

THE OLIVE BRANCH

Youth Magazine of the Seeds of Peace Program | Volume VI, Issue I | Fall 2001



Facing Tragedy Together

Seeds of Peace confront September 11

THE MAGIC OF MAINE: TWENTY COUNTRIES COME TOGETHER AT CAMP

CYPRUS PEACE DAYS: CYPRIOT SEEDS REUNITE ONE THOUSAND FRIENDS

HARD TIMES: ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN AND MACEDONIAN SEEDS REFLECT ON A YEAR OF CONFLICT

SEEDS GOES SUBCONTINENTAL: PIONEERS OF PEACE FROM INDIA AND PAKISTAN

HAIFA: ARAB AND JEWISH SEEDS COMMIT TO COEXISTENCE IN THEIR CITY

THE REAL NEWS IS INSIDE US ALL: POETRY IN THE WAKE OF CATASTROPHE



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THE OLIVE BRANCH

The Olive Branch is a quarterly youth magazine written and edited by youth from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, FYROM, Greece, India, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen, Yugoslavia and the United States, who are part of the Seeds of Peace program.

THE OLIVE BRANCH Staff

Ned Lazarus, *Editor-in-Chief*

Jen Marlowe, Jethro Berkman, Michael Wallach, *Assistant Editors*

Contributing Writers & Artists

Balkans: Artin Pilibosian, Bojan Sesoski, Florian Rexhepi, Sneska Vasevska.

Cyprus, Greece, Turkey: Arda Kuran, Charis Achilleos, Christi Polychroni, Constantina Pilioura, Halide Tuna, Ilke Dagli, Loizos Kapsalis, Mehmet Ratip, Marina Ignatiou, Niki Miliotou, Nisan Gigrsel, Panayiota Georgiou, Rina Onur, Stephanos Nicolaou.

Middle East: Amir Haddad, Amram Mitzna, Asad Hassouneh, Elad Shaffer, HEND Medhat, Ibrahim Khader, Irena Steinfeldt, Ismail Mukbil, Kareem Farid, Liav Harel, Mai Abuemara, Majeda Shehadeh, Nadav Greenberg, Netta Corren, Nofar Harel, Rasha Mukbil, Rita Konaev, Rona Harari, Sara Khatib, Shadi Rohana, Tarek Arow, Uri Rachmani.

India/Pakistan: Amal Suleman, Aneeta Nagi, Bilal Khan, Kunal Sahasrabuddhe, Rabia Cheema, Sahar Bandial, Sarah Sham, Sasha Mansukhani, Sherry Ali, Shyam Kapadia, Spenta Kutar.

USA: Chelsey Berlin, Lindsay Cope, Liz Carlin, Mahmud Riffat, Rachel Rush, Tom MacMillan.

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THE OLIVE BRANCH

c/o Seeds of Peace Center for Coexistence

P.O. Box 25045, Jerusalem 97300

Tel. 972-2-582-0222 Fax. 972-2-582-2221

Email: olivebranch@seedsofpeace.org

THE OLIVE BRANCH is printed by Ma'ariv;

Adi Saranga, graphic designer.

Seeds of Peace

John Wallach, *Founder and President*

Bobbie Gottschalk, *Executive Vice President*

Tim Wilson, *Vice President and Camp Director*

Barbara Zasloff, *Vice President*

Christine Covey, *Vice President*

Lindsay Miller, *Vice President*

Dena Fisher, *Executive Director*

Center for Coexistence Staff, Jerusalem

Adam Shapiro, Jethro Berkman, Jen Marlowe, Michael Wallach, Ned Lazarus, Sami Al-Jundi

Seeds of Peace is a non-profit, non-political organization that helps teenagers from regions of conflict learn the skills of making peace. Set at our own camp in Maine, a safe environment is created where youngsters can air their views and learn the leadership and conflict resolution techniques required to end the cycles of war.

COVER PHOTO: Seeds Liz Carlin (New York) and HEND Medhat (Cairo) face the faces of youth survivors of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center at the Wall of Hope

Letters

Open House at the Seeds Center in Jerusalem: A Cultural Meeting

I had tried Arab food before, but when my son Yair told me about the Open House Cultural Cook-Off at the Seeds of Peace Center in Jerusalem, I knew it would be different.

The first thing I noticed when I arrived was the warm atmosphere in the room. Almost everyone was there already. I had seen it before in different Seeds gatherings, from random street meetings to the larger group meetings, the love and closeness between the boys and girls, Arabs and Jews. The hugs, the close embrace, the being together that came naturally; true feelings and emotions, genuine trust, a feeling of being able to identify with each other and a close, honest friendship.

The food, while extremely delicious, was secondary. For me it was an excuse, a bridge, a common denominator to bring us under one roof. It bothered me that there were only a handful of parents.

Last night I saw on TV the parents of two Jewish Israeli kidnapped soldiers comforting the parents of the Arab soldier who was kidnapped with them by Hizbullah. The parents hugged each other and held hands, and you could feel the strong emotion, the closeness and unconditional friendship that was born a year ago between them — Arabs and Jews.

This unique relationship was formed under traumatic and tragic circumstances, and I feel that we, as parents, must take that extra step and form a relationship no matter the circumstance.

The idea of bringing together Arab and Jewish parents was brilliant, and events like this should be held more often. I was so glad to have met the families of my son's Arab friends, after I had spoken to them on the phone many times. This short meeting brought us all closer, more than any number of phone calls ever could.

Uri Rachmani (Yair's dad) (Jerusalem)

A Life Changing Lesson

We live and then we die. That, in itself, could be the purpose of life. Yet for most teens, "death" is an unspoken word that stirs indescribable sadness, an issue we do not want to confront.

Perhaps that is why I developed a special kinship to people I met at camp, who had the



Seeds of Peace 2001 campers meet with 43rd US President George W. Bush on the South Lawn of the White House.

photo: White House Staff

The White House

"If we are to build a brighter future for the young people of this world, then we must replace hatred and intolerance with compassion and understanding. Seeds of Peace offers hope in this vital mission. The organization brings tomorrow's leaders together to accomplish changing minds and hearts one person at a time."

President George W. Bush

remarkable ability to face the issue of death, like no teenagers I ever met.

Before arriving at camp, the word "death" was not one that I wanted to confront head-on. My grandfather died two years ago and my great-grandfather a few years before that. Upon hearing the word death, I was forced to recall those painful memories, which resulted in my avoidance of the topic altogether. In retrospect, I was not emotionally mature enough to deal with the ramifications of death. Because all of the campers, excluding the Americans, came to camp from troubled regions, death was a topic that continuously weaved its way into the lives of these teenagers and their conversations.

I remember one of the first nights of camp, when I initially found out about the life of my Bosnian bunkmate, Meri. She told me that while living in Bosnia during the war, she constantly feared for her life, never feeling safe in any of her dwellings. She also told me how her uncle had died in the war. I was so impressed by the frank nature with which Meri told me about her uncle's passing while I still could not discuss my grandfather's passing. In contrast, this girl was able to readily convey her feelings about death to someone she just met.

The next time that death weaved its way into a

conversation was in my coexistence group. My coexistence group was comprised of Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, Jordanians, Egyptians, and Moroccans. One of our first discussions was about the Holocaust. One of the Jewish Israeli campers, Ayelet, described how her grandmother survived the death camps of the Holocaust. While it was emotional for her to discuss, she spoke with no inhibitions about her grandmother's horrific experiences and the deaths she witnessed. Once again, I found myself surprised and awed by how someone could talk about death so openly.

The camp was only for three weeks of my life. I will probably never see any of my friends again. And I will only have my yearbook, their charming emails and their wonderful hand written letters to remember them by. I did not realize how much they taught me. Through the openness with which my friends spoke of life's most trying battles, I learned that death, or any other difficult topic for that matter, is not something to shun or evade. We must discuss our feelings and convey our emotions. It was weird. In talking about death, I learned more about life than I had ever known before.

Rachel Rush (Great Neck, NY)

From the Editors

We struggled to create headlines and titles for this OLIVE BRANCH. There are no words to encompass the horror of September 11. The only way to express the feeling of watching thousands of innocent people deliberately and simultaneously destroyed, is silence. The devastation, to those who feel empathy for fellow humans, is beyond comprehension and beyond description.

Finding words is one of many aspects of life that are more difficult since that day. The basic confidence that one and one's family will survive the day is shaken by the sight of people killed suddenly, randomly, in the middle of their daily routine. Trusting people of different identities seems risky, after a group of terrorists manipulated the trust of their neighbors and open societies to implement an attack on America from inside America. After this violation of international trust, it seems safer to stay away from people who share ethnic or religious identity with organizations that mean harm to one's own group.

Mutual suspicion is natural in the wake of such trauma. But closing ourselves off from different nations and religions is neither safe nor even possible. The world is irreversibly mixed. Countries are too interdependent, the great cities too diverse to suddenly separate people along ethnic, religious or national lines. Religions and nations in constant war is the vision of terrorists; it must not be ours. The Seeds of Peace vision of creating respect and understanding between "enemies" is more important to the world than ever before. Hard as it is to find words, we must speak for peace louder than ever.

This OLIVE BRANCH is our response. In this issue, Seeds of Peace from four conflicts and twenty countries stand together in direct contradiction to the popular image of a "clash of civilizations" between the Muslim world and "The West," which must not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This summer, the world united in an unprecedented way at Seeds of Peace International Camp. In this issue, Albanian, American, Arab, Israeli, Cypriot, Greek, Turkish, Serb, Bosnian, Croat, Kosovar, Macedonian and for the first time, Indian and Pakistani youth describe the community they created together, and declare their pride in becoming Seeds of Peace.

Throughout the issue, Seeds describe their determined work as ambassadors of peace in their countries. Seeds from Israel, Palestine and Macedonia reflect on what they have endured through a year of violent conflict and their enduring belief that peace is the path to a solution. Arab and Jewish Israeli Seeds, from a special delegation sent by Mayor Amram Mitzna of the mixed city of Haifa, report on their experiences together. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Seeds report on the remarkable bi-communal peace festival they organized in September despite serious obstacles.

American Seeds, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, recount the day of the attacks, and their subsequent work to prevent divisions in their communities. Seeds around the world describe their struggle to stand for common humanity in the different circumstances of their lives.

This issue proudly features letters from Arab and Israeli parents supporting their children's work. These courageous parents make the first step, encouraging their children to meet "the other side." It is their tremendous contribution that allows Seeds of Peace to create the international community of peacemakers that speaks in this magazine against the tides of war in the world. It is to them that we dedicate this OLIVE BRANCH. To the parents and children bereaved by terror and conflict this year, we dedicate our continued work as Seeds of Peace.

Statement from John Wallach, Founder and President of Seeds of Peace

As Seeds of Peace begins our tenth year, we are plagued by the loss of innocent lives—Palestinian and Israeli, American and Afghani—in a world that seems to have gone mad. What can we do to stop this violence and send a message of hope? Is it possible to hope anymore? I am aware that many may no longer believe in coexistence. I don't blame you. Everyone's faith has been shattered by the events of last year that culminated in the attacks of September 11. How can we make sense of 6000 lives lost? A friend said to me recently, "Think of it as one life six thousand times over." In the wake of this tragedy, can anyone be blamed for thinking our mission naïve and idealistic?

Of course, we are idealistic. We dream of a better world where justice, equality, and security for all are paramount. But we don't merely dream. As Tim says, we don't just "talk the talk—we walk the walk." We act. Every time an Arab and an Israeli, an Indian and a Pakistani, a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot or a Bosnian and a Serb, an Albanian and a Slav, meet or communicate with each other, we are reversing cycles of hatred and dehumanization.

Are we naïve to believe we can change the world? Sure. Do we have any better choice? You are the ones who can make this a better world. But you have to believe you can. If you're losing hope, think how far we have come in the last ten years.

This month Seeds of Peace is convening an International Youth Summit to discuss the root causes of hatred and terrorism. Twenty countries will be represented. Who would have dreamed a decade ago that so many nations would belong to Seeds of Peace? Who dreamed that we would win a UNESCO Peace Prize and that the United Nations would work hand-in-hand with us to achieve our goals?

Since 1993, approximately 1500 youth have graduated from our program. Not bad considering that we began with 46 kids. Today almost ten times that number attend our summer programs and hundreds more our programs at the Center in Jerusalem.

There are 60 Seeds on scholarship at some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the United States, including Harvard, Georgetown, Duke, MIT, Mount Holyoke, Bates, Earlham, Phillips Exeter, Bard College, the University of Southern Maine and Manhattanville College.

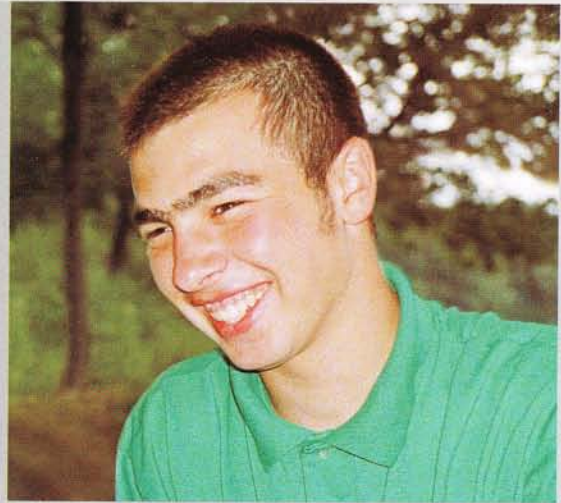
World leaders pay attention to Seeds of Peace. We drafted the Charter of Villars, a blueprint for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and presented it to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who took it to leaders in the Middle East. President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Secretary of State Albright, President Arafat, Prime Minister Rabin, Foreign Minister Peres, Prime Minister Barak and many members of the U.S. Congress have all met with Seeds of Peace.

Our 5,000-square-foot Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem opened in 1999 with an extraordinary turnout of 500 Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian and Cypriot Seeds. Violence has since made it impossible for many to come to the Center. But it remains active, bringing hundreds of Arabs and Jews together. Thanks to Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna, we will soon open a Center in Haifa. In 2002, we hope to open offices in other parts of the world.

So to those who say we have not made a difference, I say ask yourself this question: Are you the same person you were before you became a Seed? I hope you will say no. Without you, there is no Seeds of Peace. I know my life has been changed by each of you. And I hope that your lives have been changed by all of us who are devoting our lives to you. With that energy and compassion and commitment, we can change the world!

ONE YEAR WITHOUT ASEL

On October 7, More than 100 Arab and Jewish Seeds of Peace gathered at the Seeds of Peace Center in Jerusalem to remember Asel and to call for the full investigation of his killing by police one year ago, and justice for his family. The service, led by a dozen of Asel's friends, told the parallel stories of Asel's life in Seeds of Peace and of their reactions to his death. Seeds read selections from Asel's e-mails, shared memories of Asel and feelings on the anniversary of his death. Asel's sister Nardin Asleh spoke in the name of her family to the entire Seeds of Peace organization, saying "In the name of friendship and humanity, it is not enough just to remember Asel and how we loved him in his life, but to remember and condemn his death, and work for justice, which remains undone."



From a Mother at the Memorial

I just want to tell you how moved I was by the memorial ceremony for Asel at the Seeds of Peace Center. I know that often at such ceremonies people give speeches using big words, and before you know it, the real human being disappears. The speeches are dignified, but the person you are mourning is not really there. This was definitely not the case. Asel was present, and though I never met him, after the ceremony I felt I had known him well. This is not a coincidence. It is proof of the wonderful work you are doing at Seeds of Peace. Beyond noble goals and slogans, you never lose sight of the human beings involved. The fact that so many 1997 kids came proves the long term effect of the program.

Beyond the sorrow I felt for Asel's life cut short and the anger at the terrible circumstances of his death, I was deeply saddened that these kids, who were so much involved in work for a better future, were not spared and found themselves drawn into the circle of violence. This shows to what extent we are all endangered by the the conflict. Unfortunately this is why people become discouraged and, generally speaking, Israelis and Palestinians have moved apart at a frightening pace since last October. I guess this makes your work harder, but I was impressed that although some of the words spoken at the ceremony were very harsh, they did not exclude a continuous dialogue. Take care and don't lose faith.

Irena Steinfeldt (Mother of Dana Levy '97) (Jerusalem)

Dear Seeds,

With his ideas, Asel decorated life. Now he's not a decoration, but a symbol speaking for itself. For those who knew him, it's been a year now. Things must not continue this way; we must work harder to prevent people from dying like this. Asel left work undone, leaving us to finish. For his sake, memory, and his deepest desire I'm ready to give more.

