

Fund for the Future of our Children

**Children of Abraham Peace Essay Contest
4th Annual Awards Ceremony**

**In collaboration with
Georgetown University's
Office of Campus Ministry
and
Prince Alwaleed bin Talal
Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding**

**Sunday, May 3, 2009
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Riggs Library, Healy Hall
Georgetown University**



COEXISTENCE

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Welcome. . .

On behalf of the Fund for the Future of our Children (FFC) and our collaborators, I welcome you and thank you for joining us at the Fourth Annual Children of Abraham Awards Ceremony. Your encouragement of the young people, teachers, and mentors we honor today contributes greatly to the interfaith dialogue and understanding we all envision.

I would like to extend a special welcome to Roberta Baskin and to express our gratitude to her for being with us today to share in this celebration of peace.

The Children of Abraham project would not have been realized without the support of our generous patrons, Mrs. Josephine F. Ammerman and Mr. Andrew R. Ammerman, as well as the distinguished members of our advisory committee, and our kick-off workshop presenters, on-line mentors, and judges whose gift of time and knowledge has been invaluable to us.

It is with great pride and pleasure that we welcome the young essayists who have devoted so much time and energy and thought to the exploration of the Abrahamic view of our relationship to nature. We look forward to hearing from them how the process of discovery has changed their thinking about environmental advocacy and leadership.

We are pleased to welcome back Devika Jaipurkar and Jonathan Kesten, recipients of the second Children of Abraham micro-grant awards, as they describe for us the progress of their work. We are also proud to present our third Teacher of the Year Peace Advocacy Award to David Weeks, of Glenelg Country School, Ellicott City, Maryland, for his dedication to his students and to our efforts to foster the qualities of leadership.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam,
Avideh Shashaani, Ph.D.
President, Fund for the Future of our Children



*...that our children
may be peacemakers*

About Fund for the Future of our Children

Already we know that the next generation of leaders will face daunting challenges – in striving to secure peace, in establishing social justice, and in caring for the environment. Since 1993, Fund for the Future of our Children (FFC) has taken as its mission the support and encouragement of leadership qualities in today's youth. In the past, FFC promoted its vision through a variety of projects, including a national tour of the Copenhagen Boys Choir to raise awareness of children's issues, and a display of the art of Israeli and Palestinian youth in the halls of the U.S. Senate.



2008 Award Ceremony, Candlelight Prayer

As its vision has evolved, FFC has adapted its strategies. Since the Peace Essay Contest began in 2005, high school students have been challenged to address questions about the commonalities among the Abrahamic faiths – concerning the role of peace, leadership styles, corruption and injustice and, this year, about stewardship of the environment. On-line mentors

assist students as needed, and essays are submitted each January to be reviewed by a panel of judges, with prizes awarded at an annual celebration each spring: the 1st prize is \$2,500, 2nd prize is \$1,500, 3rd prize is \$1,000, and four 4th place prizes of \$500 each go to runners-up.

Some of the students participating in the contest have been inspired to participate in peacemaking in their own unique ways. FFC has sought to encourage and support this pro-active spirit by awarding micro-grants of \$1,000 to worthy projects, and offering an additional \$1,000 matching grant.

In the near future, FFC will create an on-line tribute to those leaders worldwide who have moved the world closer to the one envisioned by the founders of the Abrahamic faiths. These leaders will be portrayed by those young people whom they have inspired. It is hoped that the webpage will debut by the end of 2010.

Our work would not be possible without the dedicated commitment of our friends and supporters, the students, parents, teachers, school administrators, clergy, scholars, and other professionals who have given so freely of their time, their support, and their encouragement.

Children of Abraham Award Ceremony

Musical offering performed by Lena Seikaly

Welcome by Father Patrick Rogers, S.J., Director, Campus Ministry,
Undergraduate Campus, Georgetown University, and
Avideh Shashaani, President, FFC

Keynote address by Roberta Baskin

Reflections by student essayists
Introduced by Lauren Sumida

Presentations by 2008 micro-grant awardees
Devika Jaipurkar and Jonathan Kesten
Introduced by Melissa Mergner

Presentation of 2009 Children of Abraham Peace Essay Contest awards
by Roberta Baskin

Presentation of Teacher's Award for Peace Advocacy
to David Weeks of Glenelg Country School
Introduced by Lansing Freeman

Candlelight ceremony
with closing prayers by Rabbi Harold White and students

Closing musical offering by Lena Seikaly

2008-2009 Peace Essay Contest Question

Part I: What can we learn from the values taught by the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—to be responsible stewards of the environment?

