

State of New Jersey
Department of
Corrections
Whittlesey Road
PO Box 863
Trenton NJ 08625-0863

James E. McGreevey **Governor**
Devon Brown **Commissioner**

**COMMISSIONER BROWN'S SPEECH BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY CHARACTER
EDUCATION TRAINING MARCH 19, 2003**

THANK YOU, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JOHNSON FOR YOUR KIND INTRODUCTION, AND TO THE EDUCATION STAFF, GOOD MORNING! I WOULD ASK THAT EVERYONE PRESENT EXTEND A WARM DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS WELCOME TO MS. RACHEL BERNHEIM, PRESIDENT OF **THE RAOUL WALLENBERG COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED STATES**, AND DR. KATHLEEN MORIN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION. WE ARE HONORED TO HAVE YOU IN OUR COMPANY, LADIES.

TO THE EDUCATION STAFF, LET ME BEGIN BY EXPRESSING MY HEARTFELT AND DPROFOUND APPRECIATION FOR THE EXCEEDINGLY IMPORTANT TASK YOU PERFORM EACH DAY. AS EDUCATORS OF THE INCARCERATED, I REALIZE THAT YOURS IS NOT AN EASY WALK. BUT TAKE PRIDE IN KNOWING THAT UNLIKE ANY OTHER PROFESSIONAL, YOU HAVE TOUCHED MORE LIVES, INFLENCED MORE LIVES, AND YES, EVEN SAVED MORE LIVES THAN YOU COULD EVER KNOW. INDEED, AS TEACHERS YOU POSSESS THE TORCH THAT LIGHTS THE FUTURE AND LEADS US OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF OUR IGNORANCE. YES, THERE IS GREAT TRUTH IN THE OBSERVATION THAT AN EDUCATOR CAN NEVER FULLY GRASP THE GRAVITY OF HIS/HER INFLUENCE ON THE NUMBER OF LIVES S/HE HAS IMPACTED. WITH THESE REALIZATIONS IN MIND, I THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF ALL OF THOSE WHO YOU WILL NEVER COME TO KNOW OR SEE BUT YET HAVE BENEFITED FROM YOUR WISDOM AND DEDICATION.

I WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE ONE OF THE HEROES PROFILED IN YOUR PROGRAM, HELEN KELLER. SHE SAID THAT "THE HIGHEST RESULT OF EDUCATION IS TOLERANCE."

I CAN THINK OF NO MORE SUCCINCT PHRASE TO DESCRIBE THE AIM OF THE TRAINING UPON WHICH WE EMBARK TODAY.

AT FIRST BLUSH, ONE WOULD QUESTION THE COMMONALITY BETWEEN **THE RAOUL WALLENBERG COMMITTEE**, DEDICATED TO THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF ITS NAMESAKE, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, RESPONSIBLE FOR 25,000 OF SOCIETY'S OUTCASTS. AND YET, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN CONSIDER THIS QUESTION. CAN THERE BE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO NEED ROLE MODELS

AND HEROES—REAL HEROES—MORE THAN THE INCARCERATED? FORTY ONE PERCENT OF ALL ADULT OFFENDERS ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 21 AND 30. THIS INMATE READS ON A FOURTH GRADE LEVEL, MOST LIKELY HAS A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM, IS A MINORITY AND HAILS FROM AN URBAN CENTER.

HE WOULD MORE THAN LIKELY CONSIDER A HERO ONE WHO HAS SUCCESSFULLY CIRCUMVENTED LAW ENFORCEMENT. CONTRASTED WITH THE NOBILITY AND COMPASSION OF RAOUL WALLENBERG, THE MOUNTAIN OF DIFFERENCE IS SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE.

BUT THE ART OF PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT, THE QUALITIES OF NOBILITY AND COMPASSION—THESE WILL DETERMINE SUCCESS BOTH INSIDE THE PRISON WALLS, AND YES, ULTIMATELY IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.

AS EDUCATORS OF THE INCARCERATED, YOURS IS A MISSION UNLIKE ANY OTHER. BUT SO ARE YOUR POTENTIAL REWARDS. THE LIFE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE OFFERS GREAT INSIGHT INTO YOUR WORLD. HE WRITES IN HIS “CONFESSIONS” THAT HIS YOUNG LIFE WAS FILLED WITH SIN AND CRIME, AND IT IS SAID THAT THIS MAN WHO WOULD BECOME A DOCTOR, BISHOP AND PHILOSOPHER CREDITS HIS MOTHER AND A TEACHER WITH HIS REFORMATION.

“THE SON OF SO MANY TEARS COULD NOT PERISH” WAS HIS DETERMINED EDUCATOR’S DECLARATION.

SO IT IS THAT THE CORRECTIONAL TEACHER FACES CHALLENGES UNKNOWN TO OTHERS IN THEIR PROFESSION. THE “**STUDY OF HEROES**” PROGRAM, WHICH IS FUNDED UNDER THE CHARACTER EDUCATION GRANT OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, MAKES ITS DEBUT IN A CORRECTIONAL FACILITY HERE IN NEW JERSEY. TO BORROW A PHRASE FROM THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM BUREAU, THEY ARE PERFECT TOGETHER!

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ANY SYLLABUS, NO MATTER HOW WORTHY, DEPENDS ON THE PASSION OF THE INSTRUCTOR.

I WOULD LIKE TO TELL MS. BERNHEIM AND DR. MORIN THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN THEY SEE BEFORE THEM TODAY HAVE THE PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM TO BRING THE WONDERFUL COMPONENTS OF A **STUDY OF HEROES** TO THOSE WHOM SOCIETY HAS LOCKED AWAY.

EDUCATORS OF INMATES DO NOT HEAR HAPPY VOICES AND LAUGHTER IN THE HALLWAYS, PUNCTUATED BY THE STACATTO OF CLOSING LOCKERS. THERE ARE NO MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS MADE CONCERNING UPCOMING PEP RALLIES, DANCES OR BASKETBALL GAMES.

RATHER, THE SOUNDS OF CLANGING SALLYPORTS AND CODES BEING CALLED OVER THE INTERCOM REVERBERATE THROUGHOUT THE PRISON ON A TYPICAL DAY.

THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARRIVE AT THE INSTITUTION DAY AFTER DAY TO EDUCATE INMATES POSSESS DETERMINATION, FERVOR AND YES—HEROISM— THAT EXEMPLIFIES SO MANY OF THE HEROES IN THIS STUDY.

I WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE MY REMARKS THIS MORNING BY QUOTING ANOTHER IN THE **STUDY OF HEROES**, ELEANOR ROOSEVELT. “THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE BEAUTY OF THEIR DREAMS.”

BY VIRTUE OF MRS. ROOSEVELT’S WORDS, I WOULD VENTURE TO SAY THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NJDOC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OWN THE FUTURE. THEY FOLLOW UP THEIR DREAMS OF EDUCATING AND ENLIGHTENING WITH THE OTHER NECESSARY COMPONENT OF SUCCESS—HARD WORK. THANK YOU FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, AND WHAT YOU HAVE YET TO ACCOMPLISH.