

Breaking News

Scupper Jack's closes in Acton

Local artist uses his yard to protest war

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GateHouse Media

Posted Feb 22, 2007 @ 11:21 AM



Boxborough — Faded prayer flags hang from the eaves of Chris Flisher's home, their threads slowly unraveling in the wind and rain of a New England winter.

But each week, more flags are added to buffer the ranks.

The flags began appearing in January and — as long as the war persists in Iraq — more will wrap the house and the yard of his property on Flagg Hill Road in Boxborough.

String by string, Flisher is protesting the Iraqi War.

"I want to make my house into a visible, tangible peace offering," he said, as he reached up to touch one of the flags.

"Eventually, I am going to cover every tree I have."

Flisher began hanging the Buddhist prayer flags outside his home following the president's most recent State of the Union address. He couldn't believe that the United States would be increasing its forces in a what he sees as a failing war.

"This war makes less sense than the Vietnam War," he said. "There was no reason we should have gone in there in the first place."

Believing in the power of good intentions, Flisher, 54, bought flags from a Cambridge store and began stringing them outside — where they would be visible to people driving by.

He doesn't think that the flags themselves will bring United States troops home, but if more people adapted an anti-war sentiment, he believes it would have some sway in ending the war.

"Do I think they have some sort of magical power?" he asked. "No, I don't. But every time a person walks passed this house or drives passed it, the flags will be there as a constant reminder. If people believe in the mantra 'what we think is what will become' then it may have some effect."

The flags caught the eye of Suzanne Shultz who drives down the road regularly.

"Every time I drove by, there were more," Shultz said. "I was curious."

When she approached Flisher and asked about them, she was touched by his response.

"I really thought it was a nice reminder to us all — no matter our political views — to think about those soldiers every day and hope for a peaceful end to this war," she said.

More flags will grace the yard and the house. Flisher is determined not pull them down until the president calls soldiers home. He doesn't expect that to happen anytime soon.

"I was angry about the Vietnam War, but I am even angrier about this war," he said. "This needs to end."

Flisher, now a struggling artist, has worked as a technical writer and a radio talk show host. The son of a Christian minister, Flisher began exploring his spirituality seriously when his wife died more than five years ago. Left to raise his three sons on his own, it was at that point when he learned more about Buddhism.

"My life — which was fairly normal up to that point — came apart," he said, standing in his kitchen, looking out on his backyard. "I knew what Christianity offered, but that didn't do it for me. So, I began exploring alternatives."

Flisher enrolled in a stress reduction class at UMass-Worcester. Marrying the techniques he learned in that class with his past exploration into Buddhism, he began applying his knowledge to counter the aftereffects of his wife's death.

He was attracted to the introspection of Buddhism: the idea that you look within yourself for an answer and not at an outside source.

But it was the Buddhist's cyclical attitude toward life that truly resonated with Flisher. And it was then that he began his life as an artist.

Without ever putting paint brush to paper — aside from his art classes as a child — Flisher began painting Mandalas. The Tibetan Mandala represents the idea that life comes in circles.

A long time astrologer, Flisher connected with the Mandala and has painted them on tiles, T-shirts, commissioned work and greeting cards. His work is currently being displayed and sold at Dunia, a socially-conscious retail store in Maynard.

The Buddhist mentality gave him the strength and peace of mind he needed to overcome the death of his wife.

"It changed the way I looked at life," he said. "It taught me that change is a necessary way of life. And the ability to adjust to those cycles of change allows you to move on."

Although Flisher does not consider himself a Buddhist, he has fallen for the mentality of Buddhism and has incorporated it into aspects of his every day life.

As a way to deal with the frustration he felt with the war, he did what Buddhists would do — he hung prayer flags.

“I couldn’t just stand here and do nothing,” he said. “I decided I was going to fight back with prayer flags.”

Grabbing a stack of flags one Thursday afternoon, he trudged out in the snow. As a biting wind threatened to tug the flags from his hands, he patiently tied one end to a tree branch, dragged it across the face of the tree and tied the other end to a branch further away.

“They look great,” Flisher said, admiring them float back in forth in the pulsation of the wind. “It’s almost like being in a circus. There is a sense of celebration and jubilation about them.”

But they are much more than a decoration for Flisher.

“Some protest the war with a peace vigil. Some march on Washington,” Flisher said. “This is my unique way of raising up a peace effort to stop the war.”

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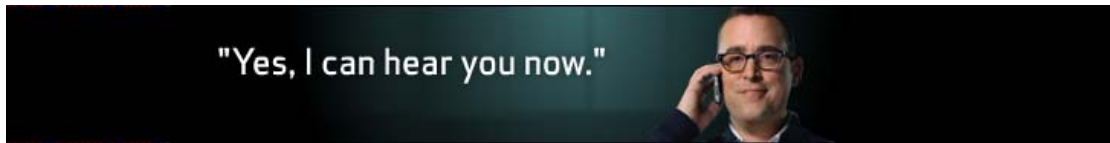


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