PART II: Propose a practical teen-based environmental stewardship project. Show how the teachings you described in part I inspired the project. (A project could be advocacy, conservation, engineering, education, religious and "other." State whether the focus is on homes, a house of worship, a school, or a community.)

ROBERTA BASKIN, Keynote Speaker



Investigative journalist Roberta Baskin has won more than 75 journalism prizes, including three Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Journalism Awards, two George Foster Peabody Awards, the Investigative Reporters and Editors Award, the Radio-Television News Directors Edward R. Murrow Award, and numerous Emmys. But her proudest achievements are righting wrongs, changing laws, and transforming the way companies do business.

During her distinguished journalism career, Baskin has served as the Executive Director of the Center for Public Integrity, the senior Washington correspondent for "*NOW with Bill Moyers*," senior investigative producer for the ABC News magazine *20/20*, chief investigative correspondent for the CBS News magazine *48 Hours*, and contributed special reports to the *CBS Evening News*. Roberta began her career as an investigative reporter in Chicago and Washington D.C.

Roberta's most recent investigation of a chain of dental clinics for children doing unnecessary drilling for millions of dollars in Medicaid money also won a National Emmy and the Scripps Howard National Journalism Award. Many of her best known investigations have focused on human rights and corporate misconduct. Roberta broke international stories on Nike's sweatshops in Vietnam and the world's soccer industry relying on child labor in Pakistan to stitch soccer balls. Both investigations led to sweeping changes.

In the fall of 2008, Roberta was elected to the Board of Directors of the Journalism and Women's Symposium. She also began teaching a graduate school course, the Broadcast Investigative Reporting Project, at Georgetown University. Roberta has been honored with a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, and an Ethics Fellowship at the Poynter Institute. She's active in journalism organizations and has been a popular guest lecturer internationally from Baku to Borneo. She served on the Board of Directors of the Fund for Investigative Journalism for 13 years, was elected to a term on the Board of Directors for Investigative Reporters and Editors, and has served on the Nieman Fellows Selection Committee. Roberta now serves on the Executive Committee of the Nieman Foundation's Advisory Board and Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Journalism Committee. She's an avid scuba diver and likes to baskin' the sun whenever she can.

ABOUT THE AWARDEES



Gemma d'Eustachio is currently a junior at Montgomery Blair High School, and this is the second year that she has entered the FFC essay contest. She runs cross country and track and is a member of Model UN and Woman's advocacy club. Outside of school, Gemma reports for a local newspaper on community and school events. She also mentors a fourth grade student from Pinecrest Elementary school. Her hobbies include baking cupcakes, shopping, and of course, being a steward of the environment!



Andrew Franklin, sixteen years old, is a 10th grade student at Glenelg Country School. He serves as student council treasurer as well as the president of the community service club and the vice president of the mock trial team. He recently participated in the spring musical "Into the Woods," and has been a member of the men's choral ensemble for two years. He has a twin sister who is an incredible singer and actress, and two wonderful parents. He plays varsity baseball for the school team and for the Western Howard County Renegades.



Laila Handoo is a junior at Glenelg Country School who loves to play tennis and to help the community. She enjoys working with senior citizens, especially those who suffer from Alzheimer's and dementia, whom she supports by hosting an annual fair. She intends to study and to pursue a career in the area of neuroscience. She is currently raising funds for the Adam Hingora Primary School in Karachi, Pakistan to help improve the quality of education, especially in the tribal areas. She plays varsity tennis and is a member of the National Honor Society.



Diana Jeang is a junior in the Communication Arts Program at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland. Diana speaks fluent French and is the vice-president of the French Honors Society at Blair. She has performed in various musical theater productions both inside and outside of school and is a member of her high school swim team as well as RMSC. Outside of school, Diana also studies voice and piano. This summer, Diana plans on returning to the NIH to participate in the Summer Internship Program in biomedical research for the second year.



