

Peacemaker of the Year Award Acceptance Speech
Susan Star Paddock
Adams County Library, Gettysburg
April 23, 2007

I'm deeply honored to receive this award from people who have spent their lives working for Peace and Justice. Being a Peacemaker is a high calling. I think peace is the outcome of honest relationships with God, with ourselves and with others, and that such relationships are the only basis for a healthy civilization.

Some people may be surprised that I'm being given this award when I have led a 20 month campaign and spoken out so forcefully on a controversial issue. Can you challenge the powerful and make peace at the same time? We can't if we mistake peace for polite silence, as people are more likely to do if the issues are local. I pick my battles, but I rarely try to keep the peace by avoiding conflict, because silence doesn't solve problems. Avoiding conflict only causes us to live in denial, just pretending everything is OK, hoping somebody else will step forward so we don't have to. Such silence erodes our character and our relationships. We can't have peace of mind or peace in our community by walling off reality and pretending. So true peace is the opposite of polite silence.

If what we are on the inside differs from what we show on the outside, the result is anxiety or arrogance. I know every human has to go through the inner struggle to see what we don't want to see about ourselves. People don't like to do that, because it's hard to do. It's hard to break through the cultural conditioning and the limits of our worldview.

When the controversy is public, polite silence does more than erode our character, it can erode our democracy, and indeed it has, in our community and our nation.

So I do believe that a peacemaker can work for justice, can speak out forcefully, and must speak out. I know that such speaking out, speaking the truth to the powerful, is far more effective when it comes from self awareness and inner peace. When we have inner peace there is no need to insult others. And when we know ourselves we know we have no right to insult others. In No Casino Gettysburg we opposed a truly bad idea, supposedly a done deal, peacefully, and in Adams County people know now that they can and must overcome bad ideas, and that we can change things as peacemakers.

I loved the prize, getting to choose books that will be donated to the library. I chose books in three categories:

- First are books on contemplation, ways to get quiet enough to know what we know, to know who we are, to refine our character, and to find an inner experience of God.
- Second, I chose social science books that clear up the blind spots in our thinking, the blind spots that keep us from seeing our systems as they really are.

- And third, I chose books on changing systems through appreciative methods and citizen activism.

I think we need a civics revival in this country. Our democracy is simply not going to stand as long as we ignore our local issues. So I hope I have inspired others to also be peacemakers as well, and I hope that those peacemakers will stand up strongly for the good. Thank you.