



Change the stories
and you change the world

from Creators of Peace



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**'From hurt to healing,
from frozen to forgiving,
from callousness to
compassion'**

Introduction



The stories told in this booklet are taken from experiences which were shared at the 'Living Peace' conference held in Caux, Switzerland, in 2016. The conference celebrated 25 years of Creators of Peace, a women's peace initiative first launched at the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Caux in 1991. It drew women and men from 41 countries from across 5 continents bringing their experience of different cultures, traditions and life journeys.

One of the insights that informs the approach of Creators of Peace is awareness of the power of the story that each person, every woman lives out of. This story shapes her world view, her values and relationships, who she is and how she thinks, what she passes on to her children and grandchildren. We have the power to change these stories; from hurt to healing, from frozen to forgiving, from callousness to compassion.

Change the stories and you change the world. The new narrative the world looks for, that heals historic hurts and addresses injustice of all kinds, will be written from the collective stories of millions of transformed individuals. The new stories women have to tell, coming from the transformation and liberation of our hearts and minds, are radically

different from the news stories in the world's headlines.

As a programme of Initiatives of Change, Creators of Peace embraces universal values of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love and the practice of inner listening. In a world of noise we advocate for silence, in a world that demands quick reactions in decision-making, we suggest space for reflection. In a materialistic world we treasure the spiritual. We long for substance more than sound bites and promote talk over twitter. We seek to heal history so that the future is truly free.

If we are serious about advocating for a new story, we will have to confront our egos on a daily basis, we will have to recognize the invitations to selfishness and greed, resentment and pride. This is not a journey for the faint-hearted, but it is the only journey that makes sense.

The women and men who tell their stories in this booklet have embarked on this journey. They come from Australia, Burundi, Colombia, Kenya, Lebanon, Romania, South Africa, Syria and Taiwan. Most of them first encountered Creators of Peace through taking part in a Creators of Peace Circle: a small gathering of women, who meet to explore their potential for creating peace and to share their stories.

We thank them each for agreeing to share their stories with a wider audience.

Jean Brown

Convenor of Living Peace Conference

Discovering the beauty in 'the other'

Marie Chaftari and Lina Hamade, a Christian and a Shi'a Muslim from Lebanon, and Iman, a Sunni Muslim from Syria, have been working together throughout the Syrian war.



Marie Chaftari

From 1975 until 1985, 'the other' for me was the Muslim. This was the case until military and political changes made 'the other' for me any person that had a different opinion. All of a sudden my parents, my neighbours and half of the Christians became 'the other' to me. I was forced to leave my house and my region, to experience displacement, fear, bomb attacks, mistrust and the accusation of being a traitor, and solitude. Now, after all these years, I can say I was lucky; but then, of course, I felt deceived. That new situation made me redefine the enemy and my way of seeing things.

Meeting Initiatives of Change in 1988, in the town where I resettled, made me look again at my opinions and deepen my faith. My personal change started through my encounter with some human beings in the true meaning of the word.

Later I met Lina at an IofC summer camp, but it was not until 2005 that we started to work together. A visitor from Creators of Peace came to Lebanon, and asked me to make an appointment for her with Lina's aunt, an eminent Muslim personality, known for her openness and tolerance. I got in touch with Lina, and was surprised by the speed of the positive response. It was during this appointment that our movement, Linaltaki ('let's meet') was born.

Although Lina and I differed politically, I could see the same fear for the fate of our country in her eyes. On Mother's Day, our visitor said to me, 'If one single mother can change the world, what is possible when two mothers try?' I decided to meet Lina again, but this time as mothers, responsible for what we leave behind for our children after us.

If you love someone you stop believing everything

troublemakers tell you about them. If we mothers love each other, our children will end up loving each other and will not make war again. This is how a series of meetings started between my (Christian) friends and ladies from Lina's (Muslim) family. We spoke about the veil and the nikab, about marriage and divorce, about religious beliefs and about everything we had heard about each other. Lina helped me to discover the beauty in the other.

With the bubbling up of global terrorism, the explosion of the Syrian war and the great number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, fanaticism is increasing and so is fear. All we have to save us from the wars around us are the friendships that we build.

Lina Hamade

I live in a country that has been bleeding for the past 40 years due to all kinds of wars and conflicts, leaving its citizens tormented and agonized.

