

*A spiritual teacher once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day was on its way back.*

*“Could it be,” asked one student, “when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?”*

*“No,” answered the teacher.*

*“Could it be,” asked another, “when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree?”*

*“No,” said the teacher.*

*“Well then, when is it?” his pupils demanded.*

*“It is when you can look on the face of any woman or man and see that she or he is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night.”*

ANONYMOUS



## THE POSITIVE POWER OF VOICE IN PEACEBUILDING

*Paula Green and Tamra Pearson d'Estrée*

*Narrative serves as a connecting thread in the long process of recovery in war-shattered communities. To recount suffering and survival, and to have adversity and small triumphs witnessed by those involved on all sides of the conflict, extends the possibility of healing and prepares the way for restoration of community. This chapter describes an infusion of two interethnic dialogue groups—one from the Bosnian war, the other from the Holocaust—and the value of voice for the combined participants. Appreciative Inquiry is discussed as an intervention tool in intercommunal dialogue, as a method for framing positive questions that uncover what gives life to survivors and their descendants, and for discovering what queries and narratives enable participants to move from victim to visionary. Other structures that employ narrative for the intention of communal healing are also explored briefly, such as truth commissions and documentation of rescuer stories.*



**H**uman relations are based on stories and memories, both our chosen traumas and our chosen glories (Volkan 1997). Each individual, each community weaves a narrative composed of myth, vision, triumph, and tragedy. Stories build bridges of understanding between people. Stories also wound, insult, and destroy the web of relations that bind us as humans. The narrative to which we give life may determine our history.

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. The grandfather said, “I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one.” The grandson asked him, “Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?” The grandfather answered, “The one I feed.”


### **APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Sampson (2002, 2) inquires: “How can we find inspiration and hope in the midst of destruction and despair? How can we rise from division to envi-

sion and define together the kind of future we want to create together?” We would submit that dialogue is a “positive-change method,” although the questions framed by a facilitator may be more oriented to encouraging narrative and acknowledgement for the sake of restoring life, rather than to lift up the positive-core theme. Intercommunal dialogue aspires to give voice as well as to restore and connect. Transformative moments in intercommunal dialogue breathe heart and life into peacebuilding, offering inspiration, hope, and the seeds of a new future. Its greatest gift lies in the fact that participants may move away from the cycle of victim-to-victimizer, to a new cycle where victims and victimizers alike become visionaries.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) invites us to call forth the high road of our personal and collective narratives, finding the positive core, that which gives life (Sampson 2002). AI informs us that the questions we ask may also determine our history. In most conflict resolution methods, on the other hand, parties are guided to focus on the problem—the conflict and/or troubled relationship—and are more often asked about what is wrong than about what is right. If we follow the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, which suggests that whatever we focus on will tend to increase, we may conclude that the more traditional conflict resolution approach could increase some dimensions of conflict—possibly the most destructive dimensions—even as it attempts to resolve the conflict. In the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, we are thus challenged to consider what it might be like to focus on “life-giving” questions in our work with communities in conflict.

Admittedly, our initial reaction to AI was that an exclusive focus on the “positive” side of conflict resolution could be inappropriate and even dangerous. Conflicts are perpetuated by real grievances, injustices, and denials of oppressive and violent behavior. To avoid facing these realities during peacebuilding processes could unrealistically gloss over the core issues that encourage conflicts to rage, or at least to fester. In the context of war zones, starting with “appreciation” may seem naive, silencing, and violating to aggrieved parties. If we encourage premature appreciation, it may appear as if we as facilitators are collaborating with the lies, serving as partners in the denial of injury. Fridman (2002) convincingly suggests that to focus on “good news” in such contexts allows the stronger group to avoid hard questions of responsibility and yet feel as if they have contributed to making peace purely through their participation. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) have, however, clarified that the driving question in AI is not necessarily “what is positive or good” but rather “what gives life.” In conflict resolution, we submit that one crucial life-giving quality is narrative: finding the voice to tell the lived story. Accounts of peacebuilding reveal the life-giving quality for participants of sharing their own stories and narratives—their truths.

