

Some observations from the session on Friday, January 13, 2012 with the residents at the Shawnee County Juvenile Detention Center

From time to time, I share some of what went on at the weekly Downtown Optimist Discussion Group (DODG). This last Friday was somewhat of a special day since it was just before the observation of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Monday, January 16.

As we approach this Day, we usually take time to read and discuss Dr. King's "I have a dream speech" delivered in Washington, D.C. in **the summer of 1963. I download a copy of the speech from the Internet and Ken Kerle and I take turns reading it. Our discussion of the speech was enhanced because Ken was present in the crowd of some 200,000 that hot August day. Ken's memory of the speech and the crowd is quite clear and helpful to the residents in understanding the setting.**

As we try to do with most of the materials we read, both during the reading and after its completion, we stopped to ask the members of Module C (Charlie Module) a few questions. For example, we asked if they thought this was a great speech. Then, we asked what made it great. Some of the responses indicated that Dr. King was a very effective speaker, that he used familiar examples from American history such as the Emancipation Proclamation, and that he was addressing a moral issue and was on the right side in his view.

We asked how much of Dr. King's dream had been fulfilled. One youth indicated that the integration of public schools had been a step forward and others identified changes in voting rights and office holding the South and the attempt to provide equal opportunity for employment.

Ken advised the students that they should be aware that the assassination of President John Kennedy later in 1963 enabled new President Johnson to gain support and passage of civil rights legislation originally introduced by President Kennedy. We also shared a bit of our personal experiences **that** confirmed the

conclusion that segregation in schools and other public places affected whites and well as African-Americans.

For the rest of the session, we returned to the early part of the excellent book, **Forged by Fire**, by Sharon Draper—a book originally found for DODG by Bill Gannaway, Jr. This book details the challenges faced by Gerald who is rescued from a neglectful mother by a loving Aunt only to have that Aunt die. One or two in our group have read this book previously but still seem to enjoy it and its message. Ted Heim