

A FORUM FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

# BUILDING PEACE

6



## INSIDE THE STORYTELLING REVOLUTION

SELLING PEACE:  
STORY BY STORY

ALTERNATIVE  
NARRATIVES AND  
COUNTERING VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM

PEACE NEEDS A  
SHARP, POINTY  
STICK



Alliance for  
Peacebuilding



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Note on cover image: Jonathan\_why's image captures a scene from Hong Kong's 2014 "Umbrella Revolution." From September to December, protestors staged a mass sit-in to call for open democratic elections. The titular umbrella became an icon of pro-democracy movements thanks to its use as a shield against police tear gas. This imagery was coupled with the yellow ribbons derived originally from the U.S. women's suffrage movement and black from annual Tiananmen protests to create an iconography that was both international and deeply personal to the individuals involved.

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Stories are both universal and individual. They are our mannerisms and our beliefs, our choice of words and our dreams for the future. Most of all, stories shape the way we interact with the world around us and how we define our role in it. We find purpose and belonging through stories—as individuals, communities, and nations.

At times, stories are tools of war: tales of nationalism can be twisted into rallying cries against an enemy across our borders—or in cases like Rwanda, the family next door. And yet, if stories can be used to call a society to arms,

of contents reflects a spectrum of storytelling mediums and our articles are relatable and poignant. As the peacebuilding field seeks to expand beyond its traditional boundaries, we sought inspiration from advertisers, filmmakers, policymakers, and activists, inviting their insights on innovative storytelling for peace. The five articles in this issue highlight how stories can usher in peace, and explore why these tales resonate so strongly among the global audiences we aim to reach.

Our authors share a deep understanding and appreciation for how story and narrative contribute to social change processes. Cara Mertes, the director of JustFilms at the Ford



can also build empathy and awareness to others' experiences. As Tramaine Chelan'gat Hugie, formerly of Storycorps, writes, connecting humanity is at the heart of the organization's mission.

Stories can also be a call to action. For Dave Loew, the Executive Creative Director at Leo Burnett, that action is crafted through creative advertising and reaches millions worldwide. Others, like Tara Sonenshine, work to 'sell' the benefits of peace to policymakers, urging them to prioritize funding and initiatives that move us closer to a more just society. On the other side of the coin, as Jasmine El-Gamal, a Truman National Security Fellow and a civil servant at the Department of Defense, points out, groups like ISIS similarly

## ***And yet, if stories can be used to call a society to arms, then stories can also be used to build cohesion and peace.***

then stories can also be used to build cohesion and peace. This special sixth issue of *Building Peace* is dedicated to the potential of stories in their many forms.

Our authors represent a range of backgrounds and perspectives, but for this issue they come together to examine the nexus of storytelling and peace. Our table

Foundation, reflects on film's role in reexamining the past and revealing new truths about our collective history. Like peace, stories are as much about the process as they are the product. Stories change and evolve with every generation and every new viewer as they find their own meaning in the messages. The act of telling a story and listening

use stories to inspire and catalyze action for their cause.

The articles in this issue definitively convey the transformative power of storytelling, but we also recognize that we have only scratched the surface of what storytelling has to offer. Today, advancements in virtual reality technology and gaming are pushing the boundaries of personal experience and empathy. Since its inception, photography

We are in the midst of a resurgence in storytelling. Technology has granted us the ability to share stories like no other time in our history. We believe that this issue of the magazine captures the excitement surrounding the role of stories in society. We invite you to join us in this storytelling revolution.

Warmly,

**Jessica Berns**

Editor-in-Chief

## ***Our authors share a deep understanding and appreciation for how story and narrative contribute to social change processes.***

has left an indelible mark on how we see and understand the world around us. And we would be remiss not to mention the vital roles that journalism, literature, and oral traditions all play in telling the stories of the sidelined or voiceless among us.



Source: Flickr: krishnakumar omanakuttan (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Source: Flickr: Steve Evaans (CC BY-NC 2.0)

# SELLING PEACE: STORY BY STORY

Tara Sonenshine

**Before dawn on Friday, December 17, 2011, Mohammed Bouazizi pulled his cart to the Tunisian marketplace where he sold his goods.** Local officials there harassed him and confiscated his wares – his livelihood – for refusing to pay a bribe. This was not the first time—but it would be the last. In a final act of defiance and frustration, Mohammed doused himself with fuel and set himself ablaze, sparking an international revolution that would become known as the Arab Spring.