Marie and I were unlike those who believed that God wanted us to fight. Our differences were never an issue. On the contrary, we cherished them, as an incentive for introspection, a motive to reach out and learn more about the other, an aspiration to discover how we can complement each other.

Trusting each other, we were united in pain and in fear – fear for the future of our country, fear of polluting the tender hearts of our children with grown-ups' hatred. We were united in our courage to change the prejudices, condescension and pre-judgements.

Then we met Iman. We did not see her first as a Syrian or as a Muslim or as Sunni. We saw her sorrow and anguish and her love of freedom and dedication to peace.

We care less about what each one believes in, and

more about how she translates that belief. Whoever said that difference is bad and evil? Whoever said that religion divides? Isn't it power and authority that does that? Couldn't God have made us all into one nation with a single faith? Isn't diversity a choice of God and a divine message in itself? Isn't the best prayer that which calls for reaching out to my brother and sister in humanity?

Iman

I went to Lebanon in 2012 to attend a Creators of Peace Circle and facilitation training. I was confused. Would I surrender to the deep voice inside that told me to be optimistic and leave a space for everyone, without any expectation of being accepted? Or would I surrender to my fear of being rejected as a Syrian and sometimes as a Muslim?

I experienced a great amount of care and sympathy towards me and my country Syria. I heard stories that helped me understand the histories of others. Understanding other people's struggle helped melt some layers of fear. Sharing stories, crying together and learning new skills helped to build a new horizon based on humanity and respect. That event opened doors to friendship and to healing.

Lina and Marie have often invited me to visit with them when the fighting escalated in Damascus. I would arrive like frozen meat filled with anger, anxiety and uncertainty, and return to Damascus a few days later with joy, love and hope. Our friendship expanded to include others. We organized a one-day event to gather Syrians and Lebanese together.

Meeting Marie's husband, and hearing him talk about his journey from being a fighter in war to a non-violent

fighter for peace, left my Syrian friends speechless. When they got back to Syria, they shared their experience in Lebanon with their spouses, families and friends. Some were amazed by the love and care with which they were received. At the beginning they were suspicious, but after many visits to Lebanon, trust has been built. They now wait eagerly for the annual summer meeting in Lebanon. Finally they can go beyond such labels as 'Muslim', 'Sunni', 'Shi'a', 'Christian' or 'Druze' and see a human being first.

My friendship with Lina and Marie has been like fresh air in the middle of a 49-degree Damascus summer – or a candle in the darkness.

Iman continues, as she has throughout the war, to draw women and youth together to build relationships of trust across the religious and social divides, for the new Syria that will one day rise from the ashes of the old.

**'Whoever said that
difference is bad and
evil?'**

Pain to peace

Portia Mosia from South Africa survived a brutal attack and now helps other women to find healing.

Growing up I wanted to make a difference and be a leader. In primary school I always wanted to know if others had lunch and if not I would share mine with them. I was elected president of my high school representative council. This was a very active role, which motivated me to do what was right.

I was raised by parents who spoke about God as the centre of everything. This developed in me a deep love for God and hunger to understand Him, which shaped my life and beliefs. I believed that God is love and that he would protect me at all times.

This belief was shaken when I became a victim in 2002. My manager had asked me to work extended hours. On my way home I was attacked and forced into a car, and driven to a place where I was brutally beaten and raped.

While it was happening, I asked God: Is this the reflection of your love for me? Where is your protection? Why have you allowed this to happen to me when I had just made a choice to serve you more and wait for the right man for marriage?

In the midst of my wrestling with God I remembered a sentence from the Bible, which says, 'And we know that in all things God works for good in all those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.' The only thing I could do was to pray for God to spare my life.

The next morning, they drove me back to where they found me and left me there helpless. Through this experience: I lost my confidence as a woman; I lost faith in God; I lost my job as an assistant manager; I spent three months in hospital to heal from the beating, and also



because my contact lenses had broken in my eyes as a result of the blindfold; I became depressed and isolated myself.

In 2007 I took part in a Creators of Peace Circle, during which we explored the power of forgiveness. I shared my story with people I didn't know. I felt as if a baggage I'd been carrying had been removed from my shoulders. I realized I needed to forgive myself and the perpetrators: not to condone what was wrong but to free myself from the prison I was in. That gave me fresh breath to start over and repair my life.

Months later, with the support of my family and friends, I realized I had so much to give to the world. In 2009 I started feeling called to be the voice for other women who had been through experiences that needed healing. I felt God had prepared me to understand and connect without judgements or reservations.

