
**Concerned
Educators
Allied for a
Safe
Environment**



CEASE NEWS Vol. 25: No. 2, Fall 2004

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**In Memory of Peggy Schirmer
1914 - 2004**

Remembering Peggy: *Voices from the Network*

I am probably not the only person on the edges of this group who was profoundly affected by just one chance to meet Peggy. About 10 years ago I came to one of the (probably) many retreats that began with a meeting at Peggy and Boone's house. The open and welcoming spirit of that home is still with me. I remember sitting in a room full of books as Howard Zinn planned a CEASE session at the NAEYC conference. Later at the kitchen table I sensed Peggy's intelligence and integrity, the power of her perspective as a teacher of young children, and the respect that radiated between Boone and Peggy as they told stories from their life together. So few people seem able to live a life of deep heart and mind, I think Peggy was one of those few and even one evening with her was a gift.

Alison Lutton

Peggy has been a powerful force in my life. She has been a teacher, a model—of how one can fight for social justice with patience and by taking small, deliberate steps, a friend who has been a peacemaker in relationships and everyday life. Peg showed me how an activist can see the ugly truth but not stop being hopeful and working for change. It's hard to let go of those we love, it's a sad time for us and all who love Peg.

Nancy Carlsson-Paige

She's an inspiration to all of us, and will remain so, but I'll miss the twinkle in her eye.

John Surr

Spending my year with Peggy was an amazing experience—I felt like their kitchen table was the axis for the world. So many visitors and so much conversation, connecting and organizing went on daily. Peggy had kind words for everyone and a positive outlook that could not be had anywhere else. She and Boone are an amazing team! Their door and hearts were always open to welcome friends and strangers into their world of creating justice for all.

Karel Kilimnik

That kitchen table at which we have all sat and shared, brainstormed, and held one another is the symbol which immediately came to my mind as well.

Susan Hopkins

Thoughts of love are going to Peggy and her family from all of us today. We have had the good fortune to have known Peggy, and now it is good to be focusing on how to continue the work on the path she created for us.

Lucy Stroock

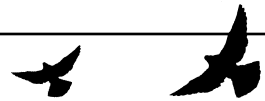
Dear Peg,

The time will come when the world will renounce nuclear war and we will have been part of that struggle.

*My love and respect,
Mary Daniels*



In Memoriam



CEASE members across the land mourn the death of Peggy Schirmer. Peggy died August 8, 2004, at home surrounded by her family. Her life as peace and justice activist will continue to inspire our work and support us with her vision of a safer world for children.

Born and educated in England, Peggy came to the U.S. as a young woman interested in economics, and justice, particularly working conditions for women. After marriage to fellow activist, Boone Schirmer, while raising their children, she worked as a seamstress and was a representative for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union negotiating wages and prices for piecework. Throughout their childhood her children remember participating in protests with their mother: against segregation, for hot school lunches and against the Vietnam War.

In her fifties, Peggy went to Tufts University for a degree in early childhood education. She taught preschool and became director at the Radcliffe Child Care Center and then at Cambridge Headstart. During 1970 she traveled to Mexico to learn Spanish and to Cuba to work with the Cuban Ministry of Education. In 1985 she went to China, the Netherlands and Denmark to learn about child care in other cultures. Her perspective was global, and her commitment was to all children everywhere.

In 1979, as the Nuclear Freeze movement was growing in the U.S. Peggy organized a workshop at the annual NAEYC National Conference entitled “Nuclear Weapons, Our Legacy to our Children?” Sixteen teachers found each other at this workshop. This group became CEASE, Concerned Educators Allied for a Safe Environment. Soon CEASE became a national network committed to generating a strong voice among early childhood educators continuing to protest the development of nuclear weapons which threaten our world and the children we strive to protect. As membership grew the mission became focused on the broad view of “safety” as articulated by Peggy and others. Safety for children is a global issue. It goes beyond the classroom and the playground to include: safety from nuclear weapons, from pollution, safety from war and weapons in our neighborhoods, and safety from economic and social injustice. The CEASE Newsletter began in 1980 and was edited and mailed from Peggy’s kitchen table for the next 20 years. An annual CEASE Seminar has been offered at the NAEYC Conference ever since.

Peggy attended the NAEYC Board meetings at the annual conference and “respectfully submitted” suggestions for ways the Association could address the issues of social policy which so directly affect children’s lives: welfare reform, violence in society, war toys, violence on T.V. Her quietly spoken statements, and her editorials in CEASE News, strongly placed these topics in the larger context of militarism in conflict with life-giving social policies. In 1995 she wrote, “reliance on military dominance permeates our whole society endangering international relations, glorifying violence in the media and wasting the resources needed here and abroad to build a safe and healthy world for children.”

