

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share with you this evening some of my experiences at KEEP and the good news about this most remarkable place.

Located in the Japanese highlands as you enter the gates and look ahead a lush green landscape and a total sense of tranquility is your first impression of KEEP. As you go up the hill you will see people busy at work, hear the laughter of children enjoying time with their families, see dozens of students attending nature camps, seminars, or guided tours of the farm, cows grazing and visitors looking on, people enjoying the handmade made bread on the veranda of the bakery, lines of people waiting for the famous soft ice cream at the Jersey hut, and as you approach the Seisen Ryo you might see families, groups attending a conference, delegations from abroad, or maybe you might spot the individual with his/her art supplies that will enjoy a day of sketching or painting the landscape.

I came to KEEP because I was moved by Paul Rusch's dream. In the past I had the chance to see a bit of the world, a number of organizations, met a number of good people working towards a peaceful world but I had become weary of methods and practices. Paul Rusch dreamed of serving the whole man and not just attending to pieces of the individual, because man is mind, body and soul. So I embarked on a journey to find out if such a daunting task was possible arriving in Japan on July 24 of this year.

I quickly found myself with a desk in the international office and a schedule that had me training in every department inside KEEP for days or weeks. The schedule noted among other places that I would be in the farm and the bakery. Knowing that I am not very gifted in the kitchen and that cows are not my favorite animals, I was a bit anxious. By the end of my first week I decided to attend mass. Being an early riser I went at 6am. So I started off from the dorm, at 5:50am and walked down the hill. By the time I got there, mass had already begun. The door was closed but I heard Father Muto's voice. His voice had the fullness of being engrossed in prayer. I was hoping my late arrival would not distract him or the congregation. Then I noticed the heavy wooden doors, and imagined how noisy it would be when I opened them. There was no turning back; I had walked that far, so as embarrassed as I was I opened the door. I was jolted by the image of Father Muto, dressed in his black tunic giving mass to an empty church. I don't know how long I stood there until I completely walked inside. There in the alter of St. Andrews Church was Father Muto praying with as much intention and passion as if the church was full. Man even when he is alone, is forever trying to find that communion with god. That communion with the spiritual part of himself. That was the first moment when I knew I had come to the right place.

The first two weeks of my training I spent at St. John's Nursery School . I found myself with children who were being taught to understand, to embrace, and to respect nature. Even during lunch, the head of the kitchen, brings out the vegetables used for that days lunch and explains where they came from, how their grown, and what significance they have for that particular meal. These children were being taught to take life-long responsibility for the environment. Then small moments began to add up. The children showing me dead insects and saying how sad it was that they had died. Handling them carefully and putting them back where they found them. The children pray before meals, before going out to play, before sleeping, but in these prayers they always mention the people in their community, always giving thanks for food, for the day, etc... These children were being taught to think about the world, the environment, their own community, their own spirituality. This led me to ask a question I had not thought about the first week. I asked one of the teachers if all these children were Christian and she responded 'no'. Yet they all honored this tradition, and it was reflected in their actions. I would later find out that some of the teachers were Christian and some were not. Yet they all performed the prayers with respect and intention. So the children were also being taught to honor and respect other traditions as they would their own. The ideals that Paul Rusch began KEEP with were all there, health, food, faith and hope. This was the second moment when I knew I had come to the right place.

So I went on to work at the nature center. I found an in-house leading specialist in the environmental field, and programs that engage the community, visitors, and students. I was there the same week that a group from Taiwan was on a working visit. They want to establish their first nature center and they were looking at the nature center in KEEP as a model. I began to see how all areas interlaped; in this case it was environmental education and reaching out to the international community. This led me to look closer at international outreach. In the Philippines the model of outreach and development which has changed the quality of life and the futures of people of mountain villages was incorporating health, faith food and hope. 20 years of outreach also implies a level of trust between KEEP, its partners, and those communities. Once I started working at the farm the importance of focusing on agriculture, means for food, tied in with environmental effects and protecting the environment. I saw the connection between agriculture, the environment, the education being fostered at the nursery, engaging the international community and doing outreach. I began to see more clearly Paul Rusch's dream.

One day I asked myself what am I doing every day? If I stripped labels off objects and places, what do I do every day? It hit me while I was working at the bakery.