As a facilitator, trainer, mentor and coordinator with Creators of Peace, I have reached out, with my colleagues, to women challenged by rape, domestic violence, low self-esteem and unforgiveness. The gift of my experience has helped women to have a change of heart and to start their own healing journey.

I no longer see myself as a victim but a victor. I know that I'm beautiful despite my experience, because my experience does not define who I am, but my calling does. True leadership comes when we are able to make positive choices in the midst of our pain. Sometimes when we go through pain we ask 'Why me?' The truth is, if not me, then who. No one deserves pain, but remaining in pain robs us of the potential we can unleash.



Counteracting discrimination

Diana Damsa from Romania describes how she faced up to her prejudice against her country's Roma community – and how she is fighting the social injustice they suffer.

In October 2005, on the very first day of a visit to India, my host took me to see the sights of Mumbai. I noticed the people begging and asked who they were. My host said: 'Poor people.' I was surprised: 'What do you mean "poor people"? Aren't they gypsies?' 'What are gypsies?' he asked. I was shocked by such ignorance. 'These are just very poor Indians,' he said.

I reflected on this incident in the times I set aside for quiet and inner listening. Something was not right. I soon realized that I had a negative image of gypsies: dirty, poor, beggars, unreliable, not to be trusted, people to avoid. Why was I so quick to assume that all beggars were gypsies? I had to admit that I was prejudiced.

My journey of discovery had just started, and is still going on. There have been six steps, so far.

1. Admit your prejudice and be willing to address it. I could see that I was the product of a society where despising the gypsies is the norm. When something is stolen or destroyed or there is violent behaviour, people blame the gypsies. I started to understand the concept of scapegoating. It was painful to realize that I belonged to the group that was discriminating.

2. Tackle your ignorance. I realized how little I knew about this group who have been living alongside us for as long as we can remember. I read everything I could about them. I was surprised to learn that they originated from northern India and started their travels towards Europe 1000 years ago. I learned about the hardships they

encountered in Europe and how they became victims of the Holocaust. The greatest shock was to discover that they endured 500 years of slavery in the territories that now make up my country. Why hadn't I heard anything about this before?

3. Take a conscious decision to show respect. I decided to stop speaking badly about them. I stopped calling them 'gypsies' and used the name they prefer, Roma or Romany people. It means 'human being'.

4. Reach out and make friends. I realized I had no direct connection with any Roma person. All I knew about them was based on assumptions and superficial observations from a distance. I looked for opportunities to meet them and, sure enough, they came my way. A few friendships started taking shape. The closer we became, the more embarrassed I felt about my old attitudes. I learned that many Roma people live much the same way I do, with a house, a job, a family and similar preoccupations and expectations. They are less visible in society because they are so well integrated, but also because many do not want to stand out for fear of discrimination.

5. Share your new learning and discoveries with family and friends. This was probably the hardest thing. Nonetheless, I started to speak to my family and friends. Some were willing to start on this journey of discovery themselves. I also started to introduce this topic into the training sessions I lead and to the groups I work with.

6. Stand up and speak out for the Roma people. I want to make wider society aware of how our ignorance and indifference affect others, how humiliating our assumptions are, how disempowering and unjust our sense of superiority is. This is an uncomfortable topic for many, and I risk unpleasant reactions even from those to whom I am closest.

We have recently registered an NGO in Romania

under the name of Centre for Social Transformation. We work for the empowerment of Roma youth and women and also to raise awareness about prejudice and discrimination. We have organized dialogues between Roma and non-Roma people. We go to schools and invite young people to learn about the history of Roma people and the slavery and injustices they have suffered. We are often asked: 'Why don't we hear about this in our history classes?'

But there are times when I have lacked the courage, strength or inspiration to speak out.

Recently, I visited a family who have an energetic young son, who has recently discovered spitting. His mother kept asking him to 'stop it', without much success. Then, to my horror, she said, 'If you don't stop spitting I will give you to the gypsies because they are dirty and spit and make a mess just like you do.' I was frozen with shock. This woman is a loving wife and a wonderful mother. But she repeats things that she was told as a child without questioning the impact her words can have. I was weak and didn't want to confront her in front of her child. I left with a heavy heart.

I want to play my part in breaking the chain which passes prejudice on from one generation to the next. I want all our children to become compassionate people, who will take responsibility not only for the good bits of our history but also for the ones we have kept in the closet.

