Early Trauma Becomes Inspiration for Healer

The Rose Hills Foundation and S. Mark Taper Foundation Sponsor the Work of an Extraordinary Dentist for the Poor

"Why didn’t you bring your daughter here earlier??" the angry dentist yelled at the stricken mother. "She has large cavities on her permanent teeth and needs three root canals!" Marina’s mother had been raised in a little village where there was no knowledge about dental hygiene and people only went to the dentist if a tooth hurt. So seven-year-old Marina had to undergo a number of tooth extractions and root canals, all without anesthesia, because that was not available where they lived. "The memory of that pain is permanently imbedded in my head," she says.

Dr. Marina Markova grew up in Montana, but not the one you are thinking of. Her birth town was Montana, Bulgaria. During the communist years, there had been a large garment factory there that employed most of the residents. At the time of her birth, however, there were a few rich people and everyone else was poor and getting along on foot, eking out a living by running a tiny store, or doing odd jobs. Opportunities were extremely limited. Marina’s mother had once had dreams of becoming a doctor, but there was no way to realize such a dream in their circumstances. The family had an uncle who had fled the country during the communist era and had come to the U.S. He had gotten a job in construction and every now and then an intriguing package full of gifts would arrive in the mail courtesy of the lucky uncle.

Then one day everything changed in an instant. Immigration from Bulgaria to the U.S. was

The Joy of Mentoring

By Makella Brems

When Madeleine laughs, she reveals a mouthful of shiny metal fillings that cap more of her molars than not. This doesn’t stop her from downing sugar—I mean straight sugar. "Look what I broooouught," she sings as she pulls out a handful of brown packets of raw sugar from her backpack. She rips them open and takes them like shots. Our weekly lessons don’t begin until Madeleine has had her fix of sugar. If it’s not with sugar packets then it’s in the form of a Snickers Bar melting between her little fingers or saliva-inducing Sour Patch Kids candies.

Even then, our lessons may not begin for quite a while if Madeleine can help it.

I have been meeting with Madeleine every Thursday after school for two years, starting when she was nine years old. After going through my

Help Available for Doctors for the Poor

Applications are now being accepted for L.A. Care’s Elevating the Safety Net Physician Loan Repayment Program. The program provides educational loan repayment assistance for primary care doctors who are new to caring for the MediCal eligible population of Los Angeles County. If you are a primary care physician who has been working six months or less in LA County serving a primarily poor population, or are about to accept a job in this area, you can find more information and the application for the program at uncommongood.org/med/mednews
Thank You, Friends!

Uncommon Good offers its most grateful thanks to the following foundations, businesses and organizations which have made generous recent grants to support its education, medical and urban farming programs that serve close to 1,000 low-income students and families each year and that support 49 doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists who serve 144,366 low-income patients each year:


What Do We Do?

1. Connect to College/CALUSA (CCC): Nearly 1,000 low-income students and their parents are served through CCC. Starting in the 4th grade, students are given one-to-one mentoring, tutoring, educational enrichment, leadership training, community service opportunities, and extensive help preparing for and applying to college. Parents are provided with social services, educational opportunities, and leadership training. 100% of Uncommon Good students go to college, even as 41.5% of their socio-economic peers are dropping out of high school. The CALUSA component of the program is an urban farm enterprise that produces organically grown fruits and vegetables for CCC families and the community at large. It also provides real world learning opportunities for CCC students and parents in the areas of ecology, health, and running a small business.

2. Medicine for the Economically Disadvantaged (MED): This program helps idealistic doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists repay their sky-high educational loans, some nearly $800,000, so they can accept the lowest paying jobs in the medical profession, those serving the poor in community clinics throughout the southland. MED also has a health career pipeline through which Uncommon Good students are introduced to careers in medicine and helped to prepare for and to apply to medical school.

