

Speech Jul 15 2024 - Seeds of Peace Camp

I was 14 when I first came to Seeds of Peace, to loud drums and welcome songs and smiling faces in green T-shirts. I was pretty shy at that age, so I found this quite rattling at the time. Then there was the way everyone was speaking. There was so much high and mighty talk about meeting across lines of difference. Now, I'm a cynic by nature and always have been, but I've come to learn genuine connection beats cynicism every time. I began my learning with seeds as a Maine seed in our domestic program. We spoke about racial and gender injustice, economic inequality — the ways these big issues in our state and country were being experienced by us kids. My world got bigger as I let other stories into my heart and mind. I began to feel responsible to be part of making life the way it should be for us all.

The secret I'm gonna share if you are moved to hear it is by getting here to this camp, you've already got all you need from this program. Seeds of peace has a way of bringing together some of the brightest, bravest, most thoughtful young people. The magic of the camp and of dialogue, is the power and gift of substantive human relationships. Without agenda or intent, the potential of young people coming together to raise one another's consciousness, to figure out where you have shared experience, shared solutions, you see where there is power in your collaboration to create change by, for, and within your communities.

I was empowered by my time at Seeds camp. I went home to my coastal southern Maine town and had this whole new world of friends, family, and mentors, for life. We lobbied our governor and senators, joined our states NAACP programming, developed public art projects, and started clubs on our high school campuses. I didn't know my power, and hadn't respected my voice enough to use it in a discerning way. I would not make that mistake again. Seeds of peace didn't teach me what to say. It taught me by example and praxis to see the power of being understood and understanding other people. It taught me the truth in the idea that small groups of people can change the world, that many is more powerful than one.

I would spend the next two summers coming back to camp, once with an international session and once with a leadership program. I chose my college, Brandeis University, and studied international relations, because of the people and passions this camp inspired.

During college, I had seen myself grow to understand climate change as a critical place for my voice and commitments to social justice.

After I graduated, I returned to my hometown of Scarborough, Maine, and I was encouraged to run for public office — to serve my community in this State's

Legislature.

I ran against an incumbent, the person who currently held the seat, and who had served in local politics for twenty years in my town.

There were many local leaders I had known and respected for many years who wanted to see someone else in that seat.

I knew it would be a tough race, but I knew I had built a beloved community here in Maine that had really begun for me at 14, with Seeds of Peace. I had developed strong principles and had been speaking with people across this state since I was a kid. Compared to the establishment candidate I faced, I knew I had better ideas, and represented a new generation, that I could be part of creating a better way of serving this state. I also knew, if I worked hard enough, and worked with other people I could trust, that I could win.

I knocked on nearly every door in my district. I had a lot of difficult conversations. I had to fundraise and talk to journalists, and debate my opponents at our local Chamber of Commerce. I had to rely on other people and their help more than ever. And by some miracle, I won.

Tim Wilson was one of the first people I spoke with after Election Day. I remember I cried hearing his words of support and a sense of confidence he seemed to have that it was right that a young person with no formal political experience like myself be a state representative. Later on, he would connect me with Rachel Talbot Ross, who is our current Speaker of the House and first Black speaker in our states history, who has also gone on to be a mentor, guidepost and inspiration as I figure out how to use the power of this role.

The communal support and empowerment of Seeds of Peace cannot be overstated in my life and in the work I do every day. And I am just one small example of so many. What being a seed of peace means to me is to be an agent of justice through humanity. Because peace is achieved only through a just, fair and beloved community. Water, sunlight, healthy soils are necessary for seeds to grow where they are planted. Just like mother natures' seeds, you will get out of this opportunity only what you put in, what you tend to, and cultivate within yourselves and each other. I wish you good luck in however you choose to grow.

Thank you so much for your time. I don't take for granted the consideration of such great young leaders such as yourselves to share my own story with. And thank you Tim Wilson for the opportunity to come speak to my newest fellow Seeds of Peace.

