

Meg Holland - Testimonial - 2/22/15

I came to FUSN as young mother 28 years ago, and now I guess I qualify as an old timer. In my testimonial this morning, I am going to focus on the inspiration of the FUSN youth coffeehouse and how that is connected to my relationships with my two sons, Matthew and Craig, and to the FUSN community as a whole.

In the fall of 2001, as a youth group parent volunteer, it seemed that one factor which connected our middle and high school aged young people across their many differences was a commitment to social justice and activism. As a parent of teens, I was also aware of a dearth of stage spaces for youth performers and musicians, as well as the stiff competition to be cast in a play to to secure a spot in a performing group. Thus when I approached the youth about producing a coffeehouse at FUSN with only youth performers, and making it a fundraiser to support our then newly-minted relationship with Communities Without Borders and our partner community in Lusaka, Zambia, the youth thought it was a great idea. Our FUSN Youth Coffeehouse is now in it's 13th year, and it has not only raised an estimated \$50,000 during this time, but it has provided leadership development, community-building and wholesome fun for a generation of our youth.

There is a personal back story here. As my sons grew up in our family and in FUSN, they were accustomed to adults treating them with respect, interest, and affection. It is safe to say that many teenage boys in the wider world would have no interest in having their mother be working shoulder-to-shoulder with them and their peers to produce an event like the coffeehouse. However Matt and Craig were cool with that. I loved it. And, after volunteering in that role and being inspired for eight years, I recognized this was in fact a calling for me. It was a launching pad for me out of the business world and into a graduate social work program and a mid-life career change as a social worker.

Had it not been for the opportunity afforded me by raising my sons in this community, I may never have made this discovery. People have often acknowledged me for my work with the coffeehouse, and my response was always that it was an incredible privilege to work with our youth and become friends with many of them. I learned and grew so much in the process.... in addition to having a blast (side note: the coffeehouse is happening in 2 weeks... be there!)

As many of you know, the last time I stood at this lectern was 5 years ago, at the memorial service for my son Matt who took his own life at age 25 while living and traveling in South America. That is another story, but I bring it up today because of the

extraordinary love and support from this community that carried my husband Bill, our son Craig, and me, for months following that tragic event. We got to fully experience the benefit of community in a deeply profound way. Over the years I have grown to hold FUSN as a cornerstone in my life - as part of our extended family. Our financial pledge is way more than a donation to a favorite charity. It is an investment in our FUSN family now, and for all the generations to come.

So today I ask you to join me in pledging your financial support for this special place that nurtures and provides remarkable growth opportunities for youth and old timers alike.... a place where young people have a chance to lead and speak and sing and even tell bad jokes to warm applause, and where each of us has a community to stand with us - to laugh and cry and sing and dance together; to hold each other during times of sorrow and to celebrate with each other in times of joy.