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# CONNECTIONS

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## **“IN SEARCH OF GOOD THINGS PEOPLE WORLD-WIDE HAVE DONE, ARE DOING, AND CAN DO”** By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor, National Facilitator

There is so much bad news bom-barding us every day from all the forms of media – radio, internet, television, newspapers, magazines, and even billboards - that it's a wonder how one holds on to hope for the future. It is important for us and

particularly for our young people to see that there are other truths – a world full of promise and

hope. What I want to share with you in this article is a sampling of the good things that are happening, that are being done by all kinds of people all over the world, particularly young people. These things have lifted me up and helped me retain a balance in experiencing the world. There are at least three publications devoted to telling these kinds of stories, of adults and children, ordinary people, including teachers and

students, who every day are doing good things, helping others, changing their communities, indeed changing the world, one step, one action, one day at a time – the tabloid newspaper, Positive News; and two magazines - Yes!: *Powerful*

*Ideas,*  
*Practical*  
*Actions;*  
*and Ode:*  
*for*  
*Intelligent*  
*Optimists.*  
Here is a

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sampling, of the kinds of stories you will read in each issue of these publications.

To begin with the Spring 2011 issue, No. 31, of *Positive News* (go to the U.S. issue at [www.positivenewsus.org](http://www.positivenewsus.org) or [www.positivenewsuk.org](http://www.positivenewsuk.org) for the British edition) and this story of “Victory for Ecuador’s Indigenous People.” Between 1972 and 1990 Texaco (since purchased by Chevron) released some 18.5 billions of

The five-day New Coaches Training, from July 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> in Bloomington Indiana, is still open with limited availability! Visit our [website](#) to reserve your spot!

### Inside this Issue:

- ❖ “In search of good things people world-wide have done, are doing and can do.” By Dave Lehman Pages 1- 5
- ❖ Book Review: ¡Si Se Puede! Learning From a High School that Beat the odds.” By Michele Mattoon Pages 5-6.
- ❖ Book Review: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, By Dave Lehman Pages 6-7.
- ❖ Media Literacy Resources Pages 8-9
- ❖ An Introduction to EdSteps Page 10

gallons of toxic waste into the rivers and water resources of the indigenous people of Ecuador. Recently a court in Lago Agrio, Ecuador levied a fine of \$8.6 billion on Chevron on behalf of 30,000 people negatively impacted by the environmental catastrophe. This is one of several stories in this issue of *Positive News* about positive things being done to address various environmental issues – not just describing in detail the problems, but highlighting positive things being done – from “Cape Verde on the Rise” (in the ten-island Republic of Cape Verde off the coast of West Africa) to “Carsharing Is Good for the Planet” (in my own town of Ithaca, New York) to “Café in Cameron helps young people join global sustainability effort” (started in Yaounde, Cameroon and being spread by the Sweden-based “Open World Foundation” to Brazil, India, Spain, and Sweden).

Also, from the current issue of *Positive News* is the simple story of six-year old Dylan Stock who, with the help of his mother, had become concerned about what was happening to the wildlife in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. He created a website – [onestartsmany.com](http://onestartsmany.com) - with

ideas about how to protect the oceans. At a fundraiser, he collected over \$1,145 to go to two Gulf charities – “Kids in Need During Disaster” which provides clothing for children in a fishing town hard hit by hurricane Katrina, and to the Audubon Institute in New Orleans to help treat stranded and injured marine life. Then, with support from “WitKids” (go to [www.witkids.org](http://www.witkids.org)) - a program that supports kid-based projects - he went to New Orleans to see first-hand the damage done, and came home inspired to create the new Ocean Club at his school, which cleaned-up a local creek as one of their first projects. One is never too young!

Continuing the theme of positive things being done at the grassroots level comes this story from the Spring 2011 issue of *Yes!* magazine – “Public Pressure Saves 2,200 Mountain Acres” – the result of efforts by “Appalachian Voices,” one of a network of activist organizations that have cultivated a nationwide movement against mountaintop coal removal. This group was able to pressure the Environmental Protection Agency to use its authority under the Clean Water Act to veto a permit sought by Arch Coal's Spruce No. 1 Mine to

dispose of coal-mine waste generated from blasting the tops off Appalachian mountains to excavate coal, in nearby streams (for more, go to [ilovemountains.org](http://ilovemountains.org)). There's, also, the story of Mari Rose Taruc - whose parents are immigrants from the Philippines - and her passion for environmental justice. She works on behalf of low-income communities of color – the ones often affected the first and the worst by environmental injustice – as the director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network ([www.apen4ej.org](http://www.apen4ej.org)) out of California, which, since 2003, has helped halt the expansion of a Chevron oil facility, defended the state's greenhouse gas reduction law, established multilingual emergency warnings, and pushed for public transit and walk-ability in neighborhood development. Most of the time it simply takes one person to get something started.

Then, too, there is the story in the current issue of *Yes!* of fifteen-year old Shannon McNamara who became concerned about the obstacles to education faced by Tanzanian girls. After initially organizing her friends to collect 500 pounds of books and education materials, she

created the organization SHARE ([www.shareinafrica.org](http://www.shareinafrica.org)) which now serves more than 3,500 students and 656 teachers helping young women progress through elementary school to secondary school, and onto college with the assistance of a girls' scholarship program she created. Sharron recently received the United Nations Youth Achievement Award.

