

## **Mary Beth Tinker**



Mary Beth Tinker was strongly impacted by the graphic footage of the Vietnam War that she watched on the news. The violence and death count were rapidly increasing by 1965, and Mary Beth, her brother John Tinker, and other students in Des Moines, Iowa decided to take action. Mary Beth helped champion the idea of wearing black armbands to school to mourn the deaths on both sides of the war, and to show support of a Christmas truce called by Senator Bobby Kennedy. On December 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, Mary Beth Tinker, John Tinker, Chris Eckhardt, and others wore the black armbands and were suspended from school. The school district tried to block the students from their symbolic protest on the grounds that the students were creating a distraction. Tinker and her parents brought the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

Today, Mary Beth continues to educate young people, especially students, about their rights. Tinker is a retired pediatric nurse and a strong advocate for the rights of young people, particularly in regard to health and education. The Marshall-Brennan Project at American University named its annual youth advocacy award after Mary Beth in 2000, and in 2006 the ACLU National Board of Directors' Youth Affairs Committee named its annual youth affairs award the "Mary Beth Tinker Youth Involvement Award."