



INTRODUCTION

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As we begin a new millennium, and face a critical time in our nation's history, it's a good time to take stock and ask ourselves some important questions: "Where have we been? Where are we going? What do we want to accomplish in the next hundred years—for ourselves and for our families? And who will chart our course?"

Creating an educated constituency of Americans is the most-critical issue of our time. Our country needs people prepared to address the urgent challenges facing our world.

We wonder how the events of September 11, 2001, could have happened. We wonder why "they" hate us so much. It's hard for most Americans to imagine how people on the other side of the world live—in desperate poverty, without hope, without opportunities. We are separated from them geographically, and by the growing distance between the haves and the have-nots. As we strive to build a more peaceful world, we must learn more how to work with all other people on this planet.

Throughout history, we've thought that fighting wars would bring peace. We've passed this legacy of war on to our children. After September 11, we wonder if, in the long term, this approach will really work. Polls tell us that our children believe that the world will be less safe and prosperous when they grow up. What can we do now to change things so that they can have a more hopeful vision of their future?

We've all been touched by the power of the examples set by legendary heroes like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, John and Robert F. Kennedy, and Mother Teresa. These men and women of kindness, courage, and action set the course for the twentieth century, yet they are famous not because they possessed superhuman brains, wealth, or privilege, but because they embraced humanity and dedicated their lives to empowering every human being. They did this with hope, self-sacrifice, and hard work. They envisioned a better world, and left a legacy of service for us to follow.

Stone Soup for the World is a blueprint for building a better world. Its heroes are ordinary folks in America and twenty-nine other countries who, by conviction, imagination, innovation, persistence, frequently hard work and not infrequently moral or physical courage, have lifted neighbors and their communities. They challenge each of us to respond in kind. By their actions, neighborhood by neighborhood, village by village, they break from the destructive patterns of our past and transform the world. The secret to their greatness is the magic ingredients in *Stone Soup for the World*—the simple truth that by working together we can accomplish much more than any of us could have on our own.

In today's world, young people are hungry for role models and modern-day heroes they can look up to and follow. Marianne Larned works with the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, training young people to become heroes. Future and emerging leaders work side by side with heroes from the book who share their time, their life stories, and their insights into the toughest issues facing their communities and our world. I've enjoyed working with Marianne and her team. Grounded in local values, her work is spreading across the country.

As the only superpower, we must be the best country and the best global citizens we can be. That means offering a hand up to the good guys—and forging new directions for the global economy. In the last century we've shown the world how we can attack and

solve perplexing problems with technology. Imagine if we were to apply that same intellectual power to solving the world's greatest problems— poverty, overpopulation, pollution, and medical insufficiency, as well as our dependence on nonrenewable energy sources. With the resurgence of patriotism in America, this is an ideal time to launch such a bold national initiative. It could become this generation's version of putting a man on the moon.

Around the world, revolutionary forces are already at work, and they have humankind's dreams on their side. It is up to us to assume leadership of that revolution, to channel it in a direction that will ensure freedom's future. We can help assure success by celebrating the heroes in our midst who by their example can lift up the spirit of our people. Their leadership will realize the true values of humankind and put to shame the false values that simultaneously exalt and trivialize our society. Their spirit is the spirit of America, and of the human experience. For humans will be nothing if they are not their brothers' and sisters' keepers.

We all can take the hero's journey. It begins with a single step, the moment we decide to stand up for something we believe in.

Stone Soup for the World asks each of us to take that first step. It's time to roll up our sleeves. It's a time to share our stories and teach our children that they too can be heroes. It's time to build a better, safer place for all people. It's time to take action—and chart the course for our future. And that's the way it is.