3. Whole Earth Building (WEB): This is Uncommon Good’s office, a beautiful first-of-its-kind green building that was constructed by hand using little more than on-site earth, by Uncommon Good staff, children, parents, and hundreds of community members. It continues to receive visitors from every continent (except Antarctica!) who come to learn how to create buildings that keep people safe from natural disasters and do not harm the earth.
Music Teacher Missionary Gives Great Gift

Eloise Dale is 94-years-old and so tiny she’d be turned away from those “You Must Be This Tall To Ride” carnival attractions. But she also could be the original inspiration for the adage that the best things come in small packages.

Eloise grew up in Kansas and married her husband, Ken, who was a pastor in the Lutheran Church of America. At the conclusion of World War II, the church had a saying about Japan, which was “send missionaries, not guns.” So the young couple was dispatched to that country in 1951 despite the fact that they did not speak a word of the language, as was the custom in those days. Once there, they were sent to language classes for just one year, kind of a tough love linguistics course. Yet it was a good match. Eloise and Ken fell in love with the Japanese people and stayed there nearly half a century until their retirement in 1999. They witnessed firsthand that nation’s extraordinary postwar recovery, and historic milestones such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the first Olympics ever held in Asia.

While Ken pastored, Eloise cared for their two boys and taught piano and organ. The two of them also saw a real need in post atomic bomb Japan for mental health care. Mental health issues were a subject of shame in the culture and families tried to deal with conditions such as depression by themselves and in secret. No one wanted to discuss the subject despite the fact that many people were suffering from mental and emotional trauma from the bombing and other wartime devastation. So the Dales decided to break the ice around the subject by holding public lectures by experts. Because there weren’t many Christians in Japan, they held the talks in secular or ecumenical settings so that folks would feel comfortable attending their strategy worked. People started coming to the talks and becoming educated about mental health. Then Eloise and Ken began to hold classes and offer counseling which became popular since the stigma of emotional and mental suffering had been removed.

Once the Dales retired, they moved to Claremont’s Pilgrim Place, a retirement community for missionaries and social justice advocates. Eloise gave concerts on the United Church of Christ’s grand Glatter Gotz/Rosales organ, which is the same (minus one keyboard) as the famed organ at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. I wish I had known her in those years. The sight of the diminutive Eloise playing all of those keyboards, stops, and pedals on that giant magnificent instrument would have been something to behold!

But in addition to music making, money management turned out to be one of Eloise’s talents. She saved and invested her earnings from her career as a music teacher over the years in Japan. As the couple’s sons became independent and successful and no longer needed their support, Eloise became interested in what other good she might accomplish with her savings. A friend told her about Uncommon Good and the struggles of our young doctors to serve the underprivileged while drowning in their own educational debt. Eloise enthusiastically accepted the nomination of Dr. Crystal to receive her gift. She then sold some of her stock and donated the proceeds, all $123,111 of it, to help Crystal repay her loans. When Crystal received the news, she burst into tears.

I scheduled a lunch date so the two women could meet each other in person. They hit it off right away and bonded over their shared concern for the poor and their interest in mental health. Crystal told Eloise that her clinic had hired two licensed clinical social workers and that every patient was being screened for depression. Her estimate is that up to 50% of the patients of the practice were suffering from mental health issues and treatment for these conditions was the service most requested from her clientele. This was especially true at that particular moment because of the recent murder of African American musician, entrepreneur, social justice activist and role model Nipsey Hussle whose activities had been bringing hope into the struggling neighborhood. Crystal said that when she asked her teen patients what they enjoyed, they were so shut down and depressed that they could not give her an answer. Part of her mission is to change this through mental health services and advocating for programs in the schools and the community to give kids hope and get them engaged in life.

