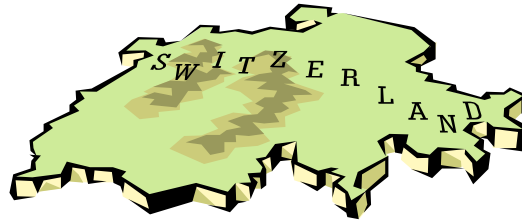


In August 2007, Dr. Marshall and Omega Boys club member Kareem Ervin were invited to attend a week long conference in Caux, Switzerland. Sponsored by the Initiatives of Change--the global trust-building network--the event was entitled "Can integrity, respect and justice lead to dignity for all?" and was attended by people from over 60 different countries. Here is Dr. Marshall's journal of the trip.



Switzerland Journal

Day 1

We're off, we're off, we're off—off to Switzerland. To an international stop the violence conference. It's the first time I've ever been to Europe. Been to Africa and Asia, but this is my first trip to Europe. Everyone has told me that Switzerland is beautiful, so I can't wait to see it. It'll be a while before we get there though. First an 11 hour flight to Frankfort, then a one hour flight to Geneva. Then a two hour train ride to Montreaux, and another 20 minute train ride to Caux. Whew!

It's great to be going with Kareem. It's his first time out of the country and he's excited as a pup. This is gonna be great for him. He has so much to offer the world and he's a great ambassador of Alive and Free. The people will love him.

The plane leaving San Francisco is packed and we're at the back of the aircraft. It's a long journey, but we're ready. We've got it all—CD player, MP3 player, DVD player—plenty to entertain ourselves. Turns out there's also non stop movies on the plane. I end up watching Spiderman 3, Fracture with Anthony Hopkins, and Perfect Stranger with Halle Berry. Then Kareem and I watched Daddy's Little Girls on my DVD player (now that's a good movie). Actually Kareem slept most of the time—he was knocked out. The only time he woke up was when turbulence hit the plane—and that seemed like every other minute.

The train ride up to Montreaux was really nice. We ended up in first class without my knowing it. I had to pay extra, but we weren't about to move—we had the whole car to ourselves. The scenery was everything folks said it would be. Lake Geneva is beautiful and the Alps are breathtaking, just magnificent. All I could think of was how Hannibal had crossed them with his elephants to defeat the Roman army way back in the day. God, there's so much history here!

At Montreaux, we caught the last train up to the conference center. (I'm a jazz fan, so Montreaux means something to me. Maybe one day I can make it back here for the jazz festival.)

At last we arrive—tired, hungry, and sleepy. We've jumped ahead nine hours, so our body clocks are all off. We get registered. Kareem and I are in different rooms and we both have roommates. I tried to call home, but I couldn't do it. I know that Ms. Estell and Malcolm are holding the Street Soldiers radio show down, so I climb in the bed and get ready for tomorrow.

A LITTLE LATER

I woke up at 5am, just at the time *Street Soldiers* is going on the air. God, is that a great show! I hope it stays on the air forever. *Street Soldiers* is in Switzerland and the Bay knows it. You can't beat that.

Day 2

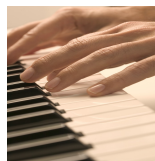
Caux, Caux, Caux—this place is something else. The conference center itself is a magnificent structure. It was built in 1902 as a luxury hotel and in the early part of the century it was the place to be. It hit on hard times during World War I and ended up functioning as an allied prisoner of war camp at the end of World War II. It was sold in 1950 and transformed into a center for European reconciliation. I watched a film this morning about a woman who was a member of the French Resistance during the war. Her husband was killed by the Germans and she was separated from her children. She said that she hated the Germans and wanted nothing more than for Germany to be destroyed. After the war she was invited to a reconciliation conference at Caux, but when 50 German women walked in--she walked out. She couldn't take it. She came back, however, and ended up speaking to the German women face to face. After hearing their stories about how they too had suffered, she apologized to them for the hatred *she* had in her heart. Talk about dealing with your anger, fear and pain! Later on, she visited Germany and became a major figure in the French-German reconciliation process.

Stories and people like that are all over this place. I guess that's why folks come here—they want things to change. In fact the conference is put together by an organization called *Initiatives for Change*. Everybody all over the world seems to be having some kind of drama; but there's also a whole lot of folks who want it to stop. Yeah, Kareem and I will fit in very well here. This is the place for us.

The opening address is by Sushoba Barve, an Indian woman who is trying to do something about the major beef between India and Pakistan. Listening to her speak was a joy. She was just so no nonsense. She knows she's got a huge task in front of her, but she's undaunted by it. It's her life's mission and she's not afraid. Now that's a ***Street Soldier!***

Next, it's on to our group meetings. Everyone is assigned to a group to get up close and personal and discuss the issues in depth. I'm in the purple group, Kareem's in the blue group (hey, it's the Ques and the Sigmas, Caux style). I also found out that everyone here has to do chores—so tomorrow, I have to set the tables for dinner and clean up afterwards. No problem, everybody pitches in here.

