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# And Old Turtle Smiled...

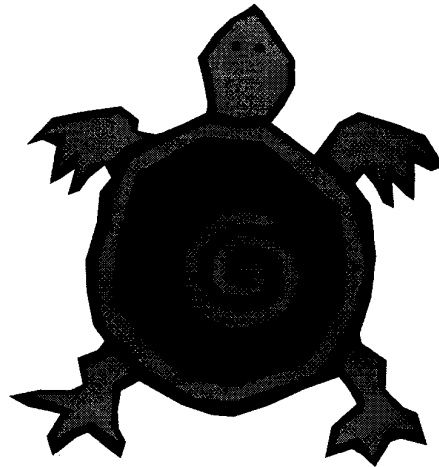
## Lessons of peace from a beloved story

By Bob Kloos

I have a wood sculpture planted in my front yard. It's planted in cement, so it won't grow taller, but it will grow on you. At the very top, there is a turtle. I suggested to the sculptor, Norbert Koehn, that the turtle would remind passersby that, in order to get anywhere, you have to stick your neck out. Just below this symbol of courage are the words: "By the grace of God, I am what I am," (1 Corinthians 15,10).

It is by the grace of God that I am still on the road with Beacon Street after nearly 14 years. It is by the grace of God that our programming still meets the needs of those who call on us. And it is by the grace of God that the book Old Turtle, by Douglas Wood (Pfeifer-Hamilton, 1992), was on a shelf in my son's room when I reached for it shortly after September 11, 2001.

It may sound too simple to suggest that what I call "my life" all balances on the grace of God, but I have traveled with myself long enough on this journey to stop short of giving myself too much credit. And I may not be able to convince you that the book from David's shelf has a message for everyone about peace in all its complexities. But Old Turtle remains, in my estimation, a simple, yet profound statement about this most elusive commodity.



Old Turtle and I have been on the road since Catholic Schools Week last January. I have told and retold the story a hundred times, first to learn it by heart, then to open the hearts of others.

Watercolors by Cheng-Khee Chee grace every page of the book. As hard as I try, I am not able to tell the story in colors that flow or blend as well, but the images produced by the author's words add layer upon layer as the story builds.

An argument has developed among all facets of creation, including the newest members on the scene, the ones who come "in many shapes and colors, with different ways of speaking." The people contribute to the deterioration until "even the earth begins to die. Because the people could not remember who they were, or where God was."

Where are you when you can't remember who you are? Or where God is? It doesn't matter. You are lost. When you are lost, there is no one else there, no one to reach to, and no one reaching to you. There are only longings, perhaps an unspoken prayer for rescue, a way out.

The book suggests that the way out appears only after courage enables someone to shout, "Stop." Stop the shortsightedness; stop the self-centeredness; stop the misuse of power; stop the killing. Gradually, people begin "to listen, and to see God in one another, and in the beauty of all the Earth."

"And Old Turtle smiled . . . and so did God."

Audiences have responded well to that smile for the past few months. I then share with a few examples from a book born from a follow-up to the publication of Old Turtle: the Old Turtle Peace Project.

The author, Douglas Wood, painted his 1975 VW Beetle to look like Old Turtle, and then handed the keys to a couple of peace-activists who traveled all 50 states, convening meetings for the purpose of sharing thoughts about peace. They collected literally hundreds of thousands of statements and pieces of art, all on the subject of peace. A Million Visions of Peace (Pfeifer-Hamilton, 1996)