

# Global Village School

## An Education in Peace and Justice

by Sally Carless

*Does America really love its children? It is a provocative — and timely — question. The answer can be found throughout the tangled webs of our lives, from what we eat and think, to what our government says and does. This article examines the question from many angles and offers a vision for education — and a model school — that shows us a path to an affirmative answer.*

Does America really love its children? Of course we want to be able to say yes right away. But let's think about it. We need to ask ourselves: What are we preparing our children for? What kind of world are we leaving them? Does America love *all* of its children? Even the gay children? The Muslims? The babies born with addictions? The children bounced from one foster home to another? Do America's political and corporate leaders love our children more than they love power and wealth?

To truly love requires a certain level of mindfulness. It implies concern for the well being of and willingness to take action on behalf of. It implies a willingness to make sacrifices. It involves a commitment to ensuring that our children learn what they need to know in order to live healthy, fulfilling lives — setting the stage for them to feel good about who they are and their place in the world.

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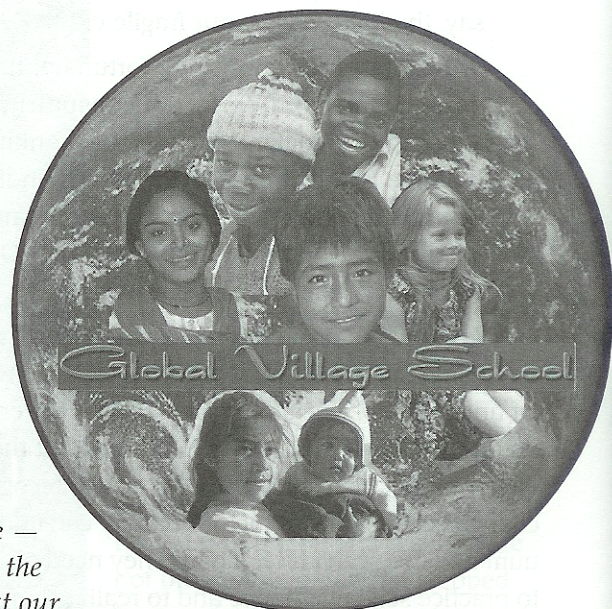
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Do we love our children enough to learn what is really going on in the world? To take the time to look beyond the mainstream media's headlines and sound bites?

Do we love them enough to wonder why our infant mortality rate is the highest in the "developed" world? To ask why there is "not enough" funding for affordable housing, pre-natal care, nutritious food, health insurance, effective public transportation, and addiction treatment centers when our military budget is bigger (\$346,500,000,000 in FY 2002) than those of the next fifteen countries put together?

Our world is filled with opportunities for numbness and distraction; corporate America provides us with such an incredible array of movies, TV shows, new stores, magazines, sports events, etc., that it is easy not to think much at all about the big picture. Advertisements tell us that if we love our children, we should buy them the latest toys and encourage them to adopt the latest fashions — that happiness equals a fast food meal. How (and what) is America feeding its children — not just the physical food, but the images and teachings they absorb? It amounts to junk food for the mind.

Are we ensuring that our children will live in a world in which they will be materially comfortable but ethically culpable? We are leaving them with an enormous collec-







tive moral and financial debt — American tax dollars and policies have led to millions of deaths worldwide. Martin Luther King voiced the same concern more than thirty years ago when he said, “The greatest purveyor of violence on the Earth is my own government.” This uncomfortable problem is not at all easy to explore. But if we really love our children, can we afford not to look?

Does America really love *itself* — the visions it was created in the name of? Liberty and justice for *all*. Freedom of speech. Freedom of religion. Freedom to dissent. So much violence around the world has been done in our name, in the name of freedom and democracy. People around the world suffer, while American corporations reap enormous benefits. What kind of legacy are we leaving our children? A world where we are seen as the enemy by much of humankind; a planet that is polluted and growing more so every day. Do we love our children enough to demand that America live up to its stated ideals?

