

“Blessed Be The Ordinary Folks”

By Mary Satre Kerwin '77

People seem determined to be separated by *something* – we are always “us versus them”, no matter how open-minded we become. The criteria can be as obvious as race or geography or as subtle as faith or politics.

On September 11, 2001, I lived in Essex County, UK. I watched the morning television news and saw Catholic children in Belfast led to school by their parents, who provided a protective escort down streets lined by Protestant parents harassing these young ones by blowing whistles at them. Faith? Politics? Us v. Them.

Following lunch at the pub with some other school mums – and a bewildering reference to the World Trade Center by Steve Wright on BBC Radio2 on my car radio as I drove home – another story unfolded on the TV news. I don't recall ever seeing those Irish school children again. Another Us v. Them had taken center stage.

I toured the Korean DMZ with my older son. We heard our young Korean guide speak with passion about how much the divided people – often families – long to reunite. Yet so much separates them that they barely speak the same language anymore. Us v. Them.

There is too much history in a similar vein for one to hope that governments will ever bring us together. So we must do our best to bridge the gaps one-to-one. It can begin as simply as children oblivious to cultural differences playing games together. (I have seen this often while living in Europe and Australasia.)

It can be bigger. Our church organist rang me on September 12, 2001, to ask if our choir could include some American patriotic songs in the “Last Night of the Proms” concert at the church that Friday. There were songs, and there were flags – UK and USA.

It could be the vet in Japan who made daily house calls when our deaf white cat was seriously injured, or the neighbor who wept and hugged me when that cat died – though she spoke no English.

It could be my friends – an English and Australian couple – choosing to raise their three children in Kfar Saba, Israel. They keep gas masks under the beds. Their day-to-day life is based on faith in the face of hardship. It's nothing special – and it's wonderful.

Reward isn't part of the deal. Once, while on foot in Yokohama, I passed a homeless man on an overpass. He shivered in the rain. On my return, I placed a paper bag with a sandwich and hot soup in front of him. I had left my change in the bag. I walked on, not looking back. I *wanted* to, to see if he was enjoying the food or if he had found the money. But I didn't. The cold wind whipped my face and my hair was wild, but I didn't stop or turn. I never saw him again on that bridge. Maybe someday that hot soup will make a difference. I believe it can. Have faith.