



ISSUE 38

# faith

## INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

**"In diversity there is beauty  
and there is strength"**

**Maya Angelou**

**Challenging and Transforming**

**Women in Leadership**

**Earthly Stresses and Strains**

**Climate Change**

**Old Patterns New Life**

**Language of Art**

**WINNER:**  
SHAP AWARD 2011

# Wedding Day

The air carried a spicy chill  
on this auspicious autumn morning.  
I, the centre of attention,  
dressed in a saffron gold lenga,  
in shades of liberty, new beginnings  
like the mendhi on my hands-  
on the day I thought  
would never come.

In every colour of the rainbow-  
all guests arrived at the registrar office  
to witness our vows  
like a poetry reading.  
I was bursting, trembling in happiness,  
petrified, "Could I do this?  
Could I say it out loud?"

Was I sure this was  
'the match' made in heaven  
just for me? Or just an escape?  
In a smiley daze; hazy thoughts ran wild  
like clouds of cosmic energy.  
"Could someone really accept me as a wife?  
Maybe, as a sacrifice? "

I listened to a promise of a man,  
who silently spoke through his eyes.  
I stood next to him,  
heartbeat like clockworks,  
opening a new chapter of life-  
of caring, sharing of mutual respect,  
as the innocent ivory stars  
draped us together.

After the vows had been spoken,  
I was handed his wedding ring.  
With a sudden spasm and a jerk,  
I dropped it! My heart stopped!  
The room echoed in delightful  
surprise and laughter,  
as we watched the gold ring  
roll away like a penny, like a dream.

Was this an omen or some kind of sign?  
Or was it just a taster of what was coming,  
of what to expect?

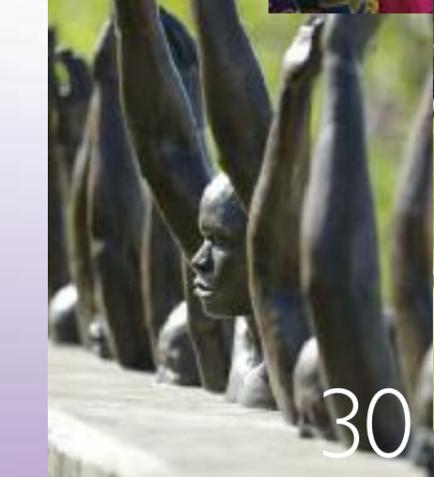
Now after a quarter of a century, he still chases,  
picks up everything I've dropped,  
including me!

*Kuli Kohli*



## contents

- 04 EDITORIAL - Heather Wells
- 05 KEYNOTE  
Ravinder Kaur Nijjar - *The Capacity to Forgive*
- 07 REMEMBRANCE  
Weeping Window
- 08 CLIMATE CHANGE
- 08 Sarah Mercer - *Shifting Attitudes on Climate Change*
- 10 Lorna Douglas - *A Call to Care*
- 11 Jill Pelto - *The Stress and Strain of Climate Change*
- 14 BOOK REVIEW  
Jonathan Wittenberg - *Curlew Moon*
- 17 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP
- 17 Orchid Project - *What can we do to end FGC?*
- 20 Maureen Sier - *'Our Sheer Presence'*
- 22 INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER  
R. Harry Bradshaw & Lesley Collington  
- *Mindfully Together*
- 24 LANGUAGE OF ART  
Caroline Jariwala - *Old Patterns New Life*
- 28 INSIGHT  
Jiwan Nabi - *Peaceful Coexistence*
- 29 HISTORICAL INSIGHT  
Equal Justice Initiative - *Acknowledge the Unacknowledged*
- 32 REFLECTION  
Michael Lewin - *Releasing the Heart with Dance*
- 33 SUBSCRIPTION FORM
- 35 IMMIGRATION STORY
- 35 Naeem Noordin - *Shaped by My Father*
- 37 REFUGEE STORIES
- 37 Alex Holmes - *Entertaining Angels*



- 40 Mary Reynard - *"WE ARE HERE"*
- 42 NEW BOOK  
Masih Alinejad - *The Wind in my Hair*
- 47 POEM  
Simon Fletcher - *On Offa's Dyke*
- 48 FAITH & SCIENCE  
David Wilkinson - *More than Science Alone*
- 49 FAITH AND THE ARTIST  
Paula Gowans - *The Essential Me*

# editorial

The word 'hate' has always carried, for me, connotations of an emotional cul-de-sac: that the person who hates is so obsessed with feelings of resentment or loathing that there is no escape, except through an outburst of violence. Hence the rapid way in which language of hate has spread across the world has left me fearful of where it will end. Yet, with faith, I remain hopeful that it can be stopped, but wonder who would take the lead. It is therefore with gratitude that I read our keynote writer's timely contribution, entitled 'Capacity to Forgive' and found the best of role models. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar reminds us that Nelson Mandela made a conscious decision to leave 'bitterness and anger' behind as he walked out of the gates of Robben Island prison in 1990, where he had been incarcerated for 18 years of his 27 years of internment. Without this 'letting go' he knew he would continue to be imprisoned within his own mind, and would be unable to lead his people away from the destructive cycle of hate and revenge. This demonstration of courage on his part, and the dignified role he played in opposing the political status quo, paved the way to the end of the Apartheid system, and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996. These developments saved his country from civil war and the TRC has become a peace-making model for countries where there has been abuses of human rights on a massive scale, such as Chile, the Congo and Sierra Leone, also a similar Commission in Canada addressing the historical removal of Indian children from their families. Mandela became known as the glowing beacon of hope shining across South Africa and the world, and is now sadly missed in a world that seems to be lacking in world leaders with the capacity to combat hatred and inspire peaceful reconciliation of differences. In this context my thoughts have been drawn to two writers, each have shown tremendous courage in their capacity to let go of bitterness and anger. The first book 'You Will Not Have my Hate' by Antoine Leiris, a Frenchman whose wife, Helene, mother of his 17 month old son, Melvil, was killed in the terrorist attack on the Bataclan theatre in Paris on the 13th November 2015. Leiris writes to the killer: 'I will not give you the satisfaction of hating you...all his life (my) little boy will defy you by being happy and free. Because you will not have his hate either.' The second book is entitled: 'I Shall Not Hate' by Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Palestinian, whose three daughters Mayar 15, Aya 14 and Bessan 20, were killed in Gaza when an Israeli tank shell was fired into their bedroom on the 16th January 2009. In an interview following the killings Dr Abuelaish said: Hatred is an illness. It prevents healing and peace. He called for people throughout the region to talk and listen to each other, and has been relentless in his efforts to bring peace to the Palestinian people. The courage of both men to refuse to hate those who destroyed their families is truly remarkable, for by hating the killers they believed they would be empowering them and the system that supports them. The pain of their loss will never diminish entirely, but removing that negative emotion from their response to their bereavement allows space and light for new life to flourish, and the seeds of hope be planted once more. Nurturing those seeds of hope is the responsibility of us all, men and women together.

## Heather Wells

*I Shall Not Hate* was reviewed by Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg in issue 25

**We thank all our contributors** - writers, artists, poets and photographers – and of course subscribers. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of donors, who wish to remain anonymous. To sustain and develop the magazine however we need regular financial donations. If any readers know of Trust Funds, Grants or private donors who may be willing to help with funding, however big or small, the Editor (Heather Wells) would appreciate your advice and/or recommendations. For contact details please see above.

faith  
INITIATIVE

[www.faithinitiative.co.uk](http://www.faithinitiative.co.uk)

Initiative Interfaith Trust

Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas  
and Charanjit Ajit Singh

### Object:

**The promotion of religious harmony by:** Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity Magazine

### Editorial Panel

Editor: Heather Wells

Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

### Editorial Team

Charanjit Ajit Singh

Shiban Akbar

Sr. Maureen Goodman

Umm Hanié Rebler

Jehangir Sarosh

Poet in residence: Rebecca Irvine Bilkau

**Aim:** The aim of the magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of different faiths and cultures: to foster understanding and reduce racially and religiously motivated violence.

**Statement:** Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

**Invitation:** We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, artwork and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve. Editorial guidance can be obtained from

Heather Wells, PO Box 110, Lancaster LA2 6GN  
Email: [hf\\_wells@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk)

### Issue 39 Themes:

- Immigration Stories
- Combating hatred through Faith

**Front cover:** Artwork: Paula Gowans see Faith & the Artist p 49.

**Back cover:** Poem: *The place of revelation*  
by Rebecca Bilkau

**Design & Print:** Print Graphic Ltd T: 01228 593 900

**SPIRAL:** "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:  
*Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfillment*  
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,  
London ISBN 184308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala for Initiative Interfaith Trust

# The Capacity to Forgive

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Mother's Model



The world today is burning in conflict, whether it is within the family, across communities or across nations.

The First World War was meant to end all wars but two decades later the world was embroiled in conflict again. Today when we look at any form of media there is only evidence of conflict, very rarely do we hear stories that illustrate people working together to uplift communities or nations. Yet many thousands of peacemakers continue to work tirelessly to bring about a more peaceful world, but their stories are never heard.

There have been many charters throughout the decades, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the **Declaration of Human Responsibilities** and the **Charter for Compassion**. But the one that will have a lasting impact for many centuries is the **Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation**.

The two opening paragraphs of the Charter state:

"The vision of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the activity of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation is to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek restorative justice and sustainable peace.

Fostering and practicing forgiveness has the power to transform deep-seated responses to memories and legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions created by such legacies. Faith and spiritual traditions have long guided us and inspired us to awaken the best of our human potential, to practice love, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to reshape our destinies."

[www.charterforforgiveness.org](http://www.charterforforgiveness.org)

The act of forgiveness requires great courage and spiritual strength. In the words of Alexander Pope "To err is human; to forgive, Divine"

So let us look to our diverse religious scriptures, and other writings, for inspiration to attain this Divine practice of forgiveness.

In the Holy Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji it is written, "Where there is forgiveness, there God resides" *Guru Granth Sahib Ji p.1372*

The final words uttered by Christ during his suffering reinforce the importance of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." *Luke 23:34*

Nelson Mandela took the decision, on leaving prison, to forgive the prison wardens and the political authorities. He knew that if he did not do that the country would continue to be in conflict and turmoil: the people needed to forgive if reconciliation was to take place. He had to be the first to forgive for the good of South Africa.

"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." *Nelson Mandela*

I wonder what inspired Nelson Mandela to think about forgiving those who had him incarcerated for decades, how did he let go of his anger, his hurt and his need for revenge? I believe his mother must have inculcated the values of love and forgiveness in him from a very young age. In his autobiography the *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) Nelson Mandela describes his mother as "the centre of my existence".

Barack Obama speaking of his mother in his book, *Dreams From My Father* (2004) said, “I know she was the kindest, most generous spirit I have ever known, and that what is best in me I owe to her...”

In my experience, a mother is always able to forgive misdemeanours in her children no matter what they have done, she is able to reconcile conflict and bring about peace in her family.

**“The Heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always find forgiveness.”** *Honore de Balzac*

Forgiving someone is a process where one has to first let go of anger, and I believe that a mother is able to do that because she has an abundant amount of love for her children. She is the wise listener and the mediator. She listens to both sides of the argument offering solutions to resolve the conflict. She knows that if a solution is not found then there can be no peace in the immediate family, and may also have repercussions in the extended family. She will continue to work to resolve the conflict regardless of timescale, and forgive her children.

It would seem then that the essential ingredient in order to forgive is **love**. Love allows us to see the other person as having the Divine Light within them.

How do we develop the ability to see the Divine Light in others? As a Sikh I am informed this can only be achieved through prayer and selfless service to God and His Creation. By developing our spirit we can begin to see God in all people. But to see God in someone who has caused you a great deal of pain is very difficult. The anger, hatred and pain burns continuously inside, holding you captive for years, and peaceful reconciliation will never be found.

**“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else but you are the one who gets burned”** *The Buddha*

In April 2018 after 25 years Neville Lawrence the father of Stephen Lawrence decided to forgive the gang of racists who

murdered his 18-year-old son in Southeast London in April 1993. He said, “It has been a heavy load to carry around and hatred is not a nice thing to have. In order to free myself of carrying this burden around I decided to forgive all of these boys who racially-motivated murdered my son.” Mr Lawrence embraced Christianity in recent years and said: “I wanted to be baptised and in order to be baptised you have to forgive people who have done you wrong.”

In the telling of these stories we are able to see how individual forgiveness and the collective forgiveness of a whole nation has led to a more peaceful existence. Both forms of forgiveness require extreme inner strength, courage and the ability to see that the act of forgiveness is freedom from anger, an all absorbing negative emotion that drains energy and blocks creativity. Yet we must also remember the importance of forgiving oneself.

We as individuals are on our Planet Earth for a very short time, compared to the timescale of the Universe. The human race should not waste this time by causing conflict with each other, but use it wisely to become attuned with God and see the Divine Light in all. We are all spiritual travellers, refugees on this Earth whose true home is with God. So why do we create conflict over borders and land when everything is temporary, and we will eventually move on from this Earth. Astronauts who have gone into space and seen our planet from above remark that the Earth looks so small compared to the vastness of outer space, they see no borders, no countries but one Planet in which the whole human race resides.

Let us draw on the model of a mother as a wise listener and mediator, who knows that if a solution is not found there can be no peace in the family. Let us all work together to nurture forgiveness within ourselves, within families and within nations. Let us create peaceful methods to resolve conflict, leaving a safe spiritual planet for future generations to enjoy.