Reflecting its roots in organizational development, AI has tradi-  
 tionally been used as a change-management tool, in environments

strikingly different from refugee camps, ravaged postwar zones, and other settings where intercommunal dialogue might be staged. AI has been largely a workplace technology, most ideally used in conditions where the structure may support and encourage participation in systemic change. We are challenged now to apply this technology to the craft of conflict resolution, where the parties are emotionally damaged, trust is nil, and leadership structures to embrace change are nonexistent. In these settings, how do we harness AI's appreciative questions to "liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future?" (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 10).

We are especially interested in the relevance of AI for intercommunal dialogue. How can positive approaches to peacebuilding be utilized in situations where histories of profound violation and distrust exist between group members? Is AI an entry-level intervention, or the reward for completing the painful tasks of uncovering the layers of grime from the picture of intercommunal conflict? As facilitators, we acknowledge the positive, life-affirming, and courageous behavior of participation in intercommunal dialogue with the identified *Other*, which is risky at best and downright dangerous in many postwar communities. Perhaps presence at dialogue itself, with its promise of relationship and healing, makes an appreciative statement: Maybe we can talk to each other. Maybe we can build a future together.

### **A CASE STUDY OF VOICE IN DIALOGUE**

Finding voice for the pain to be spoken and acknowledged on both sides may be life giving although not classically "appreciative." Voice validates identity, shifts power, and restores one's humanness. It is also not just the voice of the speaker as victim that is critical to successful dialogue, but the recognition, acknowledgement, and validation of that victimhood by the listener, especially when that listener is part of the perpetrating community. In the example to follow, the repentant tears of a German minister validated the voices of Bosnian Muslim dialogue participants, a recognition longed for but withheld by their Serb counterparts. Story and acknowledgement form the core of the dialogue. In a point and counterpoint process, the voices of victims and the voices of members of perpetrating communities create collective meaning from their separate narratives, slowly building trust, understanding, and rapprochement. In the following case study of intercommunal dialogue, one of us (Paula Green) was a co-facilitator and will recount the story.

The importance of voice and recognition in intercommunal dialogue is well illustrated by a transformative meeting of two dialogue groups: one from the Holocaust of the 1940s and another from the Bosnian war of the 1990s. Members of these two groups were brought together in Bosnia to explore the healing potential of narratives, and to learn from one another's suffering and processes of healing. In this unusual, highly



charged, and successful experiment in dialogue “infusion,” a group of Muslim and Serb educators who participate in interethnic dialogue met for four days with members of a German and Jewish second-generation Holocaust dialogue group.

The Bosnian dialogue group, the Project for Dialogue and Community Building (Project DiaCom) consists of educators from the cities of Sanski Most in the Bosnian Federation and Prijedor in the Serb Republic, the two entities currently comprising Bosnia. The post-Holocaust group, One by One, meets in the United States and Germany and includes members whose families were directly affected by the Holocaust.

I initiated the Bosnian dialogue project four years ago at the request of Serb and Muslim educators whose previously intertwined lives have been split asunder by the violence that destroyed Bosnia. They wished to explore relations and to prepare their schools for the arduous tasks of repatriation and restoration of community. I also facilitated advanced dialogues for the post-Holocaust One by One group for members to deepen their relationships. Through years of persistent and difficult dialogues, members of this German-Jewish group have bonded deeply, brought together by the particular circumstances of their family histories.

Four selected members of One by One were invited to join the trip to Bosnia, where they could use their experiences as “wounded healers” to help Bosnians in their process of recovering from war. This proved to be a deep gift for all four groups: German Protestants, American Jews, Bosnian Muslims, and Bosnian Orthodox Serbs.

We met in a hotel in Sanski Most, a war-ravaged and “ethnically cleansed” city now the home to Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) refugees and returnees. Our week together included public presentations by One by One in both Sanski Most and the adjacent and also “ethnically cleansed” Bosnian Serb city of Prijedor. The heart of our work, however, was a powerful and passionate four-day dialogue between our Bosnian Muslim and Serb training group and the German and Jewish members of One by One.

