

## November 2004 Uplifters

### Don't be fooled: It's simpler than they tell us

By Joan Chittister, OSB

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some things are naturally so complex we can't possibly resolve them, they tell us. I can accept that. We can't protect against hurricanes, for instance, because we don't know where they're going to be. All the extra food on the planet can't solve the problem of world hunger without roads and transportation and refrigeration facilities. Those things are complex.

It is also plausible, however, that there are some things we make complex so we won't have to solve them. Like debt. No, like the poverty that comes from debt.

Debt is a major American issue. We are a debt-paying people and we don't like people who don't pay theirs.

After all, we are a country that went through the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, and we have no intention of going through that kind of thing again. For years, my family paid everything by cash. What they couldn't pay for "cash on the barrelhead," they didn't buy. Instead, they saved their money in cookie jars and bought one piece of furniture at a time.

We are also the country that went through a Revolutionary War in which Little David pushed Goliath back into the sea, crossed 2,000 miles of open plains and then found its way, one horse, one wagon, one family at a time, through the Rocky Mountains to the ocean on the other side.

We are can-do people.

We became one of the most powerful commercial nations on the face of the globe. "Rugged individualism," they called it. "The pioneer spirit," they called it. "Yankee ingenuity," they called it.

What we are inclined to forget is that we also had the open land and slave labor that made it possible. We had new immigrant populations and investment monies. We had vast and incomparable natural resources.

We forget that those are what enabled us to take a land rich in natural resources and make ourselves even richer.

Which is exactly why we don't understand international debt.

Now we use our own historical circumstances from a previous time to judge the circumstances of others. "If we did it, they can do it, too," we say of those who are poorer, less developed than we. "If they worked harded, if they weren't lazy," we argue, "they could have what we have."

Otherwise, our unspoken Puritanism reminds us, they deserve to suffer for their irresponsibility.

But that may be making a relatively simple problem far more complex than it needs to be. Think of it this way:

Once upon a time, desert sheikhs were selling oil in great quantity at huge prices and putting it in Western banks. All of a sudden, the banks had so much money they didn't know what to do with it. So, they begged countries to borrow it from them who later couldn't pay it back.

Or let's put it this way: Say that in the years preceding mandatory insurance guarantees, your banker urges you to take out a \$100,000 home loan at a variable rate of interest. You have a big family; you have the steady job it will require to pay the debt off and the new house will improve your family's life. You take it.

Mid-way through the project the price of brick goes up, a flood undermines the building, the interest rate rises from 4 percent to 10 percent, you get sick, lose your high-paying job and spend the rest of your life unable to pay more than the \$10,000 a year you owe on interest for the uncompleted project.

That, of course, would be bad enough.

Unfortunately, there's another part of the process that they didn't tell you: Now your banker comes in and takes charge of your finances. Until you pay off the capital, too, they tell you, you may not own a car, send your children to school, have a telephone, or use your electricity over six hours a day. What's more, where you once grew tomatoes to sell from a stand on the street corner, you must now grow watermelons for the bank manager's children.

After 20 years of these "belt-tightening practices," you manage to pay the bank \$200,000 in interest but your old living conditions get even worse. Now without an education your children can't get a decent job either. And the price of watermelons to the bank manager never goes up so you can't possibly get ahead. The question is: Have

you or have you not paid your debt? And if so, why won't they forgive it? Is this ethical? Is this just? Are you and your children lazy, shiftless, irresponsible?

That's the story of the international debt.

That's why Jubilee USA has pressed so hard for so long to free small nations from the burden of debts their past governments accepted and no government since has been able to pay no matter how much money they pour into it. Generation after generation go without human services to pay a debt that never ends.

Argentine Nobel Peace Prize winner Aldolfo Perez Esquivel, says of the international debt: "Our foreign debt, or more appropriately our eternal debt, cannot and should not be paid. It is an immoral debt and a profound human rights issue. The debt is used to dominate people, and the impact is cruel and abusive."

Now that's not so complex, is it?

World leaders talk about calling for 100 percent forgiveness of the international debt, but they never do. In the meantime, 240,000 people could be saved each month if the debt service payments were applied to health services. In the meantime, 140 million children globally will not start school this fall because there are no schools to go to, no teachers to teach them, no supplies to give them. In the meantime, the gap between the obscenely wealthy and the obscenely poor nations of the world gets wider and wider.

If the largest creditors -- the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank -- were to cancel the debt from their own vast resources it would cost U.S. taxpayers nothing and harm the banks not at all. But it could help to develop underdeveloped countries. It could rebuild international alliances. It could reduce the terrorism that emerges out of unanswered rage.