**“The Heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always find forgiveness.”**

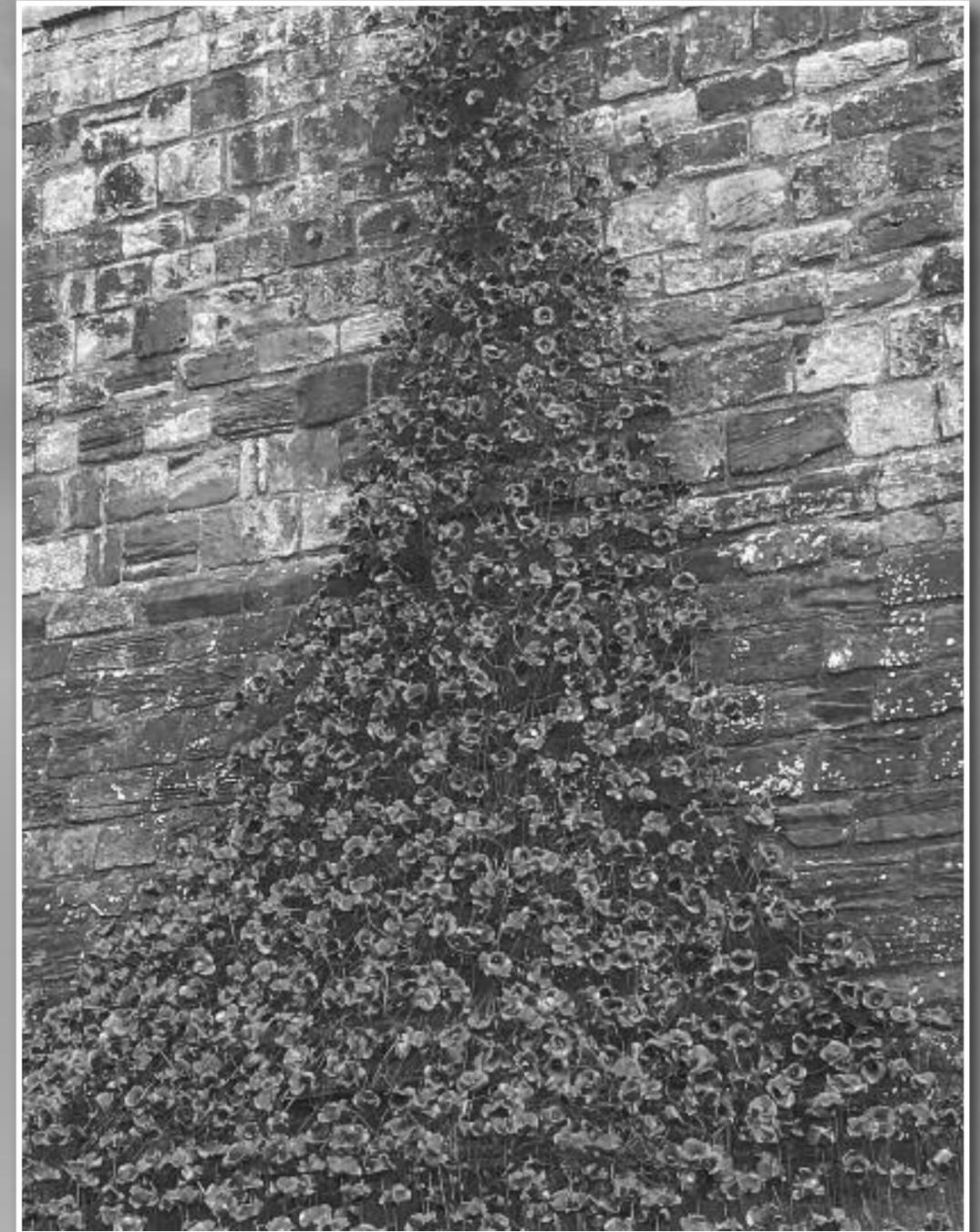


Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network

International Coordinating Committee Member: Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network

Sikh representative on Scottish Religious Leaders Forum

# Weeping Window



Photograph: Heather Wells

**“ The only solution is love ”**

Quote cited: eurocatholicworker.org

The Sculpture: **Weeping Window** is from the installation ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red - poppies and original concept by artist Paul Cummins and installation designed by Tom Piper. (c) Richard Lea-Hair and Historic Palaces. At Carlisle Castle on UK-wide tour.

# SHIFTING ATTITUDES ON *Climate Change*

Communication on Climate Change is often extremist, problem loaded and overwhelmingly negative, with statements such as “it’s too late” or “we can’t do enough” freely bandied about. While I understand that such a response mostly comes from a desire to highlight the urgency of Climate Change, I believe such ‘Doomsday’ rhetoric is damaging our attitudes towards it, fostering either a paralysing fear or wilful ignorance and laissez-faire. Norwegian psychologist and politician, Per Espen Stoknes in his TED talk (posted 8.12.17) reflects on what he calls ‘apocalypse fatigue’: “...If you overuse fear-inducing imagery, what you get is fear and guilt, and this makes people more passive”. Being faced with an ‘insurmountable problem’ causes people to become disheartened, disengaged and ultimately, disinterested. This in turn leads to a denial to recognise the scale of the problem, and significantly hinders the process of implementing solutions to Climate Change locally, nationally and globally.

In a contribution to a recent Report (Pub 2015), *Bending the Curve*, Anthony Barnosky and colleagues list five methods of effective Climate Change communication. These are:

- 1) to establish common ground
- 2) keep the message simple
- 3) be inclusive
- 4) tell a story
- 5) de-politicize climate messages

They also state that it is crucial to communicate that there are already solutions available.

**This valuable insight was the inspiration behind our idea to organise ‘Footprint’, a Climate Change outreach event held at Durham University 15/16 June 2018. Our aims were twofold:**

**One:** to encourage a more positive conversation about Climate Change. By focusing on solutions for smaller problems within the wider issue we hoped to foster attitudes of hope, passion, and a sense that goals can be achieved.

**Two:** to experiment with different communication formats and topics in order to engage as many people as possible in the most effective way.

“The status quo isn’t working – what are the alternatives?” was the question we asked ourselves, so we hosted a wide variety of speakers who introduced diverse perspectives on

ways to communicate on Climate Change related matters including: Faith and Climate Change, the Legalities of Climate Change, Food and Diet, Social Enterprise, Politics, Economy, Urban Ecology, Community Gardening, Carbon Literacy, Campaign Planning, Zero Waste, Nature in Education, Green Energy, Carbon Conversations, Art and the Environment, Creative Writing, Music, and the Cultural Dimensions of the ecological crisis.

These topics were presented via different mediums including talks, workshops, hands-on activities, crafting sessions, planting sessions, musical performances, culture and art exhibitions, one on one conversations, and structured, and informal, discussions.

By bringing so much variety into the melting pot we hoped to inspire people to think differently; to find links between topics not usually brought together; to move outside their comfort zone; to ask more questions and to encourage imaginative thinking. Attendees were therefore free to choose the topics they were most intrigued by: topics that would stimulate their interest and their creativity.

Our food waste workshop for example highlighted the uses of the app Olio, and how charities such as REUSE are using food waste not only to reduce the amount going to landfill, but also reduce food poverty and raise awareness of the problem. The Climate Conversations workshop laid out good practice for how to have effective conversations with people about Climate Change, and gave us the space to role-play, and ask questions. The Environmental Enterprise workshop illustrated how many companies are already thriving in this sector. It demonstrated how our entrepreneurial skills can be used in a social context, providing us with the knowledge and space to create our own ideas.



The focus on solutions continued throughout the two days, and culminated in what we called the Activism Forum. This was where all the attendees and speakers came together and brought their ideas and solutions to the table, and began formulating action plans on how to implement them. Due to the vibrant atmosphere that had been developed throughout the event, almost everyone had something to contribute, and all were passionate and ambitious with their goals.

From *Footprint* three main action plans emerged.

**One** – running *Footprint 2019* to continue positive Climate Change communication.

**Two** – a project aiming at raising awareness of the global scale of Climate Change in public consciousness by making sure that relevant information becomes mainstream on Wikipedia.

**Three** – Zero Waste, Zero Carbon University, aimed at pushing for our home base - Durham University - to be responsible for developing sustainability, and providing more environmentally friendly options to its staff and students. These projects will be supported by the *Footprint* community, a place for all people in Durham communities to get involved with environmental or climate issues.

Finally, the most important outcome *Footprint* hopes to have achieved is to have planted the seed of a community wide hub for anyone with an interest in environmental issues, sustainability or Climate Change (and anything in between!). The development of a social group is crucial to initiating behavioural change, as social



relationships are the most powerful influence. Although the event itself covered just two days, the relationships formed at that time, and through the organisational period, are providing a foundation on which we are now building a community wide group: this includes staff and students of Durham University and members of the local population. By creating a space in which like-minded people can gather to discuss ideas, we hope to inspire and encourage them to believe that they personally can make a difference: initially by making behavioural changes that will reduce their own environmental impact, and then to make connections that will lead to bigger actions that will provide a platform from which to spread the message further. Hopefully, in this way a shift in attitudes towards Climate Change will permeate through the wider community.

From my personal perspective, as co-organiser, I feel pleased with how *Footprint* went. The format worked well, with the variety of topics enabling all the attendees to engage, resulting in a fantastic, open and creative atmosphere. Everyone, including those involved in the organisation of the event, the funders, the speakers and the attendees were incredibly helpful, supportive and enthusiastic, and I feel much more optimistic about the groundswell of people wanting to make a difference in the world.

The experience has taught me that if you are passionate about doing something positive, then people from all directions will extend a helping hand. I am tremendously grateful to those who supported this event in any way, and am excited to be continuing to work with them in the future.

“The status quo isn’t working  
- what are the  
alternatives?”



Artist and Scientist Jill Pelto contributed images of her artwork addressing Climate Change to the Footprint event: please see p 11 - 13 for a feature giving focus to her paintings.

# A Call to Care

...the common thread...is a concept of 'right relationship'.

As editors of this magazine we were delighted to be invited to address attendees at the Footprint 2018 workshops at Durham University. Faith and Climate Change issues have often been featured in *Faith Initiative*, especially issue 37 which gave focus to different religious perspectives, and we titled the theme 'A Call to Care'. It is greatly encouraging that the organizers of this event acknowledged this relationship.

The Paper was given at FOOTPRINT 2018 to a mixed audience of students/academics/and other attendees, of different faiths, and of none. There was a strict time frame that did not allow for in depth discussions within the lecture room on beliefs and practices of religions. Hence the Paper takes a broad approach to the subject of Faith & Climate Change.

As we have illustrated through the magazine all religions/faiths have an association with the environment: portrayal of human interaction with the land and nature can be found in both ancient and modern religions. For example, there are ancient texts/poems/songs written about farming, hunting, travelling, surviving; as well as many references to the weather, trees, plants, animals, the sun the moon and the stars. The natural environment in which humans lived, and were completely surrounded by, was the key to their understanding of self in relation to nature. Added to this is the belief in a Creator, or a created order of the earth and the universe, of which countless stories exist the world over. Indeed, it is these stories that give the greatest insight into religious belief and practice.

Within the Abrahamic faiths, there is the concept and surrounding narratives dealing with *Responsible Stewardship* of the divine creation: a creation that needs to be carefully managed as it has been placed in the care of humans, who act on behalf of God. This concept is open to interpretation. Some followers of these tradition may claim that God has given humanity the resources that it needs and will continue to provide. With this mindset the concept of Climate Change offers no threat to humans, or any challenge to the almighty power of God. Others would counter this interpretation of *Responsible Stewardship* as one where the relationship is reciprocal and humanity must be accountable for its part in caring for creation. With acceptance of responsibility comes divine judgement, and when humanity gets it wrong the consequences can be dire - for example the apocalypse! Probably the most famous catastrophic consequence of human failure is the story of the great flood, which is referenced in various sacred texts.

Non-biblical faiths offer other narratives especially related to *Ahimsa* - which can be defined as 'do no harm' - and is one of the main tenets in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. *Ahimsa* is a concept inspired by the belief that all living beings have the divine spark of energy and to harm one living being is to harm all of creation. The law of *Khama* - the principle of retributive justice ie cause and effect - relates to consequences of right or wrong actions which effect the life of the individual and the world around them. In Sikhism, the teachings of Guru Nanak relate to unity of spirit and matter and the interconnectedness of all creation - spiritual emptiness within humanity leads to barrenness of the earthly terrain.

Hence questions of responsibility for the care of creation lie at the core of all religions and the notion of balance is crucial. This is probably most popularly understood in the Daoist symbol of Yin and Yang. A Daoist explanation of our situation is that "Carbon fuels are yin - earthly. When we burn them they become gases, yang, and ascend to the sky. This means the fundamental balance of yin and

yang is thrown out of kilter, and we as humanity have failed to fulfil our role as those who maintain balance. This means that burning fossil fuel is against the Dao." (Cited in an article by Martin Palmer in *Faith Initiative*, Issue 37)

Religions have been recording the stories for centuries of the interaction between humans, and between humans and their environment. Whether oral or written many of these stories still survive today in some shape or form; the historical contexts may have changed but the stories themselves have not and people are able to relate to them. They are powerful and accessible in themselves. We still farm, hunt, fish, travel, go to war, make peace, deal with disasters, fall in love. We still have the ability to imagine and create - good and bad, harmony and disharmony. There is still wisdom to be recognized in many of the stories, a heritage of human life experiences passed down from a time we can only imagine, and not just human life but the totality of life. What the stories teach may be varied from cause and effect, stewardship or the need for balance and harmony, but the common thread running through, is a concept of right relationship. If humans are in 'right relationship' to nature, with one another and with God, then it can be argued we are making the right decisions, with the right outcomes driven by a need for balance and harmony and not the economics of capitalist consumerism.

Two questions to explore or discuss.

1. What can religions offer to the Climate Change debate.
  - a. Narratives/teachings/symbols that can be related to our situation today. Ideas of right relationship/stewardship/balance/harmony
2. What can people of faith do in standing by their beliefs to minimize climate change?
  - a. Look at this from a personal/faith community/interfaith community perspective. Ideas might be - not using single use plastics and environmentally harmful products/using organic food produce. Being more confident in voicing beliefs/challenging leadership both within and out with a faith/religion. Demonstrate/community projects/using solar panels or wind turbines etc.



Photograph: David Rose

# The Stress and Strain of Climate Change

As an artist and a scientist, I look to construct new ways to communicate the reality of our current ecosystem. The key topic in my portfolio is Climate Change data: melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and threatened species. I see art as a uniquely articulate and emotional lens through which I can convey my love of the wilderness and address environmental concerns to raise awareness and inspire action.

I have studied the behaviour of the Antarctic Ice Sheet to better understand how it will respond to current climate change. I've also conducted research on the mountain glaciers of Washington and British Columbia, in the Dry Valleys and Transantarctic Mountains of Antarctica, over the rolling hills and carved cirques of the Falkland Islands, and around the aqua lakes and ochre mountains of New Zealand. I make art inspired by all of these experiences.



## Habitat Degradation: Deforestation

*Habitat Degradation: Deforestation* uses data showing the decline in rainforest area from 1970 - 2010. These lush ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes, and with them, millions of beautiful species. I'm quite certain that anyone would agree that a tiger is a magnificent creature, yet how many people realise that they are critically endangered? For this series of paintings I chose to separate the animals from their habitat, because that is ultimately what we are doing. The tiger is trapped outside the forest, cornered. He is defensive and angry that we are sealing his fate.

