

# Best of the NETWORKER

## Feature Articles from Past Issues

The Northwest Youth Networker; newsletter of the [Northwest Network for Youth](#), edited by [Jerry Fest](#) of the [InterNetwork for Youth](#)

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### Relating to the Turtle

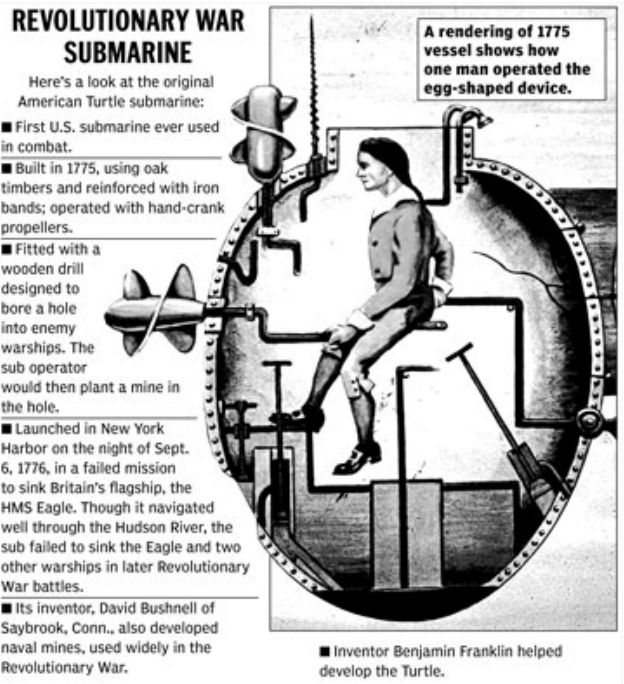
By Jerry Fest

Tomorrow is one of my favorite anniversaries; the 232<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the world's first combat use of a submarine ... during the American Revolution!

Named the [American Turtle](#), the vessel was about a century ahead of its time. A successful submarine attack didn't occur until the Civil War, and it wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that submarines became indispensable to naval power. But in 1776 the one man, human-powered sub piloted by army volunteer Sergeant Ezra Lee attacked British Admiral Howe's flagship, the HMS Eagle, anchored in the Hudson.

As an advocate for a developmental approach to young people, particularly street youth, I resonate with this David and Goliath story. The developmental approach is still new, perhaps even ahead of its time. Most youth programs, even those that incorporate elements of Youth Development, still work from a service orientation with a focus on achievement and prevention. That's not to say that countless youth haven't been helped by these service systems, but is it the best we can do? And, while we have helped countless homeless youth, we haven't put a dent in youth homelessness. The work can sometimes feel like the Turtle attacking the flagship; bold and hopeful, but ultimately futile. The Turtle failed in its mission, and as I still see service systems dealing with young people as a collection of problems that need to be "fixed," it can be easy to feel that I am failing in mine.

But then I reflect on how new and "revolutionary" the Youth Development approach really is, and what a paradigm shift it is for youth services. The Turtle didn't sink the Eagle, but it was that necessary first step to the development of the submarine and, today, there isn't a naval power in the world that would go to sea without them. Viewing young people through the lens of development rather than problems may not be the way of the world now, but we could be the Sergeant Ezra Lee's of the runaway and homeless youth field. The work we do today may just change the world for youth tomorrow.



### I Am From ...

By Jerry Fest

I have a friend who teaches third grade in Santa Monica. She recently gave an assignment to her new class. It's one of those group introduction exercises called "I Am From ..."

With "I Am From," instead of saying *who* you are, you say *what* you are. Rather than "my name is" or "I do this," you say "I am from ..." and then state something that you *experience*. For example, I might say "I am

from internet research” to describe the experience I have searching the web for links to include in this newsletter.

This “I Am From ...” was a writing exercise, and one-by-one my friend looked over the student’s work. She found one 8 year old boy who offered her a challenge. His assignment began; “I am from cow poop.”

This boy could have been in a classroom where the teacher reacted to his behavior. She could have told him that he was doing the assignment wrong, or instructed him to take his work more seriously, or tell him to stop being such a butt. Fortunately, he was in my friend’s classroom. She told him:

“I just want you to know that we’re going to be displaying these and everyone will get to read each other’s work. This is how we are going to introduce ourselves to each other. Why don’t you read it over and make certain that it really reflects how you want people to see you.”

Instead of a *reaction to negative behavior*, my friend *responded* with Youth Development Protective Factors. She enhanced her relationship with him by refusing to get into an adversarial position. She demonstrated high expectations by giving him information and letting him make an informed choice. And she allowed for meaningful participation by trusting in the choices he would make.

In every interaction we have with young people -- or *any* people -- we can either react to the input we receive, or respond consistent with the message we wish to send. The mark of a professional is to be able to always respond no matter how we react.

Of course, the bottom line for youth work is; does this approach work? You be the judge. The final assignment turned in for display had been changed to begin; “I am from rubbing my puppy’s belly.”



## The Cookie Thief

By Jerry Fest

For years I have used a poem by Valerie Cox to encourage youth workers to slow down in the judgments they make about young people and the situations they observe. I just recently learned that the poem has been turned into a film (click on the poster to visit the website). I have not yet seen the movie, so I have no idea if it is true to the poem or worth seeing, but I thought I’d share the poem with you. So, here it is; the original Cookie Thief, by Valerie Cox.

A woman was waiting at an airport one night, with several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shops, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see, that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be, grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between, which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So she munched the cookies and watched the clock, as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by, thinking, “If I wasn’t so nice, I’d blacken his eye.”

With each cookie she took, he took one too. With only one left, she wondered what he’d do. With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half.

He offered her half, as he ate the other. She snatched it from him and thought... oh, brother, this guy has some nerve and he's also rude. Why he didn't even show any gratitude.

She had never known when she had been so galled and sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate.

She boarded the plane, and sank in her seat. Then she sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise. There was her bag of cookies, in front of her eyes.

If mine are here, she moaned in despair, then the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.

How many times in our lives have we absolutely known that something was a certain way, only to discover later that what we believed to be true ... was not?

## A Pair of Firsts

By Jerry Fest



The First Flight



The First Amendment

I think you will agree that those were pretty good firsts ... and I think that anytime a good first comes along it should be recognized. That's why I'm so happy to point out that within the past week I had the opportunity to experience *two* new good firsts: The First **Oregon Runaway and Homeless Youth Summit**, and the First **Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Conference**. For those who missed the opportunity to share in one or both, let me briefly fill you in ...

Service providers, advocates, and young people from all over the State of Oregon met in Salem on September 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> for the first ever Oregon Runaway and Homeless Youth Summit. The event was co-sponsored by the [Oregon Commission on Children and Families](#), the [Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs](#), the [Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition](#), the [Communities Empowering Youth Program](#), and the Northwest Network for Youth, and provided a forum for two days of networking, planning, and training for programs serving Oregon's RHY population. As this is scheduled to be an annual event, interested parties in Oregon should contact [Jean Lasater](#) for more information.

The second "first" I had the pleasure of attending was the first Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Conference held in SeaTac on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. This well attended and well organized event was co-sponsored by the [Washington State Department of Health](#) and the [Youth Suicide Prevention Program](#). Also scheduled to be an annual event, this year's conference focused specifically on suicide prevention and early intervention for disenfranchised youth including GLBTQ youth, homeless youth, foster care youth, youth in the juvenile justice system, and tribal youth.

These were both great firsts, and they have me looking forward to seconds next year!