I remember in coexistence talking about Asel's death, among us who knew him. Anyone who wanted to speak stood in the middle of the circle, to be and to feel heard. No matter who was speaking, Israeli or a Palestinian, the rest cried, touched by others' words and memories. It took us two years to reach that point of understanding. No matter how long we stay angry or frustrated, nothing should take that away from us.

Asel was known for uniting people. No matter where are they from, or what they look like, they're people, as we are. After that session I have a strong belief that Asel is still here, doing his job and teaching us ours.

Love, Sara Khatib (Amman)

October 2, 2001

Seeds of Peace sorrowfully mourns the first anniversary of the death of our dear and beloved colleague Asel Asleh. While we commend the Or Commission for its continuing investigation, we regret that no fault has yet been found nor responsibility determined for this violent act despite hundreds of hours of testimony.

The family of Asel Asleh deserves more. They deserve a thorough investigation, regardless of where it leads. They deserve that those responsible will be identified and held accountable. They deserve the minimum that a democratic society assures all its citizens: a fair and unbiased trial in which all evidence is presented and a verdict is reached, so that justice may be done.

The testimony presented by the police to date shows that Asel was not personally involved in any violence on the day of this tragic event. To the contrary, all of the testimony has shown that when the officers first saw him, in his green Seeds of Peace t-shirt, he was lying in a pool of blood or falling down in a grove of trees. None have testified that they saw him participating in violence, exhorting anyone else to violence, or in any way standing out among the crowd of protesters.

His hundreds of friends and fellow Seeds deserve to know the truth. We deserve to know what happened. There can never be closure for his family which has been robbed of an intelligent, sensitive, caring, committed son.

Asel's commitment to the cause of peace between Arabs and Israelis is what we remember most. He gave throughout his life to advance these noble goals. In death, he—and we—deserve no less than a full accounting of the brutal act that robbed him, and us, of the promise of a life yet unfulfilled, a life that would have continued to spread goodness, fairness, justice and equality among all those he met. We implore the Or Commission to conclude its inquiry and to have the same bravery, courage and commitment that Asel had to lay blame wherever it might justifiably be—so that justice might ultimately be done.

John Wallach, Founder and President, Seeds of Peace

ATTACK ON

Witnessing firsthand the terror of September 11th, American Seeds

The Morning of September 11th

By Liz Carlin (New York)

On the morning of September 11th, I went to school wearing a Seeds of Peace t-shirt with peace written on the back in seven different languages by friends from seven different nations. A few hours later, crowded around a television in my school gym with other students, I watched for the first time the images of destruction that I would see over and over in the coming days and weeks as passenger airplanes ripped through the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Students at my school



there were few survivors to donate it to. During that week, Manhattan was papered with missing person posters that slowly gave way to memorials. I tried to comfort a friend whose best friend's parents were both missing, but found that there was nothing I could say. Within days the American flag found its way into every doorway and window, sometimes bearing slogans like "These Colors Don't Run," or "Love It or Leave It." The victim list grew as anti-Arab sentiment was made manifest in acts of hatred and violence, and I began to understand what it must be like for my friends to try to explain the pain of others when they return home after camp.

For the first time, I feel unsafe, as a New Yorker and as an American. My older sister works at the New York Times, and she wasn't able to leave the building for a few hours this week because of anthrax threats. I am afraid of my own nation, not just terrorism. In the past month there has been a drastic rise in incidents of racial profiling and hate crimes, and many Americans fear that efforts to curb terrorism and deal with current dangers will (or already do) infringe on citizens' civil liberties. In displaying a new patriotism that sometimes includes an undercurrent of intolerance, many Americans compromise the American ideals that they claim to be defending. To me, the American liberty that many feel is in question rests upon ideals like freedom of expression and our right and obligation to question our government and leaders, and on our diversity. Citizens of forty different countries were killed in the World Trade Center.

During this time, I've felt a more urgent need to have my voice heard. I am very lucky to have numerous outlets and opportunities to learn and be heard, such as discussions with friends and family, peace vigils and teach-ins; however, I still feel the most free when writing to SeedsNet or on the phone with friends from SOP. With one click of a mouse, I can express my feelings and opinions to (and get feedback from) hundreds of people that I care about deeply and who represent a diverse range of backgrounds and beliefs. Seeds of Peace has changed my life in every way, and I'm trying to bring some of that experience to my community at home.

When Laith Khouri (Jordanian Seed) came to school with me last week, my history class felt a lot like a coexistence session. Next week, I will be leading a workshop on Islam with Hend Medhat (Egyptian Seed) and the head of my school, and next month I will have Thanksgiving dinner with many family members and Seeds studying in the US.

Seeds, I love you all; if what we are doing is merely "a drop in the bucket," imagine the ripples each of us creates and the waves they will become. "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." - A. J. Muste

A Day I Will Never Forget

By Mahmud Riffat (New York)

It was approximately 9:15A.M., on September 11, 2001. I was in my second period math class with Mr. Rosen, learning about factoring, when an announcement was made by our principal, Mrs. Reidy. The class was silent as the announcement began. When it was time to go to my next class, in the hallways everyone was asking if they had heard what had gone on. I could still not picture all of this happening in my mind. Along with other kids, I called my parents, who luckily had not gone to work that day, to find out what was happening. My father told me that all of Manhattan was closed. I was told not to worry, to come straight home from school that day, and not go to soccer tryouts.

I later found out that my uncle, who works about two blocks away from the World Trade Center was evacuated from his building, and had to walk for three hours. When he had come home, his shoes and clothes were full of the dust from the debris.

When it was finally time for me to go home, I was relieved. Going over the bridge, we could see the smoke from a distance. Everyone on my bus was staring. We couldn't believe what had actually happened. When I got home, I was



I wanted to donate blood, but it was soon clear there were few survivors to donate to...Manhattan was papered with missing person posters that slowly gave way to memorials.

tried in vain to contact families in Manhattan, where I live and where the WTC was located. All the phone lines were down and thousands of New Yorkers were walking uptown from the evacuated district. Most of us couldn't get back home that night.

Once I was home, I tried to respond to all the concerned emails sent by Seeds friends all over the world. For the first time, I was suddenly on the receiving end of all those emails and phone calls.

As New Yorkers returned to jobs and schools, many people wore red, white and blue, the colors of the American flag. I wore green. I wanted to donate blood, but it became clear that

HUMANITY

found themselves coping with a tragedy they had never imagined.

happy to see my parents, and hear that my brother who lives in Manhattan was fine.

The next day, all New York schools were closed. When I woke up what actually had happened hit me. The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were no longer there. The New York skyline would never ever be the same. On a clear day, from my home, I could always see the Twin Towers in the distance and felt that they were an important part of the city where I was born, and where I live. I felt depressed, and did not know what to do. Hearing stories about what happened from my friends the next day made me feel even sadder. Then later on, I heard stories about how American Muslims were getting beaten up, or being blamed for the attacks. I was now worried that in school I would face a problem like that. Luckily enough, nothing like that happened to me or anyone else that I knew.

For many days after the attack, there was sadness not only in my house, but all over the world. My parents and I were deeply saddened by this. I could not help wondering that if the attackers had spent a summer in Maine and had taken part in some co-existence sessions, would this have happened? That is why Seeds Of Peace is so important, more than ever before.

A Great Sadness

By Tom MacMillan
(Portland, Maine)

It was an early Tuesday morning near the beginning of school. My teacher told us, that some people had hijacked a plane and had crashed it into the World Trade Center. We hurriedly tuned to a news station on the radio. More news came flowing in: a second plane had crashed. Everybody's head was spinning. There were so many questions that nobody could answer. Some time after that news, we heard the gigantic buildings were collapsing.

We had a break sandwiched in between our

classes. We could have left the room, gone to the bathroom, gotten food or done anything else, but we all just sat there trying to figure it out. Our World History class congregated together. The teacher was a native New Yorker. "Today's date, September 11th, will be in every single history book written from now on." He said. "You, unfortunately, are living history. Right here, right now."

As I went home that day, there was a surreal feeling in the air. It was calm and quiet. It seemed like the entire world had shut down. No planes anywhere. It seemed like the birds had all gone away. Maybe they had gone away to a place where people were not in complete fear. I went home and turned on the TV. More finger pointing at Bin Laden. More estimates on the loss of life. Stories of people in the buildings started flowing in. They said now that the plane that had crashed in Pennsylvania had crashed because some heroic passengers had overtook the hijackers. People wanted to attack Bin Laden, right there, right then. I heard one-person say "We should bomb them back to the Stone Age".

I was really angry and confused. I turned on my computer and wrote a letter to Seedsnet, asking how Palestinians could be happy about the attacks. I regret writing right there, right then. Many people corrected me later on, informing me that many Palestinians were not happy at all, but were very sad and disturbed. That night I went with my aunt, cousin, grandmother and great grandmother to the ocean to watch the waves. They needed to get their minds off of the attacks for a little while.

School came the next day and I left four hours

later along with many more questions and few, if any answers. It was hard to focus. Now, Osama Bin Laden was branded as the terrorist head. I heard many racist statements and names, which I don't want to go into here. Some people thought all Muslims or even the Muslim religion was responsible. This was an area where Seeds of Peace helped me. I had learned

"Today's date, September 11th, will be in every single history book written from now on." He said. "You, unfortunately, are living history. Right here, right now."

about the Muslim religion and had many good friends that were Muslim, so I tried to help people that were ignorant on the subject.

That weekend, we were called to an emergency meeting at a local Seed's house. There, we talked about our reactions, other peoples' reactions, and if any of the Muslim Seeds had experienced any problems since the attacks. They did not report any violence upon them, but they did report strange looks and fear that violence might happen. Some Muslim parents kept their children at home, fearing violence from the community.

Since the attacks, things have been tough. It seems like America has a great sadness upon it, but it also has an anger burning. The anger is the same one that it had towards the Japanese living in America during World War II, except now it is towards Middle Eastern people. School has gotten back to normal, well sort of. Recently, we had an assembly sponsored by our Civil Rights team. It was made so that people would not be ignorant of what Islam stands for. I think it accomplished its goal. Most people came out of the assembly smarter and more prepared to deal with this tragedy.



My uncle works two blocks from the World Trade Center. When he had come home, his shoes and clothes were full of dust from the debris.

A WORLD

The WTC disaster shocked Americans and the world. Palestinian and Israeli Seeds in the USA were witnesses to tragedy far from home.

Terror in the USA

By Ibrahim Khader (Nablu)

Iowa, USA

When I left Nablu this past summer to go to the United States to pursue my college studies, I thought I was putting an end to a summer vacation packed with hostile and violent experiences. I was leaving an unpredictable region and entering into the land of freedom, peace, and organization.



The September 11th events shocked every human being in the United States regardless of their religion or ethnicity. Although accusations erupted from early moments of the attack against certain groups that might be behind this act, those potential suspects were already made criminals based on stereotypes that linger in this country from the past.

Generally, in the early moments of a terrorist attack, Arab-Muslims manage to top the suspects' lists as far as the media and government agencies are concerned. Once again these preliminary judgments took place surrounding the horrific events of Washington D.C., New York City, and Pennsylvania.

On a different note, my personal experience with this tragedy has been different from many Arabs' experience in this country. The school administration was in immediate contact with me checking on my safety and whether I had been harassed. Many students and professors surrounded me with warmth and comfort. I remember one American student saying "I know it is not your fault." Such relieving statements made it much easier for me to walk around campus with confidence and peace.

Furthermore, I became involved in organizing a panel of knowledgeable professors and Muslim leaders from the surrounding community to speak on this issue from different angles; economical, political, and religious. This was a student initiative on campus to raise awareness among the student body. Evidently,

many students had mixed feelings about this terrorist attack and needed more information to clarify the matter.

Since the September 11th events the Middle East and the United States share a common enemy: terrorism. As civilized citizens we must not accept living terrified lives. We must all strive to fulfill our demands while not stepping over others' rights.

Outside the Window

By Rita Konaev (Afula)

Writing these words brings me to a point where I have to deal with something that I have been pushing away since it happened.

On September 11, the day that America was struck by terror, I found myself a part of it. I was visiting SOP counselor Eva Gordon, at her brother's apartment in Manhattan itself. We had a great day of touring planned. Sometime around 9 am, I was woken up by a phone ring. I remember the voice on the other line saying "don't go anywhere, they are bombing the World Trade Center." I was sure I was dreaming. But in a few minutes I was about to discover that this was more like a living nightmare.

As the TV showed the first building on fire, I thought that it had been some kind of horrible accident. Again I was wrong; in front of my eyes the second plane made its deadly turn.



Everything still looked so unreal to me. Hearing voices on TV saying the World Trade Center is on fire, another plane had crashed into the Pentagon, there was a car bomb next to the State Department. Those weren't the pictures I expected to see on my first visit to New York City. I think the first time I truly realized that I wasn't dreaming was when I went out onto the fire escape stairs and saw the smoke and the dust after the buildings' fall, and heard the sound of the fighter jets in the air.

For most of the people in this world, the USA has always been a symbol of power and safety, but on that day, this entire image looked light years away. Thousands of innocent civilians became another target for the evil attack of terror. Just like that, America lost another thing too, its beautiful innocence.

Not many people in this world get to experience the peaceful life that Americans had lived until that day; most of them had never had to fear for their life because of political reasons. This chance of growing up without having someone to call "enemy" is something that most of us never got to experience.

This beautiful innocence, of life with no fear and no hate, was something that we all should have learned from. But some people chose to destroy it instead.

As for the retaliation, the punishment of those people should be equal to the crime. The war that was announced on terror should be a fight against terror and against the governments that support it, but not against the innocent people that live in those countries.

Living in Israel at this hard time and being in NYC during the attack taught me one important thing: you have to live your life every minute of every day and appreciate every little thing, good or bad, that happens to you — you never know when it all could end. Terror and war don't consider people's ages or personalities; they don't care whether or not you are spending your life fighting for peace. I learned that lesson knowing that had I awoken two hours earlier, and taken the trip to the WTC that we had planned, I would probably have been at the place of the attack. And only God knows what would have happened.

The first time I realized I wasn't dreaming was when I went out on the fire escape and saw the smoke and the dust and heard the sounds of jets in the air.

IN SHOCK

The echoes of the catastrophe reverberated around the world. Seeds from around the world relate how they shared the shock and the sorrow.

Tremble

By Constantina Pilioura (Greece)

When I first saw the two planes crashing into the world's most powerful buildings, I started to tremble. I thought of all my friends who were close by, thought of all the SOP staff that works in NY. I thought of the people working in the WTC at the time of the crash. I thought of all the places I had been with SOP in D.C. I shivered at the thought that if this attack took place a month earlier I would have been there with so many of my close friends...



In my flight from America to Germany I happened to sit next to a man who worked at the Pentagon. I sat next to him for 6 hours and told him everything about camp. He got so excited about it that he told me if he had known about SOP before he would have arranged for us to go to the Pentagon. He gave me his e-mail and asked me to keep him updated about the program and to ask him if we ever need anything.

After the attack on September 11, he didn't reply to a single e-mail of mine. When I started losing hope for him I just prayed that wherever he might be he will be safe and peaceful. I didn't know him well but it hurt me knowing that he might be there, in the rubble, he and so many others that didn't deserve to pay for politician's mistakes.

Many things were and are being said about the attack in America. People in Greece and in many other countries got scared. Many people don't go in the Metro now or in banks or in crowded places. They are scared of more terrorist attacks. It's a reality that we have to come to terms with. This is crazy!

I wondered how Seeds of Peace would be able to survive such a crisis, since the Seeds from all over the world are so different from each other. However, in the first days after the attack I saw the reaction of different Seeds, expressed in so many ways: through personal

stories, lyrics of songs, sharing of hope. And when I saw that no one was blaming other Seeds for what insane people did, I realized that our bonds are strong. I realized why we are such a big family that continues for so many years. Incidents like these make our community stronger.

The only thing that's left for me to do now is to pray for the souls. But it has to stop somewhere. We are the ones that should be in control of our lives and not be scared that we'll die any minute. To stop this madness, I guess what we have to do first is to realize and appreciate the very unique and special right each one of us has...the right of living.