On Tuesday, October 9, 2012, a fourteen-year-old girl was riding home from school in the Swat Valley of Pakistan when Taliban gunmen stopped her vehicle and shot her—because she advocated for girls’ education. Malala Yousafzai was left in critical condition. She survived, carried on as a peace activist, and won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The day Betty Bigombe entered the jungles of Uganda in May 1992, she understood that it might be her last. As a government minister, she had initiated contact with the Lord’s Resistance

Army—a brutal group led by Joseph Kony and known for its violent guerilla tactics and child abductions. As a peacemaker, Bigombe ventured into the jungle to engage the rebels in dialogue to end the killing of civilians. She went on to become a lead negotiator in Uganda’s ongoing peace process. Like Malala, she understood the power of engagement.

These stories are among the thousands, indeed millions, of narratives about people creating peace through individual and collective action. Their entirely

human endeavors inspire others to act, and make the case for peacebuilding today. The acts of ordinary individuals lead others to advocate for the fundamental right to live without fear, to reach one's innate potential, and to advance economic, political, and social liberty.

Stories move people and people move policy. It is not difficult to convince those who work on global issues to care about education, poverty,

environmental disasters, and acts of terror. But how can concerned citizens expand those interests, bringing other urgent issues to the table? In an information age of citizen diplomacy, the impact of stories has often translated into funding, policy and legislative support, and engagement. Malala's story, for example, went viral and became the subject of a feature film. Her actions sparked nationwide attention on girls' education, and led to a decision by the White House to roll out a new project, spearheaded by the First Lady, called "Let Girls

Learn." That project, in turn, encouraged NGOs to weave girls' education more seamlessly into their programming and policies.

Stories give other peacebuilders the courage and determination to go on in the face of danger. While stories have the power to inspire action on behalf of peace, not all stories of peacebuilders have happy endings. Kayla Jean Mueller, a twenty-six-year-old aid worker was taken into captivity in August 2013, while leaving a hospital in Syria. She became the fourth American to die at the hands of ISIS. Aid worker Peter Kassig was beheaded, as

## Short Stories: Community Murals in the U.S.

*When it comes to peace, walls are rarely the solution. Walls separate people and prevent dialogue. They build suspicion and unease. The examples are everywhere including Northern Ireland, the West Bank, and Berlin. Yet, walls can also serve as a canvas. While graffiti and street art in the United States have long been considered a consequence of crime, the past 30 years have seen an evolution of those attitudes. Communities are embracing the role of street art to unite rather than divide.*

The city of Philadelphia's [Mural Arts Program](#), founded in 1984, is one such initiative that is reimagining the world around them. The program began as a way to redirect the energy of graffiti artists toward community art projects rather than acts of public defacement and is today a network of 2,000 yearly participants contributing to projects across the city. The results are tangible: murals including [Women of Progress](#), [Common Threads](#), and [Billiards – A Tribute to Edward "Chick" Davis](#), all art that seeks to generate dialogue

*with the community about race, gender, and legacy in a city with a history of violence and racism. Murals also give a face to the often-forgotten or ignored communities in the urban sprawl by incorporating their likenesses and heritage into the tapestry of the cityscape. They serve as a beacon of inclusion in a sea of monolithic structures.*

*Yet this is only half the story, because—like all forms of art—the process is as important as the finished product. Murals are an inherently collaborative effort due to their sheer size, and when hundreds of individuals come together to make art, great things happen. Communities are strengthened, skills are given an outlet and a purpose, and participants create a sense of belonging where there was once isolation. Positive change can be made one brush stroke at a time.*

were journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff. My own heart was broken when Anne Smedinghoff, a young Foreign Service officer and former colleague, died in a roadside bomb explosion while working to bring books to an

film, art, music, theater, and every form of cultural engagement and education, we learn of the women and men who risk everything for peace. Their stories must be told—again and again.

are not just victims of extremism but are also fighting to eradicate it through peacebuilding activities.

## ***Stories flow from every culture and every level of society—it's up to us to make sure they are heard.***

Afghan school. Ambassador Chris Stevens and his colleagues were killed the same year in Libya. These tragic stories of courage for a higher cause must also be told, bringing to light a difficult truth: peacebuilding is dangerous work.