It was such a privilege to listen in on the conversation of these two inspiring women activists from two different generations as they shared their wisdom and experience with each other. And we are so very grateful to Eloise for extending her hand so generously across the generational divide to ease the burden of a remarkable young woman who is following in her footsteps of service.
first full year of college without a single interaction with children (not including drunken college students), I decided to pay a visit to a local nonprofit called Uncommon Good in the hopes of becoming a mentor for an elementary school kid. The dome-shaped, adobe dome building and sat waiting to meet Nancy on a bench in the small building’s main opening her water bottle becomes the world’s most difficult task. “It’s stuck!” A few drops up in sugar packets: it is damn difficult to make happen for more than five minutes at a time. Every time we meet, Madeleine comes equipped with a procrastination arsenal: A new riddle—“If you’re on a plane that’s burning and crashing, where do you come out? … You don’t know it, seriously? Oh my god it’s so easy. A kindergartner could get it. You’re thinking too much, nerd… Okay, okay. You come out in the news!”

A story about a classmate—“You know that kid that I was telling you about? The one that’s very funny? Marlin Sodano? He’s smart though. He’s read like the Rick Riordian books and all of that. Him and me we always compete because we both like math and we got… we saw our test yesterday! He got 194 and I got 191. And I was like, I still beat you though because I’m eleven you’re twelve. He’s like no! No!”

A new toy—“It’s a 3D puzzle. You have to untangle all the loops from each other.

No not like that! Oh my god. But you don’t know how to put it back together now do you?”

It’s a ceremonial tug-of-war that we both know will eventually end in her pulling out her homework.

Once the initial battle is won and she plops her homework down on the table, it’s on to the next painstaking power struggle. There are times when Madeleine seems to think that every sentence written deserves a break in between, or she suddenly gets thirsty and opening her water bottle becomes the world’s most difficult task. “It’s stuck!” A few drops spilt out when she pries it open, and she has to wipe off the entire table. Then her mechanical pencil malfunctions. She presses down to write and the lead snaps. Click click click. Snap. Click click click. If you’ve ever tried to keep an elementary school student focused on her homework, you begin to understand why Adderall gets thrown around like candy.

On the increasingly rare days when she doesn’t have homework, I bring short stories for us to read out loud. After reading Ray Bradbury’s “All Summer in a Day,” a couple weeks ago, Madeleine groaned and slammed her hand on the table. “Ugh! Why do you always pick the stories with sad endings? A couple moments later she conceded, “That was a pretty good story.”

Madeleine tells me that she reads at school while the teacher is talking I ask if this gets her into trouble. She says no “because the teacher knows that I pay attention anyway and I do everything she asks.” Madeleine’s classmates seem to care infinitely less about school than she. “Our teacher is always yelling at somebody… So, I read.”

When we first started meeting, Madeleine was in fourth grade and did not know the difference between cities, states, and countries. She could solve complex math problems in seconds and give insightful interpretations of literary symbols, but she lacked basic knowledge about geography and history. I couldn’t help but be upset at the disparity between how little she was learning in school and how great her capacity for learning is. So much time had already been lost for her in relation to her peers attending affluent public and private schools.

Growing increasingly curious about the state of the education system Madeleine was dealt, I set up a meeting with someone named Nancy at Uncommon Good to try to get some insight. The next week, I rode my skateboard up for my second visit to the hidden bureaucratic dome building I was waiting to meet Nancy on a bench in the small building’s main opening. Smiling do-gooders shuffled in and out of the front doors carrying cardboard boxes of rich, greeny produce and citrus. I was eyeing the box of fragrant oranges sitting beside me when a voice came out of nowhere and startled me. “You must be Makella.” Nancy Dufford (official title: “Program Coordinator”, unofficial title: “The Doer of Whatever Needs to Get Done”) occupies a thin frame with wispy brown hair, and soft-soled shoes. Over the course of our meeting, I began to wonder how so much information and vigor was packed into such a small frame.

Nancy laughed when I asked if she had any opinions on the education system in the greater Los Angeles area. “The schools are suffering, she said, especially those in the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD). My heart gave a slight twinge. Madeleine’s district. Nancy mercifully continued, “There is a lack of funding all around.” She noted the limited resources and the limited parent involvement, many because they speak limited English and feel they don’t have the authority to question how things are being done or to make demands. Nancy also stressed the fact that “low-income” is a common identifying thread for residents in the district. Turns out that having a cohort of wealthy, gang go, being a parent-in-a-full-time-job mom and dad makes quite a difference in a school’s quality. They have the time, confidence, and resources to put the pressure on schools to perform where others don’t.