Whether protesting war toys and media violence, or nuclear weapons and both the wars in Iraq, Peggy did not waste time on anger. She got active and persevered. Her model of educator/activist will serve us well as we confront the continuing conflicts in our world and our nation. As the late Jane Davidson wrote at the time of the 20th Anniversary of CEASE, “Thank you, Peggy, for making us all feel that what we do is important.”

Peggy's Words *from CEASE Newsletters*

The Teacher as Peace Advocate,

CEASE News, Winter, 1985

Teachers need to advocate on three levels. First we must advocate for taking children's concerns seriously, secondly we must advocate for their real immediate needs as against the cut-backs and above all we must advocate to prevent nuclear war and for disarmament.

Taking children's fears seriously. This is our first responsibility. Let me read you a few examples of these concerns:

A kindergarten child: "I wish people couldn't just go and blow one country to look like junk."

A six year old boy asked his older brother if that airplane overhead was carrying nuclear weapons.

"I carry around this fear within me all the time, it is a lump inside myself.

As advocates we should not leave teachers out there alone either. *They* need help, support groups where they can share ideas about how to help children who are concerned. All teacher training institutions should include courses on the nuclear danger, dealing with teachers' own fears, those of children and the anxieties of their parents. Teachers must be prepared to deal with these issues....
(From a talk by Peggy at a pre-conference session at NAEYC National Conference, Nov. 1984)

Environmental Problems,

Editorial, CEASE News, Winter, 1989

....Even as [nuclear] plants are closed and we learn that clean-up costs are expected to be \$110 billion the Department of Energy and the Pentagon are talking about building new plants for the making of plutonium and tritium.

Our government seems not to have learnt from this history of disaster, moral and physical, but is ready to continue in the same tragic path, sacrificing the health and safety of people in the name of

"national security." Where is the leadership for a new era of arms reduction and the ending of the cold war? It must come from the people who are concerned about our environment. It must come from people who care about all aspects of the environment. We must become involved and ask our government to follow. The Kindergarten Pledge (by Lillian Genser, 1977) must become our pledge, children and adults together.

*I pledge Allegiance to the World
To Care for Earth and Sea and Air,
To Cherish Every Living Thing,
With Peace and Justice Everywhere!*

Victory for the Environment and the Cree People

Report on a Hearing in Boston,
CEASE News, Spring 1992:

....In protest against the development of Hydro-Quebec's enormous electricity project which would have flooded the lands of the Cree Indians, Peggy Schirmer spoke for CEASE and concluded her testimony by saying: "As a teacher how can I explain to a four or five year old in this year of the Columbus Quincentennial that native peoples are still suffering at the hands of newcomers to this continent, losing their homes, their caribou herds and drinking water which is poisoned with mercury. As I encourage young citizens of tomorrow to respect and care for all peoples, all life on this earth, how can I tell them that the electricity which lights their homes is killing birds, fish and animals and depriving children like them of their homes?"

After the hearing at which Peggy spoke New York State cancelled its \$12 billion contract with Hydro-Quebec, and the project was ultimately abandoned, This reversal saved the hunting grounds and livelihoods of 10,000 Cree Indians in the area.

The Ultimate Violence,

Editorial, CEASE News, Spring, 1993

1995, two years from now, will be the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As we remember that horror we are shocked to learn (Anthony Lewis, NYT 5/17/93) that Clinton is reportedly planning to order the resumption of nuclear testing when the year-long moratorium ends July 1. This might benefit those at the Los Alamos laboratories who are researching the “micronuke,” the “mininuke” and the “tinynuke” for use against third world countries. In tragic irony these same countries are being urged to support the non-proliferation policy. (Arkin, NYT, 9/9/92 and General Lee Butler, NYT, 2/25/93)

The nuclear danger is still very much with us. We learn from Dr. Alice Stewart’s study of 3,000 Washington State bomb plant workers that even small doses of radiation pose high risks. We still do not know how to dispose of the waste. Plans to incinerate Army war chemicals (nerve gas) have the city of Anniston, AL in an uproar.

Our nuclear policy has been racist from the beginning to end: from the mining of uranium ore on Indian land by Indian workers to proposed disposal of waste again on Indian land. (See story of Navaho miners elsewhere in this issue.)

With nuclear violence at the heart of our national policy is it any wonder that violence permeates our society, that every day in the U.S. 10 children die from gunfire, 30 are wounded, the 135,000 children bring guns to school? Is it any wonder that reports of child abuse and neglect have risen 259% in the last ten years?

