



CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Remembering the dream...

maid or day laborer...

I was only a teen but became smitten with King's prose instead of Beatles' songs and began to ponder his intriguing questions: Why is it that people pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water?

King's book cited references from Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" and Jacob Riis, a social reform journalist whose muckraking treatises exposed poverty in the slums of New York. These captivating passages provoked me to write about King's premises for the school paper.

My socioeconomic report, the first story I ever published, appeared in March 1968. While it arched some teachers' eyebrows and drew yawns from my peers more interested in dating than social reform, it did receive a Quill & Scroll Award for high school journalism. Thus, a modern-day muckraker was born.

Three weeks later, King was assassinated while campaigning for striking trash collectors. New York erupted in racial violence where I rode the subway to school in terror of marauding gangs. Carrying King's book for protection, I clung to his words:

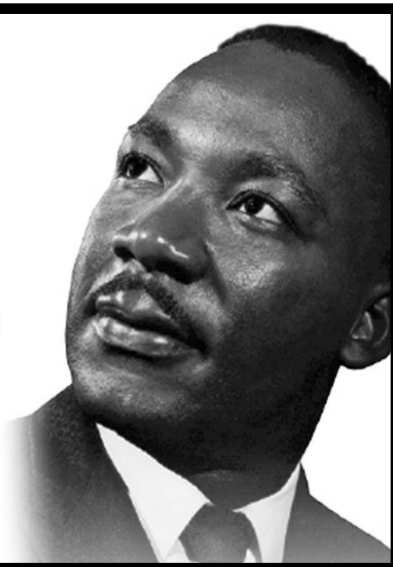
I have decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems...

King was gone but his message had inspired a career in social justice journalism. The reality of my first job revolved around mundane weather reports, police blotters, obituaries and bridal columns for the "women's pages" instead of exposés. But I would keep asking King's tough questions.

The opportunity arose during a routine general assignment responding to an emergency call from an eld-

"Our Lives
begin to end
the day we
become silent
about the things
that matter..."

— Martin Luther King Jr.



erly widow during a bitter subzero cold wave. With a meager fixed income, she couldn't afford the utility bill and the power company had shut off the heat.

Inspired by King, I probed and wrote: "How does this happen in the wealthiest nation in the Western world?"

The Associated Press picked up the story, which reached the desk of a state senator whose outrage triggered legislation protecting low-income seniors from utility shut-offs in sub-freezing weather. An ordinary story in my backyard catalyzed social justice for thousands of people. I was hooked and never looked back, trading high-speed chases for in-depth analyses that posed King's questions.

Investigative reporting didn't build a 401K but a treasure trove of social justice triumphs instead. Over a 20-year span, those reports won rights for Chino miners and back pay for striking shipyard laborers, helped raise minimum wages and funds for uninsured cancer patients, produced shelter for the homeless and meals for

shut-in seniors, shed light on subminimum wages and immigration issues, reduced an unjust jail sentence and even saved lives through a "Truth in Medicine" series.

Above all, each story, always crowned with a King quote, opened minds and hearts.

I later realized that social justice journalism isn't about exposing vice. It's about giving a voice to the "invisible" people in our communities, the ones who don't write letters or show up at town halls, and who often don't vote because they feel their lives don't matter. It's about offering solutions for positive change and carrying King's message of "infinite hope."

When I began writing stories celebrating the contributions of firefighters, teachers, volunteers, veterans, nurses, cooks and dishwashers, I realized the social justice dream of my teens had finally come to fruition.

As I burnt toast with breakfast waitresses, rode with trash collectors, scrubbed toilets with janitors and made beds with the hotel maids King championed, together we answered

his vital questions.

What would King say to us now if he was alive? I believe he would remind us, in his timeless words that seem written for the divine chaos and current "winter of our discontent," that we are all one and that all lives matter, including homeless ones.

True compassion is more than just flinging a coin to a beggar. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. Unity is the great need of the hour. We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart...

Where do we go from here?