The information reported by EdData.org on student performance in Madeleine’s district reflects Nancy’s account. The academic performance and college preparedness of students in PUSD falls well below that of students in LA County and California at large in almost every area: Cohort dropouts, standardized math and English tests scores, number of SAT and ACT test takers. … Over the course of four graduating classes (2011-2015), the number of students in Madeleine’s district who met the acceptance requirements for any UC or California State school did not exceed forty percent. My eyebrows sank deeper with every scroll of the mouse.

A stout and energetic man with perfectly combed hair sauntered in and out of the California State school did not exceed forty percent. My eyebrows sunk deeper with every scroll of the mouse. Nancy and Dufford were the doers of whatever needed to get done.”

The Joy of Mentoring (can’t, from page 1)
It just doesn’t sound right.” Some help that is. I find myself regularly looking up English

“You can’t write that sentence like that,” I tell Madeleine. “Why?” “Because….um...well… all the intuitive writing know-hows that come with being a native speaker handed to me.

son and daughter of Mexicans. So we have to take that test, but if you were an American you

grader), who had come to say hi at the end of that day’s lesson, as she spoke. “Well, we’re

we’re Mexican.” She looked at her older brother (a soft-spoken, soccer-loving seventh-

of one of our lessons, she said yes. Well, first she said, “I’ll be like, no I hated my time with

what she and I had spent several months working for. “The school doesn’t send us scores

is the test that Madeleine had spent the better half of her young life worrying about and

superhuman versatility as Nancy’s. When I asked about the English Learners program and

(they re-read it; and whomever finishes first has won one!” - Dr. Albrecht Classen

over the course of the past two years—Madeleine and I standing by a piñata dressed in our

window of all the places Madeleine and I had gone and the things we had done together

A couple weeks ago, Madeleine’s family invited me over to their home for a

“W ell, so I leave right after graduation, like the day after.”

which is that it must inevitably come to an end.

I must confess that I have a complaint about Uncommon Good’s mentor program,

the library to find Madeleine and her mom both waiting eagerly for me to come through

the door. “Oh hi!” I said, surprised. “Cómo estás?” Her mom, beaming, nudged Madeleine

the envelope’s contents to find a packet of performance graphs and scores. Madeleine had

pushed her reddened cheeks up until her eyes became little shining crescents. I pulled out

the month this year for March.

Back at Uncommon Good, Carlos had grown curious in mine and Nancy’s

conversation. “Who is your mentor?” “Madeleine,” I responded without expecting him to

know much about her; there are over 350 kids in the mentor program. He raised his

eyebrows in immediate recognition. “Oh, she’s...she is...” he never actually labeled her with an

adjective, but his raised eyebrows and slow head-nod gave her a credit more deserving than

any word could. The closest I can get to articulating his facial expression is probably

an adjective, but his raised eyebrows and slow head-nod gave her a credit more deserving

than any word could. The closest I can get to articulating his facial expression is probably

their hair out when I hear the word “lazy” being thrown around with the words

communicate will undoubtedly help Madeleine achieve the greatness I believe she is capable

of. I am saying it is hard to do. And I am saying that it makes me want to quite possibly

rip someone’s hair out when I hear the word “lazy” being thrown around with the words

“immigrant” and “Mexican.”

Madeleine may come to our meetings with riddles and stories and toys, but she

also comes with a desire to learn and improve that far exceeds any elementary school

student I know and is rarely matched by my own peers in college. She recognizes what hard

work will do for her. She engages with every assignment she’s given, and she’s never once

asked me, “Why do we have to learn this? What’s the point?” In our first couple meetings, I

stressed the importance of reading. “You can’t read enough. It is going to help you so much

with your writing.” That school year, she earned the most reading points out of anyone in her

grade. Just a few weeks ago, I gave her the first book in The Series of Unfortunate Events.