What does the rest of the world need to get on its own feet? When George Bush meets with the finance ministers of the seven wealthiest nations in the world at the G7 Summit in Washington Oct. 1, they need to press the IMF and the World Bank to cancel debts.

From where I stand, the situation is not nearly as impossible, unthinkable, obnoxious as they want to make us think it is. On the contrary, debt forgiveness is a Christian obligation. It is a moral imperative. Furthermore, it is even in our own best interests to do so.

Maybe you and I need to send e-mails to the White House before Oct. 1 to tell them that we have finally figured out how simple it really is.

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## The sacredness of the singular

By Joan Chittister, OSB

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"There is meaning in every journey," Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "that is unknown to the traveler." Over time, I always think I know why I was meant to be at a certain place at a certain time. This time, in Japan, I understood almost instantly what I was supposed to see there and why.

Japanese culture calls into question everything in life I take for granted, like plenitude and crowds and noise and routine -- and flexibility.

Japan is a nation of little things, all of them designed to make a very major point. It is a culture of the particular. This moment, this duty, this thing absorbs them. For instance:

The Japanese put one flower in a vase, one leaf on a desert plate, one piece of food on a plate. For the first time, you are forced to look at the one flower, the small leaf, the single bite of food. The Japanese are a people who appreciate life one moment at a time. It's not volume that impresses them. It's beauty and function and the simple art of being.

Every taxi cab is spotless inside or out -- no cigarette burns on the seat, no dirt on the floor, no smudges on the doors and windows. The driver wears white gloves, a uniform blazer and a hat. Every seat is fitted with crocheted white linen covers, all of them starched and spotless.

Luggage belts at the airport are surrounded by signs inset in the marble floors a uniform 18 inches or so from the rim of the carrier. They say, "Carts stop here." That way travelers can step in front of the carts to retrieve their luggage rather than needing to push or pull or jump or strain their backs in a wild dash to reach over people parked against the conveyor.

I watched a man gardening the tiny patch of land that ran along the edge of his small shop. He squatted down close to the ground and with great concentration and even greater precision, dug carefully around one plug of

moss, lifted it up and put it down again just as carefully about four inches away.

I asked my translator at dinner what I was eating as an appetizer. I expected her to say something like, "it's an avocado salad or a liver pate or a Japanese antipasto. But no. Instead she took her chopsticks, picked up what I thought was a sliver of vegetable about one-sixteenth of an inch long, almost obscured by the chopstick itself, and said, "This is sole." And then, in the same way, "This piece is spinach." and "This is a rosemary flower," and pointing to the bottom of the dish, "and that is its leaf." One by one, each single, almost invisible piece was lifted up to some kind of living splendor.

A single row of small purple wildflowers bloom in perfect order along the railroad tracks where only one line of anything could possibly grow.

One street sweeper labors over one section of territory at a time, sweeping both grass and sidewalk into a kind of incessant perfection.

And guests are doted on -- just like the flower, the leaf, the baggage and the blade of grass. Every car door is opened, every piece of luggage lifted, every direction pointed out rather than given.

Trains, streets and public places are almost eerily silent so that in a land without space every person gets the chance to bloom alone, even in a crowd.

Conductors and service personnel bow into a room and then bow out of the traveler's presence backwards, announcing your importance, requiring your dismissal before they simply leave you on your own to manage the world without them.

People everywhere jump, run, race forward to help. No one simply ambles over - maybe -- to see if you need help. You become the one flower in their human garden just by standing there looking lost.

It is a culture of awareness. Of attention. Of consideration. Of concentration. Of order.

It is a land of little things, of precise things, of attentiveness to singularity in a land that functions always in vast crowds in small spaces.

In the Hiroshima museum it was, poignantly, the one finger tip a mother had been able to salvage from her disintegrated son so that his father would not return from the war to find nothing left at all.

And, on the other hand, it is an implacable adherence to rules for the sake of the rule itself. No one can break into or ignore the interminable lines that mark Japanese life, for instance. And if you lose the train ticket that has already been punched on the train -- as I did -- you will be required to pay the full price of your train ticket again -- in my case \$185 -- to get through the turnstile and out of the station.

I know why I went to Japan. I went so that whatever the madness and massiveness of this world, I could remember the sacredness of the singular, the space that silence gives, the wonder of the individual, the reverence for the other and the comfort of order.

At the same time, I couldn't help but wonder what human values foreigners see mirrored in us when they come here? What of our culture is a gift to theirs? And, to the contrary, what is it they see in us that gives them pause?

