



**Dr. Muhammed Yunus with Walter Cronkite
Dr. Yunus' daughter and Marianne Larned**

On behalf of the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, I am deeply honored to congratulate **Muhammed Yunus and the Grameen Bank** for winning the **2006 Nobel Peace Prize**. This prestigious award sends a powerful message of support to the millions of people around the world who are transforming their lives, families and communities with microcredit/microfinance programs and loyal advocates working by their side.

I fondly remember presenting Dr. Yunus with the **Institute's first Gandhi Award a few years ago in New York City**. At this event, we honored Yunus and women from the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and two other leaders in the war against poverty and terrorism. Gandhi's grandson Arun, President of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence wrote to Yunus, "**Much like Gandhi's Salt March, which freed India's poor, your microcredit movement is freeing the world's poor so we can all work together to build a more peaceful world.**"

The Stone Soup Leadership Institute is a pioneer in recognizing these grassroots leaders; developing educational tools, trainings and public/private partnerships based upon their innovative good works that build a safer world. At the event that night Dr. Yunus, I and leaders from business, government and the global NGO community pledged to *carry on the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi...and forge new directions for the global economy, bridge the gap between the haves and have nots and strive to build a more peaceful world.*

Given the urgency of our times the Institute responded by challenging itself to use its collective power to influence the direction of our future. Working with members of the **Institute's International Advisory Council** we embarked on two major initiatives during the last four years that address the Millennium Goals. International Advisory Council member and actor Edward James Olmos encouraged the Institute to bring these heroic stories to the Spanish-speaking world through our book, ***Pan YVino Para El Camino***. Mr. Olmos stood with the people of Vieques, Puerto Rico when they ended the U.S. Navy bombing after 68 years. Eight months later on January 1, 2004, Ms. Larned went to Vieques initially to finish our next book about 100 young heroes from the new millennium. Much like the Stone Soup traveler, this journey led to an amazing learning experience.

Far from public view and media spotlight, the people of Vieques had been seriously neglected for decades -- receiving little to no help, especially for its youth. In order to realize their dream of building a new Vieques, the Institute understood they urgently needed support from public and private sectors of the international community.

Invited by **Vieques Mayor Damaso Serrano Lopez** and with support of Healthy Boston pioneer and Institute Board member, **Judith Kurland**, we conducted a community planning process with a diverse cross-section of the community. **The Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative** was born -- whose mission is to train young and emerging leaders to build a new Vieques. *We asked ourselves a question: Imagine what could happen if we worked together with the young people of Vieques to build a new Vieques -- a sustainable global village -- that would provide for them and for future generations.*

For the last three years we've lived with this question and embarked on a fascinating adventure -- investing our collective time, talent and resources in this island community. Mr. Olmos' Spanish-speaking friends responded first: **Institute Board members Nane Alejandre, Barrios Unidos and Cesar Chavez**, 27-year-old grandson of the great Latino leader. During our annual Summer Institutes, they worked side-by-side with the young people to share how they overcame obstacles to make their dreams come true. Others from ***Pan YVino Para El Camino*** followed. They helped bring our educational curriculum to life and created the Institute's first bilingual "global learning community." **International Advisory Council member Steve Mariotti and his National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship** sent representatives and sponsored VYLI staff for trainings in New York City. **Timberland** sent 25-year-old Panamanian-American **Jose Vega**, then fifteen employees from Puerto Rico to create culturally sensitive-community service projects. **Board member Marsha Reeves Jews** helped secure a Microsoft grant to begin connecting Vieques youth to the world. **Judith Kurland** orchestrated our event at Boston City Hall with **Councilman Felix Arroyo**. **jetBlue** helped make all these journeys possible.

Following in Dr. Yunus's footsteps, VYLI's Entrepreneurship Initiative is our cornerstone. Young people designed VYLI's cool logo T-shirt and they are learning to preserve their unique Taino/Caribbean culture by turning Vieques' natural resources of seeds, beads and shells into unique handicrafts. They are raising funds for educational field trips like the **3rd Annual Caribbean Artisan Festival in Tortola, British Virgin Islands**.

The multiplier effect of VYLI's model is to train young people to be leaders who then work with other young people. We've begun reversing the "brain drain" by hiring VYLI graduates who attend college off-Island to return home to help their communities. We're inspiring a whole new generation of heroes who are working together to help rebuild their beautiful island.

In light of Dr. Yunus' historic award, the Institute is rededicating itself to the mission of bringing its educational curriculum to life; providing technical assistance to build constituencies at the local level -- with global implications -- and creating "global learning communities." As Yunus has shown the world, by investing in people's dreams and providing resources they need to fulfill them, they can change their lives and perhaps, by so doing, ultimately bring peace -- maybe one community at a time -- to the world.

When VYLI's young leaders learned Dr. Yunus had won the Nobel Peace Prize they were very proud. This man they'd read about had become one of their heroes. They hope he'll come to their island sometime soon.

Walter Cronkite
Honorary Chair, Stone Soup Leadership Institute