She came to our most recent lesson announcing, “I’m on Book Nine!” She also got student

of the month this year for March.

Back at Uncommon Good, Carlos had grown curious in mine and Nancy’s

conversation. “Who is your mentor?” “Madeleine,” I responded without expecting him to

know much about her; there are over 350 kids in the mentor program. He raised his

eyebrows in immediate recognition. “Oh, she’s...she is...” he never actually labeled her with an

adjective, but his raised eyebrows and slow head-nod gave her a credit more deserving than

any word could. The closest I can get to articulating his facial expression is probably

“exceptional.” I nodded in agreement. Madeleine truly is exceptional.

As is her family. What I already knew about her mom and dad was that, in addition

to making the twenty-minute drive for Madeleine to meet with me once a week, they also

take her to Uncommon Good’s extracurricular activities: music lessons, writing workshops,

local gardening events, and to all of our hangouts outside of our regular weekly meetings.

They do the same for her brother, whose extracurricular schedule is similarly jam-packed.

What I learned during my meeting with Nancy and Carlos is that Madeleine’s parents help

run a monthly parent education program at Uncommon Good. Many of the sessions focus

on how parents can support their children’s education and become active participants in the
civic affairs of their neighborhoods. Needless to say, Madeleine’s parents are deeply invested in

the wellbeing of their children and of their community.

I asked Madeleine about her parents’ work with Uncommon Good, and she pulled

up a video of her mother on a local news station. Her mother and some fellow community

leaders were yielding signs encouraging the establishment of immigration sanctuaries at

local churches. “My mom and my brother are scared but me and my dad? We’re not scared.”

My biggest concerns at her age were winning the relay race at Field Day and finishing

the fourth Harry Potter book by the time the movie came out at Christmas.

As a government major, Madeleine’s initial lack of interest in politics and history

pained me. “It’s cool stuff!” She gave her best eye roll. “No, seriously!” I tried drawing

diagrams of the checks and balances system. I ranted about how crazy it is that we’re still

governed by a document that was written over two hundred years ago. I even tried to entice

her with the story of how Preston Brooks beat Charles Sumner with a cane on the Senate

floor after they got into a tiff about slavery. She blinked at me disapprovingly. “Nerd.”

Over the course of the Presidential election, I saw a change in her. She wanted to

talk about what she had heard on the news, from her friends, from the Internet. She talked

about the language being thrown around in relation to immigration policy. “That’s

racism.” It was the first time I had heard her mention race. It has been a regular point of

discussion since. I started to wish that she could go on not having to know or care about the

government. The week after the general election, Madeleine came to me saying, “He didn’t

win the popular vote, though. Only the electoral college.” Well, at least now she knows about

the electoral college, I thought as I tried to find some silver lining.

As the world grew more tumultuous, Madeleine and I carried on with our lessons.

Each week, she eked out sentence by sentence with her pencil held between sugared

fingers. Once she finished a paragraph, she would hand her paper over to me so we could go

through it together. I circled misspelled words and missing punctuation as she grimaced.

“What do you think I’m going to say about that sentence? What’s missing?”

“I don’t know!” 

“Yes you do. Read it out loud. You’ll catch it right away.”

“When the kids arrived at the party they gathered in the gym.” She paused for a second, looks at me, adds a comma.

“You! See! You know how to do it. You just have to take your time and read it over.”

I found myself marking up her papers less and less as the weeks went on and the CELDT
date approached.

At the end of our lessons each week, Madeleine’s mother always comes into the

library to meet us. She inquires how Madeleine is doing and asks me how I am doing. I then

stumble over my Spanish and am forced to reflect on how little I retained from my four-plus

years of Spanish classes. “Era muy bien, como siempre. Nostrousum...” I desperately look

to Madeleine for help. Suddenly I go from being tutor to tutee and Madeleine becomes my

communication lifeline. Madeleine silently smiles back and continues to watch me struggle

with phrases. “Correcto; ‘We need more’ at least is correct.” Madeleine’s mom, always coming to

my rescue, answers me patiently. “Leímos un cuento.”