Many of us supported Clinton as he promised a change from the huge expenditures on arms and neglect of the home front. These promises are being compromised. He must hear from us. The New York Times of May 6 had an editorial calling for a continued ban on nuclear tests. Let that call become a chorus.

Awards Recognize Peggy’s Lifetime of Activism

Peggy received the Abigail Eliot Distinguished Leadership Award in 1994 from the Boston Association for the Education of Young Children.

She and her husband Boone Schirmer received the Cambridge Peace Commission’s Peace and Justice award and the Boston Mobilization for Survival’s Peace Leadership award in 1989. In 1993 they were again recognized together with the Community Church of Boston’s Sacco and Vanzetti Award for Social Justice.

And in 1994 Peggy received the Peace Award from CEASE!



Join Us
at the NAEYC Conference
in Anaheim
**Peggy Schirmer
Memorial CEASE Seminar**

*Spare the Rod:
Perspectives on Discipline*

Friday, Nov. 12th 1:30-3:30

Cease Annual Meeting to follow

Then and Now:

Twenty-four years of CEASE Newsletters

Reading through the years of CEASE News since 1980 provides testimony to the continuity and the evolution of CEASE activism in response to events and our understanding of the issues.



*From the Summer 1983 CEASE News cover
Photo Credit: Donna Young, Valley Advocate*

In the summer of 1979, Peggy heard that a mock nuclear bomb explosion was to be set off at Otis Air Force Base on Cape Cod. She and a friend walked onto the base and into its child care center to alert the teachers to the dangers outside their classroom. The teachers, busy with keeping the classrooms safe, were unaware of the imminent test. Determined to raise the awareness of teachers, Peg and her friend created a slide show, “Children of Hiroshima,” based on the drawings and words of children who survived the nuclear blast... children who had been “safe” in their homes and classrooms when the nuclear disaster struck. Drawn from a book of the same name, this moving testimony against nuclear weapons is a strong tool for educating teachers and older children. *

Peggy brought her determination to NAEYC with the workshop which launched CEASE, “Nuclear Weapons, Our Legacy to our Children?”

In March of 1979, the Three Mile Island nuclear crisis galvanized fears for health and the environment from nuclear power plants. Early newsletters focus on these concerns and encourage teachers, parents and NAEYC to become advocates for an end to nuclear weapons development and limiting the dangers of nuclear exposure from power plants. They offer education for teachers and others in techniques of advocacy and local organizing to help people find and raise their voices in protest. Those tech-

** The slide show has been turned into a video and soon to be a DVD. It will be available from CEASE. Contact CEASE at info@peaceeducators.org or at our Cambridge address.*

niques will continue to serve us as we reject mini-nukes, bunker busters and missile defense shields. Protecting our environment from nuclear and other toxins remains a continual struggle as the wastes from power plants sit in decaying barrels around the country, and Super Fund clean-up dollars disappear.

Peggy’s editorials so eloquently express the need to change national priorities from militarism to peaceful development to meet the needs of children. It is sad to recognize that we are far from success, and protest must go on. Marian Wright Edelman’s strong words and deadly statistics are quoted year after year. Now in 2004 assault weapons are coming back to our streets, family health needs go unmet, and the military budget is higher than ever.

The campaign against war toys in the 1980’s inspired Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment (T.R.U.C.E.) and its annual Toy Guides in the 1990’s. TV turnoff weeks and efforts to educate parents about the negative effects of Television continue. Now Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children confronts the overwhelmingly harmful impact of inappropriate advertising and violent entertainment directed at children. In March of 2004 CEASE asked the NAEYC Board to join in protesting these threats to children’s health, and emotional, and mental well-being.

As CEASE members studied the influences of violent television, war toys, and militarism on children, they acknowledged the pervasive violence in our society and began to study the root causes of this violence. CEASE members joined with NAEYC Task Force in developing the Association’s Position Paper on Violence in the Lives of Children. Then CEASE went on to further examine the causes of violence resulting in 1993 in the CEASE Statement “Violence as a Product of Injustice”. Looking at the effects of injustice and the negative consequences for children highlighted the need for anti-bias work with teachers, an examination of our national history, and continuing effort to reorder our national priorities to support children and their families. CEASE Seminars through the 1990’s reflect these concerns.

