

Introduction to “Past versus Future”

I have been a teacher for many years. I have witnessed students studying the way human beings have engaged in war after war – whether it be the conflicts involving Julius Caesar, the War of the Roses, the various wars for independence (our own, the French, the South American ones), civil wars (ours, Irish, Spanish), the World Wars, Vietnam, the current ones. I have dealt with students in “Facing History” classes trying to understand the violence and iniquities of the past. I have communicated with students who were reading William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* with its message that people are innately violent, even as children, or who were studying the poetry of *Pterodactyl Rose* by William Heyen, and were bombarded by one poem after another noting quite effectively that humans have been responsible for the extinction of animals and other humans – and the possible future extinction of everybody.

I wrote this poem with the concept that we have better days ahead of us, that we are not condemned to repeat the mistakes of history, that we are ultimately better than that. I believe in optimism. It is a necessity for the younger generations to be optimists because the alternative is too calamitous to entertain. I have lived through a World War, the Korean War, the assassination of President Kennedy, the assassinations of such optimistic yet realistic leaders as Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and Robert Kennedy, the disgrace and resignation of President Nixon, the tragedies of 9/11, Sandy Hook, Las Vegas – but I cannot teach the young people I do every day --- the generations which will inherit the responsibility of caretaking the future of this world --- unless I believe in the future, in *their* future – and I do!

It is with this maelstrom of thoughts that I wrote the poem “Past versus Future.”