Usually Madeleine’s mom drops Madeleine off at the door, and I only see her

at the end of our lessons, but a couple weeks after the test came and went, I walked into the

library to find Madeleine and her mom both waiting eagerly for me to come through the
door. "Oh hi!" I said, surprised. “Cómo estás?” Her mom, beaming, nudged Madeleine

toward me. In a moment of uncharacteristic sheepishness, Madeleine buried her face in shut

out a white envelope. I took it and looked up at Madeleine. “What’s this?” The smile on her

face pushed her reddened cheeks up until her eyes became little shining crescents. I pulled out

the envelope’s contents to find a packet of performance graphs and scores. Madeleine had

passed the CELDT with flying colors. On that Thursday, after so many afternoons spent

studying with me and writing at workshops and reading with her mom, Madeleine and I

ditched our backpacks and played some soccer.

I must confess that I have a complaint about Uncommon Good’s mentor program,

which is that it must inevitably come to an end.

“Well, so I leave right after graduation, like the day after.”

“Nooo!” Madeleine objects. I hold back the tears.

“But I’ll be in Arizona for the summer so I won’t be that far away!”

A couple weeks ago, Madeleine’s family invited me over to their home for a

celebratory dinner of Madeleine’s mom’s homemade tamales (indisputably the best in the

world) and Champurrado. When I walked into the house, I was emotionally ambushed

by balloons and a big “Welcome” sign Madeleine had made. I escaped to the kitchen with

watery eyes only to be hit by a second wave of heartbreak. They had taped photos to the

window of all the places Madeleine and I had gone and the things we had done together

over the course of the past two years—Madeleine and I standing by a piñata dressed in our

Halloween costumes, collecting Easter eggs, jumping on a giant trampoline, peering through

a microscope at a museum. I fought back the tears with full force, but this time one got away.

[3]”People can sit on a bench, though, and cough through the night as they re-read a red book to

them whosefinishes first has won one! ” - Dr. Abregh Classen
Early Trauma Becomes Inspiration for Healer

controlled by a lottery and every year a handful of people, out of many millions, won the chance to immigrate. In 2004 Marina’s mother won the immigration lottery, entitling the whole family to move. Her father was eager to go, enticed by the glimpses of his uncle’s life in America. Her mother was very conflicted because while she wanted more opportunities for her girls, uprooting themselves would mean that she would have to leave behind all of her family and friends, perhaps never to see them again, and leave her beautiful country, famed for its mountains, Black Sea shores and roses.

Even though she spoke no English, sixteen-year-old Marina was excited about the move because she had grown up watching old dubbed Hollywood movies and her mind was filled with glamorous dreams of what life would be like here. Of course the reality, once the family arrived, was very different. Her Bulgarian speaking parents struggled to find work and she was put in a high school in which she had one ESL class but all of the other classes were in English. She brought a dictionary with her to class and painstakingly translated her textbooks, one word at a time. However, within just one year, she had worked her way into honors English class and was receiving compliments on her writing from her teachers! She even started taking accelerated classes at the local community college. Remarkably, in an honors English class and was receiving compliments on her writing from her teachers!

Even though she spoke no English, sixteen-year-old Marina was excited about the move because she had grown up watching old dubbed Hollywood movies and her mind was filled with glamorous dreams of what life would be like here. Of course the reality, once the family arrived, was very different. Her Bulgarian speaking parents struggled to find work and she was put in a high school in which she had one ESL class but all of the other classes were in English. She brought a dictionary with her to class and painstakingly translated her textbooks, one word at a time. However, within just one year, she had worked her way into honors English class and was receiving compliments on her writing from her teachers! She even started taking accelerated classes at the local community college. Remarkably, in an honors English class and was receiving compliments on her writing from her teachers!