*He is defensive and angry that we are sealing his fate.*

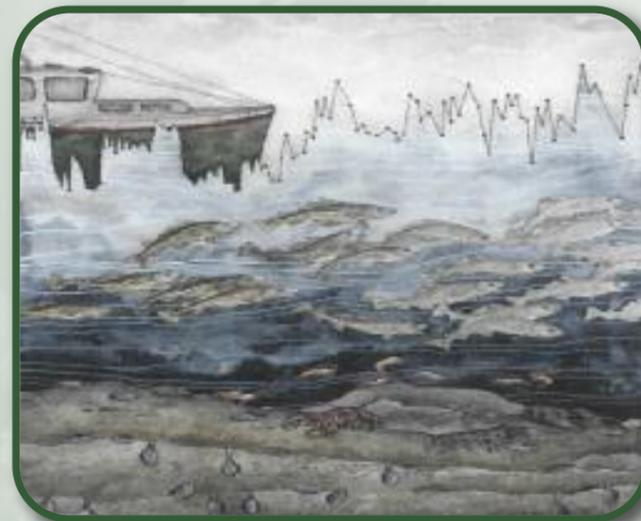


## Dwindling Migration (Caribou Medres)

*Dwindling Migration* uses data that documents the dramatic decline in caribou population herds, focusing on the George River Caribou Herd from 1980-present. Unfortunately, this trend is seen in most caribou herds globally.

**Climate Change Data**

*Climate Change Data* uses multiple quantities: the annual decrease in global glacier mass balance, global sea level rise, and global temperature increase. I wanted to convey in an image how all of this data must be compared and linked together to figure out the fluctuations in Earth's natural history. One of the reasons scientists study what happened in the past is to understand what may happen now as a result of human-induced climate change. I represented this by illustrating that glaciers are melting and calving, sea levels are rising, and temperatures are increasing. The numbers on the left y-axis depict quantities of glacial melt and sea level rise, and the suns across the horizon contain numbers that represent the global increase in temperature, coinciding with the timeline on the lower x-axis.



**Gulf of Maine Temperature Variability**

*Gulf of Maine Temperature Variability* tells the story of increasing temperature fluctuations in Maine's coastal marine environment. The watercolor uses ocean temperature data from the past 15 years to highlight how great variability affects various species including ourselves. The piece also highlights the inattention to the coupled relationship between human action and environmental responses that has contributed to depleted fish stocks and increased ocean acidification. The Gulf of Maine story spans the water column: from the burrowing clams and bottom-dwelling lobster and shrimp, to the overfished cod which disappear across the painting as they struggle to return to a changing habitat, and finally up to the surface where fishers and managers may adopt sustainable practices or continue the practices that have resulted in overfishing and by-catch. Each species has a complex interaction with the environment and if the imbalance of our give-and-take relationship with the ocean persists, we will continue to see new stresses that irreversibly change ocean conditions within the intertidal mudflats and into the yet unexplored ocean depths.



**Landscape of Change**

*Landscape of Change* uses data about sea level rise, glacier volume decline, increasing global temperatures, and the increasing use of fossil fuels. These date lines compose a landscape shaped by the changing climate, a world in which we are now living.



**Salmon Population Decline**

*Salmon Population Decline* uses population data about the Coho species. Seeing the rivers and reservoirs looking so barren was frightening; the snowpack in the mountains and on the glaciers supplies a lot of the water for this region, and the additional lack of precipitation has greatly depleted the state's hydrosphere. Consequently, the water level in the rivers the salmon spawn in is very low, and not cold enough for them. The salmon are depicted swimming along the length of the graph, following its current. While salmon can swim upstream, it is becoming more of an uphill battle with lower stream flow and higher temperatures. This image depicts the struggle their population is facing as their spawning habitat declines.

**Increasing Forest Fire Activity**

*Increasing Forest Fire Activity* uses global temperature rise information. Fortunately, I was not near any of the massive forest fires that raged before, during, and after my two weeks in Washington, summer 2015, but I was greeted with many smoke-filled days. On some days, when the winds blew from the fire toward us, the smell and taste of the smoke overpowered my senses, even though the fire was about 100 miles away. As temperatures increase, and drought and drier than average conditions persist, forest fires become a huge threat to the forest, plants, animals – and of course to people and structures.



**Habitat Degradation: Arctic Sea Ice Melt**

*Habitat Degradation: Arctic Sea Ice Melt* shows Arctic sea ice data from 1980 to the present time. Rapid warming in the Arctic has caused the sea ice area to decline so quickly that species cannot adjust. The Arctic fox is small and extraordinarily resilient to the most severe cold. They can withstand the frigid north and thus have this corner of the world in which to hunt. But when the temperatures mellow, competition from larger species could overcome them, as other species move further north to escape their own warming environment. I painted the Arctic foxes to look cornered and skittish. One is hunched and defensive, the other is yowling in panic. The sea ice, from which they are separated, is spaced out by large expanses of dark blue water absorbing the sun's heat.

*“One is hunched and defensive,  
the other is yowling in panic.”*

# Curlew Moon

BY MARY COLWELL

PUB. WM. COLLINS APRIL 2018

I first met Mary Colwell on a retreat for religious leaders, writers and broadcasters passionate about the environment. Christians, Muslims and Jews, we had in common the same love of nature, rooted in our faith, and a fervent commitment to turn it into action. Mary was in the final planning stages for her 500 mile pilgrimage across Britain in aid of the curlew.

“Why curlews?” I remember asking her. I half knew already as I had heard their haunting cry across the mudflats in a wooded cove in northern Scotland: their song had sounded like a hermit’s raga in homage to the oncoming night.

“Because curlews are emblematic” she explained “their swiftly falling numbers epitomise the fate of so many other species”.



Shropshire Curlews - Andrew Fusak Peters

But it was also clear that Mary harboured a deep love for these remarkable birds, with their endearingly large bodies, long necks and even longer, rounded beaks. ‘I stop short of giving each one a kiss on the head’, she notes in her book, when she describes how she helps catch a small number of the birds and attach miniscule transmitters to them. This is in the hope that they will send back information essential to understanding their complex needs, and protection of the perilous routes of their migrations.

Mary’s pilgrimage takes her from the west coast of Ireland, through Wales and across central England to the east coast of England, in pursuit of knowledge about the fate of curlews in landscapes where they were once common, but are now, almost everywhere, in steep decline or entirely absent: the countryside now silent where once it was filled with their song. Wherever she goes she meets local enthusiasts, joins meetings to discuss the fate of the birds, and reflects on their place in local literature and legend.

As we travel with her through the pages of her book *Curlew Moon*, we learn about the curlew’s impact on diarists, naturalists and poets: they bring joy to the heart with a ‘bubbling call, most often heard in the breeding season’. But when the sky darkens, writes the Irish poet James McKowen, then ‘give me, oh! Give me that song from the cloud / The voice of the wailing curlew’ (p. 48). And when the sea winds grow violent, the curlew is the ‘storm bird’ calling out an urgent warning to fishermen. But above all, it touches the heart with...

*Music as desolate, as beautiful  
as your loved places,  
mountainy marshes and glistening mudflats  
by the stealthy sea...*  
Norman MacCaig



Peat Bog



Shropshire Curlews - Andrew Fusak Peters

Colwell details the many dangers with which the curlew is threatened. The single greatest factor is intensive farming, with its consequent impoverishment of the former rich range of land use and the destruction of meadows, hedgerows, wild spaces and wetlands in favour of vast swathes of monoculture. Hay fields, once left uncut until mid-summer, are now mowed regularly for silage, often literally cutting to pieces the birds which nest in them. Increased numbers of sheep and cattle present a further threat to ground nesting birds. Meanwhile, forestry plantations, sometimes established for the best of reasons, to offset carbon emissions, mean greater numbers of predators, especially foxes and crows. The result is that in habitat after habitat where they were once numerous, curlews now fail to raise any chicks. If the eggs are not eaten (neatly by foxes, messily by badgers, cunningly by crows which make a hole in the shell and pour out the contents) then the fledglings are predated, trodden on by sheep or mowed to pieces.

The precise causes of the curlew’s decline differ however, from place to place. In Ireland, it is the swift, vast destruction of ancient peat bogs which is most to blame. Mary describes her encounter with an elderly priest: those bogs “were the only

places I could walk out into and scream”, he tells her. She herself wants ‘to scream’ at the lack of appreciation of the natural world. In Wales, it is the swollen numbers of grazers which have turned much of the country into what George Monbiot has called a ‘sheepwreck’. In England, paradoxically, some of the last remaining curlew strongholds are the grouse moors. The birds benefit from the careful management of the land by gamekeepers, especially the strict control of predators. A recent report describes Britain as one of the most ‘nature-depleted countries in the world’.

When she explains the rapidity of the decline of the curlew, Mary’s audiences are often shocked. It seems to her sometimes that the birds have slipped away so quietly that people have scarcely noticed the absence of their once familiar music.

But almost everywhere she travels, Mary also finds cause for hope, especially in the work of small groups of local enthusiasts. They have an advantage over larger NGOs in that they can act quickly, working in close cooperation with farmers and other interest groups. For, at least among the older generations, the love of curlews remains steadfast.



Shropshire Curlews - Andrew Fusak Peters

While she stresses the need for urgent action, she is also aware of the complexity of the bird's needs. Like many other species, curlews cover wide ranges of countries and habitats. But wherever they are, they invariably have to compete with other pressing interests: the demands of a growing human population with an expectation of cheap, readily available food. The consequent difficulties faced by farmers in making a livelihood from the land, even the impact of such new technologies as wind farms, introduced to replace fossil fuels. Yet 'curlews can give us nothing in return but songs of the soul and a glimpse of wildness'.

*Curlew Moon* is about far more than curlews alone, remarkable as they are. Their fate symbolises a more profound potential loss, to the human spirit as well as to nature. As Colwell stresses, quoting John Lewis-Stempel in *Meadowland*, should the curlews 'fail to appear we will have entered some ecological end time'.

The call of the curlew requires us to reconsider and question not only our environmental priorities and practices, but, even more fundamentally, the role we play as an integral part of creation.

'Wildlife', Colwell notes sadly, 'has to pay rent on land that is no longer theirs. The heart sinks at the thought that only what can be monetarised will survive in our materialist, competitive, over-populated future.'



Multi Use Farmed Britain



Curlew over Tooman Bog



Mary Colwell

*The heart sinks at the thought that only what can be monetarised will survive in our materialist, competitive, over-populated future.*



# “What can we do to end FGC?”

Julia Lalla-Maharajh OBE was volunteering in Ethiopia in 2010 when she first came across, at grass roots level, the practice of female genital cutting (FGC). Reading in a travel guide that 74% of women in the country undergo FGC, and realising the pain and long-term consequences that many of the women around her must have been living with, galvanised her into action. She took the decision there and then to focus on raising global awareness of the practice, and to contribute towards bringing it to an end.

FGC contravenes human, child and women's rights. There are no known health benefits, and research has shown that it is not a religious requirement: it is a cultural practice and a social norm that impacts girls and women in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, as well as within diaspora communities globally. Overall it impacts women and girls in at least 45 countries.

FGC is the full or partial removal of a girl's external genitals. On average, a girl will be cut before the age of five, although this varies between different communities around the

world; from being cut at birth, in girlhood or during adolescence. The practice is dangerous and can have devastating effects on women and girls throughout the different stages of their lives – both physically and psychologically.

## In Childhood

The potential impacts of FGC include shock, fear, pain, haemorrhage, infection, septicaemia, tetanus, HIV transmission due to unsterilized instruments, problems urinating and, in some cases, death.

## During Girlhood

At puberty, FGC can continue to damage a girl's health and welfare. The effects at this stage of life may include urinary infections, chronic pelvic inflammation, painful periods due to infibulation, scar tissue, cysts, abscesses, ulcers, problems urinating, poor academic performance, school drop-out and economic disparity.



Declaration in Senegal: photograph by Clement Tardiff and Orchid Project

### In Marriage

FGC has a strong link with child and early marriage. A girl is often cut to ensure her marriageability, or in preparation for marriage. At this stage of life, the impacts of FGC may include painful sex, adverse psycho-sexual effects, forcible penetration as a result of infibulation, being re-cut to allow for penetration, and decreased fertility.

### During Pregnancy & Childbirth

FGC has a direct impact on maternal and infant mortality. The impacts of the practice include women being 70% more likely to suffer haemorrhage after giving birth; being twice as likely to die in childbirth; having a higher likelihood of stillbirth due to obstructed labour, and impacts including obstetric fistula, foetal asphyxia, and perineal tears.

### In Later Life

FGC can cause long term physical and psychological impacts including traumatic stress disorders, depression, memory loss, isolation, marital problems, and flashbacks to obstetric complications.

Following Julia's experiences in Ethiopia she created a three-minute video and, following its global circulation, she was invited to the World Economic Forum in Davos and awarded the right to take part in a global vote. At the forum Julia participated in a panel to discuss and debate the issue of FGC with the head of UNICEF, Amnesty International, and the UN Foundation. The debate was facilitated by *Half the Sky* co-author, Nick Kristof.

The main question brought to Julia at Davos was: "What can we do to end FGC?" and she found the answer to this after visiting Tostan, a Senegal-based NGO, in early 2011. Tostan's community empowerment-based education programme has helped lead to the widespread public declarations of FGC abandonment in communities across West Africa, and for the first time, Julia was coming into contact with people who were talking openly about the practice as being harmful to women, rather than viewing it as a taboo subject, to be glossed over as a practice beyond discussion and debate. Returning from Senegal she realised that in order to bring about real change, setting up a charity with the sole purpose of ending FGC was the right course of action, and in 2011 Orchid Project was founded in order to fulfil this role.

**Over 200 million women and girls worldwide are living with the impacts of FGC today, and at least another 3.9 million girls are at risk of being cut within the next year.**



Julia meeting with children in Ethiopia: photograph by Orchid Project

Orchid Project's mission is: to foster and accelerate abandonment of FGC around the world. To achieve this, Orchid Project works through:

### Sharing

Orchid Project catalyses the abandonment of FGC globally by sharing knowledge between its partners and across the wider movement. They disseminate research and best practice through Knowledge Sharing Workshops, which bring representatives together to learn and create networks of local organisations working to end FGC. Orchid Project also supports global activists and grassroots partners to attend the Tostan Training Centre in Senegal to understand how change can happen.

### Advocacy

Orchid Project advocates globally to governments and decision makers to ensure that ending FGC is a priority. Orchid Project believes that FGC can only end with the help of stakeholders at every level; from community members, to regional, national and international actors. They make the case for FGC to be represented in frameworks and policies, as it is in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and for work to be fully resourced.

### Partnering

Orchid Project partners with inspirational grassroots organisations that are promoting an end to FGC through non-directive, human rights-led approaches. They believe in respectful, non-judgemental community dialogue around issues of FGC. Orchid Project currently support partners working within communities in Kenya, India, and Senegal that deliver a sustainable, proven end to FGC.

### OUR PARTNERS

#### TOSTAN

Tostan is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) based in Senegal. They deliver a 30-month long human-rights based Community Empowerment Programme (CEP), which takes an holistic, social norms-based approach, and engenders a collective community decision to abandon FGC. Orchid Project supports Tostan's Social Mobilisa on Programme, which allows teams of volunteers from communities who have chosen to abandon the practice to travel and spread the message of abandonment to surrounding communities.