Krzysztof Franaszek is currently a junior at Thomas Wootton High School and spends most of his spare time practicing Tae Kwan Do or reading books or the newspaper. His favorite subject is Biology.



Thu Nguyen is currently a sophomore at Montgomery Blair High School and is enrolled in the Communication Arts Program. Next year she plans to participate on the yearbook staff, doing computer graphics and doing page layout. She also likes to watch TV, dance, play basketball, save energy, and listen to the radio. She lives with her parents and four siblings in Silver Spring.



Anthony Shepherd Rousak lives in Lewes, Delaware, with his parents. He volunteers for several organizations – Helping And Lending Outreach Support of Charleston, the Red Scarf Project, Stockings for Soldiers, Delaware Hospice Festival of Trees, and Children and Families First. He is also involved in the Sussex County HAMFEST (ham radio). Anthony is currently a member of the National Honor Society, the National Technical Honor Society, and the Sussex Technical High School Bowling Club. He attends Sussex Technical High School, a county-wide school in Georgetown, where his major is electronics. Next year, Anthony would like to incorporate stewardship principles as part of his Senior Technical Exhibition of Mastery project.



Muaz Rahman, a 10th grade student at West Springfield High School, is a member of both the National English Honors Society and the National Math Honors Society, and is the president of the Virginia Chapter Of MUNA Youth, an Islamic organization.



Aishini Thiyagarajan is currently a junior at Winston Churchill High school, where she serves as president of the Homeless Outreach club and member of the Leo Club (both clubs that promote volunteerism in the community). She also participates in the debate team, the Model United Nations, and the forensics team. She leads Study Circles in her Sunday school Bal-Vikas class, in which she and her classmates

discuss and explore various religions. In her spare time Aishini loves to read books, and she has an eclectic taste in music, exploring different cultures by listening to world music. She plans to pursue a double major in International Studies and Business.



Ezra Wexler is a sophomore in the Communications Arts Program at Montgomery Blair High School. Ezra is fifteen years old, has an older sister, and lives in Downtown Silver Spring with his parents. His family does not own a car, and are all vegetarians. Ezra has never purposefully eaten meat or fish. As a hobby, Ezra enjoys filmmaking, and has entered several of his films in contests such as the Montgomery County Schools Media Festival over the last couple of years. He also likes to write creative fiction and nonfiction, but does not pursue publication. Ezra is a devoted Jew, and he prays daily.

About our Youth Leadership Micro-Grants Program:

FFC's micro-grant award program, providing \$1,000 in full grants and an additional \$1,000 in matching funds, has been established to recognize, support, and encourage the visionary efforts of young people.

The remarkable initiative displayed by participants in the Children of Abraham Peace Essay Contest motivated us to invest in both the particular projects they have undertaken and also their personal development as our future leaders. These high school students have researched the Abrahamic religious traditions, investigating topics like peace, leadership, social justice, and environmental stewardship, and have used that knowledge to propose creative projects to benefit their community, their nation, or the world. Our public interest leadership program is modeled after the highly successful micro-loan program for private businesses in developing countries started by Muhammad Yunus, the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Youth Leadership Micro-Grants take the form of cash awards presented to 10th and 11th grade students on the basis of the creativity, relevance, and viability of their proposed projects. We have found that the micro-grant awards have far reaching effects for these students, who engage with both family and community in new ways as they bring their chosen cause to the attention of concerned individuals.

"The micro-grant program combines the idealism, energy, and leadership skills of our socially conscious young people with the civic-minded financial resources of the Fund for the Future of the Children, illuminating a program of acknowledged ownership and possibility that manifests in a better, brighter world."

- Lansing Freeman

Government and Peace Studies Teacher, Montgomery Blair High School

"The Micro-Leadership Grant has provided an empowering catalyst for students to realize their vision for a better world. The initial grant of \$1000.00 serves as an affirmation of the value of a student's promising vision and secures a commitment by that student to realizing his or her vision amidst all the other competing interests in the student's life. The matching grant adds an incentive to further advance the vision and move it closer to reality."

- David C. Weeks, Director

Civic Leadership and Community Service, Glenelg Country School

The Fetzer Institute recently honored FFC by designating us as a recipient of their Common Cause Award, which is granted to an organization that shares in the common work of the Institute - "to serve those who are turning the tide of our times from fear and violence to love and forgiveness." This \$10,000 grant will enable FFC to continue to support youth as they develop into the leaders of tomorrow.

