer.

Praying for peace on earth strengthens our collective aspiration and intention to create the world we want. It invokes the mysterious power of grace. And it strengthens our relationship to the world heart, inspiring us to care and contribute to the betterment of all.

Everyday at noon, in time zones around the world, millions of people pray for peace. One of the prayers used is: "May Peace Prevail on Earth." As a way to keep this prayer in our minds and hearts, Gail and I planted a peace pole in our yard with this prayer in English, Chinese, Arabic and Hopi.

If each day enough of us pray for peace on earth and take some of these actions, a force for transformative change will be unleashed that the world has never seen before. Has the time come? My experience of my fellow human beings tells me that given the opportunity, they rise to the occasion. I believe the time is upon us!

Each September 21st, the International Day of Peace, there is a 24-hour worldwide peace vigil. To learn more about how to participate visit www.idpvigil.com.

FUEL FOR THE JOURNEY

To contribute to the Great Turning requires heart and staying power. I leave you with a poem that deeply inspired us to sustain the journey we had embarked upon, even when it required us to run with an empty stomach. It is written by Bob Bagar, who served as communications director for our team.

WE CARRY THE TORCH

We carry the torch. Not for any special interest, cause or movement, but as a mission of the heart. The torch passed hand to hand, will wreath the earth with a fragile band of light.

We carry the torch. For ourselves, friends, loved ones, the people of the world and our neighbors in the global village, that all might be linked by sharing a commitment to the future of the world and its children.

We carry the torch. We can rejoice in the knowledge that no one is better qualified than we are for the task. With this torch brandished high, we can joust with gods, vanquish fear, rout despair and flash it as a beacon to light all the days ahead.

We carry the torch. We carry it also to honor others who have come before us. Who held it fast – for a precious moment to keep the spark alive before passing the torch now burning brighter with the passion of their conviction.

Of David, there will be one salient line written in the history books. It will say: “He brought a torch around the world in the 20th century. He would not let us lay it down.” Yet he, too, knows the vision is not his alone; it is ours for safekeeping.

If enough of us come to the realization that, “We want to make it”, the world will resonate with that truth. If we want the journey to continue, a new resolve will manifest itself. The torch dramatizes a decision we each must face alone. When we affirm the light, a subtle change occurs. We change from passive observer of the miracle of life, to a champion of its sanctity. When that happens we begin to mobilize others and the balance shifts in favor of survival.

If the First Earth Run does nothing more than bring a quorum of the world’s people to the simple affirmation, that we *care*, that will make the difference. It will be enough of a difference to preserve the future.

This torch is become our mind, our heart, our voice. The stirring accents of the First Earth Run anthem can be heard to the accompaniment of footfalls beating softly on the earth’s outer rim, echoing footfalls of other ears back to the beginning of time.

Let them say of this generation:

They had enough strength to carry the torch, enough courage to venture forth. The immensity of the journey did not deter them. There were a multitude of willing hands to sustain them.

Come ... let us finish this work. Let us celebrate together. Let us come to the banquet table where candles will be bright. Where there will be song and hearts will be filled.

Come to the feast as neither king nor artisan, warrior nor savant, scribe nor patriarch. Come only as a torch bearer. As one of those who brought the light and was strong enough to cross the borders of the night.

Let those of us living on the planet in the 21st century be known as the ones who created the historic great turning toward peace on earth! I wish us all God speed on the journey.

I would be very pleased to know of the actions you take. We will periodically post them as an inspiration to others. I can be reached at: dream@empowermentinstitute.net.

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