Throughout the years CEASE members continue to examine the ways our work as educators can be improved to support children in resolving their conflicts without violence, bullying and other hurtful behaviors. Approaches to peace education, conflict resolution, anti-

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Then and Now: *continued from page 6*

bias training, and social curriculum development are the subject of many workshops, books and on-going research for CEASE members. Starting young is recognized as critical. CEASE member are presenting at conferences on how teachers of toddlers begin the work of growing children who can resolve their conflicts without violence. Participation in Peace Camps offers opportunities to enhance understanding of these complicated topics with children of all ages. Advocacy Centers, spreading now to more AEYC affiliate conferences, provide an inspiration to teachers to become active in their own communities.

Continuing the global perspective which always motivated Peggy's actions, CEASE has joined the Campaign to Ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with a large number of other national organizations. An article on the Campaign appears in the September 2004 issue of *Young Children*, on page 36.

In the fall of 2002 CEASE petitioned the NAEYC Board to take a position on the threatened war in Iraq declaring the harm to children which is an inevitable result of military conflict. Board members expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to address this threat and reiterated the Position Statement on Violence in the lives of Children on the harmful consequences of violent conflict for children.

The war on Iraq happened despite the enormous outpouring of protesters worldwide calling for patience and a non-military solution. Now we are daily watching the harm to children and families in Iraq, and here in the U.S., which war causes. Hopes for peace feel distant. We must hold on to Peggy's determination and continue the work.

Memorial Gathering

Peggy is survived by her loving family: her husband Boone Schirmer; her sister, Judy Bell in England; her 3 children, Audrey Schirmer and her husband Martin Duckworth of Montreal, Quebec, Abbie Schirmer and husband In Nguyen of Cambridge, and Joe Schirmer and wife, Jane Brelis Schirmer of Madison, WI; and her 8 grandchildren, Danielle, Jacqueline, Nicholas, Liem, Lan, Zoe, Maria, Eleni.

A Memorial gathering will be held Saturday, October 2nd from 2-5 p.m. at the Friends Meeting House in Cambridge, 5 Longfellow Park.



The Family has requested in lieu of flowers donations may be made to Survival Education Fund, earmarked Peggy/CEASE. Mail to: Survival Education Fund, 40 Oakley Rd., Watertown, MA 02472.

YES, I WANT TO JOIN THE CEASE NETWORK

Date _____

- Enclosed is my \$10 subscription. new subscription renewal
- Enclosed is my \$5 student subscription. Here is an additional gift to help defray expenses.
- Enclosed is a gift membership for:

Name _____ Phone number () _____

Address _____

_____ e-mail _____

Place of work _____ position _____

NAEYC Member How did you learn about CEASE? _____

For tax deductible contributions over \$50 make check payable to Survival Education Fund

Return to CEASE, c/o Lucy Stroock, 55 Frost Street, Cambridge, MA 02140

New e-mail: info@peaceeducators.org

CEASE Statement of purpose

CEASE is a network of parents, teachers and other concerned individuals who are dedicated to creating a safe world for our children. We seek to end the violence that permeates our society to an ever increasing degree and to remove the root causes of this violence by advocating for peace, justice and economic opportunity.

We are committed to:

- Raising public awareness about both the origins of violence and the disastrous effects violence and injustice have upon children, families and communities.
- Eliminating the acceptance of violence which is created by mass media conditioning.
- Ensuring the abolition of nuclear weaponry, and other weapons of mass destruction, and an end to the proliferation of conventional weapons.
- Putting a stop to the dangerous degradation of our natural environment by supporting the development and use of reusable, non-polluting resources that protect the health and safety of future generations.

Central to the solution of these problems is the redirection of national priorities and funding from the military and corporate interests to human services and environmental preservation.

We work towards these goals through the following activities:

- Providing a supportive network for teachers and parents who share our concerns.
- Educating the early childhood community through the publication of **CEASE NEWS**, creating periodical informational fliers, giving workshops and developing peace education materials.
- Advocating for a government that is committed to improving and expanding quality child care and child development programs.
- **Fostering a society that focuses on the well being of young children and their families through all our work.**

This revised Statement of Purpose was adopted at the CEASE Annual Meeting November 21 1996.

Spread the Word!

CEASE asks for your help in expanding our network. We would like to reach people entering the field and others who may not have encountered our work at conferences.

Please consider giving a gift membership to people whom you think might be interested.

We, also, encourage everyone to take **CEASE News** to Conferences and other events. Let us know ahead, and we will send your copies of the **News**.

CEASE welcomes contributions to the newsletter. Please write us about your work for a peaceful and safe world for children. We will publish as space allows.

Finally, please feel free to copy any materials you receive from CEASE and distribute them to colleagues, parents, students.... Help us to reach out!

Let people know about our website:
www.peaceeducators.org

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