An external review found that since 2012, Tostan's Social Mobilisa on Agents have reached over 48,000 people in 876 villages in Senegal. In Senegal, 247 communities declared that they are abandoning FGC through Tostan's Social Mobilisa on Programme.

#### COVAW

Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) works throughout Kenya on three key strands of work: access to justice, movement building, and advocacy and communications. Orchid Project is supporting COVAW to grow its project work, which focuses on shifting negative social and gender norms and attitudes that perpetuate FGC among the Maasai people in Narok.

COVAW carried out a 3-month pilot project supported by Orchid Project to raise awareness around FGC, which reached 930 people in the Narok region of Kenya.

#### ECAW

Education Center for the Advancement of Women (ECAW) is a grassroots organisation working for the rights and empowerment of girls and women in Kuria, South West Kenya. Orchid Project works alongside ECAW to deliver a programme that facilitates a movement of champion girls and paralegals who spread the message across the region of how FGC can end.

In Kuria, South West Kenya, ECAW reached over 4,000 people with their programme, 'Positive Choices towards the abandonment of FGC' through 60 workshops between October 2016 and June 2017.

#### SAFE Maa

SAFE Maa works with the Maasai of the Loita Hills, South West Kenya, using an FGC abandonment programme devised by a team of staff from the Maasai community.

They spread the word of FGC abandonment through traditional performances which are interwoven with human rights messaging. Together with the community, SAFE Maa have developed an alternative rite of passage which allows a girl to graduate into womanhood while remaining uncut.

In the Loita Hills, South West Kenya, 33% of girls from the Maasai community went through an alternative rite of passage and remained uncut as a result of the work of SAFE Maa between 2010 and 2017.

#### SAHIYO

Sahiyo is a transnational organisation with a mission to empower the Dawoodi Bohra community in India, South Asia and the diaspora to, end FGC and create positive social change. They work through advocacy and community dialogue on issues that affect the lives of women and girls, including FGC.



Photograph: Orchid Project

Over 200 million women and girls worldwide are living with the impacts of FGC today, and at least another 3.9 million girls are at risk of being cut within the next year.

We have joined global conversations to champion the cause of bringing FGC to an end at conferences such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the International Conference on Global Adolescent Health.

Our approach to ending the practice considers that FGC is a social norm which is held in place by an entire community. Parents will have their daughter cut because they believe it is the right thing to do for social acceptance, and because it is an expectation held in place by their whole community. It is difficult for individual families to stop the practice on their own, for risk of social sanctions. One of the most effective ways for a community to abandon FGC is through a collective process of deliberation, often followed by a public declaration.

# 'Our Sheer Presence'

*“Educating in fraternity is an essential part of interreligious dialogue and women are often committed more than men in this area, and so contribute to a better understanding of the challenges, characteristic of a multicultural reality.”*

Pope Francis, Vatican City, Jun 9, 2017

It is hard to get away from the image of a religious leader as an older man in robes. Historically it is mostly men who have occupied the up front leadership roles in religious traditions; Popes, Priests, Imams, Sheikhs, Ministers, Rabbi's, Lamas, Masters. In theological debate men have dominated and it is hard to deny the patriarchal structures of the world's religious traditions. To be a religious leader gives a man a position of great power and influence, albeit a position also of great responsibility. Women have played critical and important roles in religious communities, often educating and nurturing the community, and beautifying the religious space, but very rarely have they been given the title of religious leader.

In the last 100 years or more a new type of 'religious' organisation has evolved – interfaith group, community, organisation, – and into the leadership roles in the evolving interfaith space women have flocked, and have excelled in the new structures and ethos, often becoming Founders, Chairs, Directors, Presidents, CEO's and Developers of interfaith organisations.

Why is it that women thrive in an interfaith environment? What sort of leadership qualities are required for interfaith dialogue to flourish, and has years of supporting, loving and nurturing the faithful given women the necessary skills for 21st century religious engagement?

In trying to find answers to the above questions I came across an article in the Interfaith Observer (15 March 2012) where women from diverse religions, who had become interfaith leaders, were asked “What do women bring to the interfaith table?”. The answers were all so unique that I recommend everyone to read the full article, but I have taken a short excerpt from each woman's contribution to the discussion, and I hope that this gives a little insight into why women are flourishing in interfaith leadership.

## Kimberley Kin, Protestant

*My introduction to interfaith dialogue began 22 years ago via a series of discussions between a Christian minister and Jewish rabbi. They later grew to include a Catholic priest, a Muslim scholar, and a Buddhist monk. The exchanges were compelling, provocative, and I'm embarrassed admitting it took several sessions before I noticed there were no women participating.*

*So accustomed was I to seeing men, and only men, in leadership roles related to “church,” I did not recognize something was missing. In my corporate world I would have noted such inequity immediately. But in matters pertaining to God, I was preconditioned not to question. Eventually I raised questions.*

*In 2003, I travelled to Israel to attend an interfaith women's gathering...from the onset, every aspect of the women's convocation was different. They emphasized hospitality, ensuring everyone who entered felt welcome and seen. They began with a circle, rather than a panel, creating a sense of equality and unity. They engaged the whole person, invoking the powers of music, ritual and art. Girls and elders stood side by side, sharing personal stories about their lives and their dreams for the world. They allowed themselves to be vulnerable.*

*Looking back today, I have met men making an impassioned, compelling case for coexistence, rationally based, expanding my awareness and enlarging my field of possibilities. Women I've known have shown an innate capacity to build trust and cultivate community through the power of relationship and inclusion. And I've known brilliant, analytic women and deeply intuitive, relational men. The point is – between us and within us, the two energies do their best in mutual respect and dialogue, each engaging “the other” in essential, invaluable ways....we are in this together!*

## Pamela Jay Gottfried, Jewish

*As I study sacred texts of various faith traditions and engage in interfaith discussions, I find that women and men bring their individual concerns and perspectives to the table. Perhaps the greatest contribution that women can make is to add the timbre of female voices not only to the conversation but also to the sacred texts themselves. ...As a Jewish woman, I can bring only my own offerings to the interfaith table; when invited there, I strive to be wholly present and to speak with authenticity. I trust the women—along with the men—who sit beside me to share my intentions, and I pray the gifts I offer will serve as adornments at the interfaith table.*

## Rita M. Gross, Buddhist

*The most important thing that women bring to the interfaith table is our presence. I do not support theories of gender essentialism, which claim that women and men are fundamentally different, that men have a masculine essence different from women's feminine essence. Regarding most interfaith issues, I do not think that women offer different insights than men could. But because religions have been such a boys-only club, the presence of women at the interfaith table loudly proclaims a critical message that can be proclaimed no other way. Religions are no longer going to be male sanctuaries, closed off to women except for the supportive roles we have traditionally played.*

*Religions claim to have messages relevant to all human beings. ...The most important thing women bring to the interfaith table is our sheer presence. There is no other way for religions to live up to claims they make about their universal relevance.*

## Nahid Angha, Sufi Muslim

*My work with interfaith communities...began in early 1980s. I was invited to a dialogue and board membership in a local interfaith community, the Marin Interfaith Council. ... Over time my participation went beyond the local level. The Interfaith Center at the Presidio, a regional interfaith organization that welcomes and celebrates the diverse spiritual wisdom and faith traditions, invited me onto its board. Subsequently I served as president and represented the Center to the Goldin Institute, held in Spain.*

Dr Maureen Sier is Director of Interfaith Scotland

**in the evolving  
interfaith space  
women have flocked,  
and have excelled  
in the new  
structures and ethos**

*My global interfaith contributions began in the early 90s with involvement in the United Religions Initiative (URI) and Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR). ...I served as an assembly member for Parliament's conferences in South Africa, Spain, and Mexico, where I was a presenter and panel organizer.*

*My work in the interfaith movement developed, hand in hand, with creating an intrafaith movement within my Islamic Sufi community. This led to the creation of the International Association of Sufism, a UN NGO/DPI and the establishment of the Sufi Women's Organization, whose focus is education to acknowledge and recognize a leadership role for Sufi Muslim women.*

*I have been most fortunate in all of this. My fellow travellers, in both interfaith and Muslim communities, have been respectful and welcoming of these endeavours. The historical developments of the past quarter century have finally created a forum where women may claim their rightful seat at the center of the interfaith movement.*

The final story demonstrates most clearly the leadership trajectory of a woman of faith who, in serving in an interfaith capacity, was able to take a leadership role in local, regional and global platforms, eventually establishing a leadership role in her own faith tradition.

The conflicted world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century surely needs both interfaith dialogue and women in leadership roles if the structures of oppression that dominate our world are to be challenged and transformed.



# Mindfully Together

## Zen and Quaker practice: a sharing of spiritual paths and friendship

Zen and Quaker traditions are annually brought together in the 'Mindfully Together' joint Zen-Quaker retreat, now in its twelfth year. In 2018 the retreat was, once again, held at the Quaker Study Centre at Woodbrooke near Birmingham from 26<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August, providing an opportunity for the Community of Interbeing (i.e. the followers of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh) to come together with Quaker Friends in a complementary sharing of spiritual journeys to nourish mutual understanding and shared insights. As retreat organisers and participants we offer an exploration of both spiritual traditions.

### Two Reforming Teachers: two traditions

The founder of the Order of Interbeing is Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926, affectionately known as 'Thay' i.e. teacher), a reforming teacher for modern times who has translated many Zen (Buddhist) teachings into highly accessible western forms. So determined was Thay to live in accordance with the ethical guidance and spiritual understanding of the Buddha, the Awakened One, that he came to the west in the 1960s on a mission for peace, to try and halt the war in his home country of Vietnam. Unexpectedly forced into exile, he founded a thriving Monastic Centre called 'Plum Village,' in Southern France. This kernel has now grown into a large global community with followers, lay and monastic practitioners, and other monastic centres, across the world.

The founder of the Society of Friends, also known as Quakers, was George Fox (1624-1691), a reforming figure of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Society arose in a Christian context and drew from that Christian heritage and teachings of Christ, the Anointed One. However, so determined was George Fox to explore his own spiritual vocation and understanding of God free from the constraints of traditional Christian forms that he was viewed as a threat to the religious and political authorities at the time and was imprisoned on many occasions. In the present situation of interfaith dialogue and understanding, many Friends draw on ethical guidance and meaning from other faiths.

These great reforming teachers share an unwavering service to their respective spiritual paths.

### The two teachings in practice

In Zen Practice practitioners gather in a group to sit either on a meditation cushion or on a chair (sometimes also to walk) in silence while supported by the gentle sound of a bell to 'mindfully' meditate, follow their own breathing and 'dwell in the present moment.' The practice of 'mindfulness meditation', available to everyone, allows the transformation of an individual's suffering (under the practitioner's own volition) and an 'opening of the heart' to love and compassion in the service of others. There is no God in Buddhism: the historical Buddha was a man called Siddhartha Gautama (c. 6th century BCE) who left us the Dharma (i.e. teachings). Understanding of the Dharma based on individual experience may be voiced (or not) in a Dharma Sharing group.

In order for the practice to be authentic, integral and engaged, the fruits of meditation need to be applied in daily life, in thoughts, speech and action.

Quaker Worship may vary from this in form but Friends also gather in a group to sit on chairs in a comfortable room in silence. An individual's understanding rests on the experience that a 'Seed' of the holy, of God, rests in every person while they look to allow life to be guided by their own experience of the light of God. An opening to God can be discovered without a priest and the light of the Kingdom of Heaven is available 'now' in this world. Friends sit in gathered silence until 'called' by God to share (or not). Ministry may come from anyone during worship so any member of the group may stand and speak. Sometimes no one speaks; a deep and profound silence can develop. There are many views of God amongst Friends, expressed in numerous ways while 'God is love' sits at the centre of understanding with an emphasis on humility and listening to others. Since infinite truths cannot be contained in finite words there are no creeds and a commitment to be honest at all times means that Quakers do not take oaths.

The practices of the two traditions share key features in common e.g. silent practice, respect for one's own experience as well as that of others, equality of all, peace, social justice, community life and freedom of conscience. The natural environment is also hugely important with emphasis on simple living to minimise any impact on the world.

### On Zen and Quaker writings

A series of writings underpin both traditions, which also have features in common.

In Zen, practitioners see the Dharma as deeply inspirational and a key to understanding (and therefore study the Dharma, attend Dharma talks and engage in Dharma Sharing) but may also read many other books including the Bible as a guide to their life and spiritual path. Meanwhile, underpinning Zen teachings are the 'Five Mindfulness Trainings' (i.e. precepts) taken by practitioners in support of their practice (common to all Buddhist paths) and provide an ethical basis for living life. These are to refrain from: harming living things, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying or gossiping, and ingesting intoxicants.

Friends reflect their understandings in their main book 'Quaker Faith and Practice,' writings accumulated over almost four centuries that sit alongside the Bible, and which are regularly revised to reflect new insights. 'Quaker Testimonies' are the forms of witness that have emerged from seeking to be open to the Spirit of God at all times. This has led them to emphasise: the adherence to truth (i.e. no lying); the principle of equality while embracing care for the whole of planet Earth (with all given respect and justice); simplicity of living (and rejection of greed); an embrace of peace (and rejection of killing) with action towards conflict resolution. Friends also have a tradition of literature known as 'Advices and Queries,' a short reminder of the insights of their Society, which each individual may personally consider particularly in relation to service. They regard the Bible as a deeply inspirational book but may also read many other sources and religious texts including Buddhist texts.

So striking has been the ethical and practice overlap of the central Buddhist teachings of the Five Mindfulness Trainings with the Quaker Testimonies, as reflected in aspects of 'Advices and Queries,' that Audrey Urry (Quaker) and Lesley Collington (Zen Practitioner) have jointly produced a booklet entitled 'A Contemplation of Shared Insights: the Five mindfulness Trainings and Advices and Queries,' which highlights the similarities of the two ethical approaches.

### Practising together

The retreat in August 2018 was led by Sister TrueVirtue (Annabel), Head of Practice at the European Institute for Applied Buddhism in Germany, which teaches according to the Plum Village tradition and benefited greatly from her series of Dharma talks.

### Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Tim P. Ashworth, Tutor in Biblical Studies and Interfaith Coordinator at the Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre, Birmingham, who kindly read and provided various re-wordings for the Quaker sections of this article.

### For further reference

Copies of the booklet 'Contemplations of Shared Insights: The Five Mindfulness Trainings and Advices & Queries' can be obtained from the Community of Interbeing book service at [www.plumvillage.uk](http://www.plumvillage.uk)

the retreat provided a wonderful and enriching opportunity for us to come together in our aspiration to 'go as a river' in relationship with others.

