

שבת שלום

Let me open with a story that reads like a Jewish midrash. This version is adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren C. Eiseley.

A young girl was walking along a beach where thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. As she came to each starfish, she would pick it up and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl [neither] crushed [nor] deflated, bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference to that one!"

My name is Elaine Frankowski. For 17 years I've been a starfish thrower, working to make **children's lives matter**, one at a time, black lives, lives lived in poverty, lives lived with abuse or neglect.

More about my work later.

The Children's Defense Fund has named this weekend the annual observance of national Children's Sabbath, focusing this year on Justice for Children and asking "How Long Must I Cry for Help? Bending the Arc Toward God's Vision of Justice for Children. Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, recalls the Selma march 50

years ago and asks "How long will it take until we end the child poverty that traps ...one in two Black babies and one in three Hispanic babies ... how long until we affirm and act like precious Black lives matter?"

At Rosh Hashanah Eli Kramer talked about action, telling us that

When we realize, as Jews, that our own humanity is stripped when the humanity of others' is stripped ... we have a call to **action**— Not to save others, not even to help others, but to fight along side others for their humanity, dignity and liberation, because our humanity is bound up with theirs.

At Yom Kippur Rabbi Latz reminded us that, for Jews, compassion is a social policy and a religious obligation born of our common humanity.

On Children's Sabbath, how **do** we Bend the Arc Toward God's Vision of Justice for Children? **First** by recognizing that justice for children means ending child poverty, enabling adults' who care for children **to have** paid sick time so they can stay home with a sick child; **to have** sufficient income to rent a vermin-free apartment **and** feed a family; **to have** enough peace of mind to stop self-medicating with alcohol or drugs because life is so grim — in other words, to have the kind of life most of us take for granted. This work entails everything from letters to the editor to legislating in county, state or national government.

Second, by putting some of ourselves into Bending the Arc, by using some of our time and intelligence to make useful things happen. We can't all dedicate the same number of hours to action: we are raising children, working full time to support a family, caring for elders. But every little bit helps. If you knit and someone asks you to knit caps for preemies at HCMC, do it. If you have an hour a week and someone asks you to hold an abandoned infant in the infant critical care unit, do

it. Everyone has two hours, and most of us have cars. This fall Shir Tikvah members knit hats & mittens, filled backpacks for kindergartners, and donated blood. We **do** understand the need for action.

Now back to my arc-bending starfish work, taken up after retirement when I had many free hours, grown children, decent retirement savings and the same itch for action that defined my working years.

I've been a volunteer court-appointed advocate for neglected and abused children (called a **guardian ad litem** in Minnesota) for 17-plus years. Minnesota's guardians-ad-litem-for-children work in Juvenile and Family Court with neglected or abused children or children involved in high-conflict divorces. Guardians are part of the team that tries to assure each child a safe, secure, nurturing **permanent** home. They advocate for the children with every agency and person that can provide the services these children need. They speak in children's best interests during court proceedings after a thorough investigation of their circumstances, needs, and the issues that brought them to the court's attention. These children have no voice in the cases that decide their futures but their guardians ad litem do, and so we speak for them and make recommendations to Judges. In the end, the judges decide what happens to the children.

In the past 17 years I've worked on over 60 cases involving over 100 children, over 3/4 of whom are minority children. Though all black lives matter these are the particular black lives that matter to me. In this time I've have been part of some truly appalling decisions, to wit:

- **reunify** a child with a recovering addict parent who may or may not be able to sustain that recovery, or

- **remove** a child, permanently, from the care of a recovering addict parent who may or may not be able to sustain that recovery.

I've had a small number of stunning successes for children and an equal number of stunning defeats. Mostly I've had adequate outcomes for children whose lives will never be a bed of roses. My over-60 cases have involved a disproportionate number of minority families. I've had only one case where neither parent was poor.

By now you've listened long enough to have earned the end of the starfish midrash. This is how it ends:

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved.

If you see yourself as a starfish thrower and an arc bender find something that motivates you and get personally involved. If you are moved by my kind of starfish and want to bend the arc for children by working for "forever homes" for children in need, please investigate becoming a guardian ad litem in Ramsey or Hennepin County; each county is recruiting volunteers now.

My colleague and I have some brochures that explain the guardian ad litem's role and give the dates of upcoming Hennepin County training sessions. Meet me in the Kiddush hall if you'd like one or want to talk about children or guardians.