A U.S. participant named Mary from One by One, her mother a Romanian Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, wrote this observation of the first session:

There is a feeling of woundedness in the room, and I register a shock to my system as I am staring right in the face of the aftermath of war. Time rolls backwards and I see my mother five years after the war. The Bosnians on the other hand look forward, and in us see their children fifty years after the war. We are two generations of genocide, facing each other across time. The ghosts in the room are louder than the living, and I feel overwhelmed in the face of so much unexpressed anguish. They sit in silence and the room is riddled with images. Nobody sheds a tear, frozen by the brutality of his or her recent pain.



In a closed session that included the ten Bosnian dialogue leaders-in-training, the four One by One members, and the facilitation and translation team, we worked steadily at exploring relations. A One by One member from Germany, a retired Lutheran minister who had been a member of the Hitler Youth, unexpectedly began his presentation in tears, setting a norm for emotional presence, authentic voice, and acknowledgement. Gottfried apologized to the Serbs for German aggression in World War II and to the Muslims for Germany's and the world's complicity in standing by and thus allowing the destruction of Bosnia. Ilona, the other German One by One presenter, spoke of her love for her father and the utter betrayal she experienced when she learned of his Nazi past. She mentioned the shame and the silence of bystanders and offered her concern for the next generation. "The younger generation will carry the guilt of their parents, if the parents do not deal with their own guilt."

Because of her early experiences and memories of Romania, Mary felt vulnerable in this former-communist Eastern Europe setting. She brought tears to everyone's eyes with her description of her mother's inability to recover from the concentration camps and the consequent effect on her own life. As she spoke, Mohammed, one of the Muslim participants, took an enormous emotional risk by noting with great anguish that the Serbs showed more concern for Mary, whom they had just met, than they did for his recently revealed suffering, although he is a long-term group member. "Our group shows more compassion for the Jews of One by One than for victims here—our stories are no less touching than theirs."

Watching the Serbs turn away from Mohammed's pain-filled eyes, we intervened as facilitators to encourage the group to pay attention to Mohammed and to their own responses. We saw that for the Serbs, listening to Mohammed's voice meant owning the truth about their Prijedor, their home and a city with its own camps and war-crime history. Mohammed, their colleague and group member for many years, was giving voice at that moment to his long-silenced anger at the Serb group members, his face a map of grief. To let in his story apparently stimulated anguish, shame, guilt, and their powerlessness as bystanders to stop the downward spiral of violence and pain against their former neighbors and friends. To accept Mary's Holocaust narrative, on the other hand, required nothing personal from the Serb participants.

A turning point had been reached in the group, one of many that occurred during One by One's presence. An emotional voice had surfaced that would shape relationships among all the Bosnians represented in the dialogue. We sensed there were more narratives from the Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak participants, but it was only after One by One departed that the most heart-rending story emerged.



After the One by One members left, we had one more day with the Bosnian trainees, the group with whom we have devoted the most energy in the past three years. Vera, whose real name must be withheld, told a story she had never before uttered, a story of unbelievable trauma and fear that remains in her body, sending her into periodic episodes of despair and shock. As she poured out her anguish, another young Bosniak participant held her and cried with her, mourning her experience and the thirty-six members of his own immediate family lost in the war. My heart reeled with the intensity of what I was hearing, while my mind remained watchful of the participants. The Serbs, all five of whom were women, were avoiding eye contact. One of them buried her face by taking notes.

My co-trainer and I knew we had reached a critical moment for intervention. The ground under us seemed to shake with the power of voice and the terror of listening. One by One, no longer physically present, remained with us as invisible witnesses. If the group could not respond to this outpouring of agony, if the Serb group members remained frozen in their fear and divided loyalties, we feared that the group would not move forward as a group of potential facilitators. If the group could not go through this pivotal incident together, we saw that the Muslim and Serb members might remain separated in alienation and despair, unable to join each other at this moment in their history, powerless to create a shared future based on the truth.

