

KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

A MESSAGE FROM MARC

On September 11, Violet and I arose early to pack for the flight from Anchorage to San Francisco. However, we were soon transfixed by TV images of the World Trade Center and Pentagon disasters unfolding before our disbelieving eyes. Unable to return to the contiguous forty-eight, we became unwilling participants in a dichotomy not easily reconciled.

Autumn comes early to Alaska, and by the middle of September the state resembles a vast impressionist landscape of birch and aspen trees painted an infinite palate of gold, orange, and red. As reluctant tourists overwhelmed by oppressive emotions dormant since the dark days of Polly's tragedy, this epic beauty lacked luster. Mountains that seem to ascend to heaven itself, populated by free ranging eagles, bears, moose, and caribou appeared as fragile and uncertain as the fallen towers.

Evenings compelled us to watch the drama unfold on television like a flashback enhanced 6,000 times. Whether it is the uncertainty on the faces of people unable to locate relatives against a backdrop of twisted steel girders or the haunting eyes of the missing staring plaintively from thousands of flyers certain truths are fundamental. Regardless of scale, tragedy touches our souls and draws us together, and our community becomes one.

We become introspective, quietly finding balance amidst incomprehensible fear and frenzy, and are able to respond to individual needs with strength and generosity. We open our hearts as we prop each other up with entwined arms. Tragedy gives us the ability to overcome centuries of racial, ethnic, and political obstacles. Just as in the dark days following Polly's kidnapping, we are given pause by realizing the fragility of mortality, and understand that we may be divided by one or two degrees of separation, but certainly not six.

As the source of the evil emerged from the gray dust, more truths became self-evident. Another nihilistic psychopath with an atrocious history has unleashed his hatred and fury upon mankind. The only thing separating Osama bin Laden from Polly's killer is scale. As he cowers in mountain caves, bin Laden deftly wields his considerable powers to convince young men to die in his stead, just as Polly's killer lurked in shadows waiting for opportune

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ENDING BULLYING IN OUR SCHOOLS

By Assemblywoman Sally Havice

September 11, 2001 marked a horrific day in our nation's history. The cowardly and barbaric acts exacted on our people were an example of bullying taken to its worst level. Sending a message through terror won't work, as the perpetrators of these attacks will learn. On a smaller scale, bullying on our K-12 campuses won't work either nor will it be tolerated. This behavior in our schools must be thwarted before it escalates.

Our students continue to face a threat and anxiety-ridden mood that pervades our schools and places our children at peril. An optimal learning environment must also include an atmosphere of trust and comfort for children. School violence is no longer a topic to be discussed theoretically; it is an omnipresent and shattering reality—a reality we never thought would materialize.

An Escalating Problem

There was a time, in an era that now seems so long ago, when chewing gum or being late to class constituted poor behavior in school. These are certainly not actions that can be condoned, yet they pale in comparison to the elevated degree of bad behavior that is snowballing at an accelerated rate. Gum chewing and tardiness would be a welcome relief compared to today's bullying. The last time I looked, gum-chewing and tardiness did not lead to escalated violence as witnessed in cases like the school shootings in Littleton, Colorado (Columbine) or in Santee, California.

Bullying has existed as long as I remember—I'm sure it has roots in



CA Assemblywoman Sally Havice

the dawn of civilization. Some kids and adults get a perverse joy out of trying to make someone else feel inferior. Supposedly these bullies feel superior at their victim's expense. I remember when bullies made stupid remarks, yet these remarks were not at the level that could necessarily psychologically scar another student. Threats were not made against another student's personal safety. Today's bully has upped the ante.

Excuses cannot be made for the kind of violence that horrified this nation as a result of the Columbine shootings. What needs to be probed, however, is what corollary exists between bullying and violence. Witness accounts, anecdotes, and plain common sense indicate that there is a link. Harassment, teasing,

and threats will surely create a climate where tensions simmer below the surface and ultimately rise to a furious boil.

Anti-Bullying Legislation

To counteract school violence, the time has come for, not merely talk, but action. No longer can we put school violence off as tomorrow's problem, for it has become today's headache. School safety must take the place of school violence. I have introduced state legislation to make our school environment safer—a climate that existed in an idyllic time of the past.

California Governor Davis has signed my legislation, Assembly Bill 79 (Chapter 646), which aims to thwart the heart of conflict and the consequent violent repercussions. This bill would develop a policy as part of a school's comprehensive school safety plan for preventing bullying and resolving conflict. The California Department of Education would be required to develop model policies on bully prevention and conflict resolution. School districts may then choose to incorporate one or both of these options into their local school safety plan. This is not state-mandated.

Bullying is a warning sign to future violence, as was the case with the school shootings in the San Diego

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ANTI-BULLYING MEASURE (CONT.)

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area earlier this year. Victims of bullying suffer depression, anxiety, poor academic performance (participating less in class and not attending school), low self-esteem, physical illness, and as a last resort, suicide. These victims can also become so frustrated that they become the bullies and retaliate with violence.

