

A Note from the Executive Director

As I thought about what I would say about Florence, I decided to see if I could find a single word to describe what Florence did that changed the world. One word to best describe how impactful her life has been. It was quite a challenge to bring it down to one word.

Words like “forever-changed-lives” and “model-autism-intervention-program,” of course, emerged first. But they are clearly phrases, not words. Nevertheless, they are part of her legacy.

Next came “successful mother” and “role model.” Better, but still two words -- even if descriptive.

Then came “visionary” and “steward” but they did not embody the vastness of the way she changed the world. Then I found it: **Brotherhood**. Yes Brotherhood. Listen to this definition by writer Peter Terzick. And substitute the word sisterhood if you like.

What is brotherhood?

It is the wisdom of Lincoln and the warmth of Gandhi.

It is the humility of Jesus, the humbleness of Mohammed, and the humanitarianism of Confucius.

It is Catholic and Protestant and Jew -- living together in peacefulness and harmony.

It is Italian and Dane, and Bulgarian and Pole working side by side on the job and sitting shoulder to shoulder in the union hall searching for ways to advance the common good.

It is the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. It is the Bible, the Talmud, and the Koran.

It is the essence of all wisdom - of all the ages -- distilled into a single word.

But equally -- it is the understanding of neighbors and friends who sorrow at your misfortunes and rejoice at your triumphs.

You cannot see brotherhood; neither can you hear it nor taste it -- but you can feel it a hundred times a day.

It is the pat on the back when things look gloomy.

It is the smile of encouragement when the way seems hard. It is the helping hand when the burden becomes unbearable.

Brotherhood is the single word that best describes what Florence's determination and vision has fostered at Somerset Hills Learning Institute.

You felt it when you attended a staff member's wedding and realized that a third of the attendees were former and present employees – all of whose friendship started at the Institute.

You feel it when parents come together to fundraise year after year to ensure Florence's vision endures.

You felt it when a staff member had surgery and parents rallied together to send food to his family for days.

And, of course, you feel it when a child at the school graduates and everyone comes together to celebrate the many, many accomplishments that would not have occurred without Florence's determination.

I could go on and on.

And let's be clear -- creating brotherhood is a noble but difficult accomplishment -- one that many of our world leaders lack the wisdom, skill, or courage to achieve – like Florence had.

So for all of Florence's family -- Karen and Jared especially -- when the moments of grief seem too much to bear, turn to Florence's goals and achievements, smile and imitate the model.

I will forever be grateful to Florence as I know the past, present, and future families of Somerset Hills Learning Institute will be. So I will end with words of appreciation from Eleanor Roosevelt:

"If at the end one can say: 'This woman used – to the limit – the powers that God granted her; that she was worthy of love and respect; and worthy of the sacrifices that many people made in order that she might achieve what she deemed to be her task,' -- then that life has been lived well and there are no regrets."

Thank you Florence.