From where I stand, in a society that considers itself a gift to the rest of the world, I think the purpose of the trip was as much to make me aware of our own cultural sanctums as it was of theirs. What is it of our own social values, good as they may be, that we may be exaggerating, idolizing even, to the point of the extreme? And what is that doing to us as a people?

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## **The Boy Who Talked with Dolphins**

By Paula McDonald

It began as a deep rumble, shattering the predawn silence. Within minutes on that January morning in 1994, the Los Angeles area was in the grip of one of the most destructive earthquakes in its history.

At Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park, 20 miles north of the city, three dolphins were alone with their terror. They swam frantically in circles as heavy concrete pillars collapsed around their pool and roof tiles crashed into the water.

Forty miles to the south, 26-year-old Jeff Siegel was thrown from his bed with a jarring thump. Crawling to the window, Jeff looked out at the convulsing city and thought of the creatures who mattered more to him than anything else in the world. I've got to get to the dolphins, he told himself. They rescued me, and now they need me to rescue them.

To those who had known Jeff from childhood, a more unlikely hero could not have been imagined. Jeff Siegel was born hyperactive, partially deaf and lacking normal coordination. Since he couldn't hear words clearly, he developed a severe speech impediment that made it almost impossible for others to understand him. As a

preschooler, the small, sandy-haired child was taunted as a "retard" by other kids.

Even home was no refuge. Jeff's mother was unprepared to deal with his problems. Raised in a rigid, authoritarian household, she was overly strict and often angry at his differences. She simply wanted him to fit in. His father, a police officer in their middle-class Los Angeles community of Torrance, worked extra jobs to make ends meet and was often gone 16 hours a day.

Anxious and frightened on the first day of kindergarten, five-year-old Jeff climbed over the schoolyard fence and ran home. Furious, his mother hauled him back to school and forced him to apologize to the teacher. The entire class overheard. As the mispronounced and barely intelligible words were dragged out of him, he became instant prey for his classmates. To fend off the hostile world, Jeff kept to isolated corners of the playground and hid in his room at home, dreaming of a place where he could be accepted.

Then one day when Jeff was nine, he went with his fourth-grade class to Los Angeles' Marineland. At the dolphin show, he was electrified by the energy and exuberant friendliness of the beautiful animals. They seemed to smile directly at him, something that happened rarely in his life. The boy sat transfixed, overwhelmed with emotion and a longing to stay.

By the end of that school year, Jeff's teachers had labeled him emotionally disturbed and learning-disabled. But testing at the nearby Switzer Center for children with disabilities showed Jeff to be average-to-bright, though so anxiety-ridden that his math test score came out borderline retarded. He transferred from public school to the Center. Over the next two years he became less anxious, and his academic achievement improved dramatically.

At the start of seventh grade he returned, unwillingly, to public school. Tests now showed his I.Q. in the 130s, the gifted range. And years of therapy had improved his speech. But to his classmates, Jeff was still the same victim.

Seventh grade was unfolding as the worst year of Jeff's life - until the day his father took him to Sea World in San Diego. The minute the boy saw the dolphins, the same rush of joy welled up in him. He stayed rooted to the spot as the sleek mammals glided past.

Jeff worked to earn money for an annual pass to Marineland, closer to his home. On his first solo visit, he sat on the low wall surrounding the dolphin pool. The dolphins, accustomed to being fed by visitors, soon approached the astonished boy. The first to swim over was Grid Eye, the dominant female in the pool. The 650-pound dolphin glided to where Jeff sat and remained motionless below him. Will she let me touch her? he wondered, putting his hand in the water. As he stroked the dolphin's smooth skin, Grid Eye inched closer. It was a moment of sheer ecstasy for the young boy.

The outgoing animals quickly became the friends Jeff never had, and since the dolphin area was isolated at the far end of Marineland, Jeff often found himself alone with the playful creatures.

One day Sharky, a young female, glided just below the surface until her tail was in Jeff's hand. She stopped. Now what? he wondered. Suddenly Sharky dived a foot or so below the surface, pulling Jeff's hand and arm underwater. He laughed and pulled back without letting go. The dolphin dived again, deeper. Jeff pulled back harder. It was like a game of tug-of-war.

When Sharky surfaced to breathe, boy and dolphin faced each other for a minute, Jeff laughing and the dolphin open-mouthed and grinning. Then Sharky circled and put her tail back in Jeff's hand to start the game again.

The boy and the 300-to-800 pound animals often played tag, with Jeff and the dolphins racing around the pool to slap a predetermined point or give each other hand-to-flipper high-fives. To Jeff, the games were a magical connection that he alone shared with the animals.