By an act of grace we found the words to comfort and steady Vera and simultaneously to help the Serb women find release from their shame and helplessness so they could reach out to Vera. A strong and capable Serb woman, Nada, bravely rose and crossed the room to embrace Vera and said as she held her: “What my parents suffered in World War II was terrible, but not as tragic as your experience.” In this critical moment of their interethnic dialogue process, Nada acknowledged that Vera’s story was true and also that she had been comparing this ethnic cleansing with that of her parents’ experience as victims fifty years earlier. Milka, the Serb educator in the group closest to her feelings, through a burst of tears asked her Muslim colleagues for forgiveness and reconciliation. Here again we intervened, to make sure everyone registered this significant moment of asking for forgiveness, a first among this committed and struggling group. From this crescendo of emotion, the group members transitioned to a time of quiet reflection.

In the closing circle that followed, Faik, a male math teacher from Sanski Most, said: “One by One gave me the courage to tell my story. Our listening guidelines are the core of our work; we must listen to each other.” Nada, who thought she had survived the war more or less intact, articulated the shattering of myths and constructs that must emerge for a new, hopefully more honest reality to break through: “I feel upset, maybe some dilemmas in myself. My head is chaotic. I thought I was really happy—a good husband, two kids, good work, everything okay. Now I feel broken and I



must be with my new feelings to find out what has happened to me. I don't know whether my happiness was a real happiness."

Faik was not the only one to comment upon the powerful impact of this infusion dialogue. Returning to the United States, Mary wrote eloquently:

Had I not gone to Sanski Most and Prijedor, I could have still maintained some of my innocence. But I was there and I cannot unlearn what I know and that is that genocide is still possible fifty years after Auschwitz, and the Holocaust is over only in as much as each of us has learned its lessons. There is a great risk in our ignoring what is happening and allowing the evil of genocide to seep even deeper into our souls. In a world plagued by people who are willing to set aside their humanity and slaughter their neighbor, we are all being called to action.

### **REFLECTIONS ON CASE STUDY OF GIVING VOICE**

In assembling this mix of dialogue groups, several questions interested me. Observing the skills of the One by One group in the dialogue process and the intimacy many of them have achieved across seemingly impossible barriers, I wondered what they could model and teach to the Bosnians about speaking truth to the Other. Most of the German and Jewish members of One by One are second-generation survivors of the Holocaust or people whose parents were part of the Third Reich. Very few members of One by One are first generation, or those who experienced the Holocaust directly themselves. The Bosnians, on the other hand, are all immediate victims, members of bystander or perpetrator families, or perpetrators themselves. Despite these critical differences between the Holocaust descendants and the Bosnian survivors, in both instances the struggle to give voice and to witness remains strong.

### **From Witness to a Future of Service to Others**

Prior to the episode recounted here, in an informal discussion about Bosnia after a One by One dialogue meeting, a Jewish group member had remarked that he wished healing and peacebuilding efforts had existed for his parents after World War II. My colleague did not envision his parents in dialogue with Germans but wished there had been some care and attention for their devastated emotions after the dehumanization and unrelenting violence of the concentration camps. "Had my parents received psychological support during these years," he commented, "I might have had a childhood less damaged by the Holocaust."

His remarks encouraged my thinking that One by One might have experiences useful to the Project DiaCom Bosnian participants, who struggle so bravely to speak to each other. I sensed that the Jewish and





German group could bear witness to the importance of giving voice to truth in the first generation, to the legacy of unprocessed trauma, and to the betrayals caused by silence, family secrets, lies, and distorted histories. It was on this basis that I invited One by One to select delegates to accompany me to Bosnia. An unexpected benefit was the effect that the Bosnians would have on the One by One group, illuminating the relevance of their experiences in dialogue for others suffering from the legacies of war and thus opening a way to a future for them of service to others.

### **When is it Time to Face the Truth of History?**

Another question that concerns peacebuilders is the influence of the passage of time on voice, dialogue, and the healing process. The Bosnian war ended five years ago. In Bosnia, memories are immediate, the destruction visible, and the wounds palpable. For the Germans and Jews, whose dialogue participants are descendants of victims and perpetrators, more than fifty years have passed. What is the right time to begin interethnic dialogue after war? When is it too soon? What factors of time and readiness need to be considered for the emerging of voices besides the request of the participants and the need for safety? And from the AI standpoint, what kinds of questions will lift up the “life-giving forces that are present and active”?