Unexpected Fireball

By Arda Kuran (Lefkosa)

September 11th, the deadliest attack on American soil in history, will forever stay as a date of infamy. There is no more to say, no way to fully condemn the fatal nightmare that stole so many lives and souls. I share the agony, I see the pain and suffering. We've seen one totally unexpected fireball hit the heart of America. I wish we could also see one totally unexpected response, one that would be harder and require more daring. I wish the United States of America could rise and say "September 11th, 2001 will always be remembered as a day of great despair, marking the death of thousands of innocent people. This is the greatest of all pain, and we will never forget those that have lost their lives, but..." I wish the United States of America could rise and say "...but we will not fill our hearts with or feed ourselves on hatred. We will not let hatred replace the sacred love inside us. We will not take oaths for revenge, because we know there is no revenge on the path that goes to peace. Revenge and hatred bring more revenge and hatred." It's not easy not to slap back, but it's not a sign of weakness. It's a much stronger step, determined and encouraging. It is stepping out of the circle that brings more hatred, more death, more blood. It is breaking the cycle for the sake of human life, for the sake of peace of

*This pain in me cannot
reawaken the dead. But
it can reawaken me and
my understanding of
love and respect.
-- Bojan Sesoski (Ohrid)*

mind. I wish the United States of America did the unexpected, so that the chain of terror would collapse harder than the Twin Towers did. That is the only collapse that would help us on our journey to peace.

What happened is not what we wanted to see, what we wished to face. It is not the way a lesson should be taught. It is a sick, bloody attack brought about by hatred that blinded madmen's eyes to the pain of the others. However, isn't it time to ask questions, isn't it time to wonder why? I wish the United States of America would rise and ask "Why all this hatred? What have we done? Who did we hurt? Which wounds did we heal, which pains did we share? How far did we reach for good, how far for bad? Let this date be a new beginning, a beginning of a time where we answer questions, step away from the mistakes of the past, be courageous enough to confess our sins and swear not to commit any more."

There is a way to break the cycle of terror, there is a way that will lead to freedom and justice. This is the Seeds of Peace way. It is proven to work, it has changed many lives. It has taught me that courage is not the absence of fear, but the daring to do what's hard but what's right. I wish the United States of America would rise and do what's hard. As a fellow Seed once said; "... nothing is worth dying for. But sometimes it's the only way to save others." Too many people have died. Let's learn a lesson, and save others. This awful bloodshed has been going on for too long. It's time a step is taken; this time an unexpected one.

THE WAR

As war reaches nearby Afghanistan, Pakistani and Indian Seeds discuss the WTC attack, the American response and its consequences for their countries.

Attacks On The WTC

By Sahar Bandial (Lahore)

I sat in front of the television all night. The images were horrifying—people buried in rubble, screams and shouts; one of the biggest massacres the world has witnessed.

As a Pakistani, I feel that perhaps America's foreign policy, particularly toward Muslim countries, gave birth to anti-American sentiment and consequently led to these attacks. However, there can be no justification in killing innocent people; if those hijackers used Islam as an excuse then they were wrong, for Islam itself means peace and tolerance.

Statements made by some really hurt me.

"Serves America right!"

"Now America knows how it feels."

It seemed as though these people had no heart. However, many here have condemned those behind the attacks.

The events of September 11th affected the whole world, particularly Pakistan. The country is in an awkward position. On one hand we had the choice of continuing our decade-long support to the Taliban, and on the other hand—the superpower of the world. I suppose it was a tough decision but the General took it—we were to be the allies of the US.

The religious parties and others retaliated against the government with strikes and rallies across the country, in which 10-20 people were killed. I even witnessed the recruitment of men in the Lahore market to go fight in Afghanistan against America. Last week Solidarity Day was held in Pakistan and the general populace pledged its support for the government. Yet the situation in Pakistan is quite uncertain.

However, the most disturbing question is, "Will Pakistan be engaged in war?"

U.S. troops have already been stationed in Uzbekistan. Will Pakistan be an option? Maybe.



If so, we will have to witness the terror of war.

The Kashmir issue is still alive and kicking, even more so now. There have been riots by Mujahideen groups in Kashmir. There was a bomb blast in which about 20 people were killed. In an address to the nation, our leader General Musharraf told India to "lay off!" There is a struggle going on over who will win over the United States.

To me it doesn't matter who was behind these attacks. What matters is that innocent lives were lost. Human lives are the most sacred gift given to us by Allah. May God bless their souls.

As a Seed, I feel that war in Afghanistan will not help the situation—it will aggravate it. The perpetrators of these devious acts will run away, and again innocent people will suffer. Why can't America and Pakistan adopt other ways? There are other options. Now all we can do is pray, pray for the best, pray for peace.

The WTC and Srinigar Bombings

By Shyam Kapadia (Mumbai)

India, the largest democracy in the world and a secular country, has faced the wrath of terrorists like the ones who attacked the World Trade Center for more than 10 years. India blames Pakistan for conducting a proxy war in Kashmir with militias, after they were unable to wrest Kashmir from India through conventional wars. In 1991, hundreds were killed in my own city, Bombay, in serial bomb blasts, which were considered the worst terrorist attacks before the WTC. India clearly understands what the US is going through and the attitude here is "Don't say we didn't warn you." The USA's policy has been curious as they were the ones who supported Islamist insurgents in Afghanistan. It is dangerous to rear



scorpions. The same people they bred are now against the United States.

Kashmir and Punjab were in the past places where terrorism was predominant. Punjab is now at peace, and one of the richest states in India. Kashmir, by contrast has become a mass graveyard, which shows how peace changes things. A day before this article was written almost 40 people were killed when terrorists belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammed, a relative of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen banned by the US, blew up an vehicle outside the Legislative Assembly of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. My heart went out to Chief Minister Farooqh Abdullah who was crying in the Legislative Assembly a day after the bombings; most of the ministers were crying with him too.

Most Indians are angry at the USA and Pakistan, especially after the bombs in Srinagar. We do not understand why the US is giving help to Pakistan, which we believe supports terrorism in Kashmir. Many Indians feel that we should attack terrorist camps on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control in Kashmir. As our Prime Minister wrote in a letter to Mr. Bush "the people of India's patience is running out."

We hope that the US will deal with all terror equally and not retreat after dealing with Bin Laden, forgetting about terrorists in places like Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Chechnya and others. The U.S. should remember that those terrorists may one day come knocking as happened in the WTC attacks. God Bless not only America but also the entire World!!

"September 11th affected the whole world, particularly Pakistan. The country is in an awkward position. On our border we have the Taliban, and on the other hand, the US, superpower of the world."

NEXT DOOR

Few know the pain of violence more than those who live in regions of continuing war. Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on the tragedy in the United States.

Terror — An International Disease

by Elad Schaffer (Givat Ze'ev)

Not a long time ago, the world faced the deadliest terror attack ever. The great America was abruptly hit by an unknown source for her— terror.

This killing of innocents and the spreading of fear is something much of the world has known and suffered from for many years. Terror has struck in many different parts of the world, especially where I live—in Israel.

On September 11th, the day of the disaster in which thousands of humans from 60 different countries died, America woke up. The majority of the American people and the world have finally realized what Israel is absorbing every day: shooting on citizens driving the roads, car bombs, suicide bombers, kidnappings, etc.

The difference between Israel's case and the tragedy in the US is only in the numbers. The method is the same method and the results (the death of innocents) are unfortunately the same as well.

During the last Intifada, terror has just increased. The danger is right here over my shoulder, meters away. Nowhere is safe. Attacks have reached almost every place in Israel.

The decision of the free world, the one that stands for freedom and peace, must be a comprehensive recruitment to the war against terror. And I mean fighting terrorists, not civilians. I will never justify killing of innocents.

The war's target should be clear; a total removal of terror groups around the world. Destroying terror isn't only striking the terrorists themselves, their infrastructure and leaders, but also the ones who support and finance them. The terror organizations all over the world, including Hamas, Bin Laden's organization, Hizballa and others must be



destroyed from their roots, to free the world from this disease. We all have lost enough lives.

The day in which Palestinian organizations abandon the way of terror will be the day when we here have our only possible chance of reaching our deepest desire, a desire we must never give up on—peace.

The Dream of Peace

Ismail Mukbil (Aroub Camp, father of Seeds Rasha and Bushra)

The level of terror and violence is increasing rapidly among people; especially among Israelis and Palestinians. Although the world has suffered through the previous decades from various types of terror and violence, the result was a lot of suffering, torture, killing and bloodshed. No one is considered a winner in terror and war. Both sides suffer from the loss of their people and they both lack safety. Wise people from both sides should put an end to the everlasting suffering by establishing a just peace which satisfies Palestinian and Israeli needs.

As for my people and me, we are suffering from many practices which we face daily. Closures, curfews, closing of schools, the killing of civilians, etc. make our life very dangerous and unbearable. This is because of the iron fist that the occupation uses in the occupied territories. I hope that Israeli government leaders use their minds instead of their power and aggression against the Palestinians, and I urge them to follow the track of peace which creates understanding, trust and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis.

The terror and violence in the Middle East affect people and nations in many parts of the world. And what happened on September 11th is a result of that. The attack on the World Trade Center became to me a nightmare. My first reaction to these terrorist attacks was a hard



shock. When I heard about this tragedy, I prayed that it is not anybody connected to Islam or to the Middle East, since we are the people who suffer from terror and violence day and night. This terrible action and human tragedy is beyond our belief.

We Palestinians, Muslims and Christians who denounce these acts. We sympathize with the American people and we condemn the terror attacks -- whoever did them. True Islam is the religion of love, justice, equality and humanity. Allah "God" urges people to love one another, to help one another and to deal with others (Christians, Jews) in a peaceful way. These words from our Holy Quran say: "Mankind was one single nation and Allah, God, sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings. And with them He sent the Book in Truth, to judge between people in matters wherein the different" (Baqara, verse 213).

It is politics that force people to do terror and violence, and politics add tragedy to tragedy to people wherever they live.

But if we ask the question "why has terror happened," the answer should be "the absence of peace and justice." People everywhere should work hard against violence, terror and tyranny and to urge all governments to account for the ones who practice terror and violence. Also I ask the USA and Europe to deal with world issues in a just way. They should put an end to the criminals who kill, torture, and assassinate civilians whatever their nationality, religion, or position in government.

This complicated world should have all the answers to all the questions that people ask. Superpowers could stop all types of violence without looking for their own benefits. Governments of the countries in the civilized world must represent civilians who are the ones that pay the price, not the terrorists who do the crimes.

Right now, there are many urgent matters in the world, the Palestinian issue, poverty, injustice, discrimination and racism, and to stop terror, the USA and Europe must find just solutions to them.

HARD TIMES

REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR OF CONFLICT

Israeli and Palestinian Seeds of Peace from the Middle East describe the effects of a year of violence on their daily lives, and envision a different future.

An Example of Determination

Nadav Greenberg (Jerusalem)

The year began with a few short, sweet weeks of optimism. I got my schedule full of activities from the Seeds Center in Jerusalem. I was in touch with many Seeds, Arab and Israeli, and a successful year seemed ahead. Then, violence erupted everywhere. The outbreak of the Intifada might not have been so difficult if it hadn't penetrated the peaceful bubble of Seeds of Peace. My experience had been that regardless of what happens in the world, Seeds manage to impossibly continue wonderful activities. Now we had to transition to newly angry friends, canceled activities, and the worst of the horrors, the death of our fellow Seed, Asel Asleh.



Although coexistence sessions continued between Arab and Jewish Israelis, I couldn't help but feel that important activity had been stopped. Despite my determination to remain optimistic, a major part of my life was missing. I stayed in touch with several close Arab friends, and struggled to find a way to be a peacemaker in a time of war.

Towards the middle of the year, things began to change. More and more people got over the shock, and agreed that Seeds must not reflect the outside world, but provide it with an example. Several meetings and a

finding out. I couldn't believe it. I heard about the bombing, but never imagined that someone I knew was killed. I could not cope with the sudden end of a life full of joy and activity. His daughter will know him only through pictures and faint memories. That evening, a group of us gathered at my friend's house to comfort him. We spent most of that week there, for the Jewish ritual of Shivah - sitting seven days in mourning. I talked a lot to my friend, trying to understand what a person feels after losing a father at the age of 17.

I got my answer at the funeral. After heartbreaking eulogies by his daughter and friends, my friend spoke. He said his father believed in peace, even during the Intifada. He explained how instead of being in jazz clubs with his father in New York as planned, he was now standing over his grave. Then he said something that will inspire me for life: the last thing he wants is revenge, or more bloodshed, because the solution is the way of peace and breaking the circle of violence. My friend, at his most trying hour, was the greatest teacher, his words the greatest lesson.

I am now determined to make the most of this year. Although the situation around us might not improve, we must continue to show the world the way of peace. It has always been our purpose as Seeds; it is more important now than ever. Martin Luther King Jr. put it well: "The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows." Let us continue our relationships and activities in Seeds of Peace. Let us remember the past, but then look ahead, and stride boldly and courageously together into the future.

Dreaming of Friends and Freedom

By Asad Hassonih (Ramallah)

"Three Palestinians killed today in Ramallah. Israeli killed on the road between Givat Zeev and Jerusalem." Each of us in the Middle East has heard this kind of news almost every day in this year of sorrow, loss of life and all precious to human beings.

I am a Palestinian living in Ramallah and a Seed of Peace from the summer of 2000. At first, I didn't know why I should write, but I realized it's important to show what I went through.

A year ago, I lost a friend; we were like soulmates, always together. We had a lot in common and always knew what we wanted. His name was Nizar, a calm, handsome guy. One day all that changed; he was shot by an Israeli sniper and died immediately.

One year later his memory is still in my heart. He will never be replaced. When we commemorated the anniversary of the Intifada, I also



*He said something that will inspire me for life:
The last thing he wants is revenge, because
the solution is breaking the circle of violence.
My friend, in his most trying hour, was the
greatest teacher, his words the greatest lesson.*

wonderful summer seminar for the Israelis encouraged me. Optimism began to rise. I came home determined not to let this year go to waste.

My optimism was challenged by the worst of tragedies. My best friend's father was killed in a terrorist attack. The day he was killed, he had gone up North. As they began to get off the train, a terrorist approached the opening doors and blew himself up, killing him, the cousin, and a soldier from Jerusalem. Two days later, he was supposed to go to New York with his family. Two days later, New York was attacked.

Besides my friend, he left behind a wife and two daughters. I remember

commemorated the anniversary of his death. I went where he was murdered and stood there an hour or more. It seemed like one minute ago he was standing beside me, but I opened my eyes to know he will never return. I felt like crying "Why am I here alone without my friend?"

My three-year old cousin was killed too. She always had a breathing problem; she died when a tear-gas grenade was thrown in her house. She was the only child, so important to her parents, but she is gone forever.

Many might think I am making it up just to show that we suffer, but this is what happened to me. Look from our side; we are weak, without developed arms but still we fight for our freedom. I don't want war, I want our full rights. We want to live as well. The intifada is how Palestinians show that we are here, human and deserve human rights. This is not the best experience of our lives, but after years of the peace process going nowhere, living without freedom, the intifada expressed our anger.

What should be done? Both sides should place their demands on the table and talk about the way we can get our rights and live in peace. That is the important goal, not going on TV blaming each other for everything.

I hope that at this time next year I'll be able to walk the streets of my city without fear of the shooting that is outside my window today; that I'll be able to leave Ramallah, which I haven't done all year; that I'll be able to pray in Jerusalem without soldiers looking over my shoulder; that I'll visit friends anywhere in Israel or Palestine without worrying about ID; that basically, I'll just call a friend of mine then and say "Hey, I'm coming over," without thinking about all the dangers on the way.

Emotional Survival

Rita Konaev (Afula)

The date on my calendar says Sept. 28, 2001, but I refuse to believe it's been a year since the end of the peace talks. During this year, it became everyday routine to watch the news and hear the number of people killed. At the beginning, they said names, showed pictures, so people could connect a name to a person's face so he wouldn't become another number on an endless list, but now the list is so long and the number so high that the news about people getting killed is announced a little bit before the weather.

This year, every day has been a battle for survival. Getting through the day is not easy when you fear for your existence. A week ago, a terrorist disguised as a soldier shot and killed three people in our central bus station. It happened at 2:15 p.m. I was due to be at the same place at 2:45 pm. If this happened a half-hour later, I would have been there. This is our everyday reality, that nowhere is safe.

But there is another struggle: emotional survival. The constant confusion of who to trust, to believe, how to keep hope and faith is not just a confusion. It's a way of life. Everytime something happens, we are expected to react in some way, to feel sorry for a certain group of people and hate the other; To condemn terror, but to ignore military actions.

