



## EACH ONE TEACH ONE

### Emerging Island Leaders

The emerging island leaders in this chapter tell the story of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute's journey. They hold a special place in my heart. They have become my teachers. My first goal was to listen, really listen to, and learn from them. We invited them to share their dreams. And in spite of daunting odds, they dreamed of a better life. Today, 20 years later they are lawyers, doctors, business executives. And each and every one of them is an inspiration to their island community.

In 2004 I went to Vieques in search of a quiet place on the water to finish this book. However, when the mayor of Vieques saw his prison cellmate, actor Edward James Olmos's name on the cover of the Spanish edition of the first book, *Pan Y Vino Para El Camino*, he asked the Institute to help him rebuild his island community. It was then that we turned the Institute upside down to work directly with the young people. Given they spoke Spanish, we invited Spanish-speaking people from my first book, *Stone Soup for the World*, to serve as faculty for the Institute's first Sustainability Summit. The actor Edward James Olmos sent a welcome video to greet the youth delegates. Nane Alejandrez led an indigenous 'passing of the torch feather ceremony'. And the grandson of Cesar Chavez inspired Vieques youth with his family's stories of their work with farmworkers in California. Over the next four years, we created a bi-lingual demonstration project – and mentored these youth to build a new generation of leaders.

Islands are a great place to write. I had first gone to the island of Martha's Vineyard to walk on the beach, and think about a question: "What was I being called to do?" Little did I know that this question would have a two-part answer. A magical stone that found me on Lucy Vincent Beach led to my writing a book, founding an international non-profit organization, and then working with the island community's schools to bring the stories to life. We engaged community leaders and even a few celebrities to create educational events. When we were asked to bring our Stone Soup magic to others, we worked with inner city communities like Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, and Oakland – as well as national organizations like the YMCA of the USA.



For over 20 years I've lived on islands, trying to finish this book. I've traveled to more than 60, from Martha's Vineyard to Vieques, Puerto Rico, and then island hopping through the Caribbean. And I've gone from the island state of Hawaii to the island nation of the Philippines; and in Europe, to Croatia's 1000 islands, and then to Sri Lanka in Asia. Each one of these has its own special beauty, culture and peoples.

In today's world, with the increasing dangers of climate change, island people are now "the canaries in the coal mine." Every day they see their coastlines eroding, their fish supply depleted, plastics littering their beaches, and toxic waste and environmental hazards dumped into their pristine waters. On Vieques, after Hurricane Maria, there was literally no food, no water, no gas, no ferry, and no working ATMs. Along with the loss and pain, have come illness and death, and sometimes apathy and despair. The limited availability of space on islands, and the lack of affordable housing, access to living-wage jobs, government services, and other key resources are threatening the investment these families have devoted to their island for generations, just so they can survive. Many of them are being forced to sell their lands in hopes of finding a better life. But where can they go?

Just before embarking on this island journey, I had led Healthy Community Initiatives in Cleveland and Detroit. Consulting for business, government, education, and community leaders, we built public-private partnerships to address challenging local issues. It's been shown statistically that communities with less than 20,000 people have the greatest chance of success of this model. On island communities, there is less than 1 degree of separation between the people. Everyone knows everyone—and knows everything! There is a natural cohesiveness: people know their neighbors and tend to help each other out in a host of ways, from building houses to caring for each other's children. When someone is in trouble, or a loved one passes, everyone offers to help, bring meals or lend a hand. By luck or divine intervention, I discovered that islands, with their small populations, were ideally suited to bringing the Stone Soup metaphor to life. This universally known fable provided a simple and easy-to-understand way to get everyone to work together to improve their communities, especially for their children.

Living and working alongside young people in these island communities for 20 years was enlightening, humbling and a deep cultural learning experience. My life has been enriched by them and their simple ways of living—and their beautiful beaches. But I have also witnessed the dark side of this paradise; the growing inequities between the "haves" (tourists, developers) and the "have-nots" (locals). It has been especially painful to



see how little support there can be for young people. Schools are ill-equipped to prepare young people for the 21st century. The best and the brightest leave their homes for better education and greater opportunities. And without experienced leaders, these island communities are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by those looking for a quick investment.

I have deep respect for island people; they are models of resilience, survival, and resourcefulness. They live sustainably just to survive. At our first Summit on Vieques, there was no running water for more than a month, except for those who had a cistern in their backyard. One of our resourceful youth leaders led a workshop on how to take a bath with a gallon of water. When these young leaders were invited to envision a sustainable future for their islands, they created a 2020 Report for Sustainable Development. They courageously presented their 2020 Reports to their leaders and communities.

Given that the young people on Vieques only spoke Spanish, they were eager to learn English from me. Since I'd not studied Spanish, we had to quickly create a model that allowed local people to train each other. It was then that we adopted Dr. King's motto, "Each one teach one" as our own. Originally it was an African American proverb when slaves were seen as chattel and denied an education; so that when one slave learned to read or write, it became their duty to teach someone else.

The Institute's motto became the foundation for the Institute's other island community initiatives. Vieques youth leaders Josue Morales Cruz and Kassandra Castillo Cruz inspired Feliza Fenty in the British Virgin Islands, who rallied her friends to create the Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative. Then they traveled to Martha's Vineyard, where we convened the Institute's Sustainability Summits and launched a year-round program for the next 10 years. Among the hundreds they trained is Taynara Goncalves who then inspired other Brazilian youth on Martha's Vineyard. Josue and Kassandra then traveled to Hawaii where they mentored Trevor Tanaka, Jackie Noborikowa, and many others. Today, these Emerging Leaders lead the Institute's Facilitators Program using our educational tools to inspire the next generation of young people to build a more just, equitable and sustainable world. Each One Teach One.