Though stories alone cannot make peace, stories do animate the peace process, bringing a human face to a field of work that is difficult to document, and elevating the mission of preventing and resolving global conflict. When a photograph of a lifeless Syrian boy on the shores of Greece captured the world by its collective heart, the humanitarian plight of refugees took on new meaning. A crisis that had persisted for years had renewed urgency and became an international priority. People are moved to action when they can relate to an individual caught in the crossfire of conflict. Through

With stories must come action to realize the dividends peace brings. This year – 2016 – must be the one in which we move from rhetoric to reality in deepening and widening the circle of peacebuilders, surrounding them with support. It is one thing to talk, for example, about the violence against women by terrorist groups. It is quite another when a Yazidi woman from Iraq testifies before the United Nations to describe her experience as a victim of the brutal rape and sex trade perpetuated by ISIS. And yet, we must take the next step to prevent stories like hers from happening in the future, by galvanizing governments to strengthen their efforts to reduce the threat of extremism. We need to encourage parliaments to pass legislation to expand the number of women holding office. We need to create news outlets and independent sources of reporting to tell the stories of women who

Storytelling is as much about the future as it is about the past or present, and there is so much we can do to foster stories of peace in the generations to come. We can encourage young people to study abroad and promote exchange programs. We can continue funding initiatives that lead to cultural understanding. And we can stimulate a culture of multilingualism so stories can be exchanged more broadly through local dialects. Stories flow from every culture and every level of society—it is up to us to make sure they are heard.

In the end, the story of peace must be a shared tale of triumph over tragedy. As Pericles said, “What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others.”

*Tara D. Sonenshine served as executive vice president of the United States Institute of Peace and then as under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs. She is currently a distinguished fellow in the School of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University.*



Translation: "If only the Führer knew!".  
Nazi's Against Nazis  
GGH MullenLowe

# PEACE NEEDS A SHARP, POINTY STICK

Dave Loew

(Legal disclaimer: The author of this article is an outsider with total respect and appreciation for the peacebuilding community but only limited knowledge of how it actually works, its protocols, and its best practices. But here goes...)

**As a creative person who works in advertising, I sell things.** Currently, those items include beer, running shoes, and frozen waffles—all critically important to human existence, but of course, not nearly as vital as peace.

The question is this: if peace were a product or service, how would we promote it? From a marketing perspective, peacebuilding faces three obstacles: a nebulous definition, the violence itself, and a crowded media ecosystem.

Those who experience violence and instability firsthand, truly appreciate what it means to have peace. The rest of the world is fortunate enough to see peace as something mundane, taking it for granted. Peace remains an ethereal concept for many outside

the peacebuilding community.

Peacebuilding faces competition not only from ethnic hatred, greed, religious extremism, and nationalism, but also from our 24/7 media culture. More than ever, peace efforts must compete with viral videos, sports mania, Facebook feeds, and other entertainment content for a place at the table.

Peacebuilding vies for one of the most valuable commodities on earth: people's attention. Peace

needs a sharp pointy object to puncture the thick, leathery hide of distraction and human indifference.

That sharp object is creativity.

Think of creativity as a new idea or a new interpretation of an old idea. The “[Like a Girl](#)” campaign is one brilliant example of how creativity can redefine old social norms. The campaign flipped this common phrase on its head, igniting a conversation and building the confidence of girls and young women worldwide.

In peacebuilding, creativity has the power to change human behavior, inject renewed urgency into an old issue, resolve conflict, and save lives.

Creativity is, of course, no substitute for the fieldwork so essential to conflict resolution—



SHARE  
VIDEO  
TO INSPIRE

TWEET  
HOW YOU'RE  
UNSTOPPABLE  
#LIKEAGIRL

WATCH  
CONFIDENCE  
IN ACTION

adidas  
#likeagirl

“[Like a Girl](#)” Campaign  
Always

Used with Permission from Leo Burnett

than half a million text messages to citizens, encouraging positive behavior and unity.

“[Nazis Against Nazis](#)” was an ingenuous creative move by the small, German town of Wunsiedel that raised money for

look (and feel) pretty silly in the process.