She was supported by both Zen monastics from Plum Village, Southern France and the Lay Order. Integrated into the retreat schedule, Quaker practices included a daily morning 'Meeting for Worship' and an evening 'Epilogue', while a talk on Quaker practice was also offered. Overall, the retreat provided a wonderful and enriching opportunity for us to come together in our aspiration to 'go as a river' in relationship with others.

### Observations from personal experience

As a Practitioner in Thay's Zen tradition but raised in the west within the Christian tradition, I (Harry) found the more theistic language of Quaker Worship natural, meaningful and enriching, while engagement with Quaker practices resulted in fresh insights. During the course of the retreat, the notion of 'two separate traditions' gradually grew less apparent with a sense that exposure to the two forms of spiritual practice results in a deep complementary enrichment.

Photograph: Lorna Douglas

R. Harry Bradshaw (Dharma name: 'True Pure Peace') & Lesley Collington (Dharma name: 'True Lotus of Joy')  
Zen practitioners and students of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.

OF

# Old Patterns New Life

## From Painted Prayers to Mango Mosaics

I've defected! My creative process has shifted from painting into mosaic, I now see myself as *painting in mosaic*. The added delight is that I can use my sense of humour in my work, creating visual jokes and puns. I assemble shards of patterned crockery to create a quirky bird, or a scuffling hedgehog, and identify designs on cups and plates that evoke resemblance to a face. Mosaic has broadened my creative approach, using a given pattern helps free up new possibilities and wider choices for invention.

While painting I yearned to build up layers to bring about texture and depth. I felt I strived to evoke texture in my painting, whereas in mosaic, texture is real in the embossed surfaces and undulating forms of ceramic crockery. I use all nature of ceramic materials, plain and etched crockery, sparkly glass tiles and gold pattern edges that directly translate into something like a sari border, a necklace or a woman's features.

I collect crockery wherever I can find it – from charity shops, car boot sales, fleamarkets etc. I also have what I call 'crock fairies' who very kindly leave boxes of broken crockery on my doorstep: a smashed favourite bowl or cup does not have to be added to landfill. That is another of the thrills of working with these materials – its sustainability: the knowledge that I am not extracting from the earth's resources, or adding to the problems of pollution, but recycling materials that are no longer usable in their original form. Some may think of these materials as waste but to me they are gold.

The Big Sleuth 2017



Hodge Hill College 2018

### Mosaic speaks

I describe myself as *picassiette* mosaic artist. *Picassiette* is a French slang term meaning 'stolen from plate'. It is as though I am freeing the crockery pattern from a teapot or a serving dish to give new life. The mosaic speaks to the human condition. It works on many levels. People are reminded of crockery from their childhood; there is a positive reminiscence connected to their own story.

In 2014, I found this most poignant while installing a large commissioned piece for the New Haven Assessment Unit, Princess of Wales Hospital, Bromsgrove. New Haven is an early assessment unit for dementia care.

While installing the mosaic in the garden courtyard, a nurse persuaded a reluctant patient to come and see the work I had created. Once setting her eyes on the mosaic her sadness lifted and her whole demeanor brightened. She said that it reminded her of the type of crockery she had used as a young woman - I realised it had awakened happy memories. This strikes at the very core of why I create, to provide space, time and opportunity for enriching encounters such as this.

### My Heritage

My work is inspired by my Gujarati Indian heritage. My cultural background is a rich cache of ideas that have relevance to my story. I consider themes around ritual and custom, as well as how I define myself through my love of music, dance and horticulture.

Mosaic has given me a new freedom to develop ideas, whether for school and community projects, humorous pieces for craft fairs or for investigating themes for exhibition work. All speak of different facets of my story.

Making with mosaic is unlimited. New ideas blossom when I come across new crockery. The pattern and texture will inspire me into making. I use happy accidents and mistakes freely.

My favourite happy accident came about when I saw a cup fragment of Kilncraft Bacchus. The pattern resembled an eye. I now deliberately and carefully cut out this crockery to make eyes.

*Pareidolia* is the name given to finding associated images from an object. We use to do it as children; we see rabbits in clouds, faces on rock cliffs, even the man on the moon. I have discovered that I am using this consciously and unconsciously in my creative process.



“fundamentally mosaic is about decision-making”



Yardley Wood Community Primary School 2014



The Big Sleuth 2017



The Peace Poppy Commission 2018 Work in Progress



Park Hill Primary School Commission September 2014

### Well-being jig-saw

There is something potent when mosaic-making with broken, chipped, discarded, rejected and second-hand crockery. Using the unwanted and making it desirable; transforming *ugly* into a thing of *beauty*. The everyday, thrown away, is picked up and cherished... sometimes by the very people that rejected the item in the first place!

Mosaic can play a vital role in our well-being. We can use it to be reflective within our own circumstances, by literally piecing together a new meaning or helping to see what is there already.

Mosaic can be a strong metaphor that is played out in a creative form. It can be a reflection-in-action. At the beginning of my mosaic workshops for adults, I tell participants that fundamentally mosaic is about decision-making. Mosaic is about deciding on colour, shape, texture and size, regardless of the subject matter content. Our creativity can give insights into how we embellish and reflect our life in a wider context, from free form makers to high perfectionists.

The Big Hoot 2015



### The beginnings of International Projects

In 2013 International Chilean mosaic artist, Isidora Paz Lopez, invited applications to participate in an international mosaic project following the success of the huge urban intervention in Puente Alto, Chile. Using the theme of endangered plants and animal species, her team of 60 mosaic artists, decorated 84 pillars connecting the metropolis of Santiago to the outskirts of the city in Puente Alto.

Isidora put out a call on social media for an International Intervention. Over 700 artists applied to be part of this amazing opportunity. I was one of the artists invited. Sixty international professional mosaic artists from around the world

including USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and 23 Chilean mosaic artists created an epic 100 metre wall mosaic of the external wall of Puente Alto's Metropolitan Town Hall. I found it an awe inspiring project where true camaraderie, sharing of techniques and ideas was the norm.

The Chile Project was the first of many international initiatives. Since then, I have been part of projects and run workshops in Bodrum, Turkey; Gurgaon, India; Espoo, Finland.

In November and December of this year, I will be travelling to Singapore, Australia and New Zealand to run a series of mosaic workshops. While there, we will be discussing the potential collaboration of a community mosaic project in 2020.

In addition, 2019 promises to be a year of large scale projects in the UK - in schools and community.

*I also have what I call 'crock fairies' who very kindly leave boxes of broken crockery on my doorstep*

# Peaceful Coexistence

As a Syrian by origin I remember good interfaith relations in my country. It was something always to be celebrated and cherished because it was the Syrian way of life. The mingling of the sound of the church bells with the call for prayer from the high minarets, depicted a beautiful picture of worshipping God in a perfect coexistence. Interfaith was a blessing and a source of pride for all Syrians regardless of their background. Interfaith relationships have enriched the Syrian communities and made them vibrant in every aspect of life. The Syrian knowledge and awareness of each other's beliefs displayed tolerance, love and brotherhood among its people and communities.

Communities could live side by side, and most neighbourhoods were so diverse religiously that Churches would stand next to mosques, and mosques next to temples, the memory of which reminds me now of the peaceful coexistence in my country. Tragically, after the Arab spring, which turned catastrophic, interfaith relations were strangled and emptied of its true beautiful meaning. Throughout the long years of the civil war, hatred has spread like a wild fire that has engulfed all the communities, and very few people are able to forgive after the horrendous bloodshed, and the almost total destruction of the country as we knew it.



The Great Mosque of Aleppo - Syria  
Severly damaged in the conflict 2013

*...interfaith relations were strangled and emptied of its true beautiful meaning.*

# ACKNOWLEDGING THE UNACKNOWLEDGED

Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) believes that the history of racial inequality and economic injustice in the United States has created continuing challenges for all Americans, and more must be done to advance our collective goal of equal justice for all. The United States has done very little to acknowledge the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. As a result, people of colour are disproportionately marginalized, disadvantaged and mistreated. The American criminal justice system is compromised by racial disparities and unreliability that is influenced by a presumption of guilt and dangerousness that is often assigned to people of colour. For more than a decade, EJI has been conducting extensive research into the history of racial injustice and the narratives that have sustained injustice across generations. Our new museum – **The Legacy**

**Museum** - is the physical manifestation of that research.

**The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration**, opened to the public on April 26, 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama. The 11,000-square-foot museum is built on the site of a former warehouse where enslaved black people were imprisoned, and is located midway between an historic slave market and the main river dock and train station where tens of thousands of enslaved people were trafficked during the height of the domestic slave trade. Montgomery's proximity to the fertile Black Belt region, where slave-owners amassed large enslaved populations to work the rich soil, elevated Montgomery's prominence in domestic trafficking, and by 1860, Montgomery was the capital of the domestic slave trade in Alabama, one of the two largest slave-owning states in America.



Nkyinkim Installation Kwame Akoto Bamfo

To justify the brutal, dehumanizing institution of slavery in America, its advocates created a narrative of racial difference. Stereotypes and false characterizations of black people were disseminated to defend their permanent enslavement as “most necessary to the well-being of the negro” – an ‘act of kindness’ that reinforced white supremacy. The formal abolition of slavery did nothing to overcome the harmful ideas created to defend it, and so slavery did not end: it evolved.

Racial subordination was codified and enforced by violence in the era of Jim Crow\* and segregation, as the nation and its leaders allowed black people to be burdened, beaten, and marginalized throughout the 20th century. The beliefs in racial hierarchy took new expression in convict leasing, lynching, and other forms of racial terrorism that forced the exodus of millions of black Americans from the South to the North and West of the country: where the narrative of racial difference ultimately manifested in urban ghettos and generational poverty.

In the report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, EJI documented more than 4400 lynchings of black people in the United States between 1877 and 1950, identifying 800 more lynchings than had previously been

recognized. Racial terror lynchings were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized black people throughout the country, and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials. They were acts of violence at the core of a systematic campaign of terror perpetuated in furtherance of an unjust social order. These lynchings were terrorism.

The lynching era left thousands dead; it significantly marginalized black people in the country's political, economic, and social systems; and as it fuelled a massive migration of black refugees out of the South, it permanently reshaped the demographics of America. In addition, lynching - and other forms of racial terrorism - inflicted deep traumatic and psychological wounds on survivors, witnesses, family members, and the entire African American community.

Progress towards civil rights for African Americans was made in the 1960s, but the narrative of racial inferiority was not eradicated. Black Americans were vulnerable to a new era of racial bias and abuse of power wielded by our contemporary criminal justice system. Mass incarceration has had devastating consequences for people of colour: at the dawn of the 21st century, one in three black baby boys is projected to go to jail or prison in his lifetime.

*The formal abolition of slavery did nothing to overcome the harmful ideas created to defend it, and so slavery did not end: it evolved.*

Hank Willis Thomas Sculpture



Slavery Evolved Wall

**Why Build a Memorial to Victims of Racial Terror?**

EJI believes that publicly confronting the truth about our history is the first step towards recovery and reconciliation. A history of racial injustice must be acknowledged, and mass atrocities and abuse must be recognized and remembered, before a society can recover from mass violence. Public commemoration plays a significant role in prompting community-wide reconciliation. A sacred space for truth-telling and reflection about racial terrorism and its legacy is provided by EJI'S National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice are part of EJI's work to advance truth and reconciliation around race in America and to more honestly confront the legacy of slavery, lynching, and segregation. “Our nation’s history of racial injustice casts a shadow across the American landscape,” EJI Director Bryan Stevenson explains. “This shadow cannot be lifted until we shine the light of truth on the destructive violence that shaped our nation, traumatized people of colour, and compromised our commitment to the rule of law and to equal justice.”



**PUBLIC COMMEMORATION  
PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE  
IN PROMPTING  
COMMUNITY-WIDE  
RECONCILIATION.**

*Equal Justice Initiative is a private, non-profit organization that provides legal representation to indigent defendants and prisoners who have been denied fair and just treatment in the legal system. Headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, it litigates on behalf of condemned prisoners, juvenile offenders, people wrongly convicted or charged with violent crimes, poor people denied effective representation, and others whose trials are marked by racial bias or prosecutorial misconduct. The organization works with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment, and also prepares reports, newsletters, and manuals to assist advocates and policymakers in the critically important work of reforming the administration of criminal justice.*

*Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. Mr. Stevenson is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned. Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill and aiding children prosecuted as adults. EJI recently won an historic ruling in the U.S. Supreme Court holding that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger are unconstitutional.*

EJI Website: <https://eji.org/>  
Museum and Memorial Website: <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/>

\*‘Jim Crow’ is the name given to the racial segregation laws that operated primarily in the Southern States between 1877 and mid 1960s.

# Releasing the Heart

## *with Dance*

Many years ago, I attended a Five Rhythm dance workshop with a friend. Developed in the 60's the dance sequence draws its inspiration from world traditions using dimensions of shamanism, mysticism and elements from the ecstatic realm. Its underlying belief is that the universe - you, me and the largest star - is nothing but a configuration of energy that moves in waves, flow, rhythms and patterns. By moving the body to a repertoire of music, it is claimed, we can release the heart, still the mind and thereby connect to the spiritual realm – that something outside of us that is so much 'bigger' than us.

I was reluctant to attend at first but sensing my friend's enthusiasm I decided to go along. It was a large, spacious studio with about twelve people attending. The Five Rhythms consisted of Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical and Stillness. The music itself provided the guide to dancing, with a minimal amount of instructions from the tutor.

As we went through the different movements I noticed that everyone was expressing themselves individually, and yet strangely enough there a dimension of unison being played out.

“ We carry lots of tension  
in our bodies, which only the  
*dance can reach...* ”

Some dancers were reaching out to touch others with their hands, whilst others were playing out their own individual 'destiny' in the far corners of the dance studio.

At the end of the session I felt exhausted and yet elated, tired yet excited, aching yet euphoric. Whilst I was lying down to regain my energy I noticed a man visibly weeping. After the class I spoke to the tutor about this incident. She said that it often occurred in her classes because it is a time of profound emotional release. “We carry lots of tension in our bodies, which only the dance can reach...” she said quietly and calmly. I made my exit and reflected on her words for the rest of the day.....

*“Dance, dance, wherever you may be  
I am the lord of the dance, said he  
And I lead you all, wherever you may be  
And I lead you all in the dance, said he.”*

Lord of the Dance: written by Sydney Carter 1963

## DONATION/SUBSCRIPTION

PLEASE TICK RELEVANT BOX. PRICES ARE FOR UK AND IRELAND (INC. P&P)

1 year subscription **£8.00**

2 year subscription **£12.00**

I would like to make a donation  
to support the magazine **£**

**All work undertaken to produce the magazine is voluntary**



**Total £**

**Thank you**

**I wish my donation to be treated as a gift aid donation.**

I am a UK taxpayer   
please tick and date box

### Editorial Note from Heather Wells

We have a large archive of previous issues of the magazine available to buy at a reduced rate:  
Issues 1 - 37 available on request @ £3 each issue inc. p&p  
Orders of 6 and over @ £2.50 each issue inc. p&p  
Please contact me if you wish to know details of themes and issues covered.