Does America really love its children? The question causes us to step back and think. It forces us to look beyond the surface, a move that is exactly what is needed in the world today. We need to slow down, to take a look at the roots of the world’s problems mindfully, and we need to educate our children to do the same.

Children naturally want to learn; they want to know the truth. The teenage years in particular are a time when students start to question the contradictions and injustices they see around them. This is when educators and parents need to be there — not to defend the status quo, but to guide and support students in their questioning. We need to take that spark of life — that natural passion for action and justice — and nurture it into a flame.

History has shown us that people who are afraid can easily be persuaded to march to the drum of violence unless they have a strong sense of who they are in their hearts. Children (and adults) who know at a deep level that peace and justice are possible will be much less likely to be swept up in fear and hysteria, less likely to support violence without thinking, or to participate in movements that are harmful to them and to the future of the planet.

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The founder and director of Global Village School, Sally Carless has been an alternative educator for over twenty years. Sally has a Master’s Degree in Education and a B.A. in Wilderness Recreation. She also completed a year’s graduate study in depth psychology and counseling. Sally is a musician who loves to be at home in her garden under the oaks. She lives in the coastal California foothills with bears, deer, coyotes (and a few people) for neighbors. Sally can be reached at <sally@globalvillageschool.org>

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How would the world be different if a generation of our youth grew up confident in their ability to make a difference, skilled at discerning the truth in their hearts? What wonders would occur if they were truly appreciative of diversity — comfortable and familiar with people of different faiths, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations? What would happen if they were knowledgeable about the actions our government carries out in their name and exposed to examples of groups and individuals who have been successful at changing the world through nonviolent means? Imagine the adults those children would become. Now envision a world filled with those adults, a world where people look deeply at people, the news, and world events. It is a world in which people are empowered to live and to act in alignment with their hearts and souls, especially during fearful times.

## GLOBAL VILLAGE SCHOOL'S VISION OF EDUCATION

You have just shared the vision of Global Village School for Peace and Diversity Studies (GVS), a K-12 homeschool diploma program that was birthed in a beautiful valley in the foothills of Southern California. We welcome students from across the globe. Our mission is to provide a quality education that promotes peace, understanding, and respect — a program that supports students in truly being themselves. Global Village is founded on the belief that knowledge and understanding are keys to ending prejudice. Our goal is to prepare students to be global citizens, informed leaders, and effective agents of social change.

Some of the impetus for starting GVS was the rise in hate crimes domestically and the rise in divisive propaganda everywhere. Recent events underscore the urgency of the need for a new kind of education. GVS represents a new model of education that incorporates distance learning, web-based and text-based instruction, and studies in peace and diversity. The Internet provides an ideal means for creating a global community among students who are otherwise geographically and culturally isolated from each other; they can build community and interact with each other regardless of where they live.

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Besides taking core academic courses (English, science, math, etc.), GVS students take peace and diversity courses (Global Spirituality and Activism, Reflections on Peacemaking, The History of Civil Rights in America, Literature of Diversity, etc.). Service learning activities offer them a place to try out their "activist wings" by giving them the opportunity to volunteer for political campaigns or environmental or social justice

organizations, or to create their own service projects. Students can earn elective credit for engaging in many different kinds of life experiences, such as traveling, participating in cultural events, performing in community theater productions, pursuing a career in athletics or the film industry, or starting their own business. Concerning all such endeavors, we customize curriculum to match individual needs, abilities, life situations, and interests. For example, Danica, a student from Texas, was recently offered the opportunity to view open-heart surgery. She will be incorporating the experience into her biology studies. In another case, Michael, a recent GVS graduate who is Native American, accompanied his parents to Washington, D.C. for one of his government class projects; there, he observed as they testified before a congressional committee. The experience helped him gain a deeper understanding of tribal issues and served to prepare him for his future role as a leader in his community.