A Case in Point

Jim Meyers of Eastern Senior High School in Voorhees, New Jersey, was a case in point, where bullying pushed this student to the precarious edge of retaliating with mass violence. Luckily Jim's fermenting rage was preempted before he could act out his violent fantasies. This boy was continuously teased for poor hygiene and his choice of clothing, and he was often mocked as being "retarded" by school bullies. On an ABC Television news investigation, Jim said the incessant bullying "wears away at you...[Students] are laughing at my pain." This beleaguered boy said that he had an "unfocused hatred" and that he was contemplating taking his anger to "the next level." In short, Jim wanted to get back at students who teased and bullied him.

Jim Meyers' anger was held in check as thoughts and words that did not translate into bloodshed. How many Jim Meyers are there who suffer in silence and are on the verge of staging another Columbine? The difference between dangerous thoughts and their execution into action is that, in the case of Jim Meyers, school administrators saw the warning signs and reacted promptly and accordingly to counsel

Jim and control the situation so it would not escalate into violence. Quite simply, some foresight and perceptibility is needed by adults and peers to address a potentially violent situation. We cannot live in denial.

Collaborating to End It

The frequency of bullying in California is alarming. According to the California Association of School Psychologists, 10 to 15 percent of children say they are or have been bullied. One in seven students between grades seven and nine have been the victim of a bully or are a bully. More than 18 percent of seventh graders report they have been threatened or bullied at school. When one looks at these numbers, it is obvious that our schools are powder kegs ready to explode.

We must collaborate to end this ugly problem in our schools. No organization, be it public or private, should be left out of the fold. As Chair of the Assembly Select Committee on School Safety, I have held and am holding hearings throughout this state to define the issue of bullying, exchange ideas and brainstorm, and seek resolution.

Preventing school violence and promoting school peace is not something that can be clinically learned from a textbook. Through AB 79, I intend on extinguishing the uncivilized practice of bullying. But attitudes must also change. We must help our children learn to become members of the education community along with parents, teachers, counselors, and principals. These parties must learn to communicate with and among each

I AM

By Drew, Age 12

I am just a regular kid with an unsure future
I wonder what I will be when I grow up
I hear myself think about my future
I see time wiz past me with my head in the clouds
I want to be successful someday
I am just a regular kid with an unsure future

I pretend that I can fly
I feel proud about it
I touch the sky and reach for the stars
I worry about my future too much
I cry thinking of what I could and couldn't be
I am just a kid with an unsure future

I understand a little bit more every day
I say those ten words over and over
I dream about everything that could go wrong
I try not to say it
I hope I would stop saying it too
I am just a regular kid with a future

other. Differences must be resolved with constructive words, not rumors, fists, knives, or guns. Prevention is the key.

We learn from the past on how to make schools a safe haven for our children once again. The end result will be greater productivity so school can serve its intended purpose—to educate.

Assemblywoman Sally Havice chairs the Assembly Select Committee on School Safety. She is serving her third term. ■

THE NON-PROFIT CHALLENGE IN POST-TERRORIST AMERICA

By Marc Klaas

With certain high profile exceptions, it has never been easy for non-profit agencies to acquire the funding that is necessary to provide service to and educate the populations they serve. However, as difficult an obstacle as that may have been in the past, the events of September 11 created an even more daunting dynamic. It remains difficult to look at the horrific images of the attack upon the World Trade Center towers without expressing some form of physical revulsion. When the second jetliner slashed into the World Trade Center it was like a knife thrust into the heart of America. That was the moment everything changed—nearly 6,000 people lost their lives and the earth itself shuddered in disbelief.

It is estimated that agencies have already raised more than \$1.04 billion for disaster relief and will keep asking for more, but most haven't said what they will do with the leftover funds.

Because of the mind-numbing destruction inflicted by the terrorists, it is appropriate that the majority of charitable donations be directed toward disaster relief. Yet, what is considered an adequate threshold? On October 17, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* estimated that agencies have already raised more than \$1.04

billion for disaster relief, including more than \$452 million in donations to the American Red Cross alone. Although many charities “keep asking for more and more money,” according to Daniel Borochoff, president of the American Institute of Philanthropy, most charities haven't said what they will do with leftover funds.

Fundraising for Other Charities

Charities like the KlaasKids Foundation, which are not directly associated with 9/11 disaster relief, will find it increasingly difficult to fulfill their missions in post-terrorist America. Unfortunately, the needs of communities served by non-disaster relief agencies do not cease when psychopaths blow up our skyscrapers. For instance, of the 876,213 persons reported missing to America's law enforcement agencies in 2000, 85% were children. 152,265

of all missing persons were categorized as either endangered or involuntary. Sixty-seven percent of all victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies are under the age of 18; 34% of all victims were under age 12; and one of every seven victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies were under age 6. Given the context of the times, these statistics should be considered epidemic; but, alas, they are not. Non-disaster relief agencies will have to employ more creative communication techniques and innovative fundraising solutions if they hope to survive this critical transition period.