### Please make cheques payable to

*Initiative Interfaith Trust* and send to:

The Editor, Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity, PO Box 110, Lancaster LA2 6GN.  
Or see our website to make payment through PayPal

For any query involving donation/subscription please contact: Heather Wells at the above address or  
email: hf\_wells@yahoo.co.uk • Telephone: 01524 822183

**www.faithinitiative.co.uk**

### My details are:

Name:

Address:

Post Code:  Tel No:

Email:

**This form can be photocopied or downloaded from the website**

For overseas subscriptions please see website. € and \$ currencies payable through Paypal

# faith INITIATIVE

# Shaped by My Father



My father, Noordin, would never talk about the intimate details of his early life, it was too painful for him. But I wanted to know more about this man: the man who dedicated his life to his family; the man who gave unconditional love, the man who taught me how to live with courage and become the person I am today.

My research has shown that my father's story really starts in 1947, when as a young Sikh boy, around 13 years of age, he lived in a small village with his family on the outskirts of Srinagar, India. It was a time of major unrest as the country was literally being torn apart by religious and political violence. One day the violence spilled over into his village and his family was brutally massacred - his mother, father, brother and sisters were slaughtered mercilessly while he hid in a small cupboard, amongst the pots and pans, in what the family called their kitchen.

Like numerous other children who had been orphaned, he had nowhere to go. Hungry, homeless, dazed and confused, he wandered the streets looking for food and shelter. One fateful day, he was found sleeping under the seat of a bus. A man, named Dr. Syed Ali Aslam - a prominent army surgeon helping victims of war in the region - boarded the bus, took his seat and found a helpless young boy huddled underneath it. The boy's story was not unique, just another statistic in the cruel barbarity of war. With nowhere to go, Dr. Aslam knew that this boy had no future: being Sikh, the boy was easy to identify due to his religious appearance and hence an easy target. He could not abandon him. Dr. Aslam was leaving the area in a couple of weeks, for Sialkot, now in Pakistan, returning to his family and private surgery. He made a decision, to give this boy a life and future every child deserves. He took the boy, cut his hair (to protect him from those ruthlessly seeking to kill Sikhs) and said 'From now on your name is Noordin and you are my son'. With this he took Noordin with him to Sialkot. (I never did hear my father mention his Sikh birth name.)

In 1950, Dr. Aslam, his wife and Noordin, moved to Kenya, Africa and you could say this was the first immigration for my father.

He settled well in Kenya. He became fluent in Swahili, and in time got married and had four children - me being the youngest. My father supported Dr. Aslam (my grandfather) in his private surgery as his pharmacy technician, treating numerous Indians and Pakistanis who had made Kenya their home. However, life would take another unexpected turn, in 1975 Dr. Aslam suffered a fatal heart attack. With the surgery now closed, finances diminishing and the volatile political situation in Kenya, my father made the decision to leave the country and move to England for the betterment of his children's future. After all, we were British citizens. This would be the beginning of our immigration experience.

Things did not go according to plan though as on the second day of our arrival, I met with a serious car accident, suffering life-threatening head injuries: miraculously - and thankfully - I recovered. But my father could not find employment as his English was weak and his health poor (he suffered from severe asthma and bronchitis). With no money and nowhere appropriate to stay, we spent our first 8 months in a single room in a bed and breakfast. I was very young, staying in a 'hotel' felt like a holiday... what could be better?

Shortly after we were given a council flat in Burnt Oak, Edgware. It was the late seventies, and racism was at its peak. We were woken up on our first night in our new home by stones being thrown at our windows and chants of 'Pakis Out, Pakis Out'. I remember not fully comprehending the situation, but being very afraid. The next few months were spent living in fear. My parents struggled with English, I too had to learn this new language. Eggs were thrown at my parents as they walked in the street. Our neighbour, in the flat below us, would encourage his dog to defecate on our doorstep, and this became a daily routine. My father would get spat on by the boys in my school when he came to pick us up. I was bullied at school - 'stinky Paki, go back home' and 'Paki bashing' seemed to be the latest craze of entertainment for the youth of the day. I had believed that the move to Britain would be for the betterment of us all: I felt confused.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM OVERLEAF

[www.faiithinitiative.co.uk](http://www.faiithinitiative.co.uk)

Please contact the Editor for further information on themes covered in previous issues - see details over the page.



in the neighbourhood who were the focus of police and media attention. This of course was cause for excitement for us as children, although worrying for our parents. However, we survived and life took on a different shape in which my siblings and I took on more responsibility and became translators for our parents on visits to the Doctor's surgery or the DHSS: all those forms to complete, and not knowing if we were understanding, or answering, the questions correctly, but hoping we were. Those days seemed to go on forever, the queuing, the waiting, the bureaucracy, it was never ending. We were all on an accelerated path of growing up.

Despite the challenges, we were settling and adapting into our new lives. Sometimes being thick skinned isn't a bad thing. Those names, those taunts don't hurt so much. My father always used to say 'turn the other cheek, don't be like them, be more than them, be more than you think you can be' – advice which I now pass onto my children.

My father was bought up within a Muslim household, but my grandparents did not enforce Islam on him however they identified him as a Muslim. He wasn't practising and did not really talk much about religion (my mother was the more religious one). But my father did have faith and belief in God, and used to tell me that there is only one religion: humankind chooses to follow different paths which ultimately lead to the same destination, the Divine. He would tell me that as long as I do good deeds and don't hurt others, I will have followed every religion. This has had a profound effect on me: growing up my mother was instrumental in our Islamic religious education but I always felt more like my father in that I belong in every religion. This worldview is something I now share with my children.

Sadly, my father passed away in 2005, at a time I was living in SE Asia. I flew back. My father was on a life-support machine. I was able to tell him the things I should have told him earlier. I thanked him for the courage he instilled in me, the love he gave me, the belief he had in me, protecting me from the world, showing me the right path, the list is endless. Above all I thanked him for being my father, my hero.

So, did my father make the right decision to move to England, were all the hardships worth it? The answer is yes! This country provided a roof over our heads and meals on our table when we had nothing. This country has provided me with a world class education and the opportunity to pursue my ambitions. Having lived in the US and Asia for over 12 years, I now run my own training and consultancy business on clinical research and drug development, based out of London. This country is now providing a safe haven and environment for my children growing up.

Through these difficult times, my father was our pillar of strength. He never let the stress show, his warm smile brightened up the darkest of days. He had obviously been through great trauma in his life and our present circumstances would not defeat him. He was our silver lining.

Living on the 'dole' was now the way of life for us. In school my sister and I were the 'poor' kids – our industrial style school uniforms bought from the 'special shops' for parents who can't or don't work and hence have no money – made us stick out like a sore thumb. I would however, secretly sell our dinner money tickets at a discounted price to buy sweets from the tuck shop - this succeeded in making me one or two new friends. We were a minority in school, both racially and financially and hence a prime target for abuse. Kids can be mean. But we were stronger. Our black and white TV, that would only work if a slipper was thrown at it, our old grey Hillman Minx and a budgie called Joey made life worth living in this new world.

A couple of years later, hoping our situation would be improved, we moved to another council flat in Hanwell, Ealing. It worked, our situation did improve despite the notoriety of certain people

*'...be more than you think you can be'*

# *"Entertaining Angels"*

*"Yes life is hard, but it can be good, like now, and everyone smiles. We can smile because we know everything passes"*

Alex Holmes volunteers on a regular basis in Maria Skobtsova House, the Catholic Worker community in Calais. The house offers sanctuary to a small number of particularly vulnerable refugees.

## *Maria Skobtsova Catholic Worker House, Calais:*

*'Our mission is to be prayerfully present with and amongst the refugees, migrants and poor; and to build with them a community of hospitality.'*

Hospitality: *"the act and practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers; liberality and goodwill"* (Oxford English Dictionary). The etymological root of the word hospitality is the latin *hospes*, meaning guest, host and stranger.

*"Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."* Hebrews 13,2



"The Church" in the "Green Hotel"



## The Giftbearers

**YOU**  
 extraordinary ones  
 stretching deep off script  
 along subterranean routes  
 of duress and hope  
 traded across continents  
 as things of slab flesh  
 then tossed away  
 by someothers' soiled hands  
 onto somewhere's stony shores  
 arrive still breathful  
 bearing beautiful dreams  
 bearing bones  
 bearing gifts  
 beyond price.  
**WE**  
 can only guess

## On the Threshold

"Give from the heart since each person is the very icon of God incarnate in the world." Maria Skobtsova.

The front door bell rings, an unsettling sound, always, like the clock that chimes thirteen.

"In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", quickening towards the door with those thirteen quietening syllables, tracing the sign of the cross.

"Welcome back, Isaac, I am so happy you are safe". An embrace. Such cold small ears. Winter's chill is still in the air.

Or a request; "I'm so tired can I sleep the night?" Of course, welcome.

Or one hand clutching a head wound, the other a discharge paper from the hospital. Yes come in.

Or four people asking for a shower; "I'm sorry, we cannot offer showers today, the house is too full." The pain of saying "No". It feels like an act of violence.

Adonay, Josef and Haile are at the door. They've come to spend the night after their friend Samuel, just a month in Calais, has been killed, hit by a car as he jumped from a lorry. Tomorrow, to the mortuary in Lille to pay respects to Samuel's body.

Massawa presses the doorbell. He's come to shower and have his clothes washed before visiting Teodros, his friend in hospital who is now paralysed from the neck down after being shot by a people smuggler. "Welcome Massawa". Tomorrow he will see the words written above Teodros's bed: "Teodros, everything happens for your own good".

Prayer time. Once more the doorbell. Could we take an underage boy, Yonas. The two who have brought him to the door apologise saying they have tried to find him other accommodation, that he feels very frightened and they can find no place for him. We welcome him. As an Eritrean, we tell him, he will be at home here: we only have Eritreans in the house at the moment. He comes to night prayer and

speaks afterwards in good English of how he was the only Christian amongst Afghan Muslims in the underage centre where he had been placed. They bullied him relentlessly. "I don't mind if people are Christian or Muslim or whatever; it is no problem for me. For them, big big problem that I am Christian". He is grazed the length of his nose and across his chin. The silver stud in his left ear glints like the evening star.

## In the House

"In the beginning was the relationship - When two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them." Martin Buber

In the early morning quiet of the chapel, a hobbling step. Abel falls prostrate before the image of the Trinity. Back once more on his feet, he limps from icon to icon, touching each of them, kissing each of them: the Trinity, Mary and the Child Jesus, Jesus Divine Mercy, Mikael. His feet are bare, his ankle swollen from the beating he received from the riot police; the same ankle that had barely recovered from a beating twelve days ago.

Negas has flowered with the weeks. Emerging from pneumonia he begins to draw and then to sing, taking a lead in night prayer. Then a new gift is revealed; the healing gift of massage. He works on Abel's swollen ankle, Russom's arm, bruised after a beating by the CRS<sup>1</sup>, Henoah's young legs that ache and cause him to limp.

There's laughter, smiles, joy despite the tough times, despite the many hells of many interminable months trapped in Libya. Despite the aggression of the French authorities in Calais.

"The violence is worse here than in a third world country; it's the fourth world in Calais" says Senai smiling as he recounts the moment the hardman CRS<sup>1</sup> officer, rather than pepper spraying the Eritreans he was chasing, mistakenly sprayed his own face and then "cried like a baby".

"I have emptied canisters of tear gas... In Calais I follow orders and I don't think. I unplug my brain. What's important is my security and that of my colleagues. That we come home at the end of the day, safe and sound and without any injuries. I detach myself from the all of this. Maybe one day I'll confess my sins to the Lord!" (anonymous confession of a CRS officer)

The violence inflicted on the refugees<sup>2</sup>, it pricks like a fishbone from some distant friday still stuck in the gullet.



Cross with icon and rosary in the Green Hotel

## Outside the House

"A human being is a part of a whole... We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." Albert Einstein, migrant.

Sunday morning, prayer time in the Green Hotel<sup>3</sup>. Refugees are filtering through the trees towards an area bounded by low wooden timbers where once boules were played. This is "the church". We wait, some ninety worshippers seated on the peripheral timber wall. Called to prayer by the Orthodox deacon, we form into standing rows and worship begins. In the deep focus and profound stillness, a spider delicately spins its web between the collar and shoulder of the young Eritrean in front of me. Still standing, and an hour into the worship, the deacon goes through an elaborate ritual of blessing the water in a plastic bottle and then walks along the rows splashing each of us with the holy water. We end prostrate on our knees, in deep reverential silence, our foreheads pressed to the soft earth. The spider's web will now have broken.

"This is the life" says Tekle, "life at its best." Worship over, he's sitting on the base of a defunct super-market trolley stirring the contents of a charred frying pan that's balanced on some smoking sticks. It's yesterday's hand-out food; yellow rice and onion is all that is identifiable. "Bla bla, (eat, eat!)" Ten of us in a circle around the fire. Across from me, Danny. "bla, Alex". Spoonfed, I accept first one and then a second mouthful of the mix. "Bekka, bekka, (enough enough), ya-kenele (thank you)" Tekle smiles broadly. "Yes life is hard, but it can be good, like now, and everyone smiles. We can smile because we know everything passes". Half an hour earlier he and his friends had been pepper sprayed by the police.

Away from the fire, the sound of a hammer driving in nails. Two guys are making a kraar (a traditional Eritrean stringed instrument). Later someone appears with a bicycle: the brake cables will be the strings.

Out beyond the trees, a lush salad of fresh grass. High in the sycamore trees, the first pendulous fuzz of golden green shimmers in the bright Sunday light. Yellow celandine and red dead-nettle and purple violets colour the woodland floor. Dawit is writing: "Life is wrong, Life is walking. I hope, good always in my heart. Seven times down, number eight up. Life is a struggle, I will be successful. I pray to God to save me. I will win as God is with me. At last my life will be peaceful."



Playing the Kraar



Making the Kraar



Refugees in the Green Hotel gather around a fire to eat

1. CRS: Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (the French riot Police)

2. "91.8% of refugees interviewed in Calais had experienced police violence. Of these respondents, 50.5% said that the violence had taken the form of physical violence while 23.1% described it as verbal abuse and 90.1% tear gas or pepper spray." <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/RefugeeRightsDataProject.docx>

3. The Green Hotel is a sparsely wooded two acre recreational area and the Calais home for some 150 Eritrean refugees hoping to get to the UK.

