



The Wizard of Oz visits Kids at Hope

by Rick Miller

The famous children's classic, The Wizard of Oz, has withstood the test of time by sharing a set of values that continues to resonate with every generation.

Although there are many wonderful and colorful characters in the story, the three with which we can all identify are the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow. Each character seems to lack something which prevents them from pursuing their futures. Their confidence and enthusiasm for life are in question.

When the Wizard learns of these issues and perceived shortcomings he comes up with a set of novel solutions that underscores his ability to see within their souls. In order to assist these wanderers, the Wizard presents the Cowardly Lion a Hero's Medal encouraging one and all to pay homage to his great courage. In the case of the Tin Man, who felt he did not have a heart, therefore, could not love or be loved, because if he did he would surely hear it tick, the Wizard presented him a ticking clock to remind him that he in fact had a heart. And the Scarecrow wallowed in self-pity because, alas, he did not have a brain. The ingenious Wizard gave the Scarecrow a diploma proving to the world that he indeed had a brain.

Each character was enormously grateful to the Wizard. Yet, the Great OZ reminded them that what was deep within each of them was more important than the artificial items he presented. He also understood each character was no less important for not having those tangible items. He understood their importance to the three visitors, and with the receipt of the medal, the ticking clock and the diploma the Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow were now able to get on with their lives and their futures. He realized that to a great degree what they were lacking was someone to validate them.

The story of The Wizard of Oz reminds us that the three characters exist in our communities. Many children feel they lack courage to say "no" to drugs, gangs, inappropriate sex, and aimlessness. Many children feel that they are not loved and therefore do not have the capacity to love. Many children feel that they don't have brain. They feel they are not smart and therefore education offers them little.

The fact is that these children visit us every day in whatever role we play in our communities. We must remember what the Wizard taught us and that is that these children in fact do not lack courage or love or intelligence. It is that they have never been validated for their courage, love and achievement.

However, if we were to rewrite The Wizard of Oz we would add one more important character and like the other three, this one would lack something critical enough to be challenge their future and sense of purpose. In today's Wizard of Oz the fourth character would be a Child Without a Future.

In today's Wizard of Oz, the Child Without a Future is also not a fictitious character. He or she does not exist on the pages of a book or a movie screen but in our classrooms, in our youth organizations, in our recreation programs and in our faith based agencies. The Child Without a Future is not invisible, although we treat him or her like they are. They anonymously move through life. It's easy not to know their names because we are too busy doing things around them rather than with

them. They are sometimes easy to dismiss because they may not be living up to our expectations. The Child Without a Future like the previous three children struggles in our communities because our communities fail to understand and most importantly to act on the range of physical and emotional needs with which they are plagued. Their choices have been limited. Not one of these Children Without a Future ever choose to be born into poverty, or to abusive parents, or chose a teacher or other adults in their lives who rather not have them around. These children did not choose to have a life without a future.

What would a wise Wizard do for these children? What creative answer would he find as powerful as the ones he found for his previous three visitors? In the Land of Oz how would he validate their futures?

Simple enough, the powerful Wizard would present to the Child Without a Future his or her very own Passport to Their Future. It is not that children don't have a future. It's that children don't believe they have a future. And when they don't, they give up. Sometimes they give up in first, second, or third grade. Sometimes they try for a number of years and then give up in seventh, eighth or later grades. Regardless, too many of them give up and they wind up in the land of hopelessness and failure. Helping children understand that life is full of challenges and although there are terrible risks there is also great hope and opportunity. It is the responsibility of any and all adults when faced with such children, to give them a future. It would be nice to wait for a Wizard to figure it out for us. But we cannot wait. And most importantly, we eventually learned that in the Land of Oz the Wizard wasn't a wizard at all he was just a common person. The answer is too simple, the solution too powerful to wait. It is about connecting and caring.

Read about Kids at Hope's Passport to the Future to understand how you can restore a child's faith in themselves and offer them a complete understanding of their journey and destinations in life. With Passport to the Future each child will carry a tangible reminder that they can succeed in life. With their Passports in hand they will have something to remind them of the skills, talents, characteristics and intelligence they will need to succeed at each of life's destinations points including HOME and FAMILY; EDUCATION and CAREER; COMMUNITY and SERVICE; and HOBBIES and RECREATION.

Be a Wizard to a Child Without a Future. You too will become unforgettable.