Even when there were summer crowds of 500 around the pool, the gregarious creatures recognized their friend and swam to him whenever he wiggled his hand in the water. Jeff's acceptance by the dolphins boosted his confidence, and he gradually emerged from his dark shell. He enrolled in a course at a nearby aquarium and devoured books on marine biology. He became a walking encyclopedia on dolphins and, to his family's amazement, braved his speech impediment to become a volunteer tour guide.

In 1983 Jeff wrote an article for the American Cetacean Society's newsletter, describing his experiences with

Marineland dolphins. He was unprepared for what followed. Embarrassed by the extent to which he'd been playing with the dolphins without the park's knowledge, Marineland management revoked his pass. Jeff returned home numb with disbelief.

For their part, Jeff's parents were relieved. They could see no benefit to the time their strange, misfit son was spending with dolphins until a day in June 1984 when Bonnie Siegel took an unexpected long-distance phone call. That evening she asked her son, "Did you enter some kind of contest?"

Sheepishly, Jeff confessed that he'd written an essay for a highly coveted Earthwatch scholarship worth more than \$2,000. The winner would spend a month in Hawaii with dolphin experts. Now, telling his mother about it, he expected a tirade. Instead, she said quietly, "Well, you won." Jeff was ecstatic. Best of all, it was the first time that his parents realized he might achieve his dream of someday sharing his love of dolphins.

Jeff spent the month in Hawaii, teaching dolphins strings of commands to test their memories. In the fall, he fulfilled another condition of the scholarship by giving a talk on marine mammals to fellow students at Torrance High School. Jeff's report was so enthusiastic that it earned him, at last, grudging respect from his peers.

After graduation, Jeff struggled to find work in marine research, supplementing the low pay with minimum-wage moonlighting. He also earned an associate's degree in biology. In February 1992 he showed up in the office of Suzanne Fortier, director of marine-animal training at Six Flags Magic Mountain. Though holding down two jobs, he wanted to do volunteer work with Magic Mountain's dolphins on his days off. Fortier gave him the chance - and was immediately amazed. Of the 200 volunteers she'd trained in 10 years, she'd never seen anyone with Jeff's intuitive ability with dolphins.

In one instance, her crew needed to move a sick 600-pound dolphin named Thunder to another park. The animal had to be transported in a nine-by-three-foot tank. During the journey, Jeff insisted on riding in the truck bed with Thunder's tank to try to calm the anxious animal. When Fortier later called from the cab of the truck to ask how Thunder was doing, Jeff replied, "He's fine now. I'm cradling him." Jeff's actually in the tank with Thunder! Fortier realized. For four hours, Jeff floated inside the cool tank, holding Thunder in his arms.

Jeff continued to amaze co-workers with his rapport with the animals. His favorite at Magic Mountain was Katie, a 350-pound, eight-year-old dolphin who greeted him exuberantly and swam with him for hours. Once again, as at Marineland, Jeff could interact with the dolphins and find affection in return. Little did he dream how severely his love would be tested.

As Jeff struggled to reach Magic Mountain on the morning of the earthquake, freeways were collapsing, and caved-in roads often forced him to backtrack. Nothing is going to stop me, he vowed. When Jeff finally reached Magic Mountain, the water in the 12-foot-deep dolphin pool was halfway down, and more was draining from the crack in the side. The three dolphins there when the quake hit - Wally, Teri and Katie - were in a frenzy. Jeff lowered himself to a ledge five feet down and tried to calm them.

To ease the dolphins through the continuing tremors, Jeff attempted to distract them by playing games, but it didn't work. Worse, he had to reduce their food: The pool's filtration system had shut down, creating the additional risk that an accumulation of their body waste would further contaminate the water. Jeff remained with the dolphins that night as temperatures fell into the 30s. He was still there through the next day, and the next, and the next.

On the fourth day a road opened, and staffers secured a truck to transfer Wally, Teri and Katie to the dolphin pool at Knott's Berry Farm. But first, someone had to get them into their transport tanks. Transporting a dolphin is normally a routine procedure, after it has been safely guided through a tunnel and hoisted on a canvas sling. But the water level in the connecting tunnel was too low for the animals to swim through. The three dolphins would have to be caught in open water and then maneuvered into canvas slings.

Staffer Etienne Francois and Jeff volunteered for the jobs. As much as he trusted the dolphins, Jeff knew the likelihood of getting hurt or bitten by them in an open-water capture was almost 100 percent. Wally was easily removed from the pool, but Teri and Katie became erratic. Each time Jeff and Etienne closed in on Katie, the powerful dolphin fended them off with her hard, pointed beak.

