

**From the Philadelphia Inquirer
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By Deborah Heiligman**

'Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future,' John F. Kennedy said in July 1963. Children need to hear that message from him today.

Nov. 22, 1963, was my generation's Sept. 11. Our children and grandchildren need to know why his death shook our world. Why? Because what he stood for - the ideal of giving to your country - has taken a real beating in the last 40 years. Our childhoods were punctuated by assassinations, by courageous and idealistic leaders being gunned down. It was defined by the Vietnam War and the peace movement. Our generation grew up wanting to make a difference. We were told, first by Kennedy, later by others, that we really could make a difference. And we did. Protests ended the Vietnam War. Civil disobedience ended legal segregation. Action at the grass roots furthered women's rights.

But what message do we give our children? Have we made them want to save the world? I don't think so. I think the message they are getting from popular culture and from us is: Be the best you can be. Get ahead. Do well on the tests, play sports, get into a good college, make lots of money.

Maybe that's not horrible. Maybe children should be pushed to strive. But they also need to be told to help others. Not just told. Shown. Yes, many kids do 40 million hours of community service, but why? To put it on their college applications. When Kennedy started the Peace Corps, it was not for resumé's - it was for the world. What do we do now to model this for our kids? Do we drive them to the nursing home and then go out and have coffee with a friend - or do we go in and visit patients with them? Do we clean out our cupboards for the food bank and give what we ourselves like to eat, or do we give them 4-year-old snapper soup that we bought by mistake and won't miss at all?

JFK was not perfect. But he can still be a hero to kids. In fact, his life makes a great inspirational story, now as much as ever. He was a sickly kid, in the shadow of his perfect older brother, Joe. He was also a millionaire. He could have sat around on his yacht; he didn't have to work. But for him that was not an option. "Living a life of leisure is the hardest work of all," he once said. When Joe, the one who was supposed to be president, was killed, Jack was expected to take his place.

It wasn't what he wanted, but he stepped up. At first he did not have an easy way in crowds; he was not comfortable on TV. But he responded to people. He

made connections, instant and real. It was as if he knew you. That was his magic. That - and that he believed in the essential goodness of people. Kennedy never thought he would live a long life. But he hoped to inspire others to give to the world. So when you start to think about John F. Kennedy, and feel sad at our loss, don't shut out the pain. Instead, tell a child about him, and share what he meant to you.