I want to thank my Roma friend, Simona, who is here at this conference, for helping to cure my ignorance and prejudice. I want to apologize for the injustices her people have gone through at the hands of my people. I want to acknowledge that in the end we are just one people.

Reconciliation after years of violence

Baringo County in north-west Kenya has seen years of communal strife over land and water. Mediatrix Masava, Elizabeth Kipsang and Mary Cheman Kukot describe the impact of Creators of Peace Circles there.

Mediatrix Masava

In 2007, elections in Kenya led to inter-community violence. I had a dark spot of hatred within my heart because of what some of the Kalenjin people did to the Kikuyus.

I remember visiting a village in the Rift Valley Province that had been destroyed a few weeks previously. The only building left standing was the church. Homes, shops, the only school – everything was gone. This normally busy rural area was almost deserted. I saw many burned homesteads and fields. This and other experiences convinced me that working on development without working on peace issues does not make sense, because in that village 30 years of development had been destroyed in one terrible night.

In 2009 I looked into myself, identified that spot of hatred and cried it out of me. I made a pledge to myself that I will be the change that I want to see in Kenya. That is how I met many courageous, creative people, working to bring about stability, an end to violence and a re-establishment of healthy relationships through Creators of Peace.

When the Baringo County project of Creators of Peace was launched, I had mixed feelings, since I had

never worked there. I was anxious about what lay ahead of us. As project coordinator, I had to make frequent visits to Baringo to ensure that the project ran well. We were promised many things, some of which never happened and at times we nearly gave up, but we wanted to give peace a chance. I have learnt to be patient with the way things are, especially when dealing with politicians, and never to doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world.

Elizabeth Kipsang

I am a mother of five. In August 2014, I was invited to take part in a Peace Circle in the town of Kabarnet in Baringo County. At the end, I felt deep in my heart the need to unite women from the three communities in my county, the Tugen, the Illchamus and the Pokot.

For many years, relationships between our communities have been marred by violent clashes, cattle raids and revenge attacks. The escalation of hostilities has displaced many people from their homes. The most affected were my community, the Tugen people.

It was not easy to bring the women of the three communities together, and we finally decided that we would not accept our certificates for having taken part in a Peace Circle until women from all three communities had been trained.

On 27 May 2015 Pokot, Tugen and Illchamus women gathered in Marigat. The Pokot women came forward publicly and admitted that they had shed innocent blood and displaced women and children from their indigenous lands. We Tugen and Illchamus women shed a lot of tears because we could not believe that Pokot women could make that step of apologizing. It was just

like a miracle.

I felt that a new heaven on earth had been opened up. Peace and harmony filled my heart and I developed a positive attitude towards the Pokot community. I had heard many stories of how the Pokot community behave towards the Tugen. I need not have worried. When I met them they accepted that we need to work together, sit down with local leaders and deliberate on issues concerning our communities.

I can now tell my children to intermarry, do business by buying land in Pokot, have cultural festivals together and study together.

Women from our three communities have committed to working together and making peace a reality in the entire county.

‘We could not believe that [the other] women could make that step of apologizing.’



Mary Cheman Kuket

I am a community volunteer worker from the Pokot community. I am a widow and mother of seven children, and I have adopted four children who have been rescued from cultural practices of female genital mutilation in our community.

Over a long time there has been conflict between our three communities, resulting from a scramble for resources, including pasture and water, and from boundary disputes. These conflicts resulted in loss of lives, destruction of properties, displacement of people and the closure of markets. The negative social and economic impact affected women and small children most.

Their suffering touched my heart and prompted me to mobilize Pokot women to tell their husbands and young men to stop invading neighbouring communities to rustle cattle. Through Creators of Peace I managed to lead the Pokot women to make an apology to the Ilchamus and Tugen women in May 2015. These interventions led to forgiveness among the three communities and this has reduced conflicts and improved social and economic activities.

I urge the Pokot community to embrace peace and take their children to school. Inter-marriage between the three communities should be encouraged. I talk to my children about forgiveness, inner peace, listening to others and, above all, accommodating others. I want to make peace real in Baringo County.





Taking forgiveness out of the safe

Bhavna Shah from Australia describes how she set herself free.

I treated forgiveness like a precious diamond ring that is kept in the safe only to be worn on special occasions. Forgiveness sounds like a big, heavy and lofty ideal to carry around. I thought it was ideal for people seeking inner peace in violent situations.

