



Debb Bodkin
FROM
WATERLOO POLICE WORK
TO
crimes against humanity

“All humans are human and not one of us is more human than another. Human rights are for all humans, not only for those who can afford it or can protect themselves.”

L.GEN. THE HONOURABLE ROMEO DAILLIARE (RET'D.), SENATOR

ARTICLE NANCY SILCOX

PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN LANDRY & PHOTO ASSISTANT EMMA SCHMIDT

The inaugural Summer 2008 issue of MOST Magazine: Celebrating Women over Forty featured a cover story on Waterloo Regional Police Sergeant Debb Bodkin. On several occasions, Bodkin had travelled overseas to work with international justice organizations in some of the world's most war-torn nations.

In 2000, Bodkin served as Scenes of a Crime Officer with a NATO mission, investigating mass executions in Kosovo, where ethnic cleansing had claimed thousands of victims. The Kosovo experience was one Bodkin called "life-changing."

She followed that in 2004, doing investigative work for the U.S. based Coalition for International Justice in the African nation of Chad. By now, firmly committed to the humanitarian work she was participating in, Bodkin then took a three-month leave of absence from policing to work in the Sudanese province of Darfur.

Since 2003, Darfur has been the scene of a bloody civil war. An estimated 2.5 million people have been displaced from their homes and over 200,000 slaughtered. There, Bodkin acted as an investigator with the United National Commission of Inquiry for Darfur.

As a result of investigations and data collected by men and women such as Debb Bodkin, The United Nations Commission report on Darfur was released. It stated that Crimes against Humanity were rampant in the troubled nation, with some involvement by the government of Sudan.

Darfur left deep scars on this seasoned police sergeant's heart and soul. In conversation with MOST photographer Lisa Malleck in 2008, Bodkin talked frankly about her struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, (PTSD), a result of the horrors which she witnessed during her overseas work.

As part of her recovery, she had been undertaking public speaking engagements about her experiences in Darfur and other war-torn nations.

Four years later, we catch up with Debb Bodkin from her home in Kincardine.

The past four years have been eventful ones for Debb Bodkin, both personally and professionally. Now retired from 23 years of police service with the Waterloo Regional Police Service, she is a full-time humanitarian

and advocate for "Global Citizenship."

Invitations to speak on her experiences in Kosovo and Darfur come from community, professional and service organizations across Canada. Stark photos taken during her terms of service bring the horrors "home."

But it's opportunities to speak to school groups, and youth organizations such as STAND (Students Taking Action Now Darfur) that especially inspire her. These opportunities are fertile ground for educating youth to be good "Global Citizens" too.

Bodkin laughs when she reveals the most common question young audiences ask her.



"Girls usually ask me: 'what can I do to help people in Darfur?' Boys usually ask me: 'how can I become a cop?'"

Her answer remains firm for both sexes. "I tell them to go to university or college and get a job where they will be in the position to make a difference in their community and in the world. I tell them to become teachers, engineers, experts in agriculture or police officers."

Some high profile opportunities to talk Global Citizenship have come Bodkin's way too. These include interviews on CBC Radio's "The Current" and an appearance with popular TV host George Strombopolous.

Bodkin's personal life has had some highlights as well. In 2009 she married ▶



longtime beau Bill Klym, an OPP officer. When Bill was promoted to Inspector of the OPP Kincardine Division, the couple pulled up stakes and moved to the little lakeshore town. “Here we’ve built our dream home,” says Bodkin. She retired in 2011.

Retirement and small town living suit Bodkin well. When I approached her to set up an interview for this article, she needed to work around her regular yoga and massage session. She loves the fellowship and slower pace of small town Ontario.

THE EFFECTS OF HUMANITARIANISM

While she still admits to tears when she talks to audiences about the tragedy of Darfur, the debilitating effects of her struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are behind her.

Counselling through the Tema Center Memorial Foundation was essential to Bodkin coming to terms with the horrors she had seen in Darfur. The Canadian foundation, founded by a Toronto paramedic, in memory of murder victim Tema Conter, seeks to assist emergency and military personnel suffering from the effects of PTSD.

“I started to feel better as soon as one of the Tema counsellors said to me: ‘you are OK. What you are feeling is normal after what you have seen.’ Up until that time I had thought I was losing my mind.”

Tema also helped her defeat the bogey man of feeling that she, one person, was helpless in front the monster of genocide and torture. “I realized that I could help; that every time I gave a talk and people heard me and wanted to do something too, that I was doing my part for the people of Darfur.”

Yoga, journaling and meditation also assisted Debb Bodkin become whole again.

One of her most thrilling moments after returning from Darfur was meeting a man she calls “my hero.” Retired Canadian General Romeo Dailaire, also a sufferer of PTSD, after witnessing the Rwandan genocide was speaking in Waterloo. She went to hear him and the

two met after Dailaire’s talk. No doubt a feeling of kinship passed between the two Global Citizens.

Bodkin varies her public speaking life by serving as Director of Kiss4Kids (www.kiss4kids.com). Kiss4Kids, whose membership includes current or retired paramedics, policemen and women collect worn service uniforms (which for security reasons cannot be recycled or publically discarded). Volunteers take the garments apart and sew items of clothing from the fabric for needy children overseas.

“There are mountains of worn out uniforms in police and EMS headquarters across Ontario,” Bodkin says. “They’re just filling up space and doing no good to anyone when there are so many children in need of clothing in Africa.”

While the work is on the small scale now, Bodkin has great plans for it. “Getting the Police Chiefs on board is the first step,” says Bodkin, who has already convinced Waterloo Regional Police Chief Matt Torrigan of the value of the work.

Bodkin’s hoping that a Community College design class will take on designing patterns for simple pants, dresses, shirts and skirts. She’ll be looking for secondary school sewing classes to undertake the sewing. “A great way to fulfill their community service hours,” she suggests.

This fall also sees her also travelling to Poland, Lithuania and Belarus with a group involved with genocide history. The trip will broaden her knowledge on crimes against humanity in the former Soviet bloc countries and will enrich her talks on Global Citizenship.

And Bodkin anticipates a return to Africa, not at a visitor, but in some short-term working capacity. She’s applied to the RCMP Retired Officers International Peacekeeping program, presently operational in Southern Sudan.

Committed to doing her part for the victims of crimes against humanity around the world, Debb Bodkin is guided by an African proverb. “It says that if you think you are too small to make a difference ask someone who’s spent the night with a mosquito.” ■