The trust between the sides is gone, the political, economic, and emotional prices of this year will take forever to pay. But the biggest loss is the hundreds of innocent lives. I will never agree that anything is more precious than human life, not religion, land, and not even independence. There is no reason to kill people, any people, Israelis or Palestinians.



The consequences of this year will haunt Israelis and Palestinians for long years to come. The broken families from both sides won't be in a hurry to forgive after all the pain on both sides of the Green Line. Still I believe there is no other way than starting to rebuild the lost trust on a stronger base and start moving forward from these horrible times. Both sides have to realize that violence is not the way to handle this conflict, and people's lives are a price that none of us are ready to pay any longer.



Rasha Mukbil and fellow Seed Bushra, her sister, host Noa Epstein and Noa's mother Carol at their home in Arroub Camp before the intifada.

No Safe Way to School

By Rasha Mukbil (Arroub Camp)

Traveling to school is probably the most routine thing in a young person's life around the world, something you do the same way every day. This last year, my case has been different. Since the intifada began, it takes me at least an hour to reach my school instead of the fifteen minutes it used to. Most of the time I am late, lucky to have made it at all.

I walk every day to reach the entrance of the camp where I live. There I have to climb a big pile of dirt placed by the Israeli army to block cars from entering the main road. From there, I take a van with a yellow Israeli license; they are now the only vans allowed to travel on the main road. After ten minutes' travel, I am faced with large cement blocks placed across the street, behind them tanks and armed soldiers who check everything, even my school bag. Sometimes they force us to get out of the van and to walk for nearly a kilometer. If I am lucky, a van takes me to the next checkpoint, near the entrance of the next village, Halhoul. From there I take a taxi to the city of Hebron.

After a year, somehow, I started to get used to this. But the 27th of September, 2001 was a school day no one could get used to. It was about 12:00 when the shooting started near us. All the girls and teachers at my school were frightened. Then the bullets began hitting the classrooms of our school, in the center of Hebron. All the girls and the teachers were lying on the ground. The shooting lasted until three o'clock. Some of the girls were injured; others left the school crawling on their knees. For me, it was an ugly scene which I will never forget for all my life. My classmates were falling around me just as if they were killed by some unseen thing. I was just waiting my turn to be injured or killed. I was not frightened of injury or killing, but to be the last one alive.

I was lucky to find myself away from my school. I ran towards nowhere. I found myself in another dangerous area. I didn't know where to go. After running a very long way, I managed to find an old man who led me to a taxi that would take me back home. It was a narrow escape; in that situation, I saw death in front of my eyes.

I pray to God to stop terror and violence which doesn't differentiate between a school and a battlefield or between civilians and soldiers.

Both sides should place demands on the table and discuss how we can get our rights and live in peace. That is the important goal, not going on TV blaming each other for everything.

HARD TIMES

REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR OF CONFLICT

For years, Albanian and Slavic Macedonians watched together with fear as war spread throughout neighboring Balkan countries. This year, the fighting hit them. Albanian and Macedonian Seeds write about living through it.

It Wasn't Supposed To Happen

By Sneska Vasevska (Skopje)

Whatever happened here in Macedonia was not supposed to happen. Those young people that died were not supposed to die. Those houses that burned down were not supposed to be burned. Those mothers that lost their children weren't supposed to lose them. Those children that were afraid to go to bed, shouldn't have been afraid. But they were. And they still are afraid. Mothers are still losing their children; young people are still getting hurt; houses continue to burn; and what was happening is still happening. Although everyone knows that it's not supposed to be, it still exists.

As a 16 year-old girl from Skopje I have and I have always had both Christian and Muslim friends. I have never minded if their people called what they believe in "Jesus" or "Allah"... I have never minded if their parents took them to a church or to a mosque. I have never minded if they knew another language besides Macedonian. For a long time, I didn't even know that there was a difference between any of them. I mean, I knew that Bibi loves Croatian music, and Ena does not, and that they will never agree whether "Life Is Beautiful" was the best movie ever, but that was the only difference I was aware of.

Obviously other people, people in higher positions than me, thought that the way of separating people, by nation, by religion, was more important. That is why the shooting and the killing began.

Why did it all begin, anyway? No one knows the answer. If you ask the Macedonian Slavs "Who started the war?" they will say that it was the other side, the Albanians. If you ask the Albanians the same thing, you will get the same answer: the other side. You will never get the answer to that question. You will never find out what the truth is. Yet, as my teacher

in third grade used to say, it takes two sides to make love or war.

For a pretty long time there has been a kind of a war in Macedonia. For a pretty long time young soldiers from both sides have been killed, and families from both sides have been suffering. For a pretty long time Albanians and Macedonians have been living without even one thought of trying to live together.

We have really lived together for a long time. We shared the school buildings, the libraries, the cinemas — everything. We went out together, we laughed and played together. We had trust in each other. That's what most of the people lost a long time ago — trust in the other side.

Now, things have begun to get better. Hope is here again. Both Albanians and Macedonians from villages where the shooting happened are happy to go home. Both Macedonians and Albanians are happy to sleep without having to hear bomb explosions every night. Both Macedonians and Albanians are happy to have the chance to try to live together again. I am sure that they will do that. They will try, and maybe, just maybe, there will be peace in Macedonia. Maybe not tomorrow, maybe not the next month, maybe not the next year. Maybe I won't be alive to see it, but I am sure that only if we try, my children, my grandchildren, will live in peace, together with the Albanians. And it will be thanks to those people with hope, with initiative and with a wish to create a better world — the people from Seeds of Peace.

If I Could Have Just Helped Stop It

By Florian Rexhepi (Skopje)

My parents never talked to me about war.

About seven months ago, war hit my home in Macedonia, where for a long time Albanians and Macedonians lived together. It was a really shocking event. During and even before the war, life between Albanians and Macedonians had been getting worse. Strange things were happening, things that made peoples' hate bigger and bigger, until killing, robbing, fighting, shooting, and bombing became everyday life.

During the war I moved to Kosovo which now was a free land. I lived there alone, took care of myself, went to school and played basketball. Basketball was what I did the most. I became sort of famous. I was everybody's favorite basketball player. I signed autographs. When people saw me on the street they took photographs of me. For a 15 year-old kid



Whatever happened in Macedonia was not supposed to happen. Those young people that died weren't supposed to die. Those children that were afraid to go to bed shouldn't have been afraid. But they were...

that's a very good experience. But each time I thought of my family and friends, and the situation, that experience didn't mean much. I took the risk to visit my family and friends a lot. I went home to see my little seven year-old sister who didn't know what was going on. I knew that something bad might happen any second, but they were the only thing that mattered to me. Every day I would read the newspaper and watch the news to see if it would get better. I live 8km away from a village called Haracina from where you could hear the bullets firing. A lot of my Macedonian friends stopped contacting me. Some of them were scared; and some of them just stopped considering me a friend. Now they considered me the enemy. Violence was everywhere. If an Albanian went to a Macedonian neighborhood, he would get beaten up very badly. The same thing would happen to Macedonians if they went into Albanian neighborhoods. A lot of times my friends would tell me that some friend of mine went to war, or someone that I know had died.

The government was confused. The people were scared. It was far from a normal life. The winner was nowhere, and the people that lost were everywhere.

Help came from NATO, and they chose the best solution in this case — the solution that a lot of people had forgotten. Both sides stopped for a moment. Signs of peace were created, people started thinking in a better way. Now a lot of people will give different reasons why the conflict started. It was war. At the time, I didn't want to know why it started, I wanted to know how it could be stopped. The conflict didn't last for long but it looked like it would last forever. I said to myself: "if I could just help stop it". I know I helped, I never let the anger win, I never lost hope. Today Macedonia is still not peaceful, but there is progress. Everyone wants peace, and everyone hopes for it.

Time to Unite in Europe

By Bojan Sesoski (Ohrid)

It has been seven tough months for Macedonia. 90 villages have been enclosed in the crisis, 160,000 people have become refugees. Cultural and religious monuments have been destroyed, people are now poor, and though everything seems to be over, we are facing more problems.

Let me go back. Macedonians and Albanians lived together in the past. We are not separated in different towns; we often live even in mixed neighborhoods. From the time Macedonia gained its independence from the former Yugoslavian federation in 1990, the politicians worked hard to improve democracy and full rights for everyone. Albanians were in the Parliament and the government. That's how Macedonia kept itself out of war for a long time. The others called us an "oasis of peace."

The conflict started with armed attacks on the police this spring from an Albanian terrorist organization, the National Liberation Army. The Macedonians see the goal of this organization as creating ethnically cleansed territories, though they claimed to be fighting for more rights for Albanians. They pursued their goals by banishing Macedonians and ruining their homes in the mountainous northwest. Not all Albanians in



Sneska and friend Erblin Mehmetaj (Kosovo) at camp.

Macedonia sided with the NLA. Some stayed loyal to the Macedonian army. Others were blackmailed to participate in the conflict. In some towns, Albanians refused to be part of the conflict and coexistence continued.

After three months of crisis, the President showed his plan for peace: Disarm the terrorists, rebuild the ruined houses, return the refugees. This enabled a "framework agreement," between Albanian and Macedonian leaders. The President invited NATO to help disarm the NLA. Today, a small number of these NATO troops remain.

Both Macedonians and Albanians are for peace, and support the agreement, but with small differences. Macedonians can't accept the amendment to erase the words "Macedonian nation," from our Constitution, nor the amendment that relates to the Orthodox Church and its important role in the process of creating the country. To Macedonians, that would signify the loss of their identity and national sovereignty. On the

other side, Albanian politicians see those phrases as obstacles to equality.

After disarmament, NLA leaders said the organization did not exist anymore. Now the police should retake control over the territory, and if safety is guaranteed, the refugees should go back to their villages. The many robbed and ruined houses must be rebuilt. Then the time for regaining trust between normal people will come. We, the people, were the ones who suffered the most. Just imagine what its like to be forced to leave your home, and then go back and find an empty hole where your house used to be. Everything you did — ruined forever. Imagine not speaking with your closest neighbors and friends because they are now "on the other side." In the fighting, many children became orphans, many people died, others were brutally molested, even part of the cultural heritage was totally ruined. We need to think of small children who are growing up in hatred. How will their lives look? No, so many things at this crazy time are just not right. Coexistence must continue the way it was before. We need the voice of reasonable people. We can succeed if we try hard, and only if we try together.

Throughout history, the borders in the Balkans have changed too often. Too many wars have happened on this soil in order to create ethnically cleansed territories. All the minorities in the whole of the Balkans need democratic rights. It is time for everyone to free themselves of the evil called nationalism. We have already entered the twenty-first century and ideas like those will only bring us back to the bloody past, before modern civilization. I cannot trust my neighbor if all he thinks about is banishing me from my home. It is time we start accepting each other. We have one life - let's go through it with dignity. We can all find our place in one great country: United Europe.



I returned home across the border to see my little seven year-old sister who didn't know what was going on. I knew that something bad might happen any second, but at that moment they were the only thing that mattered to me.

THE KASHMIR CHASM

Seeds of Peace from India and Pakistan present their perspectives on the origin of their conflict, from the birth of their nations in 1947 through the struggle over the disputed province of Kashmir which continues today.

Paradise Shattered

By Bilal Khan and Sherry Ali
(Lahore)

Those who have seen Kashmir valley say it is more beautiful, serene and haunting than Switzerland. You'll find a picturesque view at every turn of the entwining road — the kind of look which you find in paintings tastefully hung in drawing rooms. I still vividly remember some of the bewitching sights I set my eyes upon as a ten-year-old.



It's been more than half a century now since Pakistan and India started fighting in that beautiful valley. Although the Indian government today refuses to accept it as the major cause of dispute between the two countries, Kashmir has led to three wars between India and Pakistan. Although Kashmir is the 'apple of discord' today, the seeds of hatred were sown long ago.

When the British rulers left India it was decided among the three parties, majority Hindu, the biggest minority (Muslims), and the outgoing rulers, the British, that India would stand divided between the two communities on the basis of Hindu majority areas and Muslim majority areas. Muslims of the then-united India felt they would always be ruled by the bigger majority in a democratic dispensation and that their rights and interests would not be safeguarded under Hindu rule. Hence, they thought of a separate homeland, called Pakistan.

Yet, the Indian Independence Act of 1947 left

the hundreds of princes in the Subcontinent to choose which of the two new states they wished to be a part of. The Maharaja (prince) of Kashmir was Hindu but the state had a Muslim majority population. Both sides fought, and a cease-fire was arranged in January 1948, leaving Kashmir divided between India and Pakistan. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, declared in 1948 that the accession of the Maharaja had been accepted provisionally and a plebiscite (vote) would be held in Kashmir to determine the wishes of the Kashmiri people. This plebiscite has never been held and Pakistan has consistently demanded that it should be held, confident that the overwhelming Muslim population would vote for Pakistan if given the opportunity.

Both Indian and Pakistani rulers have been exploiting the issue to win support of the masses. The problem has manifold dimensions beyond the rights of the people of Kashmir. The valley of Kashmir is considered a piece of Paradise on Earth. Kashmir is the fountainhead of five rivers which flow down into Pakistan's biggest province, the Punjab. Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whom we call the Quaid-e-Azam or 'the great leader', called Kashmir "Pakistan's jugular vein".

Today, Kashmir presents a horrible picture. India claims that Kashmir is its integral part since its Maharaja opted for India. Pakistan, on the other hand, demands that the future of Kashmir be decided according to the will of the people of Kashmir. India accuses Pakistan of engaging in cross-border terrorism in Indian controlled Kashmir. Pakistan maintains it only provides moral support to the freedom fighters and the Kashmiri freedom struggle. But the fact of the matter is that young people in Pakistan are

always ready to voluntarily sacrifice their lives at the altar of Kashmir. India has gone back on its promises for talks many times in the past. It's actually a no-win situation for governments of both the countries. Whatever the struggle may be called - holy war or terrorism - the blood of innocent and naïve people will continue to spill and Kashmiris will continue sacrificing their lives endlessly, until a Nelson Mandela rises in India to call it quits.

Born in Strife

By Kunal Sahasrabuddhe and
Sasha Mansukhani (Mumbai)

The year was 1947. India had been torn apart by the most feared of evils... religious discord. It seemed as if partition was inevitable and that cooperation was lost in the stormy waters of separation and the bitter heat of the desert of anger. Rabindranath Tagore's dream: "Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls" was never to be.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah wanted for his own religious minority in erstwhile British India a separate state where they could live without fear of persecution or oppression. He feared such persecution would ensue if India remained a single union. Little did he or Jawaharlal Nehru heed Mahatma Gandhi's words:

"Remember, if you divide India today, tomorrow we might escape its consequences, but generations to come will curse us at every step for the kind of hell we have bequeathed to them."

That very year, most of the fragments that had broken away from India were joined to either India or Pakistan; whether out of fear or actual support for the respective countries, nobody knows.

Not too long after freedom, at midnight, Kashmir was attacked by tribes from an area to its west, possibly from Pakistan. The monarch Maharaja Hari Singh accepted Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's offer — protection by the Indian army. Jawaharlal Nehru then promised a plebiscite in Kashmir, and committed a cardinal sin in not carrying it out. The violence ensued.

No one could have predicted such a carnage except the prophet of non-violence Mahatma Gandhi, but the politicians had refused to listen to him. No one foresaw that millions of people would move from Pakistan to India and vice-versa. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs had lived together in harmony in the region of Punjab. Suddenly neighbors that used to exchange milk everyday slaughtered each other. It was the end of a culture — especially in Punjab. In Bengal, this wave of meaningless violence was prevented by Mahatma Gandhi's

campaign for nonviolence in Calcutta.

The Year is now 2001. Since Partition and the accession of Kashmir to India, India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir. The demography of Kashmir has changed completely, and thousands have been pushed out of the state by the fear of militants. It is now useless to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir, as most of the original residents have either fled or have deceased. The only way out now is to honour the Lahore declaration and the Simla Agreement, which say we should honor the Line of Control (LoC) as the official border. Both countries have spent enormous amount of resources in this area which they can ill afford. Let us hope that with the end of global terrorism, peace will return to this Vale of Kashmir and between India and Pakistan. Like Seeds of Peace, diplomacy is also a step in the right direction.

Pakistan became an Islamic Jamhuriya (republic). Mahatma (great soul) Gandhi tried his level best to stop the violence which broke out after Partition and prevented bloodshed in Bengal where he declared a 'fast unto death'. He almost died in the process but peace prevailed in Bengal. Punjab was not so lucky.

