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Don't give hope the boot

By **Shauna L. Smith**

As one of 20 therapists helping people deal with grief and other strong emotions at the *Eyes Wide Open* boots exhibit in Sacramento in March, I had a conversation with a woman who had been a peace activist all her life. She spoke about her reaction to the 1,533 boots of soldiers and hundreds of shoes representing more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians, mostly women and children, who were casualties of the Iraq war.

The woman told me, through her tears, that until recently she had hope that we could make the world more peaceful, fair and humane. But, because of our government's militant and disturbing policies, she was feeling more hopeless and despairing each day.

After acknowledging her feelings, I told her that I, too, sometimes felt discouraged, but that it was she who kept me hopeful: she and others who have been--individual by individual, group by group, and community by community--creating a culture of true compassion. Before this administration's egregious policies, many of us were oblivious to how politics affected us. Now, groups of concerned citizens are growing, slowly and surely.

As those in power continue to pursue a militaristic approach to conflicts; to infringe on our civil rights; and to take funds from education, health care and environmental protection, they are slowly and surely hanging themselves.

And while they do, we are building a force of people fed up with militarism, lies and injustice. When that rope tightens enough, we will be strong, clear and bold, ready to take their place, bringing with us a map for peace, integrity and justice.

She nodded and held my hand, and we made it together through the rest of the exhibit.

We listened to musicians singing of peace; speakers reminding us that war is terrorism, too; Cindy Sheehan and Karen Meredith talking through tears about the loss of their sons in Iraq; and the lines from a John Donne poem "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

And as we listened to a somber reading of the names of the American and Iraqi dead, followed by a bell tolled after each, we felt ourselves getting closer and closer to the critical mass necessary to change the direction of our country.

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