



Celebrating



#7 With Liberty and Justice for All

by Bob Kann

I learned that you don't have to be widely known to make a change or have a legacy.

-2014 Student Freedom Rider

Civil rights are the basic rights that every citizen has under the laws of the government. In the United States, the civil rights of each individual citizen are protected by the Constitution. Civil rights mean that regardless of gender, skin color, religion, nationality, age, disability, or religion, a person should not be discriminated against.

Throughout history there have been different civil rights movements. Each movement fought for the rights of a given section of the population that was being discriminated against. The most famous civil rights movement in the United States was the movement during the mid-1950s and 1960s for African Americans to be treated fairly and equally under the law.

The A@L “Freedom Summer 50th Anniversary Youth Trip” and “March to Equality” projects were civil rights initiatives designed to provide a foundation of historical perspective from which students could begin to envision, explore, and create a city that celebrates diversity and equality.

The “Struggle for Civil Rights in Baseball” project guided students in an exploration of racial and gender discrimination through the lens of professional baseball. The “Somos Unos, Somos Muchos” program directed students to investigate immigration issues and cultural identity while celebrating Latino heritage.

The goal for all these projects was to instill in students an understanding of civil rights and empower them to learn from the past to build a better future.

Freedom Summer 50th Anniversary Youth Trip

The goal of a project like this is to educate and to remind the community of the potential for young people to really influence their social justice environment around them and for them to really understand the importance of voting.

-Kelly DiGiacinto, Teacher, Nova School

In 1964 young people from around the country traveled to Mississippi to join local activists and risk their lives to promote a more equal society. During that violent summer, three civil rights workers were murdered. Freedom Summer participants were beaten, more than a thousand were arrested, and homes and churches were burned, all sparked by the attempt of organizers to register black voters.

To honor the 50th anniversary of these heroic acts, students from the Milwaukee Public Schools in collaboration with Arts @ Large took their own freedom ride to Jackson, Mississippi to participate in the 50th Anniversary Celebration of Freedom Summer. This diverse group of high school students and teachers, university students and professors, parents and community members visited various civil rights landmarks in the southern United States, including The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, The National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, and The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Among the many life-changing experiences, participants stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spent his last moments and they marched across the Pettus Bridge in Selma alongside activist Joann Bland, who as a child marched across the same bridge during “Bloody Sunday” where civil rights marchers were assaulted by state troopers.

Students worked with a videographer to create a short film of this once-in-a-lifetime experience which documented the youth trip, recorded student reflections, and featured exclusive interviews with civil rights leaders from the 1960s. The film and other student artwork were curated into an exhibition at the A@L Gallery called “Freedom Summer: 50 Years Later” which ran from July 25 through October 1, 2014. Students shared their experiences with the community by providing tours of their exhibit.

As part of the project, students also created artwork, wrote poems, and produced interactive maps. In partnership with UW-Milwaukee and Milwaukee Public Schools, middle and high school students collaborated with university students to host a series of summer workshops that engaged the community in a creative dialogue around social justice-based issues.



Working with the students from NOVA High School {Northwest Opportunities Vocational Academy as part of A@L 2012 March to Equality project} in Milwaukee, I've seen how poetry, theater, and visual arts impact both those who create and experience them alike. The students' work in the arts pulled together the various facts they had gathered into a meaningful whole that neither they nor those who saw their work are likely ever to forget. It changed the way the students look at their neighborhoods, their city, their elders, and themselves. Through endeavors such as these, students see themselves not as passively being schooled in test-taking but, rather, as agents in constructing and sharing knowledge and purpose.

