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An Extraordinary Experience - Messengers of Peace A Message to Iraqi and Jordanian Children American Independence Day 2008

Sizzling burgers, fireworks and the beach could never replace the lasting memory and deep meaning for a small group of America's youth in Laguna Beach, California. The young people that were to be hosted by the Iraqi Children's Art Exchange and the Endangered Planet Foundation were to soon discover how The Art Miles Mural Project and the magic of mural making would transform them into "Messengers of Peace" and illustrate, once again the power of art could move and educate people.



Just a small distance away, perched on a hillside street a short distance away, a Laguna Beach Mom was discussing the significance of this day with her young son and went to her computer and typed in a few key words (Democracy, Peace, Iraq). To her amazement she discovered those words tumbled across her screen where she could see that right there in her own Earth Trustee City, a mural event was taking place and that an intercultural mural painting session for youth and children were invited to paint one half of a mural for Iraqi refugee children in Jordan. The Iraqi refugee children would paint the other half when famed Iraqi visiting artist *Qais Al-Sindy* would bring the mural to them. Their goal was to honor Queen Rania, an advocate of human rights and multiculturalism in Jordan



and to see their mural join over 5,000 others in Egypt in 2010. Riveted by the story and concerned about holiday traffic, she and her son raced down the hill to the foundation office.



Once at the Endangered Planet Gallery, she came upon a group of sun tanned teens, standing in front of a mural in progress. The youths had been asked to sketch their ideas and symbols of what represented America. Their sketches were strewn along the wall just outside the gallery and the discussion they shared about McDonald's and Wal-Mart, hotdogs, jazz, the blues, eagles and diabetes and insulin, finally came round into a thoughtful representation of an Indigenous symbol, a buffalo and an angel of peace. Bright cheery colors of happiness exploded on the canvas as the young people took instruction on mixing paint and

textures onto the canvas. They became lost in thought and although light chatter persisted, the seriousness of what they were feeling and wanted to portray shone through as brightly as the late afternoon Laguna sunshine.

The boy and his Mom were transfixed, full of questions and drawn to the idea that their “hometown” was reaching out on America’s birthday to youth in a country that were victims of a conflict that our country was indelibly part of. For some of the Foundation



members, it became a moment of truth, to see and understand how the power of art does indeed move and educate people, and as a young poet named *Kristofor* softly played a mellow guitar and later recited a special poem of PEACE, each of us felt the image of Laurel Burch’s “harmony around the sound” children enjoyed by their hands, tug at our hearts.



The young Americans and Art Miles Master

Muralist, *Qais Al Sindy* had indeed created their message of Peace, and we are all looking forward to the completion of the mural by the Iraqi and



Jordanian children, and the moment when the Mom and her son can look upon the finished canvas and remember this extraordinary experience—messengers of PEACE.



A Mural Story
by
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