

Creating a Better World

BY PAMELA BROWN

Suna Senman-Lane is an idealist, philosopher, and inspirational mentor, helping people, especially teens, discover the essence of their being, nurture their harmonious relationships with others, and create an exemplary world. "As a teen, I was concerned about problems around the world and the suffering people were experiencing from war, famine, and disease. I hoped to change the dynamics of disrespect that lead to violence and neglect. Decades later, I have my own teens and observe a world far different than what I hoped for at their age," said Suna. Her 15-year-old twins attend Horace Greeley High School.

After working as a clinical social worker with challenging mental health patients in some of New York's troubled areas, Suna focused her skills on healthy human development. In 1996, she created a developmental program at local schools, including Play Care at the First Congregational Church in Chappaqua, and in 2004, she founded the World Foundation for Original Human Development (WFOHD), a not-for-profit educational program. Through WFOHD, Suna offers youths and adults the opportunity to visualize and create a healthy future world.

"We felt respect was a core element, and looking at the world, there was a lot of gender-based disrespect causing great suffering in the world across cultures and throughout history," said Suna. She presents Gender Respect Seminars four times a year, offering new perspectives to stimulate discussions and self-discovery. "We focus on a key common element—being a unique individual who wants to express the self to the fullest and harmonize with others." The women's seminars comprise three series: breaking the feminine down to basic core units; layers of a person's being and different roles played; and how women experience themselves in relationship to men. "The seminars are like taking a miniature piece of life and



Pilar Martinez

Teens for the Future pose with Suna (clockwise from left to right; standing: Maddie Metcalf (9th grade), Zayla Lane (9th grade), Joe Kress (8th grade), Peter Unrein (8th grade), Emily Judson (9th), Carol Farha (9th), Suna Senman-Lane (seated) and Connor Dowd (8th).

finding something meaningful to you, where you are at this moment, that you can apply to the rest of your life," Suna explained. There are Gender Respect Seminars for men and women together, too.

To encourage healthy living, on the first Wednesday of every month, September through June, from 9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m., Suna hosts free monthly teas at her home. Open to men and women, it's devoted to connecting with one's individual thoughts and feelings and to be part of the community. "It's an open forum, like a lab in living in the feminine/yin space. I present a topic simply to have a beginning point," said Suna. "They're a practice in being and consciously living in the moment. A few days ago, I noticed myself in a very unbalanced state, of chasing my infinite To-Do list. I noticed my virtues diminishing. Compassion got lost in giving directions and orders," she said. "Joyfulness, appreciation, and love got lost in the guilt of not having gotten more done. These teas remind me to smell the roses and 'be,' live a life worth living. I find the

teas to be magical in how they bring people together."

Suna's new book, "Being: A Process" offers a scientific and spiritual approach to living a balanced life. "The most important thing for a woman is to know herself and be herself. I also feel a woman's identity can be smothered behind someone else's need and can get so extreme she doesn't even know that she doesn't know herself," said Suna. "Each person's experience is real. It's the interpretations that differ. I elaborate on this in my book. This perspective is the basis of my attitude toward being a mother and drove me to develop the programs under WFOHD, especially The Youth Project (TYP) which Teens for the Future (TFTF) is a pilot project of."

In 2007, Suna founded Teens for the Future, a youth-based organization encouraging young people to envision their future and make the world a better place. "Teens consciously build their future centered on respecting self and others. The teens created a mission to discover needs that most people are unaware of and become part of the solution.

They begin their process by researching the causes and challenges of an issue, and then create a short term project bringing some solution to the problem,” said Suna. TFFT has collected school supplies for one thousand children in Darfur, held an essay contest allowing teens to voice their concerns for their communities, and sponsored a young nurse on a medical mission to serve 6,000 orphans in Uganda. Last year, TFFT held a tri-state Awareness Day at the Chappaqua Library and spearheaded a collaboration of schools to provide support to Ugandan orphans.

TFFT put Hithia Shibuya’s life in perspective. “It allows teens in America to have a broader mindset to what is going on in the world and allows them an opportunity to make a difference for other teens around the world who don’t have the resources we have here,” said Hithia, 22, of Tarrytown. “Through my involvement with youth programs and service projects in different countries, I’ve seen the contrasting differences of my world to other people and I

see how much I’ve been given in my life. TFFT allows teenagers to see what’s happening around the world and brings them to a point where they want to help others.”

Hithia views Suna as a mentor to the hope for a better future. “Nothing is impossible. Suna has a very optimistic viewpoint toward making a change in the world and lives her life according to the principles of WFOHD. Her outlook on life is one of tranquility and peacefulness,” said Hithia. “I believe people are limited by the pessimism they see in the world and therefore are limited in trying to do something to make a difference. Suna goes above that pessimism and keeps going.”

Suna’s background has influenced her life’s work. Born to a Swedish mother and Turkish father, Suna was raised throughout the United States and was a competitive gymnast as a teen. “It taught me to overcome many fears and go beyond my concept of self. I also traveled around Europe in my late teens getting exposure to many cultures,” she said. Suna earned a B.A.

in French with minors in German and political science from West Virginia University and holds degrees in biology, math, and Swedish from the Gymnasiet in Sweden. In addition, she earned a Master’s Degree in religious education and social work.

Overall, Suna’s goal is to provide the next generation with better opportunities to create a world that pleases them. “Young people want to make a difference in the world. I believe in giving each person the space to be the unique individual he or she wants to be and that person will contribute to creating a harmonious society and beauty in the world.”

For more information on Suna’s projects, visit www.WFOHD.org or email theyouthproject@aol.com, or to get on the notification list for the monthly teas, email Genderrespect@aol.com. For snail mail: WFOHD, P.O. Box 7, Chappaqua, NY 10514; Phone: (914)414-6186. “Being: A Process” is available now at AuthorHouse.com and local bookstores.


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Saturday, May 2: Teens for the Future—The Youth Project sponsored by World Foundation for Original Human Development is hosting its 2nd annual Awareness Day in Chappaqua. It’s a great time to meet and greet young people who are making a difference in the world. You can learn about their projects and innovative solutions to the world’s problems. Eat great food at Don Emillio’s Restaurant, 57-59 King Street, Chappaqua. There’s lots going on. Hear live music, make and buy crafts, and try winning the grand prize of two Bruce Springsteen concert tickets! For more info, visit www.teensforthefuture.com or www.wfohd.org

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