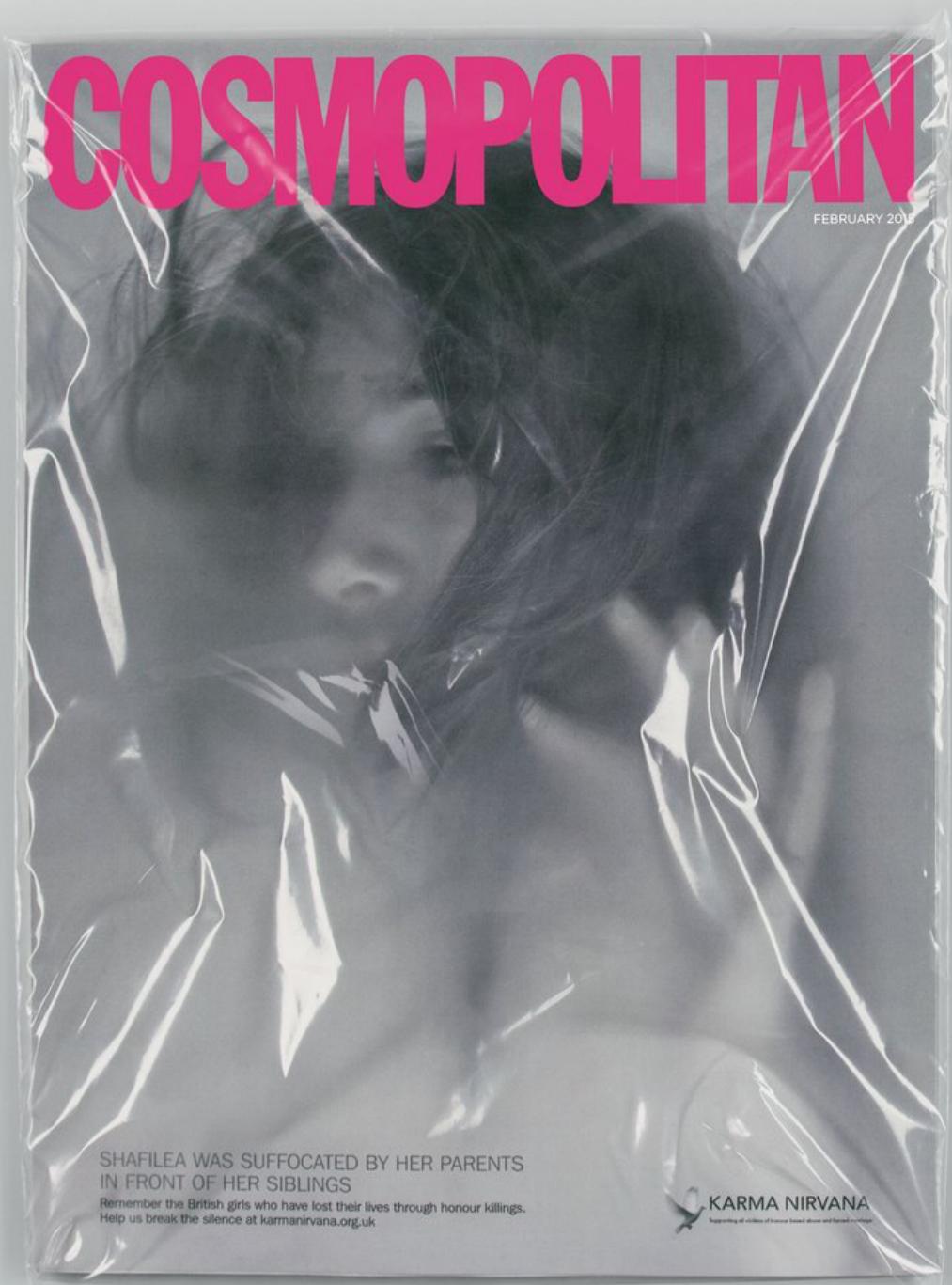
The irony of using an event against itself built awareness for the nonprofit—a German-based organization that works to rehabilitate extremists—and raised money to support their peacebuilding efforts. The action was indirect, but it succeeded in diffusing hate and making peace more tangible, while undermining the message of the extremist group. Could an idea like this be reworked to reduce the recruitment appeal of ISIS, for example?

Shock can also be used to raise awareness. While *Cosmopolitan* (*Cosmo*) magazine typically serves as a distraction from more pressing matters, *Cosmo UK* took

## **Peace needs a sharp pointy object to puncture the thick, leathery hide of distraction and human indifference. That sharp object is creativity.**

but it can amplify and complement these efforts. The mobile phone campaign, “[We Are Peace Kenya](#),” for example, shifted a troubling trajectory of election violence in the country, creating peace by sending more

an anti-fascist group by turning the tables on an annual neo-Nazi march. Local residents and businesses sponsored each meter of the march, pledging a total of €10,000 to the anti-fascist effort and making the Hitler aficionados



Cosmopolitan UK February 2015 Cover  
Cosmopolitan UK  
Used with permission by Leo Burnett

a bold swerve from its standard fare with its February 2015 issue. This limited edition was created for the non-profit [Karma Nirvana](#), to promote awareness of honor killings.