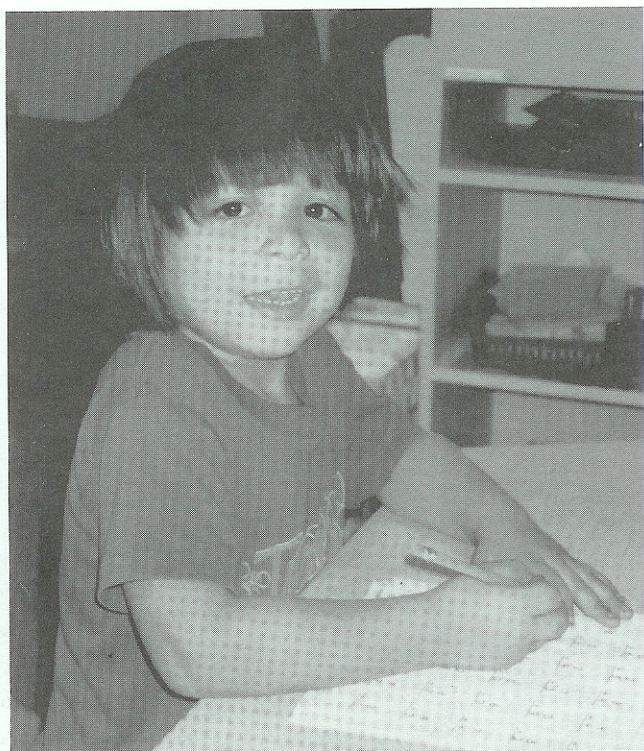
We also honor each student's learning style, as we did, for instance, in Michael's



case. Although highly intelligent, Mike was not succeeding in public school. Attending GVS enabled him to earn his diploma while studying in ways that were better suited to his learning style and interests. He rediscovered his love for reading through biographies of people whose thoughts and experiences were similar to his own. His writing improved dramatically when he was encouraged to write rap lyrics as part of his English course.

As mentioned earlier, Global Village School is a home schooling program. We believe that home schooling can be a valuable means of providing extra support to students as they speak from their hearts by helping them cultivate their strengths and their passions. Consider, for example, the case of our first student, Sreymol, who was born in Cambodia. She was living in an orphanage when an American met her. This person kept in touch with Sreymol over several years, and eventually was able to adopt her. Sreymol is remarkably sensitive and compassionate. Her parents chose GVS because they wanted to be able to nurture those qualities, as well as provide a course of study geared to her needs as a non-native English speaker. Home schooling enabled her to continue learning Cambodian as well as English and to pursue her strong desire to learn about Gandhi and other peacemakers. Having spent the early years of her life in very challenging circumstances, Sreymol realized that there was a real need for people to help each other. She found her passion — to become active for social change. At the tender age of 17, she has found a way to alleviate some suffering personally: She hosts her own website, where she sells homemade clothing and pies and then donates the proceeds to the homeless.

One of the assumptions GVS makes is that, like Sreymol, most people are naturally loving, compassionate and courageous, and have a strong desire for justice. What is often missing are the information and experiences on which to base decisions and an environment that supports constructive ways of being.



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## MEETING “GLOBAL” EDUCATION STANDARDS

A typical Global Village School course poses the kinds of questions that provoke a dialogue on issues of social justice. For example: How are international monetary policies impacting the world? How are they impacting the lives of indigenous people, the welfare of “less developed” countries, the state of the environment? What is the real cost of that pair of basketball shoes — what natural resources were used, who made them, and under what conditions? Whom does the global economy benefit the most? Whom (and what) does it harm? What is the real cost of that fast food burger? Was any rainforest cut down to provide land for raising the cattle? What kind of life did that calf have before it became that tender veal cutlet? Does the purchase of that bargain item support a government or corporation in continuing its human rights abuses? Why is it that many governments spend more on interest payments to global bankers than on the health and

