

Only Connect

By Juliana Forbes '78

Juliana Forbes '78 is one of the co-founder of Mothers Acting Up, whose mission is to mobilize mothers to act on behalf of the world's children. She is the mother of two children.

From my years as a student and through years of conversations with AO (Forbes), I believe the opportunity and challenge of “*connecting to something larger than yourself*” has been particularly alive at Colorado Rocky Mountain School. I believe in this concept and how it rescues us when we're in danger of falling into the bottomless pit of self-absorption and gives us a life-line: opportunities to contribute, to be needed. As Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn say in *Half the Sky*, “... There are a few factors that can affect our happiness levels in a sustained way. One is ‘a connection to something larger’ – a greater cause or a humanitarian purpose. Traditionally, this was what brought people to churches or other religious institutions, but any movement or humanitarian initiative can provide a sense of purpose that boosts one's happiness quotient. We are neurologically constructed so that we gain huge personal dividends from altruism (pg. 249-250).”

But there is more to this concept, and I think it is going to save humanity.

Many who are held up as leaders—Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi, for example, talk about mutuality, about our interconnection, and about how if one of us is wronged, we all are wronged. Although we repeat these words, I don't think we've regarded them as true but rather that these leaders were just *really* good humans. Uber nice. And when we serve others ourselves, we secretly congratulate ourselves for being good. Not wise. Our motivation for connecting to something larger isn't to lift everyone up, but to contribute so we can personally be better people.

This is outdated. We're not being good when we honor our connections, we're being aware of the many inextricably intertwined ways our lives are connected. Today, the principles of social justice aren't just held by the morally passionate, they are held by the wise.

I believe that this current age is teaching us how to recognize our connections. Collectively we're moving from a paradigm of taking care of ourselves—and our intimate circles—often at the expense of others (see history, and how we've rewarded, idolized, forged numerous statues for those who managed the biggest grabs) to a paradigm that recognizes the responsibilities of our interconnections. This will take time. We are clumsy at it now, although many—especially younger leaders—seem to understand it more intimately than those of us “hard-wired” in the previous paradigm. My children are infinitely more clear about our global interconnections than I fear I will ever be, no matter how deep my vein of earnestness.

In my work with Mothers Acting Up (MAU) we've focused on this extensively, urging mothers to recognize that our children's lives are all interconnected—politically, environmentally, socially, and economically—and that only by working to nurture and protect *all* children can we protect our own.

My colleague, Beth Osnes, wrote a play, recently performed at CRMS, which centers on the challenge, “*How do we get people to authentically care about other people's children?*” Before she launches into the main “baby swapping” story line, there is this section by a cultural anthropologist:

Our sensibilities as a people are clannish. We evolved from the clan structure, hunters and gatherers. These are peoples who intermarried; all looked the same and rarely absorbed or accepted others into their clan. Clan humans were more

successful than other humans and thereby thrived such that we are their descendants. What is needed at this state of our evolution is a forced expanding of this clan mentality. Our very survival as a race depends upon it. Something radical must be done to make people aware that each nation's impact is linked to each other's survival globally. We are members of a global clan whether we like it or not.

I love this piece and I often think, “whether we like it or not.” We know there are tremendous challenges facing us. I believe this concept of mutuality is the threshold we must—and will—walk through in order to find shared solutions. We’re living in a time, as Dewitt Jones says, with an “accelerating curve of possibility.” When we focus, not on what we have to give up, but also on how we’re going to re-design everything to reflect this mutuality, our hearts and minds will be fed by the sheer creativity of our lives. And our existence will continue into another century.