



PEACE CURRENTS

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEEKING COMMON GROUND • SPRING 2005

From the Executive Director

It is almost spring. The next few months will pass by quickly as we head into summer. The windows in our office will open wide to allow the cool breeze inside our office. We will be busy preparing for the summer programs.

This year there is a lightness. It may have to do with the fact that our new office actually has windows to the outside world. It may be that there is renewed hope in the Middle East — albeit cautious and ever-changing. I think it has to do with the fact that as Seeking Common Ground enters its 12th year of programming, the organization is in a cycle of growth. With the addition last summer of two staff members (bringing our full-time staff to three) we have had the opportunity to expand our programming, begin codifying our methodology and program curriculum, increase our outreach, develop new funding opportunities and contribute to the field.

It is a pleasure to come to work every day. Eilis and Erin bring a renewed sense of activism, commitment and purpose to our mission. They, in turn, have built a solid internship program for students and other interested individuals. To date we have seven interns working in our office.

We received a grant from the Phillips Family Foundation that will allow us to continue to grow our year-long program in Israel and Palestine. Our home group leaders in the Middle East and U.S. are working hard to recruit and select students for the 2005-2006 BBFP program.



As we enter our 12th year of programming, the organization is in a cycle of growth.

The Middle East staff — comprised of an Israeli Jew, Israeli Palestinian, Palestinian from Jenin and our coordinator from East Jerusalem — are a model of cross-community integration and peace building. They are a model of what women can and do achieve even in a time of war.

Nine days before the Palestinian elections I was in Jerusalem meeting with our past participants and their mothers. This was our first mother-daughter program. Some women crossed borders without permits because they felt this meeting was so important. Some fathers complained that they too wanted to be a part of these meetings and not be left out!

At the age of twelve we are a model for younger organizations and projects working specifically in the Middle East with Palestinians and Israelis. We receive inquiries from people worldwide seeking consultation and information about coordinating similar work in their communities. We are hoping to contribute to the field of research as we embark on an evaluation of our program and past participants. We are thrilled to partner with the University of Denver and the University of Delaware in this endeavor.

I want to thank the board of directors, the staff and volunteers, our funders and the participants past and future for the privilege of meeting and working with such a talented and committed group of people!

Looking forward to the future...

Melodye

—Melodye Feldman

Inside

Zena & Sarah p. 2



Face to Face p. 3



Lama & Inas p. 4

SCG Merchandise is now available on our website at www.s-c-g.org

“I will not dishonor my soul with hatred but offer myself as an architect of peace.”



Board of Directors

Chuck Jacobs, *Chair*; Laurie Brock, Aleshia Cantrell, Josh Gould, Charlie Gwirtsman, Nicki Rounds, Steve Shapiro, Tim Sisk

Staff

Melodye Feldman, *Founding Executive Director*

Erin Breeze, *Associate Director*

Eilis McNamara, *Program Coordinator*

Spotlight on BBfP: Reflecting on the Summer

“One of the experiences I went through during Building Bridges can be described as dark as the night and like a heavy black dot on my heart. We were doing an art activity where we were asked to draw how we see peace in our own eyes. The room was filled with all kinds of colors, music was playing and the noise of chatting and discussions could be heard. One of the Israeli

Jewish participants and I started to talk about the conflict and with each word spoken we grew angrier. I started to see the room getting gloomier and gloomier until anger controlled me. Our argument was very harsh, we were both crying and finally we couldn't continue

and had to separate from each other.

I left the room. When I went outside I smelled the fresh air of the mountains, heard the whispering birds, saw the beautiful blue sky and I realized that there still can be hope. I can change the way she thinks about Palestinians just as she changed me a little. The next day I apologized to her if I hurt her because our friendship means a lot to me, and to her too. Even if you get on each other's nerves and you argue with your friends, you still love them and respect them.

When I think deep in my heart I would say that this specific argument with this special girl changed me a lot. It made me a better person: a person who can handle pressure and be more open-minded to the other side. Building Bridges made me express what I feel, not only what I think, and best of all it gave me the power to speak without being afraid of the result and to believe in myself and never doubt my potential. It was an experience I can't forget.”

—Zena, 2004 Palestinian BBfP participant

“When I first arrived at Building Bridges it seemed like there was no conflict. Palestinian and Israeli teenagers linked arms, chattered excitedly in Hebrew and Arabic and greeted the American delegation, myself included, warmly. But although these developing friendships were reassuring, it was clear that they held deeper resentments than they were expressing. A few days later the anger and hurt surfaced in discussions of Israeli military policies, the wall, and suicide bombings. I felt overwhelmed. Even though after these discussions people remained friends with their presumed enemies, I became confused because of what I perceived as prejudice and hate in my new friends' hearts.

But as the anecdotes and stories my Palestinian and Israeli friends told became more and more personal and after watching two participants — one Israeli and the other Palestinian — open up to one another, I felt renewed hope for the peace movement in Israel and Palestine. Because of that, I spent the rest of the program seeking out people's stories, of pain and joy and hope, and I told some of my own. Because no matter how detached I was from the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, and no matter how numb I was to its violence, I recognized that people are profoundly affected by it: not in a scandalized, dramatized way, but in a personal way, a way that I could relate to.

After participating in the Building Bridges program, I've realized that if we overcome our desensitization to difficult situations, personal or otherwise, then we can do so much to change them: although perhaps I cannot change the world, I know I can change that which I personally come across.”