The main problem between India and Pakistan can be summarized in one word: Kashmir. Many puppet kings or Rajas ruled India during the British rule. They were actually controlled by the British. When the British left India, it was declared in the Indian Independence Act that each Raja would have the choice as to where he wanted to cede his territory. On the fateful night of 22nd October 1947, Pathan tribesmen, with the backing and support of the Pakistani army, invaded Kashmir. The Maharaja begged India for help in overcoming the Pathans. India

land and finances to be used. Both sides have not only wasted their time, effort and money but have also ruined Jammu and Kashmir, which was earlier known as "heaven on earth!"

Painful Partition

By Rabia Cheema (Lahore)

It was a time when terror abounded. The killings were indiscriminate and each killing bred revenge and counter killings. It was an event that would come to be known as the Partition, but to the common man, it was better known as hell. This was no sudden thing, rather the culmination of years of discrimination and dislike, hatred and intolerance.

In the 1940's, the Muslims moved to partition India and create Pakistan from the Muslim majority areas while the Hindus vehemently opposed this. My grandmother, who was a teenager at the time, marched in rallies and protests for the formation of Pakistan. "I was once nearly shot by a policeman. My sister was with me and I remembered throwing myself on top of her. I also got tear gassed quite a few times. My eyes use to water for days and days. I sometimes had to stay up all night at our hostel to keep guard. No one was safe anymore."

Partition occurred in a violent blur. Masses of people fled their homes. The Hindus and Sikhs had armies which waylaid trains to Pakistan and attacked passengers. My great grandmother fled in the dead of the night, and stood long hours in a freezing cold swamp holding her baby above her head while she listened for the "enemy" during her flight. "It was very dark and we hid in the river while we waited for the looters to pass. I had to hold him in my hands because the water was too cold." Although it was proposed that the UNO be given this task, this was not acceptable to the Hindus. Pakistan was deprived of the Muslim majority areas in Punjab and the Kashmir issue arose from the faulty decision of boundaries. The division of India was now finally and irrevocably done.

Since the independence of Pakistan, two wars have been fought over Kashmir. My grandfather was a prisoner of war in one of these for three years before he died. His stories of the terrible hate rampant among the masses is unbelievably shocking, yet sadly all too true. "The air was always fraught with tension whenever a Hindu and Muslim came into contact. They were always edgy. I myself was constantly wary. It's sad, considering that only fifty years ago we were like brothers." Even today, the common man on both sides of the border suffers from an ingrained prejudice. Kashmir remains a bone of contention between the two countries, harming the cause of good relations.



Shyam, Kunal, Sherry, Sasha and Rabia in their coexistence group.

Both sides have not only wasted their time, effort and money but have also ruined the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which was earlier known as "heaven on earth!"

Fifty Years of Fighting

Shyam Kapadia (Mumbai)

To understand the Indo-Pak conflict one must understand the history of India. India has an ancient, rich collection of myriad cultures and religions. Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism were born here. Its people were happy and attuned to peaceful coexistence for centuries. Unfortunately, under the British colonial policy of divide-and-rule, it was religion that tore India apart.

In 1947, the Indian Independence Act was approved by Her Majesty the Queen, granting India independence after 200 years of British rule. Due to perceived religious tension the British decided to divide the land into two dominions: India and Pakistan. Initially both communities (Hindus and Muslims) rejected the idea of partition under the Cabinet Mission Plan but Jinnah, head of the Muslim League, was adamant on a separate Muslim homeland. He decided to call for a 'Direct Action Day' in which hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs were killed. Soon everyone considered Partition necessary. India was declared a secular state and

pledged help provided he ceded his territory to India. He agreed happily. The Maharaja then left Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, to hold talks with V.P. Menon who was in charge of Kashmir's accession. The Maharaja knew that only the Indian Army could stop the Pathan tribesmen from overrunning his kingdom. On the night of 26th October, the Maharaja as his last order told his secretary, "If V.P. Menon does not arrive on time, please shoot me as I do not wish to see my beloved Kashmir ravaged by the Pathan tribesmen." Luckily Menon arrived in time, and as per the Maharaja's wishes, Indian troops protected Kashmir and it officially became a part of India.

Since 1947 India and Pakistan have fought three wars; in 1965, 1971 and 1999. India has been the victor in all three wars and yet to give it its due. India has not forcibly taken away any land from Pakistan and returned to the situation 'quo-ante'. Since 1989, Pakistan has openly aided and supported terrorists in Kashmir that have killed more than 70,000 people (UN estimates). Even more have been killed in the cross fire between the militants and the Indian Army. Pakistan continues till today to give "moral support" which consists of allowing its

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SOP was truly international this summer, bringing together 18 delegations from conflict regions of the world: The Middle East, Greece and Turkey, Cyprus, Portland Project, the Balkans, and for the first time, Seeds of Peace from India and Pakistan.



photo: Marina Gaudlin

Camp's Many Colors - Haifa Seeds Amir, Marina and Nofar

third party, Seeds of Peace. That enabled us to speak with and listen to each other, respect and understand each other. We learned to live together, and to share our stories and opinions. There we met friends from around the world: from the Middle East, the Far East, the Balkans, Cyprus and America. Our connections continue today through phone calls, letters and the Internet.

At camp, we learned to win together, to lose to each other with honor, to develop relations of love, respect and patience and to feel empathy, despite the conflicts that exist between us. I learned that I am part of a big world, full of different groups of people, but I am connected to them. I won't give up those connections, at home or around the world.

Liav Harel (Haifa)

On the second day of Color Games, at breakfast, one of the Israelis said something to me about a terror attack in Jerusalem. Slowly, Israelis started asking to be excused in order to call home. Then it was announced that all the Israelis should meet in the Small Hall, and I got nervous. We all went to the Hall, and Bobbie explained to us that there had been a suicide bombing at Sbarro in Jerusalem and more than a dozen people were dead. We got really upset, and people started crying. Counselors took the kids from Jerusalem to call home and make sure their families were OK. I left the Hall in an emotional storm, but outside two of my bunkmates from Jordan were waiting for me and they asked me if my friends and family were all right. It made me feel better, that they really cared about me. At that moment, I really felt what we were working for in the coexistence sessions, that we were supporting each other. Friends from the other side gave me the support that I needed at that time; that was the meaning of the whole camp for me.

Nofar Harel (Haifa)

At camp, I was part of several groups. My coexistence group where we discussed everything, the table group where I ate every meal, and the whole camp together but without a doubt, the most important group was the girls in my bunk. On one of the last nights of camp

Panayiota Georgiou (Limassol)

Days passed and we became a part of the crazy Seeds. We learned to trust each other and to communicate. "Group Challenge", my favorite activity, helped. By solving simple problems as a group we planted seeds of trust, which showed in coexistence. We stopped facing the enemy and started looking at our friends. We could understand each other's pain. I realized that a story always has two sides. I learned to respect the other's opinion and to ask the others to respect mine even if we didn't agree. It may sound easy; it's not. Often I disagreed with friends but I left the disagreements in the Green Hut so they wouldn't affect our relationship.

I hope I will see camp again. Even if I don't it will be there to remind me that I am a Seed of Peace and proud of it!

Ilke Dagli (Asagi Maras Magosa)

The day before flying to the US, I didn't know what I would face. All I knew was that

SOP has campers from countries with conflicts. I prepared my luggage again and again, thinking that 3 weeks is so long! When we arrived at the camp, immediately I met the spirit of SOP! I breathed it in so deeply. All the wonderful adjectives I know are not enough to describe it! The energy, love, and friendship was flowing between us like a cable, a bridge between our hearts.

Every day before even saying "good morning", we were told to "Make one friend from the other side." We made more than one friend. We learned to trust the enemy, we learned how to cooperate, how to help and work hard together. We learned each others' pain. We ate, we slept, we laughed, we cried together. The bond between everyone was strong and concrete. Then I understood that 3 weeks is not very long! I am proud of myself and all the Seeds!!

Amir Haddad (Haifa)

All of us from Haifa, Arab and Jewish kids, live together in a mixed city-but our first meeting took place under the auspices of a

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after lights out, our counselors put us all in bed and said good night, but instead of sleeping, we all started to talk. In the bunk we were Jews, Christians and Muslims, Arabs and Israelis, and we started talking about everything-religion, culture, the situation; I learned a lot of things I never knew before. Time passed and we started talking about more personal things-about what will happen when we leave this paradise and go home, what we will take with us from this place. I felt surrounded by people who supported me. Suddenly, tears came to my eyes-not tears of sadness. I suddenly felt that I'd discovered something; I had discovered so many things about a different world than I ever knew before, and about myself.

Sneska Vasevska (Skopje)

After two months at home, I still tweak myself to make sure those three weeks were not a dream, that I really was in a beautiful place with all those wonderful people. It really happened.

It began when I took the first step off the bus at camp. Smiling faces, green shirts, open arms, counselors looking for their campers, confused campers (including me), tired girls and boys, green grass, big trees, wooden bunks, blue lake, clean air...one of the best days of my life.

I never spent such wonderful moments as with the people I was taught to hate. I never enjoyed someone's English accent as I enjoyed Erblin's. I never liked acting the way I liked Agon's. I

saw I have many similar wishes and problems as Arta. I often spent my free time listening to Erblin's stories about his family, laughing with Arta, or practicing sign language with Aurora. I listened to their side of the conflict for the first time, and tried to understand them. I saw that they suffered too, and that they have hearts just like us. I saw they wanted peace, just like me. It wasn't just the Coexistence sessions that made me realize that, it was everything: Group Challenge, Color Games, meals, the rest hour, swimming...

They were Albanians, they still are. I am Macedonian, and I'll always be. But at camp, that didn't stop me from talking with Erblin during Sports Day or walking with him in DC. That didn't stop me from lying on the grass in front of the girl's dock with Arta discussing the cute boys at camp. That didn't stop me from becoming their friend. They are supposed to be my enemies. But, I can't call them enemies. Not when I can remember Agon's jokes, not when I can almost hear Miranda's singing. Not when I think of what they said about how they suffered too. Not when I know they are normal people, just like me, just like my family. Not now.

I feel I was given an assignment to spread what I learned to the rest of the world. To show my family that what we did was committing to fight for peace, not with weapons, but with words. To show my friends that each of us, the youngest girl or the shyest boy can make a difference. We can continue what we started, and we should. Not because we have to. Not because we promised our facilitators. Not



photo: Bobbie Gottschalk

because we have to prove anything. Because we want to. Because we want peace. Because we're Seeds of Peace.

Bojan Sesoski (Ohrid)

The reality of our world is cruel and horrifying. At Seeds I learned something extremely deep. I learned about new values that defy all the pessimistic views of the future. At Seeds I found my friends. Arabs and Jews; Macedonians, Serbs and Albanians; Turks and Greeks; Cypriots; Christians and Muslims, together like nowhere else. Before we left camp, one counselor told me he felt really bad. He said, "This is like an ideal world. I'm so sad that you will have to go back in the real world, where everything is not so shiny." He was right. It was hard for me when I came back to Macedonia. In those three weeks at camp, I couldn't believe how much people's opinions had changed. While I was seeing that peace is possible and absorbing energy, optimism and hope for the future, people at home were losing their hope for peace. There were huge contrasts in front of me; the crazy fun at camp and the crazy war at home. But I managed to get through that by getting in touch with my friends. I became confident that what I experienced in camp will not fade.

*At Seeds I found my friends.
Arabs and Israelis; Serbs,
Macedonians and Albanians;
Turks, Greeks and Cypriots;
Jews, Christians and
Muslims, together like
nowhere else in the world.*



photo: C. Larry Malm

Together Again: Seeds celebrate the end of Color Games

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photo: Bobbie Gottschalk

"This is MY house!" -Camp Director Tim Wilson at Line-Up

Aneeta Nagi (Lahore)

"Do you have poultry in your bag?" Asked the immigration inspector.

"No, I only have biscuits," was my reply.

This conversation became a standard joke in the famous Bunk 1. Why? I never knew myself.

We were walking in the airport when we saw a horde of females wearing green shirts and shouting "Seeds of Peace!" Leslie and Mandy warmly greeted us. After an inevitable tour to the restroom we finally boarded the buses and were informed that all the Indian and Pakistani girls will be residing in the newly constructed Bunk 1. It was a relief to know we would be together, but the first night was horrible. Though my eyes went dreary because of lack of sleep I was reluctant to shut them for below me slept the Indian girl, Sarah. I was afraid that she might do something horrible to me.

The most powerful moments were during co-existence discussions. They were tough but we struggled not to let hatred sway our hearts. I was disturbed to hear what my Indian counterparts said but I realized the best I could do would be to accept, put myself in their shoes

and that would be my biggest achievement.

Looking back, I know I have changed immensely. Now I feel things others will probably laugh at or ignore. Now I try to reason out things that are difficult for others to comprehend. At camp, I did not realize how I was changing. It just happened.

Bilal Khan (Lahore)

In the early days of camp we did not do much other than play games, eat and go to line-up. By the third day I had learned many new games. I have played games since I was a child but never realized how much you learn about a person by playing together. I recall when we got our green shirts. We felt so proud wearing them. When we all went to line-up in those shirts, they looked beautiful. There were people from different regions of the world, with different skins, accents, views, united in T-shirts.

Bunk life was easily the best part of the camp. I remember all gathering around before falling asleep to plan some funny prank for the next day. No one will ever forget our pranks. We would go late to line-up and then serve as waiters. We would run to line-up wearing towels and shaving cream with toothbrushes in our mouths. We would deliver funny speeches and make everyone laugh. It was so much fun.

During our last co-existence session, we decided to plant a young tree to symbolize a new beginning of friendship and hope. We were saying goodbye to our facilitators when suddenly, it started raining. For a bystander, it would have been hard to say whether the droplets on those faces were rain or tears. Everything felt so exquisite.

I recall the day we left camp. Everyone knew what others were going through. We were



photo: Maisha Totry

Seeds relax in the shade during General Swim

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leaving the place that had brought a revolution in us, the place we had made so many friends, the place we all had fallen in love with. Autographs, some last snaps, a last look at the things we loved and some small words that yelled goodbye. And then the bus drove off.

The camp is over now but, as we were told, we will continue to be Seeds for the rest of our lives.

Sarah Sham (Mumbai)

Being the very first Seeds from India and Pakistan to set foot in camp, we were entirely oblivious of what this “peace program” was all about. Thus we extensively investigated the state of affairs of Kashmir, and came armed with heaps of information, facts, figures, statistics, etc. We were prepared for a debate, an argument. It perplexed me why one debate would take three weeks! My scheme was, “Pakistanis will now know who is right, and who Kashmir belongs to! We will win this debate and return victorious!”

Now I ask myself if I could have ever been more mistaken. Seeds of Peace provided us with the opportunity to look at the “other side” and hear them out, to comprehend that they too have a line of reasoning. I had no idea about the Pakistani point of view. Once I listened, I was flabbergasted at how the same story was conveyed on the other side of the border! In one coexistence session, we wrote our histories of the partition of India. Then, we exchanged our accounts, and to our disbelief saw what we acknowledged as the supreme truth was being completely contradicted! We finally arrived at the fact that history was only one’s own interpretation of certain events.

If you’re wondering, we did return victorious. Not because we won a debate but because we won the trust and love of our Pakistani friends; because we earned a profound understanding about them. We reached no solution, but reached a compromise, which is FAR more meaningful; and we both emerged triumphant.