-Margaret Rozga, Civil Rights Activist and Wisconsin Poet Laureate

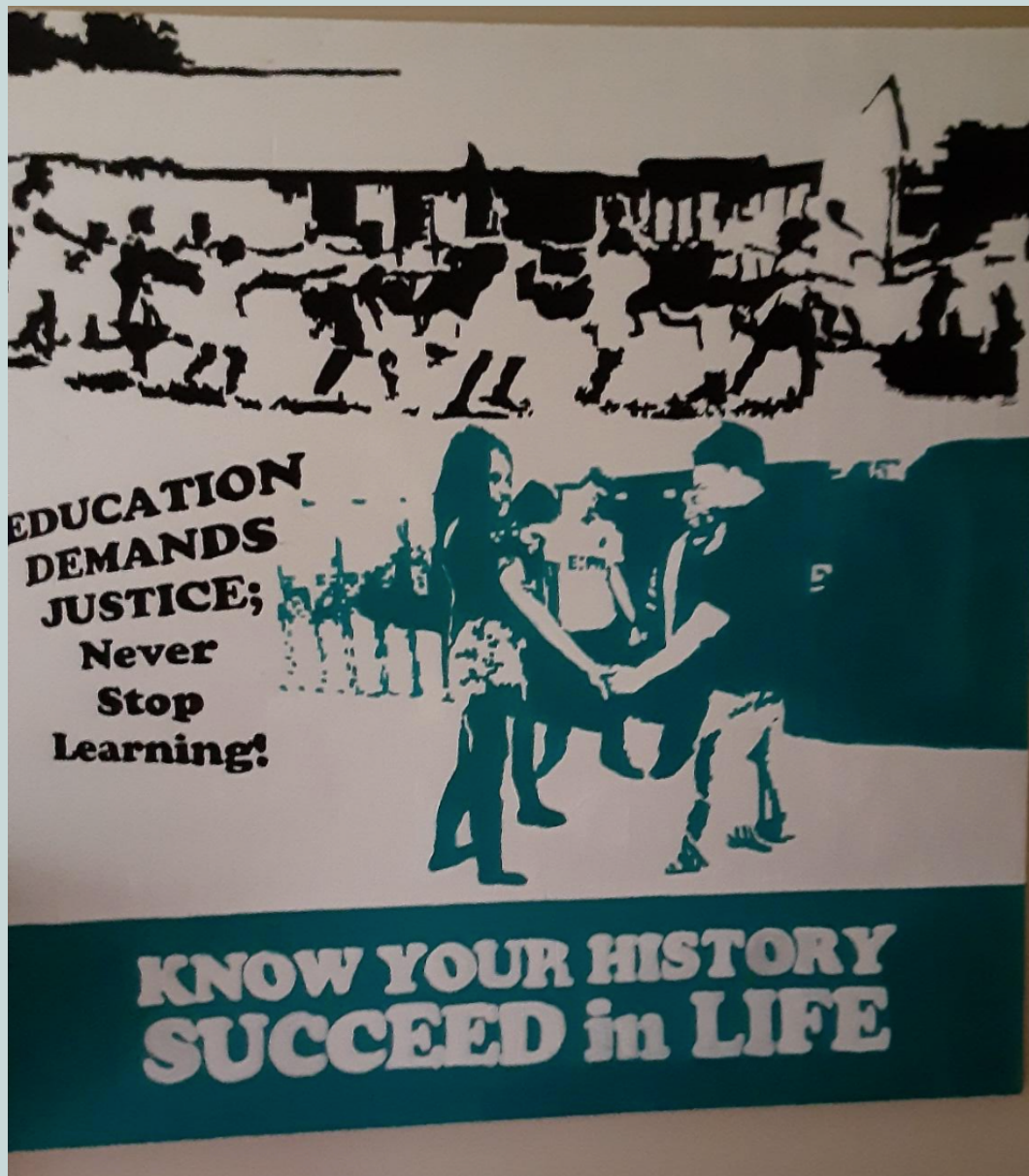
Margaret Rozga is a well-known Civil Rights activist who has been involved in a variety of A@L projects since 2012, including speaking at March to Equality events, traveling in the Freedom Summer 50th Anniversary Youth Trip, presenting poetry workshops, and most recently reading *Brown Girl Dreaming* as part of the A@L Storytime Series. She was the Wisconsin Poet Laureate 2019-20 and became a tenant in the Arts @ Large Community Center shortly after beginning her term.

The following are excerpts from an interview with Margaret Rozga.

To prepare for the Freedom Summer semester, we did a professional development seminar for teachers who were going to participate. My role in that seminar was to do a poetry workshop to demonstrate what teachers might do with their students. From the collection of Freedom Summer photos on the WI Historical Society website, I selected the one that is the original of the scene depicted at the top of this painting--Freedom School students dancing or playing a game in a circle. It seemed to offer lots of possibilities for poems, not only the dress of the students but the circle and other details that weren't carried over into the painting.

In the summer school class at Washington High School, the teacher and students decided to use this image as a model for their own image. The bottom of this painting shows the students doing a 50-year update of the original Freedom School photo, their circle, their interpretation that places them in the tradition of the Freedom School students. It's another example of students identifying with civil rights history and interpreting it in a way that is meaningful to them.





For my part, I was thrilled that the photo I selected for that professional development workshop made such a strong impression and was carried into an actual classroom project. I think it also validates Ryan Hurley's approach {Former A@L Program Manager} that when you give people room to be creative, they are creative.

One other thing I love about this painting--the canvas is white. The clothes of the Freedom School students were white, one of the interesting things about the photo. So in the painting, the clothes were not painted. The canvas became the clothes, and the bodies of the students were painted in, so to use the art term, the bodies of the students are the positive shapes.



About the Author

Bob Kann grew up in Skokie, Illinois, but it happened so long ago that he remembers nothing of the event.

As a child, he loved sports above all else and could perform a standing back flip by the age of nine. His mother worried that reading nothing but sports books would stunt Bob's intellectual growth, but his older brother assured her that he would eventually read books on other topics (he did). Little did any of them know that he also would write several books including a book about a baseball player and another about an athlete who competed in several sports. Listening to his father's tales about growing up during the Depression, driving at the age of twelve to make deliveries for his father's store, and other stories of the south side of Chicago planted the seeds for Bob's later passion for storytelling.

Bob attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, became a teacher, received his Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and later a Professor of Education at UW-Parkside and UW-Stevens Point. Shortly after becoming a professor, Bob realized he liked making his students laugh more than he liked teaching them. He recognized that what he wanted to next undertake was simultaneously entertaining children and adults since this seemed limitlessly interesting and creative.

In 1982, Bob became a storyteller, juggler, and magician who began performing for children and families throughout the United States. In 1985, he realized that being a former teacher/professor turned entertainer, he had unique insights into the relationship between entertainment and education. Hence, he began teaching graduate classes and presenting keynotes and workshops for educators and nonprofit organizations on topics related to humor, storytelling, creativity, and motivation. (Coincidentally, A@L CEO Emeritus contracted with Bob to perform at the PumpHouse Regional Arts Center in LaCrosse, WI at the beginning of his career. Bob continued providing great educational programming at various organizations where Sullivan worked and subsequently was one of the first artists to work with Arts @ Large in 2001.)

As a free-lancer for more than thirty years, Bob has developed many interests which have led him to produce storytelling tapes and write books for children, design curriculum for teachers, collect and write historical stories for nonprofit organizations, and apply his research skills as a consultant for social service agencies.

Bob believes it's easier to climb the ladder of success when it's lying flat on the ground. He usually can be found reading his favorite book on levitation. He simply can't put it down.