



The Author's Journey **Marianne Larned**

For as long as I can remember, I've felt if we each did our best, gave what we could and all worked together, the world would work. As a child, I learned from those who showed me how. The great leaders of our time inspired me to reach out and help others. When **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** asked the nation to create equality for all people, I volunteered to tutor black kids learn how to read. At first, it was a shock, traveling with my mother each week from our safe, suburban community to Boston's dangerous, inner city of Roxbury. But as a twelve year-old Girl Scout, I learned a valuable lesson: the joy of making a difference in someone else's life. The summer I turned sixteen, I had an opportunity to help with poor families in the "hollers" of Appalachia. Again I was shocked by their poverty, and touched by their ability to make light of their troubles. The songs we sang around the campfire still echo in my heart.

When **Cesar Chavez** invited people to join the grape boycott, I learned how I could help immigrant farmers in California over 3,000 miles away. To support them, our middle-class New England family stopped eating grapes for a long time. It was John F. Kennedy's call to action that touched me the most: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country . . ." His words left an indelible mark on me. When he told the country we needed more teachers, I decided to become one. First, I taught handicapped children, then adults who

wanted to change their unhealthy lifestyles, and later corporate executives and government, hospital and community leaders who wanted to build healthier communities.

Learning, teaching and serving have given me a strong foundation for my life. After learning to heal from a life-threatening disease, I realized that if we could each heal ourselves, we could help heal the planet. As a consultant to major corporations in the '80s, I learned we could build a national movement to get Americans healthy. After the peaceful revolution in the Philippines, I learned with Filipino business, community, and media leaders how a nation of people could actually rebuild a whole country. Working with business, hospital, and community leaders in the 1990s, I learned how to create public-private partnerships that met their community's needs. Using the Stone Soup folktale as a teaching tool, we discovered how to do more with less: when we worked together and pooled our resources, we helped build healthier communities.

In the beginning of each new project, I would ask the same question: What will it take for you to get others more involved in your community? People would respond by saying they wanted to know how others had faced similar challenges and worked together to resolve them. They wanted to learn about what was working in the world. So I would tell them stories, about leaders and ordinary people who were working together to make their world a better place. These inspiring stories gave them new ideas, as well as the hope and courage they needed to get started. It was immensely rewarding to watch these people rally their communities, rebuild their own can-do spirit and tackle the tough issues they faced. Their pride and joy was contagious! It renewed my own faith in our work together.

But when I listened to the news and read the statistics, I often felt concerned. I was especially upset about how our country's children were starving: for food, for love, for a good education and hope for their future. In my heart, I knew it didn't have to be this way. From what I'd seen in the communities I'd worked in both here and abroad, it seemed that we knew what needed to be done and what it would take to build a better world. We just needed the will power and the people power to do it. I wondered how could we spread the good news of "what works" to more people, so they, too, would have hope that we really could make things better for children, our country and around the world.

It wasn't until 1990, when I met a Frenchwoman named **Claire Nuer** that I discovered why all this mattered so much to me. In Claire's leadership training program, I realized how my own childhood had given me a unique compassion for the world's children. When my forty-six-year-old father died and left my mother to care for our big family, it changed my life. At the age of nineteen, I felt a profound responsibility to carry on my father's dream: that we would all make something of ourselves. Having already lost two siblings, I realized how fragile a child's life can be. Then when my youngest brother, Christopher, died at the age of nineteen, it devastated my family and left a huge hole in my heart. For many years I tried avoiding the pain by filling it, with important people, places and projects. I couldn't bear the thought of losing any more children in the world, so I kept myself very busy. With Claire's help, I learned how I could face my pain and use it as a lever to change my life and the world.

As a Holocaust and cancer survivor, Claire's commitment to creating a more humane world had given her the courage to take on impossible tasks, time and again. When she asked training participants, "What changes could you make in your life today to create a more humane world fifty years from now?", it was a powerful wake up call for me. I realized how much I longed to be part of a community of people who were committed to building a better world for all the children. The next day Claire challenged us again saying, "One person can be the rock that changes the course of a river." Her simple words helped me see that if she had the courage to live her dreams, so could I. In that moment I decided to be one of those rocks to change the course of the river.

Strengthened by my new commitment, I felt a growing urgency as we neared the year 2000: What kind of world are we leaving for our children? I wondered. What kind of legacy are we passing on to them? What are we been teaching them, by our actions, as well as our words? Are they learning about the great leaders who've dedicated their lives to making the world a better place? Are we giving them opportunities to serve and make a difference in someone's life? Are we teaching them how to solve problems in their communities?

To ponder these questions, I took some time off from my fast-paced life and returned to my New England roots. Walking the beaches of Martha's Vineyard, I kept asking myself what I could do. One day I found a magnificent stone on Lucy Vincent Beach. Its

fossilized imprint is like the tree of life. It fit perfectly in the palm of my hand. Like magic, it reminded me of Claire's words, and my commitment to be one of those rocks to change the course of the river.

A few months later, I spent the Christmas holidays with my dear friends, Georgia Noble and Jack Canfield in Santa Barbara, sharing stories about our lives, and talking about the state of the world. I found myself saying to Jack, "Just think what could happen if the 10 million people who read your Chicken Soup for the Soul books took the next step, from healing themselves to healing the planet!" He immediately responded, "Great idea. You should write a book about it!" Stunned, I realized he was right—and also that I was nervous. Jack gave me his vote of confidence, and told me the four most important things he'd learned from writing his books: keep it simple; touch people's hearts; inspire them; and choose a great title.

Returning home to the Vineyard, I held my special stone and pondered Jack's challenge. Then I called my mother, shared his idea with her and asked her to tell me the Stone Soup story again. She laughed and said, "Your life is a stone soup story. You're always getting people to make something out of nothing. You've always said that if we each gave a little, there would be enough for the whole world." My mother's words helped birth this book, Stone Soup for the World.

To begin, I invited 100 friends and colleagues to join me on this adventure. I sent a letter asking them to nominate "community heroes" and friends who could tell their stories from the heart. Over the last two years, we collected more than 2000 stories about people who've made a difference in the world. After sorting through them, we selected a good sample—something for everyone. Thirty friends and colleagues reviewed each story, giving them the "taste test" to make sure they each realized our goal of touching people's hearts and inspiring them to help others. Thanks to these friends and colleagues, we assembled a wonderful collection of 100 stories of people who are making the world a better place.

As we created the book, we built a wonderful community. To the community heroes and storytellers featured in the book, thank you for bringing hope to me and millions of people every day. I'm grateful for the great teachers who nurtured my soul along the journey, many are featured in this

book. To the kindred spirits who've supported this book and participated in the Stone Soup gatherings in New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles as well as at the Presidents' Summit in Philadelphia, a special note of gratitude.

My dream is for each of us to become like a traveler in the folktale, Stone Soup, discovering our own magic stone and a way to pitch in. For curious, first-time travelers, I hope this book gives you new ideas, inspiration and direction. For our young people, I hope you enjoy meeting some of the real heroes of our time and will discover the joy of making a difference in someone's life. For fellow seasoned travelers, I hope these stories nourish your soul and give you strength to carry on. For all of us, may these stories rekindle the joy of giving and the power of working together to build a better world.

Marianne Larned
Martha's Vineyard, 1998