Sasha Mansukhani (Mumbai)

The second day at camp we met our “enemy” and what amazed us was that we got along fabulously! During the day we played soccer and volleyball together and at night we plunged

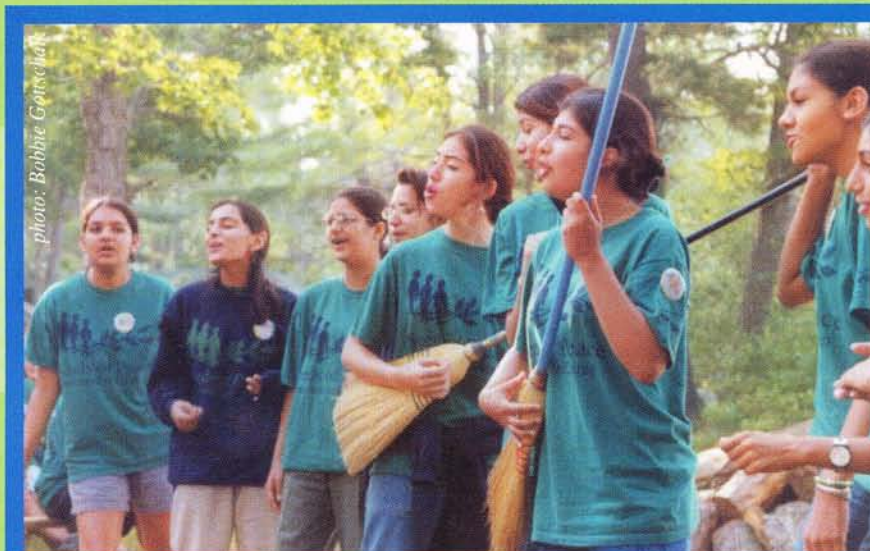


photo: Bobbie Gottschalk
Indian and Pakistani Seeds from the famous Bunk 1 unite in an inspection protest

into girl gossip. At the same time we began our coexistence sessions. Our first step was to learn to listen to each other. It was difficult even to hear something that directly opposed everything I had always unquestioningly believed. Next we learnt to understand each other — understand that there could be a perfectly valid reason for the so-called “unreasonable” behavior of the enemy nation and it’s people. I remember a time when Zunaira from Pakistan was speaking with immense emotion to us about her grandfather and how he had been through partition. We were moved to tears listening to her. We observed a minute of silence on impulse. This is when I felt we had really begun to understand and respect each other. Then came the toughest part - acceptance. To understand our differences and ACCEPT them. Respect the other nation for what it is and strives for. The co-existence sessions grew tougher each day, but only pulled us closer to form a tight bond of trust.

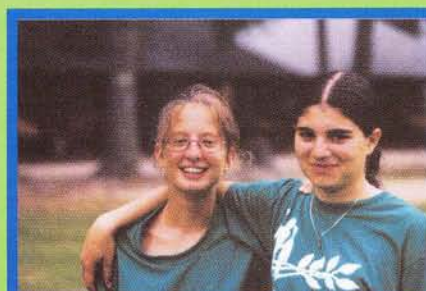


photo: Bobbie Gottschalk

Spenta Kutar (Mumbai)

Seeds of Peace changed my life. Who would believe that I would befriend Pakistanis, whom I used to consider bitter enemies? Participating together in the myriad of activities, we began understanding each other on a deeper level. I started to appreciate their view of our conflict, the problems they face. The discussions were heated, passions and voices raised. Though we did lock horns, we were able to ‘rise’ above and strengthen our bonds. As the days progressed, I realized I had been prejudiced. The Pakistani boys were not irrational fanatics, the Pakistani girls not clad in burkhas as I had imagined — they were just like me!

Seeds of Peace has given me hope. Earlier, I read the newspapers, scanned the headlines and glossed over the terrible border skirmishes that were going on between India and Pakistan blithely unconcerned and unaffected. Now, I am an avid and passionate Seed of Peace.

I remember when Zunaira told what her grandfather endured in Partition. We were moved to tears. We observed a minute of silence on impulse. This is when we really began to understand each other.

WE WANT TO SEE

At a Seeds of Peace workshop in Prague, Greek and Turkish Cypriot youth imagined a month full of Bicommunal activities. This September, they realized that dream. Cypriots from all over the divided island met in the buffer zone to acknowledge each other's pain and celebrate their togetherness.

1000 Friends Reunited

By Christoulla Polychroni (Larnaca)

Keeping the Seeds spirit alive after camp and working for peace is the priority for both Greek and Turkish Cypriot Seeds. The September project was the result of hard work originating from young peacemakers achieving what was thought to be impossible: rebuilding the trust between the two communities.



One of thousands of pleas calling to reunite divided friends.

On September 23, a bi-communal panel spoke of violence that occurred in the past, condemning all violence no matter who the perpetrators. The ceremony closed with a minute of silence in memory of all the victims in the painful history of Cyprus. That minute of silence was wonderfully loud, reverberating in each person's heart a message of hope. As one panelist said, "We cannot forget what happened in the past but what we can do is forgive each other...and together we can move forward to a common future on our island."

Unfortunately several political newspapers in the North disapproved of this, as of any kind of bi-communal activities. They accused us of holding one minute's silence to honor the murderers of innocent Turkish Cypriots. In addition, two Turkish Cypriot adults were charged with collaborating with the enemy. And if these false accusations were not enough, participating teenagers from the North received intimidating calls. Furthermore, we heard that Pergamos checkpoint might be closed, not letting any Turkish Cypriots come to the huge festival on September 30. Despair and frustration conquered me.

Everything seemed against us. More than 1000 people would be waiting anxiously to see their friends on the 30th. What if their friends did not, or could not come?

The difficulties were and always will be many but we had to continue the preparations. We chose to hold hands and give strength and courage to our friends from the other side. Our desire for peace grew even more powerful.

Finally, our hard work was rewarded. On Cyprus Peace Day, people didn't hesitate to come. They came with the hope of seeing long lost friends after 27 years. A smile rose on my face as I watched the incredible conversations between Greek and Turkish Cypriot co-villagers and saw tears of happiness in their eyes. I was proud to give people the opportunity to feel such great happiness, to have offered my own 'little something.' Our efforts to bring these good people of Cyprus together were not futile. I realized that day the future of Cyprus is in good hands, and in these hands, we lay the hope for a culture of peace.

Cycling to the Future

By Loizos Kapsalis (Nicosia)

The September Project was about: "Acknowledging each other's pain and celebrating our togetherness." The climax was the closing ceremony in Pergamos Park. Older Cypriots, who had friends from the other community and have been separated from them, had the chance to see each other after so long. At the same time, the younger generation of Cypriots could meet to create friendships and bonds. The desolate, dusty park was flooded with people, music and laughter.

To symbolize this day—Cypriots starting separated, struggling with all their strength and with the will to continue no matter what the obstacles in order to meet and celebrate this togetherness loudly—we decided to hold a parallel event: A bicycle marathon, where Greek and Turkish Cypriot teenagers would start from two different points on the island and cycle their way to Pergamos where they would unite and cycle together into the future at Pergamos Park.

Greek Cypriot Seed Marios Spyrou launched the idea and the two communities found their cyclists and were ready to ride for peace. It was decided that Greek Cypriot cyclists would start from Kiti and cycle a 27-kilometer marathon to Pergamos. At the same time, Turkish Cypriot Cyclists would start from Famagusta. From the meeting

OUR FRIENDS

point in Pergamos on, they would cycle together, and finish at the festival.

On that day, the eight Greek Cypriots gathered at the church in Kiti feeling anxious. It would be a long, demanding day, making us all tired. The signs were ominous; we had heard people were discouraged from participating by those who did not want the events to take place. We heard the Turkish Cypriots would not be allowed to enter the park. We took all this as a compliment that what we do means something and has an impact and became eager to start and more determined to finish.

During the marathon different feelings arose. At times, we felt the fatigue and wanted to stop, but spirits were kept high, the determination was strong and we were all eager to see our friends. Finally we reached the meeting point. The Turkish Cypriot cyclists had not arrived and time was passing. We were worried—had anything happened? Were they near? At length, two very brave cyclists showed up. The feelings were common: we were all excited and happy. We had cycled through the past and overcome all the obstacles. Now we were standing in the middle of nowhere at the present, ready and willing to move into the future together. We started. In a short time we were in Pergamos Park, tired, sweaty, but very pleased. We had made it. And we were together. We sat together talking and listening to the music playing.

This is how we should be—together. With the obstacles of the past overcome, the pain of the other side acknowledged and with the will to be together, we will be able to move into the future holding hands.

We Won't be Stopped

By Niki Miliotou, Larnaca and Marina Ignatiou (Nicosia)

When I came back from Seeds of Peace camp, I carried with me all the enthusiasm and hope for peace in Cyprus. I decided to work to destroy the wall of hatred that has separated our island for 27 years. The future of this island belongs to us—the devoted and peace-motivated youth that fight stereotypes and build trust between the two communities.

We are faced with many difficulties. We had difficulties in the camp as well, but it was easier to work with people whose aim was peace. Back home things are harder; people are very closedminded and are used to living with negative stereotypes. My own friends tell me it is crazy to have friends from the other side. Some people call us traitors and the government doesn't support us. We meet in rough conditions, in the small village Pyla in the buffer zone. It can be a dangerous place, but that doesn't hold us back. Sometimes the Turkish Cypriots are not granted permission at the checkpoints to come to meetings, but that doesn't hold us back either. With the help of Mr. Nicos Anastasiou, one of our inspirational coordinators,

we come up with alternate plans.

I was a member of the coordinating committee of the September project. We worked to organize a month that would acknowledge each other's pain and celebrate our togetherness. We designed "I want to see my friend" forms for Greek and Turkish Cypriots to fill out for everyone they knew from the other side. We collected hundreds of these forms and decorated the walls of the UN headquarters where the Bi-Communal Press Conference took place on the 1st of September. The aim of the conference was to inform the public about the work already achieved, to make a call to every Cypriot to prepare these forms and to announce that September would be a month of bi-communal activities. We had press coverage from local and foreign TV stations; it was a huge success. The second stage was a panel discussion on the 23rd of September. The forms were again displayed. At the discussion, Greek and Turkish Cypriots talked about their personal experiences during the war as well as acts of violence that happened to both communities. The third stage of the campaign took place on the 30th of September in Pergamos "Park" (a dusty place with a few trees and picnic benches). The aim was to reunite old and young people from both communities as well as to declare the 30th of September as the CYPRUS PEACE DAY. During the festival, approximately 1000 old friends were reunited, some after 27 years! It was very touching. The lifeless, dusty park was filled with laughter, tears of joy and most importantly hope.

I felt pride and satisfaction that day, but also some sadness, because my Turkish Cypriot friends had received threatening phone calls and no one was sure if they would turn up in Pergamos that day. Some of them did, but I am ►

My own friends tell me it is crazy to have friends from the other side. Some people call us traitors and the government doesn't support us. We meet in rough conditions...but that doesn't hold us back.



Cemal and Christi cross the border to reunite in Pergamos Park.

PEACE DAY



photo: Jen Marlowe

Cypriot Seeds stand together in the buffer zone.

◀ proud of all of them, even the ones that didn't come, because for them things are ten times more difficult than for us.

Our mission is not over yet. We will continue overcoming obstacles on the road to peace. The young volunteers from both sides who love their island and want peace instead of violence are going to be the winners. Day by day we're breaking the ice between the two communities. We're dreaming of the time when passes won't be needed, the threats will stop and love will spread all over the island.

Down to the Wire

By Halide Tuna (Nicosia)

Cypriot peace volunteers had a unique experience by participating in "September Project", built on two basic ideas: "Acknowledging each other's pain" and "Celebrating our togetherness". In both communities, the stories being told are always about the suffering of 'our side' at the hands of 'the other'. This process dehumanizes the 'other' and creates an image of a barbarian. For example, in Turkish Cypriot community the important subject is the suffering of Turkish Cypriots from 1963 until 1974 at the hands of Greek Cypriots and suffering of Greek Cypriots during 1974 is very little known. In the Greek Cypriot community, the well-known subject is the suffering of Greek Cypriots during the 1974 war and suffering of Turkish Cypriots is never mentioned. In the bi-communal work, we strive to replace fear with trust and acknowledge each other's pains.

Many important events and tasks led up to a festival on the 30th of September. We needed to visit villages all over

the island that had been mixed before 1974 to find people who wanted to see friends from the other side that have been separated by a border since 1974. Visiting villages was a really tough job. We saw how the faces of some elderly people changed when we told them about a meeting with their old Greek Cypriot friends. They could not forget what had happened in the past.

We held a Panel Discussion where the main topic was "Acknowledging each other's pain". During the discussion, everyone sat for one minute in silence in honor of all Cypriots who died. In TRNC the following day, this one minute of silence was reported (by the secret police and other extremists who came to the discussion dressed as ordinary citizens) as 'one minute of silence for the Greek Cypriot murderers of Turkish Cypriots'. In the news, it was said that Turkish Cypriots in the Panel Discussion would be investigated, all information about them would be published in newspapers and they would be branded as traitors. On the following day, a leader of TRNC said in an interview that the aim of people who participate in bi-communal activities is to have sex.

When I heard these lies I was shocked. I was also really afraid, because if something happened to me, my parents would be in trouble too.

A day before the big festival on September 30th, I received a phone call from my best friend. She had been told that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a public announcement saying that the check-point to the entrance of Pyla village was blocked. I reassured her there was nothing like that, but I was doubtful; maybe this information was true. Friends were calling me all day long to ask if the information given was true. I have never felt so hopeless—the wrong information was being spread so quickly, while it took us the whole day to spread the right information. A night before, I learned that most of the Turkish Cypriot cyclists gave up cycling.

The next morning, the day of the festival, I bought many newspapers as I could to see if there was any announcement about our Festival. In the car on the way to Pyla, we all tried not to talk about the possibility of the checkpoint being blocked. We needed to keep ourselves calm to be prepared to talk to the policemen at the checkpoint. At the checkpoint, we were all frozen; no expressions on our faces, no words. They just took our ID cards and made the usual process. Luckily, they let us pass. We could barely believe how well everything was going until I saw my Greek Cypriot friends at Pergamos Park. I hugged them and at that moment understood that everything was OK and real.

At 2 pm, the festival began. Many old people came. We helped them to try and find their friends. An old man asked me something in Greek and my Greek Cypriot friend told him that I'm a Turkish Cypriot. When the old man heard this, he gave me a red carnation. I have kept it since that day. At 3pm, the day was officially announced as "Cyprus Peace Day". At the same time, 10 cyclists from both communities entered the Park with their bicycles. They had cycled the same distance from two sides of island and finished together at Pergamos Park.

When festival was over, members of coordinating committee stayed there to clean the park. We were tired and ready to sleep but sharing the same feelings and hopes for the future.



photo: Jen Marlowe

Neither checkpoints nor fear kept friends apart. Cyprus Peace Day.

THEY WANT WAR? THEY'LL HAVE PEACE!!

By Charis Akhilleos (Nicosia)
(e-mail sent in June 2001 to Cypriot Seeds from the Prague workshop)

Yesterday was a special day for several reasons. A symbolic day. A symbol of the injustice there is in this place, a symbol of the hostility of some people, but most importantly, a symbol of the goodness and the commitment of the majority of Cypriots.

I bet you all know about the obstacles that we

hope and were there last night, to strengthen the efforts of that wonderful group of people, to strengthen the voice of all peacemakers. The message was indeed sent!

Guys, we kept hearing about the threats of a bunch of jerks, who have nothing to do but distort the harmonic climate each time it is about to be created. I know we would all like to have attended this festival. However the majority didn't make it. I know this was for many reasons. Reasons that I can understand and respect. Some of us, including myself, were

friends. And if I have the right to speak on behalf of those of us who were there, you were there with us! You were in our hearts, in minds, in our souls. Just like you've always been.

They tried to stop us, but they failed. And they will always fail, unless they realize how silly they are being by doing such things.

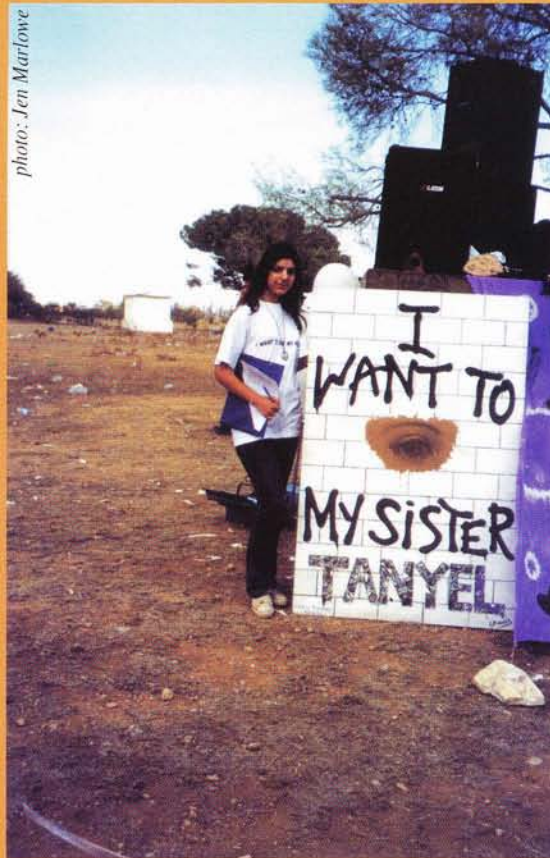
Last night, the choir performed out of their hearts, trying to approach every Cypriots' heart. And that's why the message was sent. Despite all the difficulties, those who have passion, who are fair and believe in what they do, were not stopped.