One area that can potentially bridge the gap between huge, well-funded agencies and small organizations is the vast suite of communication tools offered through the Internet. With proper design, support and positioning, the Web and email can enable small organizations to achieve maximum visibility and impact.

Maximizing Our Web Presence

Although many organizations established an online presence in the early to mid-'90s, several factors doomed them to failure. Initially, the Internet did not provide enough traffic to target audiences to justify the investment and many organizations were not able to survive the diminished return. For instance, in January 1990, there were 1,120,000 Internet and 3,400,000 email users worldwide, but by January 2000 those numbers had increased to 337,000,000 Internet and 447,000,000 email users, making the World Wide Web the fastest-growing media in world history.

Another early fallacy concerned advertising revenues. Many organizations borrowed money against estimated earnings that never developed. Finally, as its popularity increased, many organizations were waylaid by animation, music, and other slick technologies that emphasized amusement over content. Unfortunately, browser speeds unable to keep pace with technology resulted in many organizations losing their audience as they took longer and longer to load.

By way of illustration, the KlaasKids Foundation website, launched in April 1996, at the onset of the trial for Polly's killer, emphasized the issues on the forefront of our agenda: crimes against children and pro-active

solutions to those crimes. By closely monitoring statistical information we determined that our Megan's Law page drove the majority of traffic. To follow up on early success, we made a comparative analysis of every state's implementation of Megan's Law and organized it on an interactive map color coded to emphasize Internet access. Currently, we directly link to more than 150 web pages in 35 states that give personal and locator information on registered sex offenders.

The Internet also encourages international interactivity, as it has no geographical boundaries and is constrained only by language and ideological barriers. Our online advocacy resulted in two visits to Great Britain last year to promote Sarah's Law, a British version of Megan's Law. We also receive many queries from as far away as Russia and South Africa. Users in Saudi Arabia access our website more often than users from any other country except the United States.

By following certain management principles, focusing on substance instead of style, without consideration for profit, and by maximizing the strengths of the Internet, the KlaasKids Foundation website at www.klaaskids.org has become a leading children's advocacy resource that consistently receives 500,000 visits per month.

Finding New Roads to Funding

Unwilling to rest on our laurels, KlaasKids is approaching the coming funding crisis in the following ways. We have added banners so that our supporters can easily donate vehicles or other property to the Foundation, as we believe that this is one area of charitable giving that will not be so directly impacted by the emphasis on WTC disaster relief. We are also upgrading and updating our website to make it more easily navigated and relevant to the times. And finally, we will be reformulating and reformatting this publication, the *Klaas Action Review*, for eventual electronic distribution instead of hard copy in an attempt to cut overhead and increase distribution.

The Internet is still a medium of vast opportunity and incredible potential. For instance, our most recent online venture, Beyond Missing (www.beyondmissing.com), is a revolutionary concept that will save lives and eases the burden on law enforcement and families whenever children are kidnapped. The Internet is a marvelous tool that can greatly enhance the success of any non-profit if it is pursued with vision and creativity. Otherwise, one risks becoming another missed hit on the endless journey to information and education. ■

MARC'S MESSAGE

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moments to convince little girls that he meant them no harm.

The mad Arab uses religion and inequality to excuse and justify murder in the same way that the killer used drugs and alcohol. Both commit heinous crimes for instant self-gratification, without consideration for the consequences of their actions. Like all psychopaths, they lack conscience and consideration—therefore they have no empathy for the children they murder with impunity. It is inevitable that given the chance, such men will strike again. They cannot be successfully treated or cured; therefore they cannot be trusted in negotiation or surrender.

Hatred finds its own depth when children become viable targets in war. The twisted logic of the psychopath predictably asserts his cowardice through his declaration to destroy the future rather than attempting to convert it. We shake our heads in dismay as we battle this moral depravity by holding our children closer, loving them more, reassuring them constantly, and demonstrating strength and courage through example.

Through this act, society redefines not only its role models, but its heroes as well. Overpaid actors and athletes are replaced by men and women in working class uniforms and stay-at-home moms. When we collectively muster the courage to stare the devil in the eye, we challenge rather than yield to his adversity. Yet our anxieties are not easily alleviated, for the lessons of the World Trade Center are stark and vivid: Even the most formidable edifice can be reduced to gray dust in less than a minute.

Terrorism comes in many guises and is predictable only in its depravity. Whether it is the baby killer or the holy warrior, the end result—an unyielding march toward destruction—must be acknowledged and addressed or we become indentured to violence and slaves of fear. Memorial services continue to honor the victims of the World Trade Center and Pentagon disasters; if America were to mourn only one day for each victim we would not emerge from our grief for more than sixteen years. Right now a million candles, lit in homage, create beacons of light in the darkness. If we fail to eradicate evil, the candles will flicker out and we will be enveloped in darkness forever more. ■

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

The KlaasKids Foundation relies entirely on the gifts given by its thousands of loyal supporters. It would be impossible to list each one of you due to lack of space; therefore, in this donor roster, we recognize those who have made a special effort, giving a gift of \$50 or more. However, gifts of any size are always welcome. Many thanks for your wonderful generosity on behalf of America's children.

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