One by One taught me something of the depth of perpetrator groups’ suffering. I see how much anguish German members carry about the behavior of their family members and their nation. I know they long to heal these wounds and to experience themselves as good people, not through denial but through facing history. Their message to the Bosnians confirms that the path to forgiveness and restoration of dignity and community unfolds through voice, acknowledgement, and atonement. Children must learn the truth of violence committed by their elders and the truth of victimhood endured by the family. Repressed family and communal history, both among victim and victimizer families, reenacts itself, generation after generation. Traumas are transmitted. Ghosts emerge, demanding revenge. Only the truth can set us free. Who could be better qualified to give this message than descendants of the Holocaust and the Third Reich? From an AI perspective, the testimony of One by One would say: “what gives life is truth.”

### **Yearning to Have Their Voice Recognized**

For the Bosnian educators involved as future trainers in Project DiaCom, observing the closeness between Jewish and German dialogue partners touched them deeply. Currently the Muslim and Serb educators, formerly colleagues, neighbors, and some of them even relatives, still feel quite estranged from one another. They live in separate cities in different political entities, and carry dissimilar traumas from the same war: the



trauma of victimization and profound loss and the trauma of involuntary membership in the perpetrating ethnic group. Our Muslim members yearn to have their voice recognized and to receive acknowledgement of wrongdoing by Serbs, at the very least within the confines of the group, whereas the Serb members continue to deny the atrocities and the extent of Serbian perpetration in this region of Bosnia. We had hoped that the great risks of honesty taken by One by One members and their commitment to dialogue and to each other would inspire the Bosnians, as indeed they did, profoundly.

### **Cultural Differences in Dialogue**

In many ways, the situations of the two dialogue groups are not comparable. Factors of culture, isolation, economic and social devastation, political pressure, repatriation, and international intervention, among other issues, all influence the process of dialogue. Second-generation Germans and U.S. Jews live in cultural environments very different from Bosnia. The second generation Jewish and German One by One members frequently develop their dialogue skills through a process of psychotherapy, group work, and the norms of subcultures comfortable with self-disclosure and emotional expression. The Bosnians come from extended family clans, fifty years of communism, and limited experience with structured group process. As the Serb educator Milka reminded me, “We were taught not to interfere with public policies, express our emotions, or talk about our problems outside the confines of the family.”

### **Political Dimensions of Dialogue**

The political and economic environment in which dialogue is embedded clearly affects the process and outcome. Unlike Holocaust descendants, Bosnians must create a shared future as neighbors. Adding to their burdens, Bosnians face struggles with a stagnant economy, shattered infrastructure, and a demoralized, unemployed population. In this region of northern Bosnia, citizens of the two entities remain estranged and distant. Interethnic dialogue stands outside the prevailing social norms from even before the war. In such a bleak environment, how do dialogue participants heal themselves and rebuild community? What makes it possible for them to find their voice and what happens as a result?

Empathy and compassion, hopeful fruits of the dialogue process, do not flow easily in times of deprivation and struggle. Furthermore, dialogue partners frequently experience family and community pressure not to cooperate with the perceived enemy, and politicians protecting their own lives or interests can threaten dialogue members with loss of jobs or worse. Split loyalties that ripped apart mixed Bosnian families during the war now tug at families around issues of interethnic relationship building, an issue



also familiar to One by One. In the best of circumstances, dialogue would be supported and augmented by public rituals of peacebuilding such as days of mourning, memorials, truth commissions, and trials for war criminals. This is not the case in Bosnia, at least not in the present moment. Few signs of economic restoration or life-giving, community-building processes exist to nurture the vision of a united Bosnia.

### **Facilitating Infusion of Dialogue**

As a facilitator of this astounding combination of brave and wounded beings, I saw my task as that of container-builder, creating an environment sacred and safe enough for truth to be present, where the lived stories could have voice, and where acknowledgement could help to heal the pain. What made it possible for voices to emerge in this infusion of dialogues was the very careful and choreographed bringing together of these two groups, both of whom knew and trusted the facilitator, and all of whom were experienced group members. Each day we met in plenary and smaller sharing circles, working through structured questions and spontaneous emotions, sharing personal narratives and collective wisdom. We had present in the room five religions, two genocides, many cultures, and the complexity of using translators. Yet much was positive here. Presence and voice, intention, courage and commitment, the will to heal and rebuild. These constitute a positive core.

