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HOMETOWN HERO: Music teacher is patient and Good

By Susan Knickerbocker

In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 catastrophe and in these uncertain and troubled times, Hometown Hero Linda Good says she has asked herself many times: What does it mean when our national leaders ask us to go about our daily lives, just as we did before?

And she answers: We must continue our present work in the world. People are counting on us. However, it cannot be business as usual. The hour has come to reflect more deeply on the larger questions of life.

"Let's create a message of love and light which we can each spread in our own way," Good said. It's paramount, she says, that each of us continue extending our light to those around us; otherwise, darkness and despair will prevail, causing a breeding ground for fear, jealousy, hatred and continued wars.

Good lives modestly with her husband Leonard. Neither material objects nor a high income are her priorities. Instead it is relationships that she feels are important. Her mission, she said, is "to keep everything harmonious and balanced in perspective, to grow spiritually, to be the best wife, daughter, mother, grandmother, teacher, friend and musician that I can be."

Does she ever fall short of her goals?

"Oh yes," Good answers. "Unfortunately, all the time, and this world tragedy has caused me to look hard at my mission. I want to spend more time with my brother, who is battling cancer, and his wife. And make more time for my 90-year-old stepmother."

Good says she wants to continue, too, to spend all the time possible with her daughter Nancye, son-in-law Paul and granddaughter Faye.

?For they are the arrows to the future,? she said, ?and Leonard and I are the bows.?

Linda Good said she's been reflecting on past decisions she would change if she had the chance today. Ten years ago, for example, the single mother of two of her music students asked her to be their surrogate grandmother.



Matt Johnson

At the Children's Day Celebration on Saturday, Oct. 13, Linda Good was a popular entertainer, together with her group of young violinists, the Island Strings. Good has brought her musical magic to numerous events on South Whidbey.

"At the time I was concerned that my other students might feel left out if I treated these two students in a more special way," Good said. "But the family needed me. I should have asked myself, "How will I feel about the decision in five or 10 years?""

Still, Good remains committed to her philosophy: Each morning as she wakes up, she believes the day will be the best ever. Only at the end of the day does she allow herself to evaluate if it was.

For fifth grader Anna Statz, the day is better when Good is part of it.

"I get this warm feeling when my parents drive me into her driveway," Anna said. "Linda opens her door and welcomes me into her cozy warm home. She's such a patient teacher, somehow she gets me to want to practice my piano every day."

After earning a masters degree in ethnomusicology (music from all over the world), Good trained in the Suzuki method of teaching, which holds to the belief that all children learn music, just as all learn to speak.

All Suzuki students are asked to do something kind for someone every day. And through their music, Good explains, they will become more sensitive and compassionate. Suzuki teaches that from beautiful hearts comes beautiful music.

"Perhaps it's this Suzuki training that causes Linda Good to be so patient, remarks fellow musician Bill Humphreys."

"Linda is one of those rare, unique individuals who is so relaxed, warm and easygoing as to appear in s-l-o-w m-o-t-i-o-n, yet this patient lady is one of the busiest, most energetic and most productive people I know. Literally hundreds of young people have gained a special insight into life and music from her," Humphreys said.

Linda Morris agrees: "This kind of sustained, unflagging, dedicated patience is rare, especially in these days. Even after all these years of teaching, Linda can still get excited about hearing a rendition of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," as if was her first time to hear it."

Good herself reflects that everyone experiences life and the world through their own eyes, in their own time and at their own pace. She does ask each student to practice each and every day, unless they're "too sick to eat."

"It is such a privilege to live in America, I don't like to see apathy in anyone," she said.

The same feeling extends to such things as voting.

"We are fortunate to have the right to vote, and we have a citizen's obligation to study the issues and candidates and vote," she said. Apathy leads to isolation and a feeling of unconnectedness.

Good says she thinks often about the fourth airplane on Sept. 11, the one whose passengers overtook the situation and downed the plane so the tragedy wouldn't be worse.

"Apathy couldn't have accomplished that," she said. "Those passengers were passionate."

Linda Good gives those who know her the sense that there isn't anything you can't ask her. She openly shares her thoughts and deepest feelings.

One recent communication touched her, she said. It was an e-mail from Diane Kendy and Michael Nutt of Langley. It read, in essence:

A violin student voluntarily played at the New York armory, where families of the missing came to be with others and seek information. The student was touched by all the smiling posters of the missing.

A colonel came in from Ground Zero. The young musician, wanting a first-hand account of the tragedy at the site, asked, Excuse me, colonel, but what did you see

The colonel's eyes welled up. He stopped and swallowed hard before being able to answer, "What you'd expect to see."

The young violinist took a deep breath and then played "Amazing Grace," thinking about ways his life would change. When he'd get into some petty argument with someone, he resolved, he would remember the colonel's answer, when there weren't words enough for description.

For words only go so far, and even music can only go a little further from there.

Linda Good reflects: "It's only the love and compassion we share with one another that is able to go even further."