# “WE ARE HERE”

Nea Kavala Refugee Camp was established in March 2016 when the Greek border with Macedonia was closed. Its actual location is twenty kilometres from the Macedonian border in Northern Greece, on an old military airport. When I arrived as a volunteer in June 2018, there were around 400 residents, many of whom were from Syria and Iraq, but also from Afghanistan, Kuwait, Palestine, the Congo and other countries. In extreme summer and winter temperatures the refugees were housed in either 16 metre tents, accommodating families of up to 10 or ISO Containers, box-like structures with a door, a window and, most importantly when temperatures dropped below freezing, a form of heating.

Encouraged by my cousin's experience of working at the Camp in 2016, and finding myself with two months available, following the completion of the academic year, I decided to fulfil my long-held dream of volunteering for humanitarian work by applying to a small independent organisation “We are Here”. I had heard of the organisation through my cousin and I liked the fact that they were supporting everyone – irrespective of race, religion or gender by creating a Community Centre within the camp. The space provided a welcoming environment where people could build friendships, and take part in a variety of activities held six days a week.

The Centre was a hub of activity with men enjoying sports, and women attending what was called: the “Women's Space”

where they could participate in craft work such as jewellery making, art and sewing; this space provided the women with a break from day to day routine. The aim also was to educate the women about the importance of doing sporting activities, and taking care of their bodily health. All adults had the opportunity to take English lessons, at different levels – and music lessons, to learn to play the piano or guitar. A library, stocked with a collection of English, Arabic, French and Urdu books, was open to residents, and also provided space for general study or IT classes. For children, up to 3 years old, kindergarten was held in the morning and in the Summer evenings, the children could have fun gardening outside the community space. At the weekend, art classes, music lessons and sports activities were provided for all the children.

Music and dancing on a Saturday night was always popular as the whole community could dance, and enjoy each other's favourite music. I always looked forward to the weekends as it was great fun encouraging all the children to be involved in the activities. We would walk through the camp carrying a speaker playing upbeat songs such as “ABC” by the Jackson 5 or “Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go” by Wham! which the children would be delighted to hear, and it wouldn't be long before we would have around 50 children singing and dancing with us as we walked through the camp, towards the Community Centre for the activities to begin.



I look back on my time working in Nea Kavala with very happy memories but overall, my most memorable day was when “We Are Here” teamed up with another organisation “Drapen I Havet” to create an Eid festival for the 500 residents. This brought five teams of residents together to make their favourite dishes from their home countries, for us all to enjoy. It was a hugely successful day and I was thrilled to help serve the beautifully made food on the Syrian table. Traditionally, the Eid festival marks the end of Ramadan, but Nea Kavala's Eid festival happened a couple weeks later so everyone would feel included. It was a day to remember with everyone enjoying the delicious food, fun games, music and dancing. It was a pleasure to watch so many people from different backgrounds and countries, all socialising, celebrating and enjoying the day together.

However, working in the camp was not without its challenges. The slow asylum process means that it may take years before people will be able to make a fresh start in a new country; a fresh start that isn't in a refugee camp! Many people were undoubtedly becoming frustrated at the delay, and also the limitations of their living accommodation, so I understood to a degree those who used materials that they had removed from pathways, or a piece of wood from fencing, to help make their small Container feel more like a home. The camp also doubled in size during my time there to around 800 refugees, which totally stretched resources. Many of these new residents were families moved from the overcrowded islands, but with no Containers left, five big tents had to be divided into rooms to house the many new families, along with a few extra bathroom facilities. This provided each family with one room, and a shared bathroom with many others.

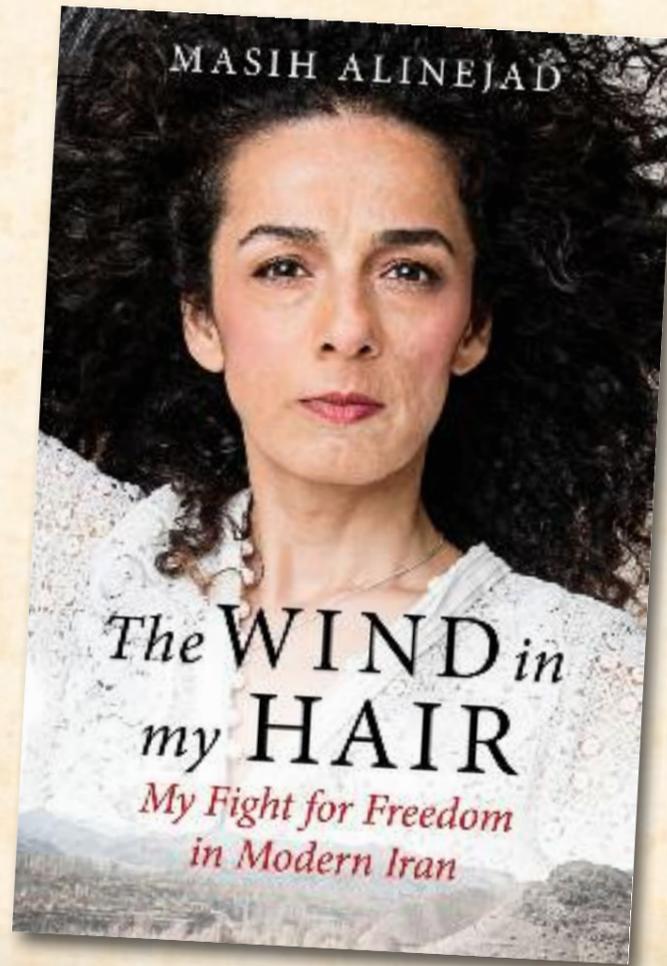
I was full of admiration and respect for the “We Are Here” team during my time working for them. Being a small organisation, they were able to be flexible and adaptable. For example, when the local Greek school, which many of the children attended, was closed for the Summer, the organisation was able to invite four and five year olds from the local community to attend the kindergarten.

Many of the residents were the kindest and most welcoming and generous people I have ever met. My last few days therefore, were the hardest I have ever known as I knew that I would never see many of the families again. Some even insisted on giving me their apples and bananas as a goodbye present, a kindness that I found very humbling as I knew they had very little money or food. Being able to maintain contact with these people through Social Media has been a great comfort.

Overall, my time working in Nea Kavala reinforced the idea that people's basic needs are not just shelter, food and water. Volunteering allowed me to see first-hand that in these difficult situations, our human need extends beyond material necessities to actions that also lift the human spirit. After hearing about children attempting to commit suicide in the overcrowded refugee camp of Moria, on the island of Lesbos, I recognise just how vital many of the small organisations like “We Are Here” are in addressing the issue of boredom and frustration of refugees, caught up in a situation not of their making. A small distraction such as going to the “Women's Space” and creating a beautiful bracelet can bring some joy into a woman's life: an evening of shared music and food can create a communal bond that is empowering and life-affirming. Yet, the future of many of these invaluable organisations, that work to enhance the lives of refugees, is at risk as many rely solely on donations.

We would walk through the camp carrying a speaker playing upbeat songs such as “ABC” by the Jackson 5 or “Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go” by Wham!

# The WIND in my HAIR



## My Fight for Freedom in Modern Iran

### EXTRACT: Chapter 19

Iran was in turmoil.

In 2010, my focus turned to highlighting human rights abuses as the protests and the crackdown continued. Much of my work was identifying those who had been arrested, shot, and killed, and interviewing their families. Unearthing this information was not easy. Often the families didn't know for some time that they had lost a loved one. To keep the number of casualties low, the authorities did not release information about those who had been killed. They also told families not to talk to the press and not to hold public funerals. Some families had to bury their dead at night.

But I wanted the world to know and not to avert its eyes. I wasn't the only journalist who was chasing these stories. Masoumeh Ebtekar, the Tehran City Council member, was secretly sending me phone numbers and information about victims of the

crackdown. Ebtekar was one of the students involved in the 1979 U.S. embassy occupation. She had gained fame as the spokeswoman for the hostage-takers. She now worked to undermine Ahmadinejad. (Once Rouhani was elected, she stopped cooperating with me and cut me off totally.) Iran state television started producing programs on how I was one of the women behind the sedition. They said that I was making up fictitious deaths. Death threats became a constant feature of my life.

I was so busy I had no time to worry. I would get up in the middle of the night to monitor the news in Iran, and then wake Pouyan\* up and take him to school before heading to my own university. I would rush back from classes, prepare food for Pouyan, and begin working again. Money was tight, and I turned my living room into another bedroom and rented it out to make ends meet.

\* Pouyan is the writer's son

One morning, I had been up for a couple of hours working on a story, when Pouyan called out that it was time for me to take him to school. "Mammon...I'm gonna be late," he shouted from downstairs. In the mornings, he made his own breakfast while I worked.

"Coming," I yelled. "Put your coat on and get in the car."

I grabbed my phone and raced downstairs two steps at a time and jumped into the car, still focused on my own work. I drove as if on autopilot and didn't exchange a single word with Pouyan. In five minutes, I pulled up in front of the school. I was in a rush to get back quickly to wrap up the story before going to my own classes.

"Time to get out, sweetie," I said as I turned around. The words froze in my mouth. He was not in the car.

I was so preoccupied that I had driven off to the school without waiting to see if Pouyan was in the car with me. I couldn't believe I had left him behind. I screamed and punched the steering wheel before putting the car into gear and heading back home. Pouyan was standing in front of the house and looked relieved when he saw me.

"Where did you go? I went to pick up my jacket and—"

"Jump in, I went to get milk for your lunch." I wasn't going to tell him I'd forgotten him.

"So, where is the milk?" he asked innocently. "I'll take it with me."

"All they had was chocolate milk, and you're allergic."

Pouyan and I were getting to know each other. We were in a new setting—a new country, for him—and there was no knowing how long I'd be in Britain. I felt guilty for not having enough time for him, but I had to work. As a single mother, I had no choice.

One of the challenges during those days was that the Iranian authorities would pressure the victims of the crackdown not to talk to the émigré journalists, who were the only ones who could write about it without fear of retribution. All Iranian media is controlled by the government, to varying degrees, and Iran-based reporters acted more like cheerleaders than journalists.

Sometimes when a contentious article of mine was published in *JARAS* or *Kalame*, the authorities would pressure those who had given me an interview to retract their comments or deny ever speaking with me. The family would call me, often in tears, and hesitatingly ask if I could make the changes.

"Whatever you want," I told each and every one. "I'm on your side. When you are ready, we can always add those details back in."

Of course, it really hurt to take down an article. One day, I got a call at the university from Ladan Mostafaei, the wife of Ali Hassanpour, one of the victims of 2009. A father of two, he was shot in the face and killed in Azadi Square, but his body was kept by the security forces for 104 days.

I had interviewed Mostafaei for hours, but now she wanted me to edit the story or pull it down. She feared for her own safety;

other journalists had warned her that she might get into trouble just for talking to me. It was nonsense, I told her, but I removed the article from the website. I stood by the veracity of my reporting, but the family had been pressured.

Every time this happened, government news sites would accuse me of publishing fiction. Otherwise, they crowed, why remove the offending article?

I started taping all my interviews. Transcribing the tapes was a laborious task that often had me in tears. Adversity forced me to find a solution, and I hit upon the idea of putting all my interviews on SoundCloud, a streaming service that at the time was revolutionary. I think I was one of the early users of SoundCloud among Iranian journalists. No one else was broadcasting their interviews.

It was in this way that I started creating what later became the largest collection of audio files of interviews with the families of the victims of the 2009 protests.

I had no idea what I had was of any value until one day, Ali Hamedani, a bright BBC Persian reporter, arrived at my house. As I made him a cup of tea, he ran his finger along the windowsill to examine the accumulated dirt and quietly assessed the pile of unwashed dishes in the kitchen sink. I didn't have any other refreshments to offer him.

He offered to buy my collection of audio interviews.

"I can't sell them to you," I told him. "These are stories of loss and pain. I know these families. I've relived their pain. I've cried with them. I can't make money off these tapes."

That afternoon I played one tape after another for him, explaining the backstory of each case, how I'd found the family, what had befallen them since, and how they coped with their loss. Hamedani instead decided to make a program about me, as the keeper of the records of the crimes committed during the protests.

Soon afterward, Niusha Boghrati, the editor in chief of Radio Farda, a Persian-language radio station based in Prague, called to commission me to make a multipart documentary about those who had been killed in the protests.

I knew Niusha from our days in Iran when we were journalists on rival papers.

"I want a half-hour episode about each victim. Everything you can find about their lives and of course their deaths," he said. "We'll broadcast one every week and reruns, too. We can't let the people forget."

He quickly dismissed my protests that I had never made a radio program. "We'll assign you someone to teach you, don't worry."

A week later, I got a ten-minute tutorial on the art of making a radio documentary, and then I was on my own.

I wanted to get away from working for *JARAS*, *Kalame*, and other reformist publications. Living outside Iran, unfettered by self-censorship and freed of the red lines of the regime, I had moved politically beyond the baby steps proposed by the reformists. One time when I visited Kambiz\* in New York,

\* Kambiz is the writer's future husband

a European radio station called to interview me about the continuing protests. I called Kambiz and told him that I wasn't sure my English was good enough, and that I needed some pithy quotes to make news.

"The people voted for change, but their vote was stolen," I told him. "The people are calling for change. What else can I say?"

"Tell them that the people want regime change and you'll be fine," Kambiz said, hanging up quickly.

The interview was short, and I thought it went well. I gave it very little thought till later that evening, when I received a call from Iran. Karroubi's son was not happy.

"You called for regime change. Have you lost your mind?" he asked. "We want Ahmadinejad to go. We don't want to remove the Islamic Republic."

I realized that Kambiz had tricked me. When I called him on it, he just burst out laughing.

"I didn't think you'd go ahead with it. Besides, you can't have a little change. You need to change the whole edifice, not tinker with the decoration."

For me, human rights were universal and not just limited to my own political group. I wanted to write about the female Mojahedin prisoners who were kept inside with their children. I thought it was a huge human rights violation. The editor in chief of *JARAS* thought that I should focus only on reformist prisoners. After a shouting match or two, I quit. I left *Kalame* at around the same time.

Money was going to be even tighter with my income limited to the Radio Farda programs and freelance pieces. I started making what turned out to be a fifty-seven-part documentary, consisting at first of a weekly half-hour radio program devoted to the life and death of each one of the victims. This had a big impact, with each episode including audio from the family, interviews, and my own narrative.

I was living on nicotine and coffee. When I sat down to work, only one thing calmed me, and that was cigarettes. Every morning, my in-box was full of painful messages, news of someone being tortured, someone missing or in a secret detention center. My head was filled with the voices of mothers crying as they told me in painful detail how their son or daughter was killed. They recounted the humiliation the family underwent to get their child's body back. Sometimes the father would speak. When I listened to their tales of loss, I'd light up a Marlboro Menthol just to steady myself. Sometimes I smoked one after another even as I was crying. It was my only vice, I told myself, because I didn't drink. Pouyan hated the smell of tobacco, and I took care to open all the windows and blow the smoke outside when he was at school. At other times, I'd sneak out on an errand just to smoke a cigarette. Like all smokers, I carried lots of chewing gum and mint to cover the smell.

