



## A Toast for Change

In 1994, Erin Gruwell walked into her first classroom, Room 203, at Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. Little did she know many considered that class a war-zone, and no one advised her to bring any armor.

Many students in her room were written off by the education system and deemed “unteachable.” They were the students no teacher wanted and were the ones who weren’t expected to succeed. Many lived in racially divided urban communities and were hardened by first-hand exposure to gang violence, juvenile detention and drugs.

In a diary entry Gruwell wrote, “Even though a lot of people have given up on them, I refuse to believe they’re a lost cause.” She inspired, motivated and, consequently, gave her students a second chance on life much like Starr Commonwealth has been able to do for so many youth since its founding 97 years ago.

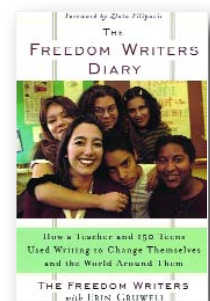
Through assigned readings and field trips, Gruwell’s educational philosophy encouraged and promoted her students to rethink rigid beliefs about themselves and others, reconsider daily decisions and restart their future. Each student made a life-altering “Toast for Change” where they agreed to give themselves a chance to start life over.



**Save the Date! Founder’s Day – Sunday, October 3, 2010**  
**Featuring Keynote by Erin Gruwell of The Freedom Writers Foundation**

Gruwell believes that “writing about the things that happen to us allows us to look objectively at what’s going on around us and turn a negative experience into something positive and useful.” Therefore, she assigned each student a diary in which they wrote about their daily battles and experiences. These diaries for some were the only place where they felt anyone wanted to hear their stories, for others it was the first safe place to share their stories. They dubbed themselves the “Freedom Writers” in homage to civil rights activists, “the freedom riders.”

As a graduate from University of California, Irvine, where she was awarded the Lauds and Laurels Distinguished Alumni Award, Gruwell currently serves as president of the Freedom Writers Foundation. She raises awareness by traveling nationwide to speak to large corporations, government institutions, community associations, schools and juvenile halls. She earned her Master’s Degree and teaching credentials from California State University, Long Beach, where she was honored as Distinguished Alumna by the School of Education.



Please join us in welcoming Erin Gruwell to Starr Commonwealth as our featured speaker for this year’s Founder’s Day event to be held Sunday, October 3 in Albion, Michigan.