How wrong was I?

Fifteen years ago, when I was relatively new to Australia, I was lucky to find a job as a customer service representative quite quickly. But I did not make it past the probation. They said I talked too long with the customers. Can you believe that? I can make fun of it now, but back then I was devastated. My ego was crushed. I began strategizing on how to become a millionaire and prove myself to the world.

I told my husband, 'I am going to become a distributor of Avon beauty products and I am going to be a millionaire.' He disapproved and I chose not to listen to him. My best friend was supportive and so my empire was built with high glass ceilings. Then I spoke to another friend and she uttered the most despicable thing, 'I don't use Avon'. Everything I heard after that sounded distant and in slow motion. The cannons went off in the distance and my empire of dreams crumbled to pieces.

She was no longer one of my friends. I started declining invitations to the parties she went to. I would feel heartburn and knots in my stomach as soon as someone mentioned her name.

After 15 years I recognized that I had made a mountain

out of a molehill. Due to my low self-esteem at the time, I had lost confidence in my ability and saw myself as a failure. I had taken her rejection of the product as a personal attack when all she was trying to convey to me was that her skin was sensitive and she couldn't use many of the products on the market.

I walked up to my friend and asked for her forgiveness for my reaction to an event of which she had no memory.

This experience has taught me that the quickest way to end suffering is to forgive and ask for forgiveness. To quote Louie Smedes, 'To forgive is to set the prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.'

**'The quickest way
to end suffering is to
forgive.'**

Facing the deep wound

Erhling Wang, from Taiwan, was sold by her birth parents and rejected by her adoptive father.

I was sold by my birth parents when I was one month old. Although, from the age of eight, I knew I was adopted, I got along quite well with my adoptive parents. I believed that they loved me and they treated me as their own. When I was 12, they separated, and as they were negotiating over which one would keep me, my adoptive father, whom I adored, said, 'She's not my real child and I don't love her anyway'. I was confused and angry. I couldn't believe what he had said. I buried a seed of hatred in my heart.

I stayed with my adoptive mother who was a polio victim. I grew up with a deep fear of abandonment. I could not safely love anyone and was full of hate. I took it out on society by cheating, stealing and hurting people.

In 2005, I joined an IofC programme, and started to listen to the inner voice. I began to address all the anger inside me. I wrote many letters to my adoptive father, but never posted any of them, because I did not know where he was. Finally I was able to write, 'Father, no matter what you have done, I respect you as a father. I forgive and love you.' I started to get on with people, apologized to my teacher for cheating and paid back money to the shop from which I had stolen. The shop owner said I had restored his hope. I tried to be part of the answer rather than part of the problem in society.

In 2010, my adoptive father's new wife called me to tell me that he was very sick. I went to visit him, but he couldn't speak. I started crying. I looked at him, held his hand and kept saying 'Thank you' to him. I saw there were tears in his eyes, too. At that moment, both of us got



released. The only thing left in our relationship is love.

I have just completed my Masters' thesis, which is about self-narrative. So I had the chance to look back over my life. I discovered that the original source of my life was my birth parents, and that there was a deep wound inside my heart, which I had never faced. Through time in silence, reflection and writing, I faced the pain.

When I stayed with my pain at being abandoned by my birth parents, I gradually began to feel their pain too. Since I became a mother, I have empathy for them, especially my birth mother. How difficult it must have been to give away their child. I cried for them and for myself. I learned to accept my destiny and to say yes to whatever is God's plan for me. When I made connection with the source of my life, I also found love and faith in it.

**'At that moment,
both of us got
released.'**



'Forgive my blindness'

Camilo Villa and his wife, Luz Stella, have created an initiative for women in Colombia who have spent most of their lives in prostitution. He tells its story.

The Academia de Belleza (Beauty Academy) aims to create a secure space for women who are searching for new paths ahead. We combine two elements in our approach: inner work to heal their profound wounds and recognize the unique beauty of each one, and entrepreneurship, to find the project through which they can each shine, make a living and flourish.

You cannot imagine the amount of healing that has been taking place.

The women who take part are over 45, too old for the business of prostitution. Most ended up on that track as the result of a painful event in their lives, rather than a conscious decision. Most of them have children (often from an unknown or absent father) and some have grandchildren. Their families do not know about this dimension of their lives; the shame of it makes it too hard to share.

