



St. Catharines Torch Club

April 2015 Newsletter

Reed Taylor

Reed is a retired high school English teacher, with a BA from Yale and a Ph. D from Emory. He joined the Buffalo Torch Club in 1981 and has served as president and current treasurer. He served on the IATC Board and as international president in the mid-1990s.

Voluntary Service as Soft Power in U.S.-Africa Relations

Africa is much in today's news, mostly for deadly sectarian violence. Forty-five years ago the US engaged in a different kind of conflict in Africa, vying with the Soviet bloc to line up the newly-independent African nations on America's side of the Cold War. In the midst of this political competition a visionary Harlem minister, James Robinson, saw an opportunity for "building bridges of friendship" between North Americans and the people of these emerging African countries, by sending volunteer students to assist in local projects to meet community needs. His program, Operation Crossroads Africa, founded in 1958 as colonial power on the African continent was being replaced by independent governments, envisioned a paradigm of service that inspired the creation of the Peace Corps five years later. Without any political agenda, American and Canadian university students paid to take part in projects which former U.S. Ambassador to South Africa James Joseph recently called "assisted self-reliance." At the same time, however, they exerted an influence termed "soft power" in a recent book by Joseph Nye. Reed Taylor led one of these volunteer groups for OCA in 1969 to rural Sierra Leone in West Africa, and will share his insights through the presentation of an 8mm film taken that summer.

Next Meeting

- Wednesday April 8, 6 pm social hour, 7 pm dinner.
- Best Western, St. Catharines.
- **Dinner:** Warm rolls and butter, trio red pepper soup, 1/2 Cornish hen, roasted potatoes, fresh vegetable medley, ice cream crepes with raspberry chocolate coulis and berries, tea and coffee.
- Cost: \$25.
- **Speaker:** Reed Taylor
- **Topic:** Volunteering Abroad as Soft Power
- Please let your phone captain know whether you are coming.
- If you require a special meal, please contact Doreen Peever or Julia Frankel.
- If you need a ride, contact David Warren at 905-934-9765.

March 12, 2015 Meeting

Secretarial notes by Abraham Rempel

Regular Meeting

Date: March 12, 2015

Location: Best Western

Time: 6:30 - 9:30 PM

Attendance: 31, including 1 guest

Welcome: Anne Elliott (President)

Anne graciously complimented us on how well February's evening was conducted in her absence. She had the Club sing Happy Birthday to Leslie Thorburn, who has turned ninety. It was good to have our president back.

Toast to the Queen: Michael Manley-Casimir

Invocation: Susan Drake (a Buddhist prayer)

Business:

Penny Blake informed the club of the concert, "Love is in the Air," sponsored by the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara. It will be held on Sunday, April 12, 2:00 PM at 223 Church Street. It features Melissa-Marie Shriner and other notables. Tickets are \$15. Please contact Penny at 905-732-2097 for your reservation.

Speaker Introduction:

In lieu of a speaker, it had been decided by the Executive to view a documentary film. John Mayer introduced his Unitarian colleague, Doreen Peever, as the film's presenter and MC. As former Unitarian chaplains, they have married "oodles" of same sex couples. Doreen is also very good at origami (from *ori* meaning "folding", and *gami* meaning "paper").

"Honor Diaries"

This award winning film features interviews with nine women, all from Islamic societies, but now living abroad. According to its own website:

"Honor Diaries is the first film to break the silence on 'honor violence' against women and girls. Honor Diaries is more than a movie, it is a movement to save women and girls from human rights abuses – around the world and here in America."

To say that "Honor Diaries" is heart-rending is truly an understatement. It names the nearly unspeakable abuses commonly endured by Islamic women and girls. The list includes private and public lashing, police detention, imprisonment, disfigurement, being bought and sold as slaves, forced marriages, genital mutilation, and executions, again both public and private. Islamic women are controlled at every level by fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Such violence against family members – female members – is ostensibly because "Nothing is more important than our honor." That's male honor, entitling fathers to kill their daughters, brothers their sisters, and so on.

Rightfully, these nine women ask, "Is this Islam?" Their goal is to make known what has been largely hidden, to enlist a "whole army of women helping other women" and to bring about a "systematic change in the Muslim world."

What may have gone unnoticed in the film, due to its exposure of an exceedingly grim reality, is something much more positive. Each of the nine women exemplified exceptional intelligence, insight, outspokenness and courage, all without a hint of reprisal, bitterness or self-pity. What was so positive was their demonstration of womanhood at its best in taking a very public stance without even a marginal loss of their femininity. There was no gender confusion in "Honor Diaries."

The question and answer period led by Doreen Peever and Anne Elliott was curtailed by the lack of time. But the mem-

bers overcame their immediate somberness with their perceptive comments. One member, Chris McNaughton, suggested that Torch International take a role in this cause. Roger Brook and John Mayer were especially eloquent in their sensitivity and responses.

Closing Remarks: Two issues: the meal was a bit of a disaster and our PA system needs to be upgraded.

Next Torch: Wednesday, April 8, 2015, featuring a presentation by Reed Taylor from the Buffalo Club, "Volunteering Abroad As Soft Power."

Other News

Merle Richards announces that Arts Place Gallery in Port Colborne will hold its annual silent auction on Sunday, April 19, 2.00 - 4.00 pm at the gallery, King Street, Port Colborne.

Penny Blake would like to inform everyone of an upcoming concert, Sunday April 12, 2 pm at the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara, 223 Church Street. See the flyer on the next page for details. Penny will have tickets at the April Torch meeting

Newsletter and Website

The St. Catharines Torch Club website is at <http://vaxxine.com/torch>. Updates for the website and items for the news-

letter can be sent to stcatharinestorch@gmail.com

Vocalist *Melissa-Marie Shriner*

with *Erik Gero*, piano

and *Penny Blake*, alto



Love is in the Air

A Spring concert aimed to delight with a bouquet of love songs,
folk songs, jazz standards and opera favourites.
Featuring the love songs of Erik Gero and Penny Blake.



Sunday, April 12, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

223 Church Street, St. Catharines

Tickets: \$15

E-mail: ucn.communications@gmail.com