Have you guys noticed that especially these past months, the distorted minds are trying to do everything to stop us? The cross visits are actually stopped, there are no Turkish Cypriots at the UN camp this year, there are threats coming and going, there is what happened yesterday. Do you know why they are doing all this? Of course you do. Because we, guys, have gone so far with the peace work. Because we are starting to get what we want. And they are afraid! Yes they are!

While driving home last night, at around 11, my mum, who was as tired as I was, turned to me and said "It's really frustrating seeing that every time you make a step forward, they are taking you back to the beginning". I disagreed with her, and I still do. We did not take any step back yesterday. We moved forward. A lot forward. And we are facing towards the September events with much more courage and much more strength. We now know what to expect and how to fight for what we deserve.

In the whole of Cyprus, I've had only one place where I could see my friends. Only one place where I could see my dreams coming true. And they are trying to take even this place from us. But they won't. They had no right to do what they did, and they have no right to do anything similar. But we DO have the right to keep working for this holy purpose. I had friends I wanted to see yesterday. There were people that had worked so hard. I have a sister that I haven't seen for weeks. I had a chance to see her yesterday, and this chance was taken away. And I'm telling you, I'm not going to let this go on. WE are not going to let this go on. They want to fight us? They want war? They'll have peace!! I might sound angry, and yes, I might be. But I am more determined than ever. The more they fight us, the more they strengthen us. And in this sense, we will continue, won't we?

I'm not going to let this go on. WE are not going to let this go on. They want to fight us? They want war? They'll have peace!! I might sound angry, and yes, I might be. But I am more determined than ever. The more they fight us, the more they strengthen us.



Charis, separated from Tanyel by checkpoints, calls for a change.

faced these previous days, concerning yesterday's concert. Many thought that it would not take place after all. Others were just scared. Some didn't even bother to think about it; they felt comfortable with just criticizing and doing nothing more. But there were those brilliant people, who spent hours and hours in Pyla organizing, who left their families every week to practice, who literally did everything that was humanly possible in order to create a peaceful atmosphere for all of us, Cypriots, for an evening. The people of the choir!

There were also many others who never lost

there. I can say out loud that I felt really proud for being present at such a special event. And I can assure you, that I returned back safe and sound. From what I hear, everyone did. So, where were the killings and the violence we were told that were going to take place? I saw none of them. The Greek Cypriots had nothing to worry about. Our dear Turkish Cypriot friends were, I think, in greater danger. Being stopped at the checkpoint and not allowed to pass is not a pleasant thing to deal with. I know there were hundreds of Turkish Cypriots who were planning to join us yesterday, including you, my

CREATING A

This summer, 42 Jewish and Arab teenagers attended Seeds of Peace as the representatives of the City of Haifa. With Mayor Amram Mitzna's support, the Seeds have now begun a program of coexistence discussions, music groups, and parent meetings to bring home the magic of Maine.



Mayor Amram Mitzna with the Israeli delegation at the Seeds of Peace camp in Maine.

Work of a Generation

Majeda Shehadeh (Mother of Michelin Shehade, Haifa)

One week ago my daughter came to me and she said, "Mom, my trip to Seeds of Peace did something to you, I can see it in your eyes. You have a chance to speak about it at this presentation." What I really wanted to say today is that these children succeeded at what we, the adults, failed to do.

I was also once a young person of their age, and this conflict did not start yesterday or the day before, but has been with us for decades. When I was fifteen years old, the older generation also thought it necessary to initiate meetings for Arab-Jewish reconciliation, and these meetings occurred—although believe me, I couldn't tell you the name of the Jewish school we met with, because the meeting lacked something.

Not that we didn't talk—we talked, of course, a lot. We talked about food, about holidays and customs—but not a single word about the conflict. The adults apparently thought that if we ignore the conflict, it will just disappear. They were mistaken. Today I know—and it is hard for me to say this—that we, the Arab students, did not have the courage to speak, and that the Jewish students did not have the courage to listen.

I want to illustrate this with a story of a man who decided to wear a mask for several years. This mask was frozen in a certain expression of a certain opinion. After several years, when he decided to remove the mask, he found that his own face had assumed the shape of the mask.

That is what happened in our meetings. I regret that we, when we were young, stuck to the opinions we had inherited, and we were not willing to look at things in a different way.

The youth of Seeds of Peace succeeded where we failed. They played together, ate together, slept together, but also, every day they talked about the conflict. I believe it was difficult for them, but it is right to know what the other side says if you listen to them, and terribly wrong to decide what they think before ever hearing them speak for themselves, and to judge them with no knowledge at all.

Now I talk a lot about this conflict that will be with us for some time. I hear people's opinions; there are optimists who believe the conflict will disappear within a year or two. To them, I say I hope so. There are those less optimistic, who say that the conflict is so deep, the goals and backgrounds so different, this will be with us for ages, the bitter fate of the peoples who live in this land. To them I say, with good will it is possible to sweeten this bitter fate.

I don't know how long this will take. But I know that we must not—for it would be such a

grave injustice to pass on this conflict to another generation. I genuinely want to see my grandchildren reading about this conflict in history books and not in newspaper headlines. I am so happy that my daughter had the opportunity to experience Seeds of Peace. I regret that I did not. But it looks like these kids are going to do the work.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you: to the people of Seeds of Peace, those whom I've met and those behind the scenes whom I have not; to Mayor Mitzna, who has proven on more than one occasion that the issue of coexistence is very important to him; to the Haifa Foundation and the Ministry of Education; to the parents, who had the courage to allow their children to be exposed to different opinions—it takes a lot of courage to do it.

Most of all, I want to thank the kids. I have a request for you. I would like to see you meeting always, and talking, even arguing. Don't lose touch. Even though these are not encouraging times, even threatening and painful times—don't repeat our mistake. Keep on meeting, keep on talking, especially about this.

I know that Michelin invited all the other kids in Maine to Christmas; I want to extend her invitation to all of your families. I want to end with words from the New Testament, spoken by Jesus two thousand years ago here in the Galilee: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are truly the children of God."

CITY AT PEACE

We constantly blame the other side...very rarely do we ask ourselves, what are we doing to change the situation?

Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna

I personally have undergone two Seeds of Peace experiences-the experience of my visit to Seeds of Peace camp in Maine, this summer, during the second session-and the experience here this evening. The summer camp was for the children; this evening for the adults, the parents-those who failed, as Majeda said.

It seems that especially for us, who have lost some of the hope, the dream that this land and its people could actually live tranquilly; to us, the adults, the message from the youth is that even on top of this volcano there are flowers, seeds that grow between the smoke and the ruin, the sadness, the tragedies. We adults have become accustomed to this gloomy reality; each one creates his own niche of daily life. The message of the children is that despite it all, a different life is possible.

This meeting tonight was not just to dim the lights and see slideshows from a distant shore far from reality; actually, we created in this room a microcosm that shows it is possible to bring this feeling, this message to many people. We are all naïve enough that if we dimmed the lights and sat quietly together sometime like this, we would behave differently.

I have been on both sides of a rifle- yet I have no doubt that it is possible. One of my meetings, as an army commander in the heart of the Casbah of Nablus, during the first intifada-a piece of cake compared to the current intifada-I found myself and a few soldiers amid a crowd of youths, their faces hidden in keffiyahs, preparing to throw stones. It was a clear evening, and they recognized me from television. I sensed the ripple of recognition spreading through the crowd. They recognized me.

So we stood there and talked. I saw lightning in their eyes. When I saw that lightning in their eyes, I knew that no matter how hard and sad is

our reality, it is still possible. And you, the Seeds, prove it, you proved it. I saw you in camp, talking with each other, in Washington, at the State Department, and I am convinced that it is possible, that we have to believe, that we have to be naïve, that we have to be optimistic, and we have to act-most of all, to act. Not just read newspaper editorials and watch television and go about daily routines, but to take action.

Here in Haifa, as we do many things a little differently, we want to continue this experience together, to find the way to make Seeds of Peace not a one-time summer experience, but an experience that continues, like a youth movement, that builds the experience around us here at home. We are not responsible for solving the conflict-although I am happy to hear those who have fresh ideas on how to do it-we are responsible for knowing each other. Those of us who know, who have had the experience of "sleeping with the enemy," know that it is possible to talk, that it is possible to recognize the legitimacy of the other side. Here in the Middle East, we constantly blame the other side, and complain that there is no one to talk to. Very rarely do we ask ourselves, as individuals, as a society, as a nation-what are we doing to change the situation, even if the other side is the way we imagine them? That is our challenge.

I want to thank the parents for jumping on the bandwagon. When I received the phone call from John Wallach this spring, I didn't think twice. I knew that there would be no problem here in Haifa to build a group of Christians, Jews and Muslims who would support this project. I also want to thank Moshe Vidan, who using his great experience supervising youth delegations created this excellent group. I want to thank the people of Seeds of Peace, and we promise to preserve this program and lead in the efforts to keep the idea and the dream alive.



Not Just Next To-With

Shadi Rohana (Haifa)

When I first got to camp, everyone was talking about this "other side" that we should get to know. Well, I'm a Palestinian living in Haifa, "the city of coexistence." In fact, a Jewish Israeli family lives right next door to me, so I thought to myself "That's gonna be easy!"

And for the first few days, it was. Then, coexistence sessions struck. Many issues were brought up. I can't say we solved them all. Thinking about it right now we didn't solve any of them! In our first coexistence session we all agreed to try to separate our relationships, the



ones we have inside the sessions, and the ones outside, which wasn't an easy thing to do. But we reached an accomplishment: Understanding.

I learned two main things at camp. Through interacting with delegations from other parts of the globe, I realized that there are actually other problems going on around the world. When you live in the Middle East you get the feeling that the whole world revolves around you.

I also realized that before camp, I hadn't been coexisting at all. Coexisting is not only having a Jewish family living next door, it's living WITH each other; Dropping all stereotypes—being able to separate friendship from political views. Dealing with what we all have in common: Humanity.

After I got back from camp I was invited for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, by a fellow Seed, Ruth. I was also sitting in a Café a few weeks ago with my friends and among them was another Seed, Tamar, who's from this "other side." Now I'm really coexisting.

Who Am I? IDENTITY

I Live on a Thin Line

By Rina Onur (Istanbul)

"I'm an Armenian Turk."

This is the statement I've lived with all my life. This is the statement that defines my identity and which also strikes everyone who hears it. Yes, I've lived with this for sixteen years and explained how it could be true to everyone who was interested. I've lived with this statement every time I changed my school and met my new classmates. I've lived with this statement every time I met with a pair of curious eyes and I explained once again: "I'm an Armenian Turk."



For the ones who don't know me, I'm a sixteen year old girl living in Istanbul, which is the most crowded city of Turkey. Istanbul is the famous metropolitan which is thought by some to be similar to New York City by the way that life unfolds with constant surprises. Istanbul is a place where you can experience extremes at the same time. One second you can find yourself stuck in the middle of chaotic traffic and another second you can find yourself having a boat trip on the famous Bosphorus. One second you lose yourself in the routines of daily life and another second you'll be entering a nightclub. So it is hard for one to discover and protect her identity, if she has to hunt for it in the Istanbul streets like I did...

Most of my friends at school had their clear identity in their hands the second they were born. They were Turks living in Turkey, a Muslim country. But for me, it was hard to figure out who I really was. For those who never experienced such a thing, it's an irritating feeling: Not knowing who you are, where you come from, where you belong, what integrities you should carry and fight for. Most of my friends didn't even have to worry about it, for they were no different than the others. But those who are part of a different minority community, like me, have such an internal conflict of identity. We hunt for it and if we find it, we have to fight for it, so we won't forget it.

I live on a thin line, which separates two

different worlds containing different extremes. I'm going to a school where all my friends are Muslims except for a few Jews. Out of school, nearly all my friends are Armenian Turks whom I knew from early childhood. At one stage of my life, I felt that I was being forced to leave one of those worlds. Either I would choose to live among Armenians (which many of my friends prefer to do) or I would enter the world with my Muslim friends and be abandoned by most of the Armenians I knew. But I'm an Armenian Turk! To make such a decision would cause me to lose one side of my identity. I may carry Armenian blood in my veins, but the way I live, the way I

where such fanatics who hate the other side also exist, I had to be determined and also brave.

Being an Armenian living in Turkey, where most of the people I live with do not accept Armenian genocide, I feel as frustrated as Turkish Cypriots whose country is not recognized by other countries. I believe in this, I feel it has happened and I grieve for it. While I wait for sympathy, I face the exasperating denial of my ancestors' deaths and believe me, it is not easy to deal with.

There were times when I felt I was doing something wrong by expressing my identity and when I thought I should follow the path that



Rina with Arab, Jewish, Cypriot, Greek and Turkish friends

look at things surrounding me is no different than my Muslim-Turk friends. I feel no different from them when I'm among them laughing, talking, having fun! They're my friends and they've never made me feel that I was different. They've never approached me with prejudice. They've never looked at me in a way that would make me turn to the other side...

But still there came a time when I felt different. I had to find out who I really was. I had to be able to say that I was an Armenian Turk freely, without feeling any inferiority due to difference. I would never be able to do that without the support of my family and my real friends from both sides. Living in a world

everybody else had. But then my family was on my side. My parents haven't been able to find the courage to do the things I did. But with the opportunities I got, they wanted me to draw my own path. They wanted me to do what I felt like doing about my identity.

Now here I am, an Armenian Turk living in a seemingly tiny world, which for me is more expansive than the world itself. I live my life with my integrities, making my decisions without being influenced by the difference in race, nation or religion. Whether I'm appreciated or not, as long as I believe in it, I will be able to get up and say in the proudest way, "I'm an Armenian Turk!"

The Real News Is Inside Us All

Mehmet Ratip (Lefkosa)

The latest happenings are on the headlines
They must push us towards thinking
But, thinking is not enough
We should KNOW !
We should be sure of ourselves
What could we know though?
We've got to KNOW OURSELVES
The visions introduced are all from the same center
The choices are always present, but all from the same bag
What's got to be done through all these fires?
There must be something inside us all
Something not from newspaper headlines
There must be something inside us all
Something not coming from our national history
There must be something inside us all
Something not including religious exploitation
There must be something inside us all
Something never present in any politics
There must be something inside us all
Something never showing up on the exchange rates
There must be something inside us all
Something having much more freedom than the day's freedom
There must be something inside us all
Something much more democratic than the day's democracy
There must be something inside us all
Something always questioning without stopping
There must be something inside us all
Without the need of others' telling what we should know
There must be something inside us all
Where all the Muslims do not pay for what the mad ones have done
There must be something inside us all
Where not everyone burns for the values of one country
There must be something inside us all
Without the obligation of people to be thrown into a chaos socially
There must be something inside us all
That can simplify and apply "the real democracy" to individuality
There must be something inside us all
With the knowledge that freedom is found by passing through the mist of fears
There must be something inside us all
That doesn't say "terror against terror"
There must be something inside us all
Something open for both who desire 'globalization'
And who possess madness due to others
There must be something inside us all

Something knocking down the
"majority-minority" perception
There must be something inside us all
That can say "I am Me, I am Free"
There must be a peace inside us all
That does not need a few signatures over a piece of paper
There must be a wisdom inside us all
That can be respectful to all other differences
And that can be completely responsible for his own difference
There must be something inside us all
That can put away all the memories and concepts of the past
Stuck in our brains till now
There must be something inside us all
That can take lessons from the bigger picture of what we experience and live
There must be something inside us all
Something in peace with its own state of being
Got to be sure that no one's willing to be in pain
Got to look at what's affecting our lives
And got to own those influences of an outside source according to "personal will"
Got to stop being humiliated by
The politics being the self-profitable games of those holding the reigns of power
Got to stop being humiliated by
The economic life destroying the real tastes of joy and life
Got to stop being humiliated by
The possible consequences of the horrors in America
Got to come out and ask loudly
Just as the souls of innocent people will ask
"Who called the death into my life?"
Should not put the world into a vicious circle of no ways out
Before it's too late and before losing the necessary consciousness
Got to say "Stop" at a point
And got to change the way we're heading towards
The one who kills someone he doesn't like is known to be a killer
The one who kills people he does not even know in wars becomes a great hero.
Is this the logic or the madness of the world that we are living in?
And this is simply the system which makes us simple slaves
Is there more harmony in a globalized world?
Is there more freedom under national-religious sovereignty?
There must be something inside us all
The real harmony inside us all
There must be something inside us all
The real freedom inside us all
Let's see a Muslim not trying to stop a Christian going to his church
Let's never see an 'unknown' terrorist fire the

American policy.
How could this be? Simple !
Let's see each human decide on his life road and take his drive himself
Unlike a flock of sheeps as we did till now
Let's see each human know himself really, know his inner-reality
Let all the bags open and every choice be a door
Let the one who desires be a dictator
Let the one who wants be a caveman
Let the one who desires be a terrorist
Let the one who wants be the US President
Let the one who wishes be mad
Let the one who wishes be wise
But let all of them do to themselves whatever they do and whatever they are
Let the dictator exploit himself, divide and rule himself everyday
By stealing money from his own pocket
Let the caveman be a fugitive in a wild forest
Let his nudity be one with nature and let him be a feast for wild animals
Let the terrorist design and put bombs to each part of his body once a day
Let him explode and demolish himself in his own house
And let the US President live quietly in his little home
And let him make each marble of his home a state and rule them
There must be something inside us all
That is only ours
There must be a peace inside us all
Got to let it be your friend
Got to walk with it
Cannot know anything else
Future days will bring much more darkness
Whoever is blamed or judged guilty by America
In the end, everyone under the guilty ones' flag will die
All the innocents will die again
Whoever is supposed to bring the doomsday to America
After the burning bodies in the skyscrapers.
How much of the reasons of the doomsday's arrival will disappear? Got to ask!
Should we establish a "world army" against terrorism?
Then, what ?! Won't the world be divided into two again?
Won't there be discrimination on both sides?
Won't there be innocent people living their ways
And innocent people without any claims on both sides?
Everything is slowly being simplified into a vicious circle
In the world we live, under the system we crawl
There must be something inside us all
That is only ours
The real news is inside us all.