In this experiment in multi-level dialogue infused with the history of two genocides, the members of One by One discovered the relevance of their arduous journey for others recovering from war and betrayal. The Project DiaCom members experienced a degree of intimacy among former enemies and their descendants previously unimaginable to them, and participated in acknowledging their own tragic past as a bridge to Bosnian healing and community restoration. We as facilitators stood in awe of all the participants, Muslims, Serbs, Jews, and Germans, as they wove a new story from their intertwined histories, this one committed to honesty, introspection, civic responsibility, and compassion. We deeply felt the value of respecting all the parties in the dialogue, remembering that there is no life without suffering, especially in war, and that the journey to healing may begin with a single phrase: "Yes, this tragedy happened. I hear your voice. I acknowledge your experience. I accept your truth."

In our dialogues we do not use the language of forgiveness and reconciliation, but rather select more present-oriented words such as narrative, relationship, community building, collaboration, and healing. We sense that forgiveness and reconciliation, if they develop, grow out of this larger journey of finding voice, rebuilding trust, and restoring relations. We believe that we cannot wait fifty years for the second generation to undertake the healing process, and indeed postponing the public narrative process is



a betrayal of the second generation. Wounds pile upon wounds and the cleansing becomes even more difficult. We believe we need public rituals to bind the community, as well as private events like dialogue to strengthen collegial bonds and encourage collaborative development. It is difficult but not impossible to interrupt the cycle of blame, hatred, and revenge, and to balance out the needs for punishment and compassion. Our commitment to interethnic dialogue rests in the hope that transformation will emerge through the power of voice to build connection and caring and to unfreeze powerlessness produced by silence. Not a panacea, dialogue is but one significant element in the process of facing history, nurturing trust, and restoring intercommunal relations.

### **OTHER STRUCTURES FOR GIVING VOICE**

If voice is considered to be the nutrient that “gives life” to conflict resolution, let us also consider other examples of structured processes, in addition to dialogue, that might increase voice. These include sharing stories around common themes or problems, organizing voices into collective empowerment, witnessing and testifying, collecting rescue narratives, and memorializing. In addition to these, every culture offers opportunities for stories and witness, which run the gamut from psychotherapy to coffee klatches to religious and cultural rituals to the writing of history, the latter which more often than necessary becomes the narrative of the victor.

#### **Sharing: Telling Stories in Groups**

A powerful technique for giving voice to experiences of suffering, marginalization, and oppression is the sharing of stories in groups of those with similar experiences. Groups that grew out of the women’s movement, for example, or Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon meetings, provide structures for others to witness one’s story, frequently reducing the sense of isolation and stigma. Because structural violence so often creates a lack of recognition of one’s own oppression (Curlé 1971), finding common cause within a group may instruct, awaken, and release the silenced voices of the oppressed. In Chile during the years of dictatorship, for example, facilitated groups focused on the problems of fear, which helped to free the participants from the binding fear that prevented action against the regime.

We have, however, met cultures where even a closed, confidential group may still not be “safe enough,” and is thus culturally inappropriate. In some settings, revealing experiences of injustice and injury in a group may risk further isolation, retribution, or even abuse. In these cases, victims may require another way to share the unexpressed narrative in personal conversations with a trusted other.



In the close and interrelated extended family systems in some traditional societies, where women are invariably related to the husbands of other women, no secret is considered safe, even among women. Their voices are silenced by family loyalty, tradition, fear, and the oppressions under which they live. In this type of setting, the threat of retribution for breaking silence outweighs the women's need to share their narrative within their community. In situations documented by one of the authors, women expressed their loneliness and their desire to share their difficult lives with peers, but anxiety over retribution ruled their lives and silenced their voices.