Marina loved her work in South Dakota, but after two and a half years she missed her extended family back in Southern California. So when she saw an ad for a dentist at the ParkTree Community Health Center in Pomona, a community clinic near her old dental school, she applied and was hired. In the meantime, however, due to interest rates, her educational loan balance was actually increasing and she now owed $422,000, which was $62,000 more than when she graduated. Yet even though she was drowning in debt, she remained committed to being a dentist for the year. Once established in Pomona, she reached out to us at Uncommon Good to let us know that she was in the community and that so called baby teeth are important and so they don’t have them brush or floss. They don’t realize that infection in the baby teeth can harm later adult teeth or the child’s overall health. And the infections spread rapidly in children’s mouths because the enamel on their teeth is thinner than that on adult teeth. Overall, Marina says that there is much more need for dental care than she saw in South Dakota, and the problems she is treating here are more complex.

In her practice at ParkTree, Marina especially appreciates the chance to help children. However, like her own family, most of the families she serves lack dental education and bring their children in for their first dental appointment too late. Most of the parents never have been to a dentist themselves, and their children have decay in all of their back teeth by the time she sees them. Parents put sugar in their children’s milk and don’t think that that so called baby teeth are important and so they don’t have them brush or floss. They don’t realize that infection in the baby teeth can harm later adult teeth or the child’s overall health. And the infections spread rapidly in children’s mouths because the enamel on their teeth is thinner than that on adult teeth. Overall, Marina says that there is much more need for dental care than she saw in South Dakota, and the problems she is treating here are more complex.

As part of caring for her young patients, Marina educates the parents. She tells them that cavities are caused by a bacteria that a mom can transfer to a child if her own teeth are diseased and she tastes her child’s food. She talks to them about limited sugar and not snacking between meals to keep the mouth neutral and bacteria free for longer periods.

But her favorite aspect of the work is helping children to overcome their fear of the dentist. Marina has a particularly vivid recall of a seven-year-old girl who had been tied up to get dental care. By the time Marina saw her, she had adult teeth coming in that already had cavities and she cried with fear at being brought to the dentist. But Marina has discovered that talking to her child patients with respect, as if they were adults, brings the best results. If she speaks to them in baby talk they become suspicious that she’s trying to pull something on them. She shows them her instruments and explains what they do. She is very honest and tells them that they will feel a little pinch for a few seconds but then they will feel ok. And of course, after being brave, they get a toy afterwards! After meeting Marina and being treated with gentleness and compassion by her, the little girl calmed down and never resisted coming to the dentist again. The child’s mother says that she is always talking now about the nice girl dentist and that she wants to be one, too, when she grows up.

Marina hasn’t just inspired her patients, but has motivated her family as well. Her younger sister followed in her footsteps and became a pediatric dentist. Her mother learned English and also went to school, eventually becoming a social worker for Los Angeles County for people in group homes.

Marina is grateful that The Rose Hills Foundation and the S. Mark Taper Foundation have eased her financial stress through our loan repayment assistance program. Before receiving our assistance, she was rationing her own healthcare, questioning whether she really could go to the doctor and pay for the co-payments and medications for herself. Now she no longer worries about working at the lowest paying end of the medical profession and is relieved that she does not have to pit her own economic well-being against her patients’ needs.

Let’s leave the last words to Marina as she reflects on her immigrant journey:

“Moving to the United States at the vulnerable age of 16 was not an easy transition, but it made me the strong and compassionate person and dental provider I am today. Just like my patients at ParkTree I was not privileged but I was motivated to strive for success and make my parents proud because I knew that they made a great sacrifice to move across the world so that I could have better opportunities. Now I acknowledge the struggles my patients go through every day and I feel eager to help them improve their life in any way I can.”