For almost 40 minutes the men struggled as Katie butted and whacked them with her thrashing tail. Finally, just before they maneuvered her into a sling, she sank her needle-sharp teeth into Jeff's hand. Ignoring the bleeding, Jeff helped capture Teri and hoist her into the transport tank.

When the dolphins reached Knott's Berry Farm, Katie was exhausted but calm. Later, Fortier told friends that Jeff's courage and leadership had been essential in safely transporting the dolphins.

Today, Jeff is a full-time dolphin trainer at Marine Animal Productions in Gulfport, Mississippi, where he organizes programs for schools.

One day, before he left for Mississippi, Jeff gave a demonstration to 60 children from the Switzer Center at one of the aquariums where he had taught. He saw that a boy named Larry slipped off to play alone. Realizing Larry was an outcast, as he himself had been, Jeff called him forward and asked the boy to stand next to him. Then Jeff plunged his arms into a nearby tank and hauled up a harmless but impressive three-foot horn shark. As the children gasped, he allowed Larry to carry the dripping creature proudly around the room.

After the session, Jeff received a letter reading: "Thank you for the magnificent job you did with our children. They came back glowing from the experience. Several told me about Larry getting to carry the shark. This was probably the happiest and proudest moment of his life! The fact that you were once a student here added to it. You are a model of hope that they, too, can 'make it' in life." The letter was from Janet Switzer, the Center's founder.

For Jeff, that afternoon held an even more gratifying moment. As he spoke, he saw his mother and father in the audience, watching intently. From the look on their faces, Jeff could tell they were proud of their son at last.

Jeff has never earned more than \$14,800 a year in his life, yet he considers himself a rich man and an exceptionally lucky one. "I'm completely fulfilled," he says. "The dolphins did so much for me when I was a child. They gave me unconditional love. When I think about what I owe the dolphins . . ." His voice trails off momentarily, and he smiles. "They gave me life. I owe them everything."

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## **WWII KAMIKAZE PILOT LEAVES IMPACT ON STUDENTS**

By Mark T. Hacala, Director of the Education Institute

An American high school student expressing sadness about the death of a World War II Japanese kamikaze pilot--nearly six decades after the war--is not a normal occurrence. But Kaoru Hasegawa did not die as a suicide pilot in 1945, but as a 79 year-old retired corporate chairman on January 9, 2004.

"I was sorry to hear of his passing," said Scott Salamone, a high school senior in Virginia Beach, Va. "He had a great impact on my life and I will never forget him."

Dozens of American and Japanese students had met this unique individual during the U.S.-Japan Maritime Youth Exchange, an annual program co-sponsored by Hasegawa and the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation. In each of the last summers of his life, Hasegawa stressed to students of both countries the importance of understanding, cooperation and friendship between the United States and Japan.

That he survived his special attack mission to pass this message is extraordinary. On May 25, 1945 off Okinawa, Hasegawa's diving plane was shot down by Sailors of the destroyer USS Callaghan, who then boldly rescued the downed airman from the water during the fierceness of the ongoing battle. The Americans treated the Japanese pilot's injuries and he lived to see the end of the bloody conflict.

Hasegawa returned to Japan after the war and rose to become the Chairman of Rengo Company, a large manufacturer of paper products throughout Asia. As the 50th anniversary of World War II approached, he thought of his past and started to look for his benefactors. Through naval records, he discovered that it was Callaghan's Sailors who had rescued him. With the help of friends in the U.S. and Japan, Hasegawa found the survivors of the destroyer, which had ironically been sunk by another kamikaze. The American veterans invited Hasegawa to their reunion and soon welcomed him as one of their own.

At one of many visits to the U.S., Hasegawa joined the destroyermen to lay a wreath at the U.S. Navy

Memorial in Washington, D.C., to honor their lost shipmates. During this ceremony Hasegawa met Navy Memorial Chairman Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, who was awed by the newfound sense of comradeship between these former enemies. Zumwalt suggested to Hasegawa that this goodwill be passed on to a new generation of Americans and Japanese.

With that, the U.S.-Japan Maritime Youth Exchange was begun. During visits to the U.S., Hasegawa met and became friends with members of several organizations, including the U.S. Naval Institute, which had helped to research and records his incredible story. Fred Schultz, editor of "Naval History" magazine, was fortunate enough to meet Hasegawa on several occasions. The transcript of his interview appeared in the September-October 1995 issue of "Naval History."

Hasegawa's message of friendship will continue to have an impact on the future leaders of the U.S. and Japan. "He was a very good man," said Ashley Thompson, a participant of the 2002 Maritime Youth Exchange now studying at Miami University in Ohio. "I still (keep) in mind the story that he told us."