Social justice doesn't require us to become journalists, judges, labor leaders, lawyers or legislators. It's about each of us tossing elitism aside, standing by our truth and serving one another despite our differences.

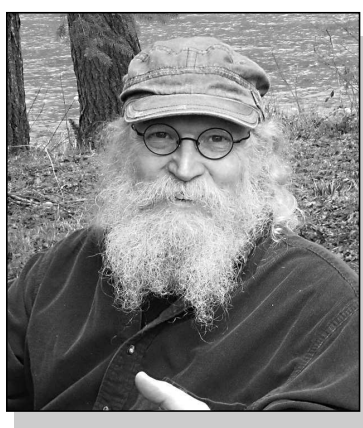
It means treating everyone with kindness and compassion on the job, the phone, the road; at the drive-through and in the restaurant; on the grocery line, online, at school and at home. By choosing love, every person becomes a hero and fulfills the dream of Martin Luther King.

Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't need a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love...

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning journalist who writes about the "Extraordinary People" of Florence.

Email her at CJReditor@gmail.com.

VIEW FROM UPRIVER



WESLEY VOTH
For the Siuslaw News

Being true as a nation to what we put on paper

So it wasn't for a couple more years that I heard the name of the man who would do more to make me a patriot and engage me in service to my country than anyone ever has.

Four years later, the spring of my ninth-grade year, Martin Luther King Jr. came out publicly against the Vietnam War, making him a villain among some of my teachers — but even more the hero in our church.

I began to read about him in news magazines, and things that he had written were available at my Quaker Meeting. When I first pricked up my ears to his words, he was talking about poverty, not race. He talked about workers riding for hours on buses to make just a few bucks doing work that was considered beneath the dignity of the rich; he was talking about young men who were being drafted to go fight in a place thousands of miles away before they even had a right to vote.

He was talking about my world.

I had not witnessed much racial tension, although I had seen "Whites Only" signs in Portland when I was small. But that summer of 1967, on the cover of Life Magazine, I saw a photo of what looked like a white police officer shooting buckshot into the back of a 12-year-old black boy, with

"I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land."

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
Memphis, Tenn. speech the night before his death

more of those photos inside the magazine.

A friend of mine and I cut those photos out and put them up on the wall of his garage bedroom where I would see them frequently for the next several years.

We added war pictures and those of peace marches. In my pre-television days, those photos were especially powerful.

When King was assassinated, we were incredibly upset. I began to read more, and to be moved by his words and nonviolent resistance methods, as well as the civil disobedience which resonated with my religious training and values.

I wanted to be able to return love in response to hate, even though it was very hard to do, and slowly I began to be able to live out the things I believed and

wanted to embody. When I became a fifth-grade public school teacher in Hawaii, it was part of King's famous speech that I assigned to be memorized by my students rather than Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; it made a lot more sense to my students than what I had stumbled over as a student at that age.

This past week, I have been listening to some of King's speeches, sermons and lectures. There are many available on the Internet that I had never heard before. I find them moving still.

And relevant.

Especially his still-to-be-heeded charge that it's time as a nation that we live up to the words that we put down on paper — the Declaration of Independence, and Constitution with its Bill of Rights.

The most moving speech I came across, and the one I find most relevant to me as an old white man in 2017 near the end of his life, is one he gave to a group of black junior high students in 1967.

The points in his "What is in your life's blueprint?" speech are:

1. Have a deep belief in your own worth; in your own significance; and that you matter.

2. Determine to achieve excellence; find your life's work and be ready to go through the doors that are open to you.

3. When you decide what you're going to do, do it well.

4. Be committed to the eternal principles of Beauty, Love and Justice. Don't allow anyone to pull you so low that you hate them; don't let anyone cause you to lose your self-respect so that you do not struggle for justice.

5) You have a responsibility to make your nation a better nation in which to live, to make life better for everyone.

6) You must be involved in the struggle for freedom and justice.

7) Do not give yourself to things that will not solve our problems.

These work for me as my resolutions as I turn 65.

Because another thing I share with Martin Luther King Jr. is a birthday.