(Oh, no! I've discovered there's a piano here, and they say I can practice on it.. Apparently, there's a music room on the third floor. My one little hobby—tinkering on the piano. They'll never get me out of this place now.)



Kareem already seems to know everybody in the place or better yet everybody seems to know Kareem. There are folks here from over fifty countries and already a lot of them seem to have met him. He's got lunch and dinner invitations already. ("Kareem, will you have supper with me? Kareem, can we talk at lunch?")

In the evening, there's one more session on the history of Caux, but by now serious jet lag has set in, and I'm out of it. I make a quick trip to the computer room to send some emails and that's it. I've got an early meeting tomorrow morning.

Day 3

Breakfast this morning is with Lauren Hatvany, the woman who sponsored our trip over here. Her family has a small foundation, started by her father and mother in law. Turns out they are here also. Laura lives in St. Tropez, France, but has spent some time in Oakland working as a defense investigator. On her last trip there she and was told to go visit Omega because of our reputation for working with youth. She came and saw us and presented the idea of sponsorship to the conference. And here we are!

Kareem has made fast friends with a young brother from Ghana, who declared to him "I want to be a street soldier. Is that ok?" I said sure, but let me tell you exactly what that is. It's a person who wants to eliminate violence from his/her own life and from the community. If you're down with that, then sure you can be a Street Soldier. We need them all over the world.

The session this morning is just as powerful as yesterday's, even more so. The speaker talks about the huge problem of human trafficking, especially of women and children. It's the third largest illegal business in the world, and quickly moving up. (The illegal arms trade and the illegal drug trade are currently one and two.) Simply put, it's all about the money. It's a \$32 billion a year industry; and unlike the arms and drug trade, the penalties are surprisingly light, most often, little jail time and a small fine.

Kareem and I are exchanging notes throughout the presentation like two kids in a middle school class. "It's material values over people, just like we teach at Omega," I write. "It's the commandment of violence—thou shalt get thy money on," he scribbles back. "And it's definitely the negative view of women," I reply. "Hey, we know all this—we know this stuff. Our stuff is universal," he shoots back. "And we get the opportunity to share our prescription."

Next it's time for our groups to meet and discuss what we've heard. The best thing to me about my group is its diversity—folks from 13 different countries: France, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Ghana, the United States, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Nigeria, and Denmark. Should be interesting, so let the conversation begin.



At lunch Kareem and I got into a long discussion with the group from Uganda and what we heard was not very pretty. The Ugandan women felt they are just in a terrible position there. The men by law can have multiple wives and the women say that they neglect the children of the previous wives. The women fight for the favor of the men, the children sometimes fight each other— hey, it's baby mama drama, African style. In addition, prostitution is rampant, poverty is overwhelming, and in schools there's high drop out rate. Sounds like Oakland, doesn't it. Come to Uganda, they say. Please come.

The afternoon session on Leadership was ok—I didn't get much out of it. But in another session Kareem was dealing, using his own life and the movie Antoine Fisher to illustrate how to deal with your anger, fear, and pain and move forward with healing and rebuilding—something a lot of folks here seem to be getting stuck on. He's the hit of the session.

By now both of us can see a pattern. A lot of folks here want things to change, but don't know how. There are clearly two groups of people here—those who are making things happen, and those who talk about making things happen—and the latter is the larger group. I think that a lot of this group could use the Omega Training Institute; they would certainly benefit from Ms. Estell's class and an Omega Family meeting.

(Alas, my computer just died; no more battery power. Can't plug in or recharge—the outlets are different here. No more communicating with the outside world.).

I woke up again at 5am and I definitely know why. The Omega Family Meeting is about to start. It's Tuesday night and the light is on. Do your thing Jack and Ms! E. Speak up Omegas! The world is listening.

Day 4

Today was the day of conversation, up close and personal. It was also the day the Diaspora found each other. Today I learned what I already knew--that black folks everywhere are in the same boat. Different addresses, same mess.

First Uganda again. I had a long talk with both the King and the Prime Minister of one of the oldest kingdoms in Uganda. Beginning with the colonial invaders who occupied the land, the native rulers who followed (who were just as bad), throw in the civil wars that ensued—and voila, there you have it—one messed up country. I'm praying that I heard this number wrong, but it seems like the King said that country had lost over 2.4 million people to this madness.

I met a Ugandan (an Ashoka Fellow like me) who is doing some wonderful work there trying to build community. He's also opened a school for girls and guess what else—he's got a call in talk radio show— a sort of *Street Soldiers*, Uganda style.

Then it's onto the Somalis. Another horror story. Colonial occupation, clans, warlords, invading American army, civil war, the CIA—whew!—way too much for me. Did you know that Somalia

functions without a centralized government? The clans run the place. There are 24 Somalis here—the largest contingent from any country. Boy, do they have a big job on their hands.