Finding a formal, stable job is almost impossible because they can identify few skills and little work experience. They have gone through so many disappointments and betrayals, so much abuse and violence that trusting in their own beauty, and in others, is a huge hurdle. The main challenge is not so much identifying a possible enterprise ahead, but having the will to jump into it with confidence.

The red light district in Bogota is by a main road. When you pass it, you can see women standing at the entrances of houses, bars, clubs and hotels. They wear extremely sexy clothes, walk in a provocative manner, use intense

make-up – all the tricks to attract the attention of any possible client. They are considered a threat to marriages and labelled as carriers of diseases. Society puts them low on the social scale.

When we started, this was what I thought too. Listening to them and witnessing their humanity was a shocking experience. I was deeply touched by their life stories and by their kindness and vulnerability. Their stories, their fears and the difficulty they had dreaming were arrows piercing my heart. I began to ask myself:

Why have they been labelled as the bad girls in the movie while in fact they have suffered the worst consequences and impacts? Why is it that the men, the ones who pay for that moment of pleasure, are not singled out? Why have we allowed sexuality to become a commodity? Why do we exclude and marginalize these women?

It also made me think about the men who use these women's services. They must have profound loneliness and emptiness in their hearts. Those encounters are the encounters of lost souls, using those few minutes of pleasure as a pill to take them away from their own reality.

As a man I felt profound shame. I felt guilty about allowing this violence and exclusion to happen in my society. I have never paid someone to be with me, but I have played the seduction game in one way or another. Now I understand that whenever there is sex without love that is a form of prostitution for both sides. And I have done that. I have also pointed my finger at these women.

So I asked for forgiveness. In a Talking Circle I told those women how bad I felt about having judged them without first asking and understanding and, above all, about not having honoured sexuality as the sacred encounter it is meant to be. I asked them to forgive me, on my own behalf and on behalf of all men who have hurt them in

any way. I committed to working in every way possible to bring the masculine and the feminine in our culture into balance, to honour women and to support men in healing and reconciliation.

Speaking to you women of Creators of Peace today, on my own behalf and on behalf of all men, I ask you to forgive my blindness, lack of tenderness, my violent emotions, my incapacity to honour and accept your cycles. And I confirm my commitment to work for the balance of the feminine and the masculine in the planet in such a way that both God and Mother Earth are honoured in every one of my acts.

**'As a man I felt
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Detoxifying the heart

*In Burundi, Creators of Peace Circles include training in new ways of building dry toilets and of detoxifying bitter manioc (cassava), a staple food. The other parts of the Peace Circle process 'detoxify the hearts of the participants'. **Germaine Manirariha**, one of our national coordinators, describes what this has meant for her.*

I had a happy childhood. From a young age, my father made me his advisor and confidante. At the age of 14 I suffered an injustice in school, which put hatred in my heart. It dragged on until I was 32.

In 2013 I left my job to help run Creators of Peace Circles. Naively, I did not follow the proper termination procedures. I was humiliated by the authorities, but I kept

my head high. It was a leap in the dark, because I could see that there was no salary, but I had made my decision.

I thank my husband from the bottom of my heart for giving me freedom in my choice. I am recently widowed after being married for 16 years and I thank the Lord who made me meet this man with such a big heart.

The Peace Circles transformed my life. I learned to take care of myself, to listen to myself and to listen better to others, especially my family.

In January 2014, my brother's wife killed him when he was asleep. It was an immense pain for my parents. I was needed to take care of my brother's six children immediately. Two of them strongly resembled their mother. I wanted to throw them out of the window to wipe out the image of this woman.

The friendship I received at this time from my colleagues in Creators of Peace gave me the courage to accept what had happened. Peace Circles taught me to forgive. Five days after this horrible death, I was able to go to the prison where my sister-in-law was, give her my hand and forgive her.

Since that moment my heart got to know a cloudless peace, despite the incomprehension of my brothers and sister. I love my sister-in-law's children with the same love.

**'It was a leap in the
dark... but I had
made my decision.'**

A new peace-creating logic

Thierry Nkurunziza's childhood was dominated by the intercommunal violence in Burundi. Now a psychologist, teacher and father, he describes what taking part in a Creators of Peace Circle meant to him.