### **Organizing: The Provocative Voice**

Sometimes raising a story to light may not be adequate to address a given concern, particularly if there are those who question its truth, have an interest in continuing the silence, or who merely maintain that "other priorities exist." Such is often the case with women's stories in times of war. In a refugee camp in Rwanda, for example, a female participant in a conflict resolution training group made a powerful appeal for the group to address the topic of rape committed by fellow refugees within the camps and quietly condoned by camp authorities. The group became silent, eyes averted and bodies squirming anxiously. The men, who were by far the majority in the room, protested both the lack of evidence of rape and the irrelevance of this topic in light of the urgency for repatriation. The woman held her ground. With the support of facilitators, the topic of rape in the refugee camps became central to the investigation of methods for organizing communities to meet needs and respond to violent behavior without further destructive aggression.

As facilitators we need to provide structures that challenge silencing and that uphold the concerns of disempowered and marginalized groups. Less privileged people are furthermore often told to wait for a more appropriate moment that may never arrive. In such cases, efforts must be made to strengthen individual voices and experiences through a public forum whereby multiple voices on the same theme are heard.

### **Witnessing and Testifying: The Public Voice**

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided the world with a groundbreaking model of speaking unspeakable truths in a very public forum for the purpose of witness, healing, and reconciliation. While there are both plaudits and criticisms of the TRC, most participants and observers agree that South Africa has offered the world a new model for testimony as a vehicle for healing the past that falls "between Nuremberg and national amnesia" (Tutu 1999, 10).



Anglican Archbishop and TRC Chair Desmond Tutu (1999) recalls that TRC commissioners worried that people who had been so brutalized by the decades of apartheid might not come forward. Those who had abused them might have intimidated them; they might refuse to be regarded as victims since they believed themselves to have been combatants in a struggle; or they might be disillusioned, not believing any longer that anything worthwhile could be expected from those who were forever making promises and being so painfully slow on delivery.

The commissioners need not have worried. People definitely did want to tell their stories. They had been silenced for so long, sidelined for decades, made invisible and anonymous by a vicious system of injustice and oppression. Many had bottled their feelings up for too long and when the chance came for them to tell their stories, the floodgates were opened.

The TRC provided a stunning and groundbreaking form of national healing and binding of the nation's wounds, whatever its shortcomings. While the journey of reconciliation requires a long arc of time and a multiplicity of processes, South Africa has approached it through the healing power of voice, so that this tragic history could be fully acknowledged and gradually transformed.

### **Remembering: The Rescuer's Voice**

In several postwar societies, researchers have collected the narratives of those who defied oppressive regimes to rescue their friends and neighbors. Holocaust rescuers are now elderly, and those who wish to remember and honor their heroic acts are seeking out the rescuers to detail their stories. One of them, Eva Fogelman (1994), wrote: "the act of rescue was an expression of the values and beliefs of the innermost core of a person." Many had never told their stories, and Fogelman noted that ". . . they paid a terrible price for this silence. A vital part of their inner self was muffled, and it left some of them psychically wounded." After the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, medical doctor Svetlana Broz, granddaughter of former Yugoslav President Marshal Tito, collected rescue stories among former friends and neighbors ensnared in those tragic events. These narratives will be published in English in the coming years.

For the rescued and the rescuer, and for the majority who stand by during times of war and oppression, these stories lift up honorable human behavior in its most positive aspect. Appreciative Inquiry suggests "creating opportunities for sharing good news stories" (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 9). What better news than to pay homage to those who ennoble human life?



### **Memorializing: The Silent Voice**

Sometimes what needs to happen is not just the uttering of the story, but the validating of the stories in “bricks and mortar” museums and monuments that increase assurance that time will not erase their memory. Passing the memory to the next generation can either perpetuate the conflict and separation or create a shared understanding of the price of violent conflict. Creating a memorial also declares that silence will not triumph—the injury of denial of voice that accompanies the victim of violence will not repeat itself in the next generation.

Living memorials such as concentration camps, gravesites, and killing fields stand in mute testimony to our history. Museums, monuments, and hallowed ground complement the testimonies and endure to tell the story when the last human survivor is gone. In West Africa, dungeons for captured slaves awaiting shipment across the Atlantic remind the visitor of a profoundly tragic past. A school in Phnom Penh records the genocide of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia; churches used for human slaughter remain in Rwanda; native populations in Guatemala tend sacred ground. One must be careful that these sites do not become stimulation for revenge, as occurred in Kosovo at the Field of Blackbirds, where Milosevic promised revenge for a battle lost by the Serbs in 1389. Our memorials and monuments must stand alongside the human narrative as reminders of past egregious behavior and as testimony to a shared commitment to achieve our “. . . dream for humanity, when we will know that we are indeed members of one family, bound together in a delicate network of interdependence” (Tutu 1999, 222).