In the evening, I watched a film entitled the Imam and the Pastor. It's the story of two clerics who were on opposite warring factions in Nigeria. (Legend has it that they even tried to kill each other). The movie is about how they overcame their hatred and became instruments of peace. It's a very powerful film, and it shows you once again, *if you want things to change, change begins with you. You have to change yourself first.* Rule for Living #4--Omega Boys Club.

Day 5

Kareem's a full fledged celebrity now. Everybody knows him and everybody's pulling on him. In addition, he's recording a lot of interviews for the Street Soldiers radio show, so he's all over the place. All of the young people in particular want to know about Omega—"what's the class like, what are the meetings like, what do you talk about there?"

The personal conversations have now completely overtaken the daily sessions in terms of importance. Kareem tells me about a conversation with a young Nigerian, who told him a story that completely lifted his spirits. A South African woman tells me about a young man from the United States she recently met. He told her about his getting caught up in the street life—on his way to becoming another black male statistic—until he heard a speech by a Dr. Marshall, who let him know that he had choices and that he needed to make them wisely. Dr. Marshall's words apparently had a major impact, because he recently graduated from UCLA and is now enrolled in graduate school. She asked that I please contact him when I get back to California. Oh my God!

Later that evening they had what they called the International Café. The main hall was set up like a huge coffee shop, tables and all—they even served coffee and tea. Since they felt that the café was incomplete without music, they asked me to open and close the joint (seems that the word had gotten out that I played a little piano). A saxophone player from South Africa heard the piano and grabbed his horn and started to jam with me. I later learned that he had been imprisoned and tortured for a time in a prison in Zimbabwe, accused of being a South African spy. He was thrilled to play his horn again. We did a couple of numbers and folks applauded like we were at Yoshi's or something. It was real cool.

Day 6

Today is our last day here. Although, the conference doesn't officially end for two more days, we're leaving tomorrow, so Kareem and I can get home for the radio show Sunday night. It's my last chance to make contacts and the last chance for Kareem to get all his interviews. I've got several CD's about Omega, and I want to get them to the right folks.

At our group meeting today, I got a chance to show the Omega CD. Folks were impressed with the kids, the work, the effort, the program. It dawned on me that with all the emphasis here on what's going on in the rest of the world, that people didn't understand and realize the amount of violence in America, particularly in urban America. I had seen and heard a lot about what was going on with them, now they had a chance to hear and know what was going on with us.

Folks are finding out that yeah Dr. Marshall and Kareem are leaving soon, so almost the entire day is full of getting names, addresses and emails, and promises to be in touch. Everyone vows to do so to. (I've got contact names from almost two dozen countries). I'm scheduled to go to South Africa in November, so all the South African folks want to know when. Kareem records Obas' beautiful original song about changing the world, so we can play it back on the radio. Our conference sponsors talk to us about future plans—they want to sponsor an Omega staff and youth every year. And of course Kareem and I talk about everything—who we've met, what we've seen, who's coming back next year.....and a whole lot more. I'm sure we'll be talking about this for weeks.

At midnight I start packing but I can't sleep, so it's one last trip to the piano room. It's 2am and the place is still. Everything's running through me, and I pick up the pen and write:



CAUX

Land so far away
And it makes me smile
Got to visit there
If only for a while
Beautiful to see
Easy on the eye
Met so many friends
Know I'll see them when

It's a land of peace
In a world of strife
Bringing folks together
To save a human life
We will all return
One day soon we'll see
But have much work to do
To make our dreams come true

Wish that I could make
Everything all right
Have to make a better world
For every child in sight
Impossible oft it seems
But dare we work and dream

Land so far away
And it makes me smile
Got to visit there
Only for a while
Beautiful to see
Easy on the eye
Met so many friends
Know I'll see them when

Goodbye—for now.

J. Marshall
8/18/07

And then I wrote the music!



Day 8

It's 6am and I'm packed and ready. Just waiting for Kareem. We've got to catch the 7:12 train to get back to the Geneva airport. The place is completely quiet. I go outside for one last trip around the grounds.

At 6:30am Kareem arrives, baggage in tow. And then here comes his roommate too. 10 minutes later our conference sponsors show up. We've got a send off party! We make our way up to the train station. More hugs, more handshakes, more promises to stay in touch. And then our train arrives and we board. This is just like a scene out of a movie! Everybody's waving. Then the train pulls out. And slowly, ever so slowly, Caux disappears. Kareem and I look at each other and smile. Damn, what a great week. What a great week. Man, it's going to be a long flight back home, and I'm just going to sleep and sleep and sleep..... Goodbye Caux, see you next year.

Epiolgue

It's a week later now and I'm putting this together. The Caux experience is still fresh, and both Kareem and I are still riding the high. I think that the whole thing was just amazing. We know a little more now about the world and the world knows a whole lot more about Omega. In hindsight, I guess everything can be summed up by something I heard someone say the first day: *"It's often those who suffer the most, who are the instruments of change."* What a great statement. Sounds like the Omega Boys Club/ Street Soldiers doesn't it, working hard to keep people everywhere ALIVE AND FREE.

The more you know, the more you owe.