

Youth Service held at First Parish, March 4, 2007

RUTH WIEDERECT

REFLECTION

“THE NOW GENERATION”

March 4, 2007

“Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end” is my father favorite song lyrics. When looking at them I guess it holds true to almost everything and especially the seniors in this class who face a new beginning, the post high school experience. We are looking to leave the small town where everyone knows everyone and their business. But every end we are forced to reflect on what ever seems to be ending. I guess this is just me reflecting on the past four years. What has it been like growing up in Needham, the nature of it is quite a paradox. You may feel confined but at the same time people struggle to leave the monotony of it all. You realize what you are leaving and you are leaving everything that you are familiar to you, your friends, the every day pressures and social norms. But what have these social norms been, the embarrassing moments that everyone seems to have in middle school and the small traditions that you hold near to your heart. Many may be questioning if our experience *is* really that different from your own, and in ways it may not be.

In this piece of the sermon I would like to elaborate on my experience growing up in Needham. I would classify myself as an average teenager growing up in Suburbia. I have grown up with a cell phone and iPod, I can navigate around the internet and chat online. I have had braces and had to grow into my awkward body therefore suffering countless number of embarrassing moments. But what have I been doing for the past four years in high school? The years have blended themselves together but for the sake of argument let's take an average day like last Tuesday. I get up at 6: 30, shower and get ready and drive my brother and myself to school. I go to class and nod off in classes such as statistics. Then I seem to by a miracle survive the day take my brother home, baby sit go to the gym and finally go to my homework. Sounds average I guess, but in the teenagers in Needham face abnormal pressures. 95% of our class will go to college and

that is the only option presented to you junior year. We compete for the top grades and the social stress is to do well in school. The students recognize that most of the time that their biggest competition to get into a certain college is the other students from Needham. For months conversations are dominated on who got in where and what the acceptance rate for each school is. The gossip transfers from who is dating who and who get in where. Even the teachers are sucked into the vortex of college. A small anecdote that I would like to share, is the small experiment that my friends tried. He started a rumor about himself that he had been accepted into Yale, it only took 48 hours for someone to congratulate his mother, a school librarian on her son's acceptance to Yale. It just goes to show the culture of Needham and how involved people become in everything that is remotely college related.

Then again Needham isn't all bad; I do a lot of complaining just for the dramatic effect. When I was writing this my parents really forced me to look at what I am going to be leaving next year or what I would miss. My off the bat answer was nothing in this boring town. Upon some time I realized the location did not mean much to me but the community meant the world. Thanks to the ¼ acre zoning for houses that Needham has you are close to your neighbors. I know that I am not just in distance but in friendship to. It is typical of Needham to have neighborhoods with actual friendly neighbors who have block parties in the summer. Those people, the people that I have known my entire life, will be the ones that I will miss.

Needham is made up of pockets of communities, which includes the people of this church. The impact that the church has made on me is profound to say the least. I have been instilled with a desire to continue to follow through with community service projects. I have had the most fortunate experiences, between Tennessee and New Orleans, to work with people who care and exemplify what it means to be a UU. This has forced me to grow as a person but at the head of all this is John Buehrens. He went on both service trips and has been someone with a dramatic effect on my maturation process. He has pushed me to a vocal part of the youth group. Not only has he been a personal mentor for me but Luke can verify the fact that he was apart of our passing the AP US History Test as he could quiz us while standing in line for a snow cone. He, as have many other adults apart of youth group show how much they care about us by doing little

things. This caring shows us the importance of our work and causes *us* love the work that we do. In this sense I guess I have a slightly unique Needham experience. We have grown up with OWL, bonding moments out of surprise and slight scarring. Many here have gone through the process of writing their Credo and going to other places of worship. This exposure causes our eyes to be opened to the world or the ideas that are all around us. We might just remember the amazing pie that we eat at the Zen Center but the experience of going there could not be replaced. Together this shows us what it means to grow up apart of the UU church and that community.

DANIEL MOORE

REFLECTION

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Everyday I wake up I thank God. I thank God for everything I have been blessed with. My parents, my health, my home, food, clothing, everything I have. I thank God for being lucky enough to be born into the circumstance that I have been. Being born here in Needham, a wealthy community, with an extremely low crime rate, and very good schools. While there are indeed exceptions, the vast majority of Needham's youths have been born with these advantages. We can leave our houses without fear of attack, and can return home safely assured that we will have electricity, water, food, and heat. We live our entire lives knowing (albeit sometimes unconsciously) that we are relatively invincible. In the unlikely circumstance someone is seriously injured, we have health insurance and hospitals to take care of us. The key concept of these blessings is that we have been born with them. We did nothing to earn them, it was all luck of the draw. They were a gift. It is this piece which I feel is often forgotten. Many of our fortunate youths are raised to believe that they are in fact not the recipients of good fortune, but that they in fact *deserve* everything they have. That somehow, they have more of a right to their lifestyle than children who were born into less fortunate conditions. Whether this is conscious knowledge or ingrained and unconscious, it is a huge issue. It breeds a sense of entitlement, a lack of compassion and a lack of responsibility to anything other than the individual and their immediate surroundings. Equally important it breeds a loss of perspective. Not only do we feel entitled to our fortunate lifestyle, but we do not even realize how good we really have it. What we have isn't enough. We need the \$200 jeans, the \$150 shoes, the fastest cars, we need everything to be bigger faster, newer, and more expensive than the next guys. It becomes not enough to live in a community and a home that some people literally die trying to achieve. And why? Cause we worked for it? Cause we sacrificed? No, cause we were born in the right place, that is the only reason, and that is what we forget. It is this unrealistic sense of entitlement that creates issues that spread beyond the individual. Kids feel that they have somehow earned what they

have and that it therefore should be exclusive to them. It is this attitude which has bred opposition to low income housing and the habitat for humanity project in our town. I have literally heard people say “My parents worked their asses off for what we have now and it’s not our responsibility to take care of every heroin addict who can’t get their life together.”