### **CONCLUSION**

In our work as facilitators and professors in conflict resolution, we are often confronted with the question of what heals and prevents the recurrence of violence conflict. Using Appreciative Inquiry as a reflective frame encouraged us to focus our attention differently. An AI frame encourages us to focus on “what gives life” and on what behaviors, realizations, and changes we would like to see increased. Speaking truths, finding voice, allows new futures to grow. Many conflict resolution processes can be focused or refocused on nurturing the expression of narratives that will support growth and life.

We have seen how dialogue between former adversaries, appropriately facilitated, can give voice and life. Creating a safe space, a sturdy container, provides the safety needed to name horrors and hurt. The occurrence of the dialogue itself can also give hope, demonstrating that “we can at least talk together.” In particular, we have seen the value of immersion dialogue:

immersing one successful dialogue into the midst of another. Such dialogues not only change the dynamics to nurture increases in find-



ing voice and expressing truths, but also change roles of classic victims to ones where they help and lead. What allows this “dialogue within a dialogue” to be such a powerful process for giving voice?

First, the mere modeling of expressing one’s voice can allow others who have been silent to find their voices and speak up. Such expression, and attentiveness by the group, validates the worth of both the truth and the telling. The powerful stories and reflections that were shared by the experienced Jewish and German One by One members when visiting in Bosnia modeled and validated a type of expression that otherwise might have been silenced by the Bosnian participants’ larger communities. Alternative norms of voicing were enacted, allowing others to consider sharing their stories as well.

Second, there exists among those who have lived through such trauma a kind of knowledge of each others’ experiences—anguish, fear, loss, betrayal, hopelessness, grief, tentativeness in happiness—with which only those with similar experiences can truly empathize. These others also have a credibility with those coming out of a recent trauma that few outsiders would have. Thus their testimony for sharing truths and witnessing others’ truths—and for the possibility of positive futures—is more likely to entice the skeptic.

Third, meaning is created socially. In other words, humans create meaning in their worlds by sorting things out with others, particularly in situations where things are ambiguous and stressful, as Schachter first demonstrated early on (1959). As recent conflict survivors struggle to understand and make meaning of their experiences, the historical vantage of past conflict survivors can add wisdom and perspective.

Fourth, witnessing the One by One dialogue group allowed those within the Bosnian dialogue group to consider alternative possible futures. As revealed in Mary’s quote above, by listening to the stories of the descendants of traumatized survivors, the recently wounded could see how their current tragedy potentially could live into future generations. They were given the gift of a window onto the future, to consider how their current choices might best mold a positive climate for future relations. They could choose which narrative, which “wolf in the heart,” they would feed. Voice became a vehicle for expanding options and empowering choices.

Finally, the models of the Jewish-German partners in healing allowed the Bosnian participants to experience evidence of mended relationships and a more hopeful future. Amidst profound violation and distrust, participants witnessed those from another setting of profound violation who had begun to forge a future in which at least interpersonal trust and relationships were possible.

We acknowledge that this process of “wounded witnesses” from past traumatic situations helping those in more recent crises to make constructive meaning is not a new phenomenon. Support groups, reli-





gious settings, twelve-step programs, all build on these processes for healing through giving voice and modeling safe changes. More recently, we have seen the trend of survivors traveling to be present for those newly traumatized, as in the case of Oklahoma City bombing survivors working with survivors of the bombings in Nairobi and New York City.

As facilitators, we challenge fellow practitioners to be brave enough to give voice, and to be creative enough to find the positive uses of voice. Rather than fear the destructive future that narratives can create, or squelch the voice that then breeds future hatred of self and others, we should foster conditions that give voice and provide ways to narrate more positive futures. Giving voice and validity to victims and victimizers allows hope to grow, visions to be shared, and life to begin anew.

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