In the September 2010 issue of *Ode* magazine I was touched - as a person with moderate hearing loss - by the opening story giving kudos to the Starkey Hearing Foundation ([www.starkeyhearingfoundation.org](http://www.starkeyhearingfoundation.org)). The story begins by noting that there are more than 200 million people worldwide who have moderate to profound hearing loss. The Foundation has provided help for the hearing of over 400,000 since the Foundation began in 1983, including a smiling Malawian boy, who is pictured being fitted with a hearing aid, and who now attends the Mau School for the Deaf, the only deaf school in his country. Then, there is the story of the Green School in Bali, Indonesia, opened two years ago by the initiative of John and Cynthia Hardy who were inspired by Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. The pre-school through high

school serving 130 students is designed and built with environmental sustainability throughout its structures as well as its curriculum, and includes a student run garden and classes in green studies.

Beyond these three publications are other similar positive, hopeful efforts available on the internet. One is an organization I previewed in a book review of *Fires in the Mind* in our last issue of *Connections* - "What Kids Can Do." Go to their website ([www.wkcd.org](http://www.wkcd.org)) and connect with "Kids on the Wire," a state-by-state, or topic-by-topic listing of amazing "good things" being done by young people throughout the U.S. Or, go to one of their related websites, [www.InOurVillage.org](http://www.InOurVillage.org) where for two years WKCD worked with students from the village of Kambi ya Simba to document the daily life in their village using digital cameras and tape recorders. Or go to another of the WKCD related websites - [www.LifeInNewChina.org](http://www.LifeInNewChina.org) - where WKCD, with help from the Asia Society, worked for two

weeks with Beijing No. 12 High School students to create a series of photo essays about life and school in New China.

Also in a previous issue of *Connections*, in our "Protocols in Practice" section, I described a protocol - "Windows and Mirrors" - which uses a set of greeting cards, "Americans Who Tell the Truth" (see them all at the website: [rshetterly@localnet.com](mailto:rshetterly@localnet.com)) from paintings by Robert Shetterly. Among these cards is a portrait

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and story of Samantha Smith, an international spokesperson and peace activist at ten years of age. In 1982, Samatha

was concerned about the all-too-real possibility of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, and so she wrote a letter to then Premier, Yuri Andropov, asking if they intended to start a nuclear war. He wrote her back inviting her to come see for herself, which she did, coming to the conclusion that the Soviet Union did not intend to engage in nuclear. Thus inspired, Samantha became a highly effective and outspoken activist against the nuclear arms race.

And, one last resource - "Project Look Sharp" of Ithaca College in New York ([www.ithaca.edu/looksharp](http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp)) - has a number of great curriculum resources for helping young people become critical users of today's media, particularly television and the internet. I invite you to use the Project Look Sharp documents (all of their curricular resources are available free) provided at the end of this newsletter – tips about what "Media Literacy Involves," "Six Key Concepts in Media Analysis," and a set of "Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages."

I end with two stories – first is the story of Sebastian Ruth, a graduate of the public middle school and high school in Ithaca, New York which I founded and served as principal and teacher for thirty years. Sebastian Ruth, is now Founder and Artistic Director of "Community MusicWorks" ([www.CommunityMusicWorks.org](http://www.CommunityMusicWorks.org)), Providence, Rhode Island. A violist, violinist, and music educator, Sebastian is a 2010 recipient of a prestigious Macarthur Fellowship., and here is what they had to say about him upon his receiving his Fellowship:

"Sebastian Ruth has turned a string quartet and a storefront space into a thriving and enriching force in the lives of urban youth and their families in Providence. After graduating from Brown University in 1997, he founded Community MusicWorks, a nonprofit organization based in Providence's West End, that offers frequent performances and free musical instruction led by its house ensemble, the Providence String Quartet. In contrast to many arts outreach programs, Ruth and his fellow quartet members have taken up residence within the inner-city community they serve, in keeping with their vision of music as a nurturing neighborhood necessity similar to a library, a church, or a health clinic. Equally focused on expanding their repertoire and their development as practicing artists, quartet members perform throughout the region and open their rehearsals to the community. Ruth's group provides all students—from elementary to high school—with an instrument on long-term loan, close mentoring relationships with instructors, and exposure to an expansive variety of music through workshops and field trips. In addition to these core activities, Ruth has broadened

his original scope to include artists-in-residence from other musical disciplines, commissioning new works with themes that resonate powerfully with diverse, urban residents, and fellowships for conservatory-trained instrumentalists interested in embarking on nontraditional musical careers. As organizations inspired by Community MusicWorks take root in New Haven and Boston, Ruth is creating rewarding musical experiences for often-forgotten populations and forging a new, multifaceted role beyond the concert hall for the twenty-first-century musician."

And lastly is this story from Ode - a story of another school, in Mahiga, Kenya which has been transformed - from a situation where hundreds of kids were jammed into classrooms with no electricity, no water system, mud floors and cold wind and rain coming in – to one with clean water, electricity, new classrooms and a computer lab. This school is due to the effort of Turk Pipkin and his wife who founded The "Nobelity Project" ([www.nobelity.org](http://www.nobelity.org)), a nonprofit that works "to make a lasting difference in the world." In the article, when asked the