2006-2007 Youth Leadership Micro-Grant Award Winners:

Priya Agarwal-Harding, currently studying at Wellesley and formerly a student at Glenelg Country School, works with an organization in India called PRAYAS, which offers shelter and other aid to victims of child-trafficking. Priya was able to spend some time during the winter of 2007-2008 and the summer of 2008 working again with PRAYAS in India. The organization has launched a project they are calling "Girls' Empowerment" (G-Power for short) in honor of her effort, which Priya will direct utilizing the award money and other money she has raised.



Priya Agarwal-Harding and the children of PRAYAS.

“The Fund for the future of our Children’s support was instrumental in helping me raise these resources and be an advocate for PRAYAS and to begin the G-power project in India. My initial essay that I submitted to the Peace essay contest in 2006 which received Honorable Mention, and the FFC’s subsequent support for my work with PRAYAS helped me maintain my focus and enthusiasm for this work and became pivotal in helping me be an advocate for the issue of child trafficking in India. Through this support I was able to raise a total of \$8,500 over the course of two years. Two thousand of which was provided to me on a grant by FFC. I hope to return to PRAYAS next year to continue my work with G-power and to continue to learn about child trafficking issues.”

– Priya Agarwal-Harding

Melissa Mergner is a senior at the Communication Arts Program at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, and also attends the Visual Arts Center magnet program at Albert Einstein High School in Kensington, Maryland. She has written and directed several short documentaries, including: “Legacy of Peace” about Japan’s atomic bomb victims, “Woody Guthrie: Voice of the Common Man” about the legendary singer-songwriter, “Invisible and Invaluable” about the plight of farm workers, “The President as Commander-in-Chief” about the importance of foreign affairs in the presidential election, “Speaking Truth to Power” about farm labor activist Baldemar Velasquez, and “Forgotten War, Unforgettable Aftermath” about the Korean War. Her films have won awards or have been shown at over 50 film festivals across the U.S. She also produced a video for Velasquez’s song “Song for Urbano,” about the tragic death of a migrant farm worker in North Carolina. She received a leadership grant from that organization to make a film about her Korean grandfather and the issue of reunification in Korea to be completed in 2009. She also traveled to India in the summer of 2008 to produce a film about child trafficking in India. She was chosen as a Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholar at New York University, where she will study



Melissa, her mother, and her grandfather with a guard at the airport in Seoul.

film at the Tisch School of the Arts starting in the fall of 2009.

“I am very grateful to the Fund for the Future of our Children for the micro-grants I received to support my film projects about Korean reunification and child trafficking in India. I have been making documentaries since I was 12, but the process of filmmaking doesn’t seem to get easier. The costs of the equipment and supplies, as well as travel, can be overwhelming. The support I received from the FFC not only helped me to pay for these costs, but also gave me confidence to take on more projects. Having an organization like the FFC endorse my work has made me think of myself as a real professional and has encouraged me to stick to an artistic vision that many people would think of as too idealistic. The support I’ve received from FFC has made idealism seem like realism. I will always be indebted the organization for that belief.”

–Melissa Mergner

2007-2008 Youth Leadership Micro-Grant Award Winners:



Jonathan Kesten

Jonathan Kesten is a senior at Montgomery Blair and soon will be a Georgetown Hoya. In his work with (SGU) School Girls Unite (an international non-profit promoting girls' education worldwide), two benefit concerts have been held which have raised enough to support over 80 young women in Mali, Africa to attend school.

“Thanks to the micro-grants from the FFC, School Girls Unite have been able to tackle even more education and justice related issues in the developing world. Currently SGU is working on a bilingual ‘Action Guide’ cataloging the progress of SGU and capturing the initiative needed to solve global education problems in our modern world. School Girls Unite has raised \$4,822.87 (almost 5k) in the concerts, thanks to the gracious support from the FFC.”

– Jonathan Kesten



Devika Jaipurkar and the cover of her *Earth Girl* comic book.

Devika Jaipurkar, an 11th grader at Glenelg Country School, envisions an outreach project to teach children the basics of environmental awareness. *Earth Girl!* is a comic book about a superhero who is trying to save the world from pollution. The comic book will be a launching pad for a broader program involving a

tour of Earth Girl to elementary and middle schools to discuss environmental stewardship.