In 1984, when I was three years old, I was hit in the buttock by a stray bullet from an army training camp in Bujumbura, our capital. I was treated and I healed. Between 1986 and 1990, I was a member of the Pioneers of the ruling party in Burundi. At the end of 1991, the primary school I attended was caught in fighting between the rebels and the military, in the middle of a school day, with both material and human casualties.

During the democratic period in Burundi in 1992, my father was a member of the opposition party. In 1993, when the opposition candidate won the elections, I joined in the dancing to celebrate the victory. Three months later, the president was assassinated.

The next 15 years were dominated by war and social instability, fleeing the fighting and then fleeing again. In 1995, when I was 14, we had to leave our home. When the soldiers searched our house, they destroyed the food we had hidden to avoid theft. When we came home we found that the same soldiers had brutally killed and burned a man. Hatred and revenge against the army started to grow in me.

My father, who was working as a film/video librarian, received death threats. In February 1997, he was arrested and imprisoned. A week later, one of our relations was killed by persons unknown.

When my mother and I went to visit my father in prison,



he cried. Two months later he was freed conditionally, but that August he felt ill and died. We suspected that he had been poisoned in prison. My mother was left with five fatherless children. I was 16 and had just finished primary school. I note in passing that my two direct grandfathers had been killed in the genocide of 1972.

In 1999, the population of my home province was regrouped in camps for internally displaced people (IDP). I saw IDP camps burnt down accidentally; I saw friends and brothers killed; I saw people close to me dying of malaria, cholera and bacillary dysentery. I suffered from these illnesses myself.

Time passed. In 2012 a friend proposed that I take part in a Creators of Peace Circle, with other young people from my neighbourhood association, the Circle of Citizen Torches from Kavumu for Development (CFRKD).

My moment of deliverance came during the Peace Circle. I was able to distinguish the evil from the criminal. I realized that I was the direct victim of the hate I had nourished against the agents of the trouble in my country. From this moment on, I subscribed to a new peace-creating logic.

At the end of the Peace Circle, we committed ourselves to building a school. CFRKD had had a kindergarten since 2006, housed in rented rooms. Now, with help from members of Creators of Peace Burundi, we bought a piece of land and started to build two classrooms for the kindergarten. The finishing work is still underway. We hold onto our vision of building a school, which will go all through primary and secondary school.

As a graduate in social and clinical psychology, I am in charge of psychological support to the participants and project team of Peace Circles and Development in Burundi. I see the approach of Creators of Peace Circles as beneficial to people who have psychological injuries

and who have lived through traumatic conflicts. It is also a tool for the prevention and transformation of conflict. We continue to meet to consolidate the skills we learned in the Peace Circles. I have discovered that when the torch of love lights, the ice of hate collapses.

I have welcomed and recognized the past that I see in the rearview mirror. I dedicate myself to the present, to what I see through the windshield, because that is what I am able to transform positively.

**'When the torch of
love lights, the ice of
hate collapses.'**

Reflections

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing reflections.

Resources

We offer these stories as inspiration to each one of us on our journey of personal transformation, and as a prompt to action in our work for peace and our service to others.

You might like to reflect on one story each day over a week, or read them through with a group of friends or community.

Take time to honour each story you read, and to reflect and share on the following questions:

- What elements of this story (or these stories) inspired and encouraged you?
- Which elements of this story did you find difficult or challenging?
- Where does this story have significance for your own situation?
- Are there any stories of personal transformation and peace creation from your own community that deserve to be heard?
- What would it mean for you to be an advocate for a new story?

Let us know how you get on

@CreatorsofPeace and via creatorsofpeace@iofc.org

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Get involved

Creators of Peace transforms, empowers and engages women in peace creation.

Read more stories about women engaging in peace creation and join the conversation.
iofc.org/creators-of-peace-news

Find out how to connect with Creators of Peace where you are and get involved with a Creators of Peace Circle.
iofc.org/creators-of-peace-take-part

Donate to support our work:
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Creators of Peace is a programme of Initiatives of Change, a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own.







Creators of Peace

LIVING PEACE

Gloria Thornton

Andantino 2 = 60
[Verse 1] D A Em D A

To - geth-er we sing out our vi-sion, of a world that is wo-men in

D A Em G

Each thread re-con-ected to each oth-er. Cre - a-tive-ly liv-ing in

A7 Chorus A F

one. We are wom-en of cour-age, wom-en of strength. Wom-

Cour-age Strength

peace in our hearts. We are wom-en of cour-

peace in your hearts. Cour-age



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