—Sarah, 2004 American BBfP participant

“Even if you get on each other's nerves and you argue with your friends, you still love them and respect them.”

“If we overcome our desensitization to difficult situations, then we can do so much to change them.”

From the Board Chair

Spring is coming. Most years at this time, Seeking Common Ground is moving carefully, and with some trepidation, toward our summer program. We are waiting hopefully for our foundation and private support, worrying about the location for the program, and looking with concern at events in the Middle East that always appear designed to obstruct our ability to conduct the program.

This year is different; full of possibilities. There is reason for optimism. We cannot ignore tensions in the Middle East, and we always must be prepared for disappointing surprises. Nevertheless, the Israeli and Palestinian leadership appear to be talking in a constructive way for the first time since Camp David. If President Abbas continues his apparent current policies and attitudes, and if Prime Minister Sharon remains willing to engage in dialogue, the parties may take the first wobbling steps in many years toward peace. Syria soon may leave Lebanon; Egypt may be on a democratic path. The winds of change seem to be gaining force and credibility.



Three years ago, our participants were excited about Camp David and its possibilities. They held news conferences in Denver. Israelis, Palestinians, Palestinians in Israel, and Americans addressed a letter to President Clinton, Prime Minister Barak, and Chairman Arafat imploring them to make progress. When Camp David failed, our participants were crushed. It took many months for these young ladies to recover from the Camp David failure. But recover they did. I have written before about the resilience of our program and its participants. Resilience can pay off; we pray that the time is now.

The winds of change seem to be gaining force and credibility.

With glimmers of hope on the horizon, we look forward to a productive summer program. Seeing concrete, on-the-ground evidence of movement by both sides to restart a peace dialogue renews our belief that we can make serious and meaningful contributions to the cause of peace in the region. We look forward to the opportunity and to your continued support.

A handwritten signature in orange ink that reads "Charles H. Jacobs".

—Charles H. Jacobs

High School Students Focus on Diversity

Denver Face to Face/Faith to Faith students again participated in this year's Cherry Creek Diversity Conference. The weekend conference attracts over 500 students from all areas of the state. Throughout the day attendees listen to speakers, participate in group activities and attend two workshops, among other activities. This year was no exception, and the Face to Face students did an outstanding job leading a workshop on religious diversity and communication skill-building.

The workshop gave a sampling of the summer Face to Face activities. Denver students shared their most meaningful experiences and what they have learned as a result of attending the program. Many of them spoke about watching individuals from opposing sides come together and how they have integrated the skills they acquired during the summer into their daily lives.

Face to Face/Faith to Faith is a program in partnership with Auburn Theological Seminary in New York.



Face to Face with Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos-Horta

The US Face to Face/Faith to Faith Home Group met face-to-face with Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos-Horta during PeaceJam's annual conference. PeaceJam — a Denver-based organization working to inspire a new generation of peacemakers — brings Nobel Laureates together with middle and high school-aged students.

Mr. Ramos-Horta, who was recognized in 1996 for his efforts in East Timor, shared his experiences with the youth, took their questions and listened to them present their action plans for effecting change in their communities. The US Home Group presented their plan to hold a panel discussion on the topic of peace and religion. The panel — which will be made up of five religious leaders from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu faiths — will provide a forum for people to learn and share different beliefs and perspectives.

Jose Ramos-Horta with U.S. F2F Home Group

Seeking Common Ground Highlights

Join the Building Bridges for Peace Community — Become a Host Family!

We are currently looking for families to host two or more Building Bridges for Peace participants from the Middle East and/or the U.S. The dates for the home stay are July 28 - August 1. Please contact Eilis at eilis@s-c-g.org for more information.



Thanks...

Thanks to our donors for your vision for peace and your support of our work.



Invaluable Interns

We would like to thank all of our interns for their time, energy and dedication. They are an invaluable asset to Seeking Common Ground. Thank you Agatha, Cameron, Christie, Dee, Johanna, Lisa and Nicole.



We've moved! Please note our new phone and fax numbers. Thanks!

Tel 303.691.2393 • Fax 303.691.2394

Save the Date:

*Our Annual Building Bridges for Peace brunch will take place on **Sunday, August 14** in Denver, Colorado.*

An Assimilation Weekend

SCG recently participated in a weekend retreat for North American organizations working locally and internationally with Israelis, Palestinians, Muslims, Jews and Christians called *An Assimilation*

Weekend: North American Camps for the Middle East Public Peace Process. Hosted by the Fetzer Institute, this was the first gathering of its kind in the United States. Thirty participants from the US and the Middle East representing 12 organizations were in attendance, including **Melodye Feldman**, SCG's Executive Director; **Brie Loskota**, Face to Face/Faith to Faith summer program director; and **Inas and Lama**, past Building Bridges for Peace participants and current summer



Lama and Inas

program staff and home group leaders.

The weekend was an opportunity for organizations to network and share information on topics such as principles and ideology, program operations, tools for sustaining relationships, and building a movement. Many organizations looked to SCG for assistance in building their young programs. We look forward to taking a leading role in maintaining these relationships, sharing best practices with fellow practitioners and advancing this North American movement towards peace.



SEEKING COMMON GROUND

P.O. Box 101958
Denver, CO 80250

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 4489
Denver, CO