One day, I stood by my bedroom window, smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke out, when I saw Pouyan walking home with

his friends. I'd lost track of time. I quickly threw the cigarette away, sprayed myself with perfume, opened more windows, and started waving my arms to clear the air. When Pouyan came home from school I was so frazzled that I called out, "Hi, sweetie, you want your cigarette now or later?" I'd meant to ask him if he was hungry.

His friends burst out laughing.

"I hate smoking, Mum," he said, hugging me when I got downstairs. "You think I don't know you smoke?"

Each episode of the documentary took a lot out of me. My room felt like a morgue. A digital morgue filled with tales of torture and death. All my stories were about prisoners, victims of the Islamic Republic's brutal clampdown on the opposition.

Parvin Fahimi became a major presence in my life for months and months. She was the mother of Sohrab Arabi, a nineteen-year-old pro-democracy student who went out one day to demonstrate against the election results and never came home. As Parvin told me, she assumed that he had been arrested. She went to the authorities but found no answers. Every day, clutching a picture of Sohrab, the youngest of four brothers, she climbed the steep hill to Evin prison, meeting other families also gathered there. "I'd wait outside, and as soon as a prisoner was released I'd run over and ask if they'd seen my Sohrab," she said. "I even made a video and posted it online on YouTube."

After twenty-six days of shuttling between prisons, hospitals, and courthouses, she was summoned to the Revolutionary Court and asked to identify her son from among sixty photographs of bodies. She was then shown a coroner's report, dated June 19, which said that her son had died of a gunshot wound to the chest. He had disappeared on June 15.

Parvin described her love for Sohrab in detail to me. His death was killing her; her pain was raw and visible. And she wasn't the only one.

With every article, interview, Facebook post, the chances of my returning to Iran became dimmer. I had hoped that somehow a solution to the political crisis could be found, but the situation grew more grim with each passing day. In February 2011, I received a panicked call from one of Mousavi's daughters. Security forces had come to arrest her father. I was the first reporter to break the news that Mousavi and Karroubi, the leaders of the Green Movement, had been put under house arrest. Many expected another wave of protests to be unleashed, but nothing happened.

To keep our long-distance relationship going, Kambiz and I would take turns flying to see each other. My routine in Kidlington was to take all my interviews and notes and occupy a corner at the Costa coffee shop, a Starbucks rival. Everyone there knew me because I'd often end up crying as I typed my notes and listened to my interviews. One week, Kambiz came during a particularly difficult period. I had a breakdown and couldn't face listening to another family. I told Niusha that I was going to quit the Radio Farda program.

*My head was filled with  
the voices of mothers crying  
as they told me in painful detail  
how their son or daughter  
was killed.*

"You've recorded thirty episodes," Kambiz said, holding me gently, as if I might break in his arms. I looked gaunt, weighing less than a hundred pounds. We were standing in line at Costa.

"Thirty-two, if you are counting," I said. I could not be consoled.

"Think of it as making history. You are making their history. You'll bring them to life; their families will always remember you."

"I know all that, but listening to their cries, stories of pain and loss . . ."

"You get the coffees and I'll hook you up," Kambiz said. He was determined that I finish.

I returned to my corner seat with two lattes. Kambiz looked pale and was busy wiping tears from his face.

"What happened?"

"I just listened to about thirty seconds. That's all I could take. I don't know how you can listen to their pain."

I patted his arm gently. As long as he was with me, I could handle it.

The series, called *The Victims of 88*, a reference to the Iranian calendar year 1388 (2009), when the election and the protests took place, won an AIB International Media Excellence award in the category of Investigative Documentary/Radio in November 2013. It was like winning an Oscar for international radio programs. At the award ceremony, I burst into tears when the announcer read the judges' commendation: "Superb research is its foundation." I continued crying throughout the gala reception, the tension of the past two years pouring out of me. In all the photographs from that night, I look as if I'm in mourning, with red, blotchy eyes and a dripping nose.

While making the program, I'd hit upon the idea of reaching out to the Islamic Republic officials and asking them to account for their actions. This may sound routine for those living in the West. In the Islamic Republic, asking tough questions was dangerous. In Iran, journalists never really challenged those holding the reins of power: the heads of security services, the Revolutionary Guards, the clerics, the top ayatollahs sitting on secret committees. But now I was outside their reach, and all I needed was their personal mobile numbers. I decided to go after Saeed Mortazavi, the prosecutor general who had interrogated me in Tehran. The Butcher of the Press had by now shut down more than one hundred publications.

This time, I held the upper hand. He could not threaten me with prison, or shut my newspaper down, or grill me about my private life. He was under pressure, and I surprised him by calling him on his private line. Even if he slammed the phone down on me, that itself was newsworthy, and I could make a short, quick radio hit. But he didn't slam down the phone. Instead he engaged in a conversation.

The sound of his voice made my throat dry up. Here was a man responsible for arresting and torturing hundreds of protesters, someone who was implicated in the death of the Iranian-Canadian photographer Zahra Kazemi. And he had interrogated me for five days. I saw myself back in the interrogation room, and even though he was in Iran and I was in Oxford, my hand was shaking as I spoke to this thug thousands of miles away. Nevertheless, this time I was the questioner. And I was not alone. Friends were downstairs in the kitchen, cooking a meal, oblivious to my tussle with Mortazavi.

“How do you like being called a murderer?” I asked. “You are the most hated man in Iran. How do you feel about that?”

“You are counterrevolutionary,” he said in an oily voice. “I’ll grant an interview under one condition: Return to your country and repent. You’ll be treated fairly.”

“If I return, what guarantee is there that I won’t end up dead like Zahra Kazemi?” I asked.

“If you repent, there’ll be no problem.”

“But you were the one who interrogated Zahra Kazemi, and she ended up dead.”

He hung up. I stumbled downstairs and collapsed on a sofa. My friends made sweetened tea for me as I told them of the encounter.

I broadcast my interview on my own Facebook page, and BBC Persian rebroadcast it. For the first time, Iran’s chief prosecutor had responded to a journalist in the diaspora. Iranian authorities had rarely given interviews to or engaged with journalists outside the country. They regard these journalists as the enemy. Islamic Republic authorities prefer to engage with reporters who can be bullied and threatened with jail or worse.

I joined Voice of America as a contributor, providing special segments mixing satire and politics. With this platform, I started a new trend of calling Islamic Republic officials on their private mobile numbers. Their numbers were sent to me by disgruntled lower-ranking officials.

Aghajan\* still refused to speak with me. When I left Iran, he turned his back on me. He also wanted me to repent for my opposition to the Supreme Leader. Until then, no communication. Even Mother refused to talk to me when he was around. Ali and Mohsen were on my side, but it was painful not talking to

my parents. Ali\* kept them abreast of what I was doing. But news of my activities often reached them via other means.

“Sometimes I’m too late. One of the neighbors has already told Mother,” Ali said proudly.

Times had changed in Ghomikola. Our neighbors had invested in satellite dishes and were watching banned television programs like VOA’s Persian service. My most famous call was to Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, a hard-liner and Tehran’s Friday prayer leader. He had once said the country had to shed blood, if needed, to safeguard compulsory hijab. So I called him and asked him to explain what exactly he meant. Without giving me a chance to introduce myself, he blurted out the standard line—how compulsory hijab was part of the country’s Islamic faith.

“But we are seeing women being attacked and beaten. Is that what you had in mind?”

There was a pause. He had never been challenged by a journalist before in his life.

“Where are you calling from? Which news organization?”

When I introduced myself, he went apoplectic.

“How dare you! How dare you call me? You are counterrevolutionary,” he screamed. “You can’t call me!” And he slammed the phone down.

I worried about his health. I thought he was having a heart attack.

The audio clip of the interview went viral on the Internet among Iranians and was passed hand to hand inside the country, saved on flash drives. Khatami—no relation to the former president—was a regime thug, threatening young people from his bully pulpit every Friday. Every Iranian enjoyed hearing him get his comeuppance.

\*Aghajan is the writer’s name for her father, it means ‘dear sir’ in Persian. \*Ali is her brother.

*“You are counterrevolutionary,”  
he said in an oily voice.*

*“I’ll grant an interview under one condition:  
Return to your country and repent.  
You’ll be treated fairly.”*

Extract from *The Wind in my Hair* by Masih Alinejad, published by Virago, £14.99

## On Offa’s Dyke\*

From here it’s pretty easy to define  
the other or that place where difference lies:  
another country, parish, language, life.

But what if you’ve got one foot in both places,  
quite normal Marches DNA where Welsh  
and English vie for cheerful prominence?

If you contain both streams, you’re surely like  
the trees that sprawl across this ridge, or birds  
or butterflies that can’t be quite pinned down.

So, being what we are, why should we mark  
the borders in ourselves, the meeting points  
patrol, our porous frontiers question still?

\*An earthwork built in Saxon times (8th century) by the Mercian King Offa to keep the Welsh out of their own recently-conquered lands. The Marches is the name given to these disputed ‘borderlands’. The Offa’s Dyke path is a popular walk, appreciated on both sides of the border.

# More than science alone



## ...a glimpse into the mind of God

Many tributes have been paid to Professor Stephen Hawking, following his death on the 14<sup>th</sup> March, for his extraordinary scientific achievements, and his humanity in the midst of severe illness. As someone who has written much about him, I have to say that he was an inspiration to me, in my life as an astrophysicist, and as a Christian theologian - although in later life he himself became more convinced as an atheist.

I have long been fascinated by Hawking's work in numerous areas of relativity and quantum theory: and his contribution to the long-term goal of bringing these two great theories together in order to describe the very first moment of the universe's Big Bang. For as you go back in time, our current laws of physics break down in describing the universe within a fraction of a second before the very beginning. Some religious believers see this as a gap to insert a Creator God – the kind of argument that states if the universe began with a Big Bang then who lit the blue touch paper! Hawking, unconvinced by this, had been working on a 'theory of everything', which describes the initial conditions as well as the evolution of the universe.

As a Christian I welcome this. The God I encounter in Jesus is not a creator who is proved by a 'god of the gaps' argument; that is if science can't explain something then let's insert god. Nor do I believe in a deistic creator, a god who lights the blue touch paper of the Big Bang and then goes off for a cup of tea with a cheery wave saying see you on judgement day. Rather, the images of God in the Bible are of a God who holds every moment of the universe's history in the palm of his hand. I interpret this as God being the giver and sustainer of the physical laws by which the universe evolves.

Hawking suggested that a theory of everything would be simple enough that it could be written on T-shirts and would enable us to 'know the mind of God'. However, the T-shirt wouldn't do justice to the origin of the laws which make up the theory, why they are so elegant, and what the purpose of the universe is. Here I would agree that we do see God's mind in the gift of science, but you need more.

From this position, I am grateful for the life and work of Professor Hawking. He has given me a glimpse into the mind of God, and inspired me to keep asking questions in both science and faith.

Revd Professor David Wilkinson is a Methodist minister, theologian, astrophysicist and academic. He is Principal of St John's College, Durham and Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University.

First featured as *Thought for the Day*, Radio 4 15.3.18

# The Essential Me

Up until fairly recently, I have taken life in my stride. Life is for living after all. I took for granted the ability to swim, climb, cycle - they were part of my interests, alongside yoga. But everything changed as my diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis burst my bubble of predictability. This, in turn, had an immediate impact on my job, family life and outlook on my future. At the time, I was a young mum and an Art teacher, striving to balance a hectic life with fatigue: my faith was my touch stone of 'Who I Am'.



with and the artist

*“I strive to capture  
movement and  
limitation.”*

As my illness continued to worsen, my ability to stay independent eroded, and I had to rely on others to help deal with my daily needs. This has pulled the rug from under my feet and precariously perched me in a life of surrender. I didn't choose this constriction, or wish others to taste it either. I feel very sad that my hopes and plans are nullified by paralysis, and micro managed by loved ones who feel responsible for my obvious needs: and are prepared to sacrifice their own lives to accommodate my lack of capacity. I am constantly conflicted: is this Love?... Or duty?

Yet, I'm not just my body. The essential me is always wanting to surface and be apparent. Everyone can make a difference despite their circumstances. Life is a wonderful gift. My interest in painting continues. These days I'm investigating the space created by fluid mediums contrasted by the controlled flat matt marks that limit their expansion. I strive to capture movement and limitation. One could say that this is embodied in my own life. Limiting the pallet also helps to simplify the image and get to the essential statement.



As I want the viewer to think about their own lives, the paintings are Abstract and do not lend themselves to an obvious and recognisable answer. There is much force and movement in the painting to express the energy of life. These are captured like a fast shutter camera that catches a glimpse of its source. Another painting has restraining flat bars that contain the movement. When reflecting on these pictures, there is always the bid for freedom that battles against the limitation. I consider the refugee, the young mother, the ageing father - how do they cope with their limitations?

The flat repeated patterns, and mark making, reflects our commonality as humans. The same yet totally unique. We believe we are individuals and separate, yet we have more connections than colour and faith dictates.

I have not fused into something else nor do I opt for the perks of a 'blue badge' as a way to avoid parking fines, but there is no holiday for the disabled or the "I can't be bothered today" reprieve. It's a mental battle to remind me daily of who I am?

As a Christian and earnest seeker of the God within. The more I explore my gift of creativity, and share this with others through educational workshops, the more fulfilled I become. I find solace in helping to inform other disabled people about their rights, and how to access funding which will improve their independence. Of course my painting continues in a haphazard way, as I try to make time for it whenever I can.

God's work with me has not finished yet, and although my idea of life would take me in a different direction, I believe that the more acceptance I embody, the better for my mental health, and the well-being of my family. For myself, happiness is something internal not external and the practice of meditation has given me an awareness of what is always there within.

Making time for daily meditation, and reflection, grounds my spinning thoughts and reminds me of my Maker.

I value this gift.

# *The place of revelation*

*You stumble on it when your satnav  
has lost you again: a hollowed rock,*

*purple as foxglove, black as sloe,  
where quiet impels you to listen.*

*Water pools in its granite bowl.  
A beetle drags a leaf. Sanctuary.*

*You know, like you know how fear  
and swagger live together, that deities*

*wait here to be found, stone warm, patient.  
When you need honesty, they'll show you*

*a dead vole; when you're chaffed, dispatch  
bog cotton and a bustling blackbird;*

*and if remorse is the sickness, shush you,  
regret being punishment enough.*

*Something pushes at the cage of your ribs.  
Its name escapes you. Gratitude comes close.*

*Rebecca Bilkau*