Everything in the bakery is made by hand. Even all the jam that is produced comes from peeling grapes and taking out the seeds, one grape at a time. After discovering that I could not mold one decent piece of dough, I was relegated from bread making to jam. So I started to peel grapes. The first day I peeled grapes with one of the staff at the bakery. The second day, I peeled along with two other staff. The third day, I was engaged more in the conversations. When you have hundreds of grapes to peel you better have something interesting to talk about. I realized at that moment that in the past three days I had joined a circle. As I started to think back on all my experiences, I had been joining circles all along. That's what I did day in and day out. I quickly realized that I was joining circles of trust. I then decided to go to the Paul Rusch archives and find out from his pen and hand what he was doing on a day-to-day basis that made KEEP possible.

Rusch wrote thousands of letters by hand and by typewriter. He was not only asking for funds to build KEEP, but he was keeping in touch with people out of genuine love and concern. As I looked through the history I asked myself, if I took away Paul Rusch's connections and looked at his day to day thoughts and actions what is it that delivered him from being an American in Japan in the 1930s to building KEEP and having it survive and be so successful well beyond his death. The more I read his correspondence, his fundraising activities, documents, his thoughts, etc.... there was one variable that follows him from the 1930's till his death. Paul Rusch continually built circles of trust. These circles being self-sustaining, went on to create other circles, engaged other circles and so forth. If Paul Rusch had not constructed all those circles of trust before the war we would not be sitting here talking about KEEP today.

This is very good news, because Paul Rusch's understanding of human needs, led him to live a life and crystallize a dream that could be self-sustaining because circles of trust naturally cooperate within themselves and with each other, and thus we have KEEP. Yet there is more good news, KFTF promises to share this model on a global scale. It will start off by hosting environmental and agricultural conferences focusing on the Asian region.

As I have stood in the balcony of hunter hall and watched the construction of KFTF, let me tell you what I have dreamed.

I see KEEP being the new destination for conferences on aging and social welfare.

I see Paul Rusch's words from 1958 bearing fruit in 2010. In 1958 he wrote the following:

So that in our time, in a world full of pain and confusion and bitterness, the world's religions find themselves faced with one great common mission: The Mission of Peace.

Regardless of the differences between religion and religion, or creed and creed, to fulfill their promise to their followers, they must gather under the one banner bearing the inscription, The Mission of Mankind is Peace.

I see KFTF being a new forum for religious reconciliation and cooperation conferences and efforts.

I also see KFTF being a venue for conflict transformation. In prolonged conflicts distrust is inevitable. All you have to do is turn on the news and you will notice that this distrust impedes those in conflict from envisioning and much less arriving at even a partial solution to their problem. I see KFTF engaging those in conflict in a circle of trust that will make KFTF a place for parties in conflict to come and start building a relationship based on trust as modeled by KEEP so that they can begin to at least envision a viable solution that is best for all. What a better place to do this than in a land where at the same moment that the world was losing its humanity due to war Paul Rusch had planted trust and had full faith that he would reap peaceful tomorrows. Its inspiring for us sitting here to think about those times, how inspiring could it be for someone in conflict to walk inside KEEP and imagine their story could have the same ending.

I am not visionary like Paul Rusch, I'm sure if he was here tonight he would have a longer list.

There is so much more I have experienced at KEEP that I wish I could share with you if time allowed. I don't know what it is you will fall in love with when you first come to KEEP. For some of you it will be the spectacular nature. Perhaps hiking will be your newfound hobby. Others might have an interest in the farm. For barbecue fans eating outdoors while watching Mt. Fuji will be a treat. For others it might be as simple as the sweet night air, the smell of a bonfire or watching the dreamy twilight fog as it settles over the highlands. Like I said before, I don't know what it is you will fall in love with. However, I am certain of one thing. When you return home you will want to spread the news about a place in our times that is on the verge of bringing the global community into a circle of trust. KFTF will inspire and transform relationships by establishing circles of trust geared towards long-term cooperation that will yield new theory and methods of addressing world problems. When trust is present everything is feasible. KEEP and the world will chart a new course by facing issues collaboratively and creatively thereby, seeking what is best for the global community.

Thank you for your time and your patience this evening. I hope we will meet again, next time at KEEP.