This sense of entitlement and arrogance, companied with a lack of compassion, creates a survival of fittest mentality. If you don’t succeed, then too damn bad, suck it. This is an extremely dangerous attitude to adopt when dealing with children at risk. It puts an extremely unrealistic pressure on a lot of kids. It pressures them to ignore their problems, repress their individuality, and attempt to forge for themselves a lifestyle and a persona that may be contrary to who they are. How is a kid supposed to grow into themselves when they are being forced to grow into a mold? How are you supposed to take time to take care of yourself when you have practice after school, work in the evening, three hours of homework, and need to be ready to do it again on maybe 4 hours of sleep the next day, 5 days a week, for 9 months a year? When do you have time to just be a kid? It’s important to learn responsibility and develop a strong work ethic but there has got to be a better way.

So what do we do about this? A lot of people like to blame the schools or the media and while both are a significant part of it, both are reflections of the people who run them. While it’s easy to view them as nameless, faceless corporations or administrators, it’s simply not accurate. These are people just like us, living in Needham and towns just like Needham all over the country. We can’t afford to pretend that it’s all on them. We can’t just them all in a room and say “Figure it out” because like it or not, we are just as responsible as them. We have to be part of figuring it out. We have to be active in making a difference in the lives of kids in our community. It is the responsibility of the entire community to take care of our kids, and make sure that they are put in positions to succeed, which means more than grades and prestigious colleges. It means developing a strong foundation of morals and self confidence with which kids can build on. It means raising happy and well adjusted individuals. Unfortunately it seems that often in Needham confidence and happiness overflow into arrogance and just being spoiled.

The biggest problem with Needham isn't the schools, it isn't the media, it's the attitudes. Parents who work their asses off for what they have in order to give their kids a better quality of life, the ones who have sacrificed and truly deserve what they have, must make sure to remind their kids of this. That to deserve it we as kids have to earn it. That to walk around with a false sense of entitlement is not only unacceptable, but completely unjustified. That we as kids are lucky and have an unfair advantage. That we have a responsibility to give back to and take care of our community. A responsibility to help those who aren't as lucky as us. That when tragedy strikes, it's on all of us to do something about it, whether it is in the inner city or at home. That someday it could be our kid, who is a victim of the very attitudes and lifestyles that we create. We live in a community of tremendous opportunity and fortune, and we must all take an active part in living up to this and preserving it.

LUKE WILDER

REFLECTION

“THE NOW GENERATION”

March 4, 2007

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

Lao Tzu (570-490 B.C.)

When I first looked at the topic, I had absolutely no clue where to go. Having been through the process of college, now all we do is wait. So instead of talking about what has happened, I think it is important to look at what is to come. The now generation, my generation is going to be faced with unimaginable challenges from every side. The only way we can ever find an accurate means of shaping and understanding our world is to look within, to see exactly the change we want to make in this world. There is one

thing, looming on my horizon that truly challenges me to define my world. Four months from now, this government is going to send me a small card, and mandate that I sign up for the draft if it ever gets reinstated. This poses a great challenge to me, simply because I do not believe in the killing of other human beings. It is my believe that our government is blackmailing me into signing this letter by threatening to levy a fine upon me, or put me in jail because I have a different view of the world, and am morally opposed to systematic indoctrination into a war machine designed to take the lives of other human beings, and that is a value and principle I have carried and will continue to carry with me for the rest of my life.

I am the future, we are the future. Every single face up on this stage represents the face of the future, and 10 years from now we will be the ones forging the potential for this country and this world to grow. It is time we looked within to understand what direction our hearts will us to go. College and technology have and will continue to provide us with the tools to shape our world, but it is only when we harness these tools that we will be able to achieve what we seek to achieve. If we do not take our stand, if we do not work our hardest to make the world better, then we have truly failed. I know there are people in this audience who would not agree with me, who share a common faith, but not all of the same beliefs. I am truly proud to be with those people today because I want to send each and every one of you the exact same message. FDR said "We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon." If you too have hope and believe in this better world, it is your responsibility and your duty as a citizen of this earth to do everything within your power to achieve this greater good you seek. For me, this means peace, because peace for me is

not an ends, it is the means to its own ends. Violence and war will not beget peace, peace will beget peace. In the words of Spinoza “Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.” And if you share my goals, then I join Lao Tzu in asking you to seek the peace within, and harness that to spread peace in the world, because that is the only way we will ever truly be one world, linked together peacefully because we are all one people, human beings. Listen for a moment, to this room, where man and woman of all different age and beliefs, thoughts and feelings, and hopes and dreams can come together as one. That...is the sound of peace.

And in one-way or another, I don't think I am alone in my search for peace, so I leave you with this:

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Isaiah, II:4