COEXISTENCE HOTLINE

On September 11, Seeds of Peace in some countries found themselves among a minority of people who opposed or even cared about the attacks on America.

Conflicted Feelings

On September 11, the US was shocked like the rest of the world by the biggest terrorist attack ever. Even though the presidents and kings of the Arab world denounced the attacks and expressed their grief, many people in Egypt and other Arab countries supported the attacks because America is the number one ally of their "enemy," Israel. Some women in Gaza gave out sweets and men in Lebanon fired guns to express joy. They say they were happy because at last the "untouchable" Americans would feel how it is to lose a loved one, as they have, more likely than not, suffered this evil.



I was shocked. I always thought America was safe. I felt confused. Should I be celebrating like some Arabs, and if so, why? The more I thought about what happened, the more sorry I felt; for the innocent victims and the people who lost their loved ones.

The pictures of planes crashing into the WTC made me wonder how those passengers lived those terrifying moments. What were they punished for? Some were just kids who died without understanding anything about politics at all. Many firefighters and policemen bravely lost their lives trying to save others.

I was upset that some humans were capable of celebrating the death of fellow humans. It was a heartless feeling. I'm even more appalled at the people who financed and masterminded the plan. I feel sorry for those who were brainwashed to carry out this act of terrorism.

By Karim Fareed (Cairo)

Against Indifference

I was at school when I heard what happened. I was worried for all of you, scared and disappointed. Thousands of people killed in such a terrible way. And many were indifferent or even happy.

Macedonians and Serbs are close allies. In 1999, when NATO bombed Serbia, we blamed the Americans. So, when our teacher told about the attacks in the USA, most of my class didn't care. At home, one of my Serb relatives called and was happy. A friend couldn't understand why I was worried, and kept asking if you cried when bad things happened here. My neighbor kept saying Americans deserved it. They all

were happy from the death of thousands of people who weren't guilty of anything. Why should those people and their families suffer?

I couldn't believe that there are people able to kill and hurt so many. For what? Revenge? To prove they are strong or right? Thinking that killing innocent people is OK is insane.

People that were happy are as bad as the killers. Unfortunately, I found many people that bad. My class all said the Americans deserve it. I told them what I think. I told about the magnificent people I met at camp, Americans fighting for peace. I'm sure that in the buildings and the planes were wonderful people just like you. I told them to try to imagine how would they feel if thousands were killed in Macedonia! One or two understood. But just one or two.

There has been a lot of terror in the world, in my country too, catastrophes and mass killings. But never anything this bad. This was a step backward to the past, to a worse way of living. People will never forget what happened. The movies and books will be famous, people will be blamed, there will be more hate and more victims. But there won't be peace. Even if the people that did this change their minds, and understand what they did, there won't be peace.

Before camp I wasn't worried about world peace, Arabs or Jews, Cypriots or Americans. I just cared about the Macedonian conflict! But after camp I understood that peace is the most important thing in people's lives. Till the end of my life I'll fight for peace, but not with weapons. Not with killing. There's a better way.

Always remember what we had at camp. In a world full of fighting and killing, sometimes I think you're the only people that understand. But I'll keep trying, hoping that more people will understand that killing isn't the right way! You should try too. Together, we can succeed. If we work together for world peace and respect, our children or our grandchildren will live in peace. If we just try a bit more, one day, people from all the world will live together, like one

Many nights when sleep was far away, I wore my green shirt, clinging to it, huddled in bed thinking of what I had to stand for.

family, and they will be thankful to every one of us Seeds of Peace. I am sure we can do that.

Sneska Vaseska (Skopje)

Facing Love and Hate

My heart sank as the whizzing screen showed the pictures and my mother's tears confirmed it was real. Then anger exploded from deep within and I was lost in wild, blind rage-not shouting or screaming-only silent.



In the days after September 11, I saw the extremes of love and hate in Pakistan. "Serves them right!" banners read. Men clad in shawls, faces invisible behind flowing beards chanted mockingly at the Americans. Posters flashed the familiar face of Osama Bin Laden everywhere. Fearing bombings, people would not go anywhere even a hint of American culture breathed. Pakistani support to the U.S. shot the simmering anger to the boiling point.

I quarrelled with classmates at school. In my desk later that day, I found a note reading, "Keep your views to yourself." Dormant emotions awakened in explosive wrath. Yet side-by-side with this ugliness, I witnessed the beauty of people who sincerely cared for others, regardless of religion or passports. I saw the true light of Islam, the religion whose meaning is peace. Muslims crowded to mosques and prayed for those in pain. Loudspeakers all over the city boomed, mourning the many deaths. It was touching to see how an event so far away affected people here. At school we held a special prayer for the dead, and nearly everyone cried.

Nothing that happened, from any possible angle, was right. Many nights when sleep was far away, I wore my green shirt, clinging to it, huddled in my bed thinking of what I had to stand for. Peace seemed so far away, almost not there. But I saw, in the eyes of those who cared with sincerity, that peace did exist. It was just not visible because the blindfold of impatience was bound too tightly around my eyes.

I'm loosening that blindfold from my eyes. I am scared, but even fear comes with meaning. To all Seeds wherever you may be, know that all around you are people who understand and are concerned. If you don't see any, loosen that blindfold. Soon, I promise, you will see.

By Amal Suleman (Lahore)

COEXISTENCE HOTLINE

The authors of these letters face a dilemma. THE OLIVE BRANCH asks you to provide some support and guidance. Respond to olivebranch@seedsofpeace.org

The Shadow of a Tank

Hi. For those who don't know me, I'm Mai, originally from Jaffa, living in Ramallah and I guess that's the part I'm going to talk to you about; living in Ramallah this week was rather different from any other time.



I'm in my final year of high school, preparing all year for the terrible tawjihi exam, which means I have a lot of studying to do. About ten days ago I was up studying at 4:30 in the morning. At 4:50 a.m., I think, it all started with a bang. Even that wasn't so unusual after a year of intifada, so as in all emergency situations the family met in the corridor in our apartment, the safest place in the house. There we stood listening, and there came the shooting... A couple of hours later the shooting stopped, and we had enough courage to look out the window, THERE IT STOOD. I've seen tanks before on TV but I never thought they were that HUGE until I saw one outside my window. That's the way it started...

It's true the last months were unbelievably boring... and something new happening was only a wish... something new did happen in the end, which turned from a wish to a nightmare.

The first days were frightening; we couldn't go near the living room. We had emergency meetings in the corridor every half-hour. Between shooting and loud tank bombing studying was out of the question. (PS: my semester tests were supposed to start that day.) Instead of listening to the teacher in my school I was listening to an Israeli soldier telling the people of the neighborhood in Arabic that they are stuck in their houses indefinitely; a curfew.

I'll tell you a couple of details which made things look even worse. First, my dad was sick. He had to get to the hospital for important tests, but he couldn't go. He was in physical pain and I was in emotional pain to see him like that. Secondly my sister was stuck in Jordan and listening to her cry because she's worried was really bad.

And so the days went on, stuck at home not being able to watch TV or look from the window, and worst of all listening to that sound of the tank. On the other hand I had the chance to work as an operator; the phone was ringing

every two minutes. Thank God there are still people with human love and appreciation. Every time I felt I can't take it anymore the phone would ring and a friend would tell me that things will get better sooner or later, but to be honest they haven't and for days I was totally down, frustrated from everything and not able to find one good thing in life. Yes it does sound stupid now, but it didn't then.

So after five days of being neighbors with two huge tanks I woke up looked from the window and didn't find them. What a relief, but it didn't last for long. Before I reached the word 'gone' in "MOM THE TANKS ARE GONE." I realized they had just changed their place. This gave us dangerous chances to slip out of the house; that's how I go to school now, crossing my fingers not to see a baby tank in my way (there are big tanks and small tanks which I call baby tanks). Baby Tanks are the ones who crash into people's cars without a reason. I didn't hear that, I saw that outside my window. It wasn't an accident; what happened was that poor driver had bad luck and was going in the opposite way of a baby tank which was going in its fastest speed. So there was the driver trying to go on reverse on his fastest speed so he won't be over run by the tank. At the end of the road he turned to give the tank space to go on its way, but it simply crashed into the poor driver's vehicle (Thank God it was a van). That's what I see when I look out the window everyday; soldiers in tanks making walking people suffer...

Today my father had an operation, remember he was sick, the hospital is five minutes away from my house and still taking him there was a huge risk. My sister came back three days ago so she's with my dad now; me and my mom can't get there, we can't get out of the house. I thought hospitals are the red line that no would dare to cross, but a day before my father's operation the hospital was nearly bombed by tanks. In this moment we have two things to worry about. First I'm alone in the house with my mom, and it will be a tragedy if soldiers try to enter our house as they did other flats in our building, and the second thing is my sister and father are alone with two nurses in the hospital (yes things are that bad).

So in the mean time I study less then I did in second grade, I don't sleep at all (remember! Tanks= loud sound= no sleep= no studying). These are some things that happened to me when the tanks came to Ramallah. It doesn't

seem like this is going to end soon. In the end I pray to God this will never happen to you, and remember when you wish for something new, be specific 'cause you might be misunderstood.

Mai Abu Emara (Ramallah)

My Mai,

I tried to call you yesterday. Ned told me he talked to you, and how bad your situation is. And that you still asked him to send me a hi. I love you baby, so much. I couldn't get through last night, the lines were busy, it didn't even connect me. So I figured maybe I should write you, even though you know I much prefer talking, and even more than that meeting you, seeing you, which is hardly possible these days.

I read Seedsnet (which, I have to admit, I haven't done for a while) and saw in your words a lot of anger and tears maybe? And read them more than once. It didn't really get through. I can never know what you're going through; I myself haven't seen a tank from such a short range ever. And I don't know your reality, and I don't want to either. I don't want you to know it at all.

It seems like neither of us has got many choices. You can't choose the view outside your window or the noises you wake up with, if you even go to sleep, or the fear you're in. I don't have a way of changing it, what my government is doing to you, or what my army is doing. I simply don't know what to say.

One of my best friends is a soldier, now in Tulkarem. The other day on the phone, he suddenly hung up because someone was shooting at him. Last time he was home, he felt uncertain about whether he's coming back. I didn't know what to say to him either.

Mai, I just want you all to be safe. I have no option to guarantee it, and it's frustrating, and horrible. I don't know- can I help you in any way, can I do something? Is there anything I can do for you that will make it better?

Please, be strong, and remember everything we've always talked about. There is another way of life, and we'll get there one day.

Love you more than anything,

Netta Corren (Haifa)



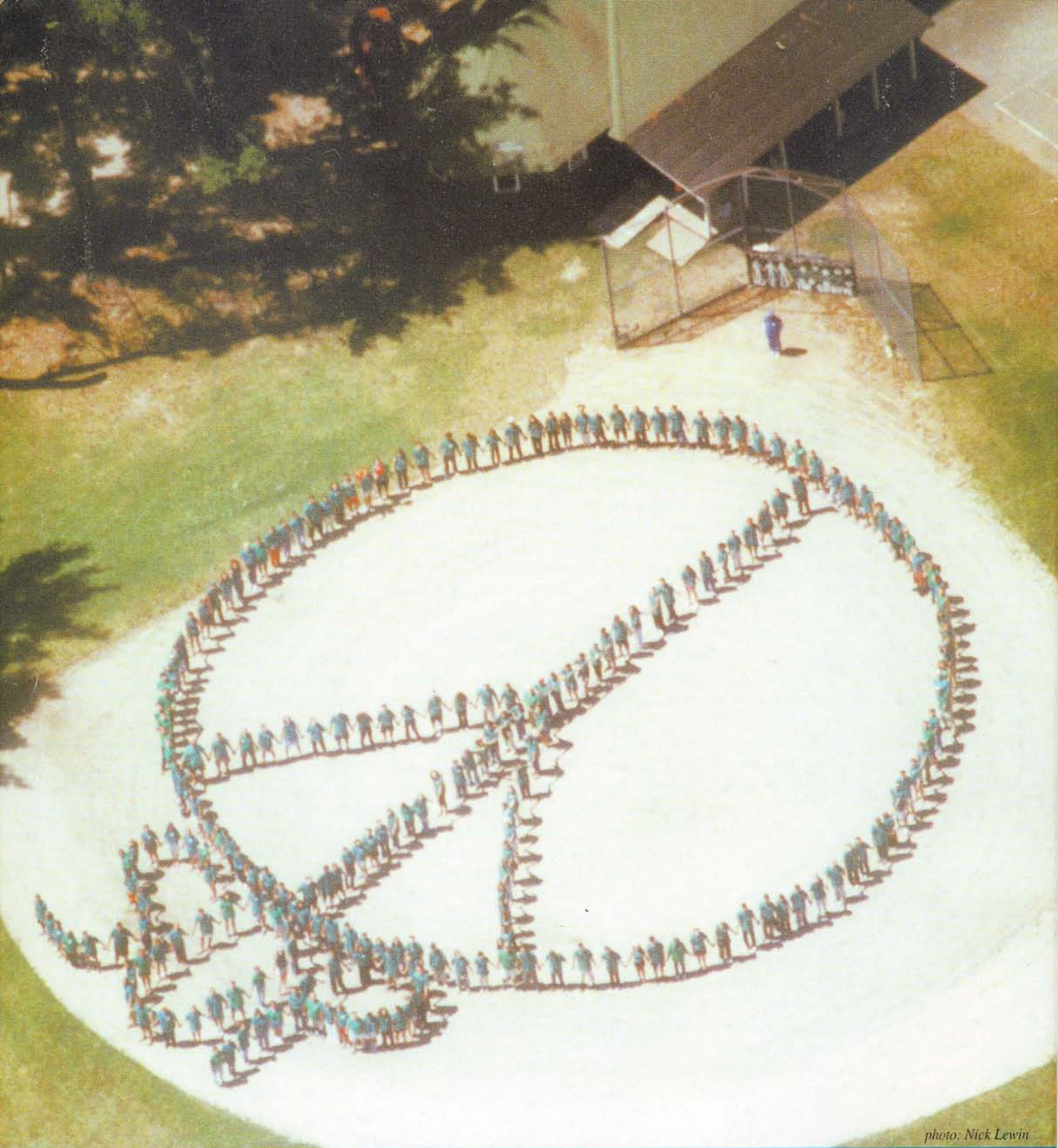


photo: Nick Lewin

“Back home things are harder... My own friends tell me it is crazy to have friends from the other side... We meet in rough conditions... but that doesn't hold us back.”