Dr. Marina Markova with a happy dental patient.
world and creating a development model which respects Nature's rights to exist and fosters her regenerative powers.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconvene our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities - an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "resources" because it speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government.
The United Nations Harmony  

recognize the continuity of all life. We should also stop characterizing the crisis as (merely) “climate change” and recognize all parts of this collapse of life, e.g., ocean acidification, excess release of GHG’s, pollution, deforestation, over use of fresh water, soil degradation, etc. She asked, “How did we get here?” and answered, “We wanted to be free of natural constrains. We were greedy.” Today, we realize that indigenous law is closer to natural science than our current laws, which protect corporations and trade at the expense of human rights. We must recognize that there are limits, planetary boundaries that we cannot exceed. They should be incorporated into our laws.

The afternoon session began with a video from the European Economic Social Committee. The representative warned that we must avoid two pitfalls: (1) settling for “window dressing” that merely enshrines the status quo by e.g., assigning a dollar value to Nature and allowing offsetting; and (2) placing the cost of a transition on those least able to pay. We must seek climate justice as we transition to carbon neutral economies. The committee is working on a “charter” for the Rights of Nature and a “circular economy.”

A second video speaker described our current economic systems as based on the notion of limitless profit, limitless growth and limitless consumption. We must replace this with recognition of Earth’s “carrying capacity”; and we must foster ethics of stewardship and community; and we must learn from indigenous people. People will be moved by their spiritual connection to Nature.

Dr. Freddy Delgado (Bolivia) spoke about helping students learn by connecting them with indigenous peoples. An attorney from Colombia talked about her work (as a plaintiff and attorney) on the Columbian case recognizing the legal rights of the Amazon River. This first Rights of Nature suit in South America was brought to protect the rights of future generations and was based on language added to the constitution establishing the legal right to a healthy environment. The favorable decision recognized this right and the principle of solidarity among all living things. The next speaker was the judge on that case, who lamented that constitutions aren’t enforced in Latin America. [Nor was the judgment in that case; according to press reports, deforestation continues unabated]. The judge advocated for mandatory education on Rights of Nature. She also advocated changing terminology, e.g., disasters should not be called “natural disasters” if they are caused by man.

A speaker from France reiterated the notion that indigenous law is closer to natural science than our current law and said that the separation in law between people and the world is “wrong” because “all beings and places are one.” Deforestation of the Amazon reduces rainfall around the world. The movement is growing. There have been 25 Rights of Nature trials in South American and 21 wins. Judges are innovators in South American, especially in Colombia, but the judgements aren’t enforced. Planetary boundaries must somehow be incorporated into law. Another speaker advocated recognizing environmental crimes in times of peace, as well as in war, noting that “ecocide, in Greek, means destroying our house”.

By video, author and scholar David Boyd (The Rights of Nature), characterized us as being caught in a race between education and catastrophe. He said, we must make children ecologically literate, must treat nature as a community to which we all belong, and must avoid the injustice of the worst impacts falling on the people who did not cause the catastrophe. We must also address unsustainable levels of production and consumption in some countries and enhance support for developing nations.

Themes seemed to me to emerge from the day of presentations. They included the importance of: (1) recognizing planetary limits or boundaries and trying to incorporate them into law; (2) educating youth and parents in Nature as well as in the classroom; (3) learning from indigenous peoples how to live harmoniously with Nature; (4) rejecting the reprehensible expedient of displacing the cost of environmental destruction onto the poorest nations and peoples who have caused the least harm; and (5) appealing to people’s spirituality, feelings and sense of community to spread the understanding that we are part of Nature and must live together in harmony.

Themes seemed to me to emerge from the day of presentations. They included the importance of: (1) recognizing planetary limits or boundaries and trying to incorporate them into law; (2) educating youth and parents in Nature as well as in the classroom; (3) learning from indigenous peoples how to live harmoniously with Nature; (4) rejecting the reprehensible expedient of displacing the cost of environmental destruction onto the poorest nations and peoples who have caused the least harm; and (5) appealing to people’s spirituality, feelings and sense of community to spread the understanding that we are part of Nature and must live together in harmony.