“My Earth Girl project has made many strides since the Kick-off event last November. By the end of 2008, the Earth Girl story was complete. After a few more minor corrections, the story was given to the illustrator. A few weeks later I received the black and white copy of *The Adventures of Earth Girl*. I always knew that the book would come out some day, but holding it in my hands gave me a surreal feeling. After the hours of work I had put into this project, it was finally coming alive. Without the generous grants given to me by the FFC program I would not have been able to reach this point. This entire process has been a great learning experience for me. I learned the importance of teamwork, communication, and diligence. However, the most valuable lesson I learned was about keeping faith. Because of the undying faith that Mr. Weeks, my parents, and all of the members of FFC had in me I was able to make this project a success. Faith is the fuel that has kept Earth Girl going and it will keep her alive for years to come.”

-Devika Jaipurkar

Fund for the Future of our Children's
Third Annual Teacher's Award for Peace Advocacy
is presented to **David Weeks**



David Weeks holds a B.A. in Social Relations from Harvard College an M.Ed. in Language Development and an M.A.in Guidance & Counseling from Loyola College in Baltimore. He has pursued postgraduate study in Waldorf Education from Mercy College of Detroit and in Social Development from Emerson College in Sussex, UK. Mr. Weeks has also participated in independent study to support a doctoral program in contemplative education, curriculum design, and executive functioning from

Union College, Cincinnati, OH. David Weeks has thirty four years' experience in elementary, middle, high school, and adult education. Presently he is in the middle of his 26th year of working at the Glenelg Country School in Howard County, Maryland. In 2000 he took a sabbatical leave from his teaching to travel the Silk Road from Beijing to Istanbul. He enjoys learning about different cultures and has traveled extensively in the Himalayan and Southeast regions of Asia. After the 2004 tsunami Mr. Weeks and his Glenelg Country School supported the Ban Nam Khem community in Thailand for three years. David Weeks specializes in Eastern Studies as a teacher with courses in Islamic Culture, Asian Studies and Modern China. He also has pursued his passions for service and community building by directing the Community Service and Civic Leadership Programs at the Glenelg Country School. Additionally he founded and has directed the Maryland Youth Partners in Change, a three year middle school leadership and service-learning program since 2003. His service to his students and the community has recently been recognized with his having received the 2009 Howard County Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission Award. David Weeks has three sons in his twenty four year marriage to his French Canadian wife, Marie. His personal interests include community service-learning, community building, playing the alto saxophone, ice hockey, gardening, and travel.

Special Thanks go to our...

ESSAY JUDGES

Andrew R. Ammerman, *Board of Regents, Georgetown University*

Susan Bilek, *Philosophy Teacher, Washington, DC*

Mohamad A. Chakaki, *DC Green Muslims*

Allison Fisher, *Program Director, Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light*

Luby Ismail, *Founder, Connecting Cultures, Silver Spring, Maryland*

Alex Kronemer, *Film Producer and Co-Founder, Unity Productions Foundation*

Stacy Ricotta, *Educational Advisor, Houston, Texas*

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Rabbi A. Nathan Abramowitz, *Faculty, Theology Department, Georgetown University*

Mark Braverman, Ph.D., *Clinical psychologist and organizational consultant*

Susan Bilek, *Philosophy teacher, Washington DC*

Mohamad A. Chakaki, *DC Green Muslims*

John Deken, *pursuing a Ph.D. in history at the University of Missouri*

Allison Fisher, *Program Director, Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light*

Kenneth E. McNeil, *Partner, Susman Godfrey LLP*

June Murray-Crawford, *High School Teacher, Hudson, Massachusetts*

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Fund for the Future of our Children



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"Once again, the Children of Abraham Essay Contest has encouraged our youth toward service and interfaith thinking. The essays were excellent. I wish there were a thousand Children of Abraham Contests -- it is amazing to see the students think in such creative ways."

*– Alex Kronemer, film producer and
co-founder of Unity Productions Foundation*



"I feel privileged to have served as a judge for the past four years. Reading the essays is truly an inspiring experience. You are wonderful models of peace and social justice."

*– Andrew R. Ammerman
Board of Regents, Georgetown University*