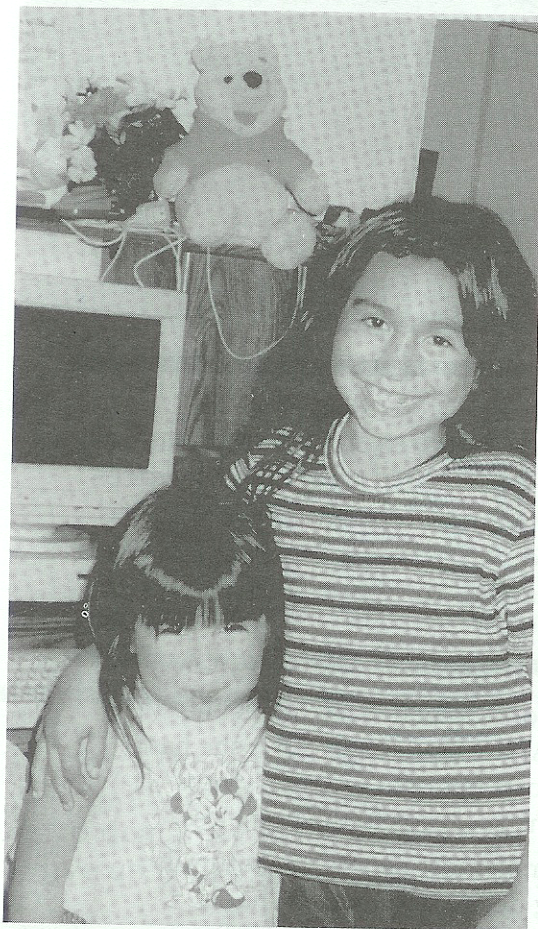


education of their people? Grappling with such questions, GVS students taking the course "U.S. Government" immerse themselves in lessons about human nature and the Constitution, the media, the branches of government and the political process, and then put their learning into practice through a service project.

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There is much talk these days about state standards, accountability, and testing, testing, testing. Accountability to whom? To the planet? To future generations? While these "standards" may be a good starting place, do they really address what people need to learn and do in order to become effective global citizens and stewards of our planet? At GVS, we cover "the basics" but also go far beyond, teaching students how to look beyond the commonly accepted stories. (For example, students are usually taught that America only invades other nations to bring freedom and democracy, when in fact numerous military actions and covert CIA operations have been carried out to benefit American corporate interests.) We encourage our students to discern truth and "right action" for themselves. We help them to cultivate their sense of personal power — their ability to make a difference. We believe that these and other such vital issues and questions constitute "global" education standards.

In this vein, we offer an online Peacemakers course, which presents both role models who work to enact nonviolent social change and concrete examples of such successfully enacted change. We examine not just what these role models did, but also *how* they did their work and the results that followed from their efforts. What enabled them to look at painful truths without giving in to a sense of hopelessness and despair? What sustained Martin Luther King? What motivated Gandhi? How was Mandela able to emerge after twenty-seven years of imprisonment and speak of reconciliation rather than hate?

We believe that the world's spiritual traditions have much to offer by way of answers to such questions. In our Buddhist Path to Peace course, for instance, which highlights writings from Buddhist teachers of peace such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, students learn how Buddhist teachings can help them create peace in the world. By reading, reflecting on, and practicing basic Buddhist teachings, students cultivate the capacity to look at troubling situations without getting lost in anger or despair. They learn to see social action as engaged compassion, love, and wisdom.

Because it is not just our youth who need this information, GVS offers courses to adults as well. We have also developed an Activism and Resources section on our web site (<[www.globalvillageschool.org/resources.html](http://www.globalvillageschool.org/resources.html)>) so that anyone can access organizations working for peace and justice, can find peace education resources, and can learn

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about alternative sources of media. Our aim is to connect people with the many courageous groups and individuals who — even though they do not often make the mainstream news — are all working hard to create the kind of world that Global Village School envisions.

We believe that such a world is possible, and that education is the key to helping us discover how to create it. Margaret Wheatley said, "There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about." If people have the skills, information, and role models they need and are connected to their hearts, the rest will follow. May we all find the wisdom, courage, and commitment to open our hearts and look deeply with eyes of compassion; may we all find the strength to stand up, speak out, and demonstrate that America really does love not just its own children, but *all* the world's children. ■

To learn more about Global Village School  
visit our website  
<[www.globalvillageschool.org](http://www.globalvillageschool.org)>.



All of the photos that accompany this article were provided by the Global Village School.

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