The [special edition](#) featured the face of a woman appearing to be suffocated, symbolizing the true story of a 17-year-old British-Pakistani woman who was suffocated and killed by her parents for refusing an arranged marriage. The magazine was given to members of Parliament and generated twenty-eight million media impressions and nearly £5 million in earned media for the cause. It also led to the creation of a National Day of Remembrance for honor killing victims.

Social media can also invite active participation in a cause. The question is how to create value beyond a simple “like”

or “follow.” An organization’s mission must be placed directly into people’s hands . . . or thumbs, as the Lebanese women’s organization [KAFA](#) did.

To urge Lebanese lawmakers to rule domestic violence a crime, KAFA invited the public to show its support by posting photos of their red thumb on social media with the line “Vote for us, we’ll vote for you.” More than two million people—half the Lebanese population—were exposed to the message. This simple galvanizing act generated twenty-two million Twitter impressions from fifteen countries, \$1.7 million in free public relations (PR), and—most importantly—prodded Lebanese lawmakers to pass the requested bill.

These successes were tangible and easy enough to measure. In peacebuilding, success may be harder to evaluate. While the for-

profit arena measures success metrics like brand awareness and sales growth constantly to ensure a return on investment, measuring the number of lives saved—deaths that do not happen—is more elusive.

In late 2015, this challenge became apparent at the Chicago launch of “[Put the Guns Down](#),” a hip-hop movement inviting participants to add their rap verse to a song against gun violence. It garnered great PR coverage, healthy YouTube viewership, and dozens of submissions. Yet the city began 2016 with the most gun deaths since the late 1990s. Does this mean the effort was ineffective? Would the world have been better off without it? Certainly not. It is unrealistic to think that even the most creative communication effort could instantly make the lure of the drug trade unattractive. The initiative made a positive impact on the

“Red Thumb/Vote for us. We’ll vote for you”.  
KAFA



Put the Guns Down  
Music Vs. Gun Violence



community's dialogue around gun violence and, today, it is likely that a number of people are alive because someone heeded the message.

Deeply rooted problems that fester over time are especially challenging for mass communication efforts. But a

fraught with challenges. But the sharp, pointy stick of creativity can help redefine peace, renew its promise, and raise it as a priority in the minds of many. In short, creativity can help build something as important as peace itself: hope.

## ***While the for-profit arena measures success metrics like brand awareness and sales growth constantly to ensure a return on investment, measuring the number of lives saved—deaths that do not happen—is more elusive.***

well-crafted creative message – delivered at the right time to the right people – can make a difference. For communication professionals who lend their expertise to help reduce violence and oppression – but who work outside the peacebuilding field – sustaining their efforts over time is a challenge. But the same can be said for those within the field: it takes patience and persistence over time to make a meaningful difference.

Many global citizens are fortunate enough to be able to take peace for granted, making the process of selling peace one

*Dave Loew is executive creative director at Leo Burnett Chicago. His work includes award-winning ads for Coca-Cola, P&G, and Condé Nast, as well as pro bono efforts for World Wildlife Fund, ReGrow West Africa, and Mother Jones magazine. Several of the examples in the article were created by Leo Burnett offices in other nations.*



# THE CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Tramaine Chelan'gat Hugie

*"Tell me the facts and I'll learn.  
Tell me the truth and I'll believe.  
But tell me a story and it will live  
in my heart forever." - Native  
American Proverb*

**My father disappeared when I was five months old.** Twenty-eight years later, I traveled to Kenya to find him. I placed a one-line "Situations Wanted" ad in a Kenyan newspaper, and within 24 hours – among a population of more than 46 million people – we were reunited. The next day, I

found myself on the cover of East Africa's largest newspaper, and in the days after I was interviewed on several local talk shows.

I went to Kenya to find my father, but I did not know the ripple effect my actions would have on my Kenyan family and the Kenyan Diaspora. Hearing my story moved others to their own reconciliations.

In the weeks and months that followed, I received numerous

emails from Kenyans around the world saying they were inspired by my story to find their own lost relatives and reunite with loved ones. My story of faith, forgiveness, and fortitude became a light for people I would never meet.

Invigorated by this experience, I returned to the United States one year later, determined to help people share their own stories. Not long after, I began working with StoryCorps, a nonprofit

media organization and cultural institution whose mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build bonds between people and create a more just and compassionate world. StoryCorps is guided by the belief that the simple act of listening creates stronger human connections. Its signature forty-minute interviews are intimate conversations between two people who know each other well and are inspired by universal themes of family, love, and work. Since its founding in 2003, StoryCorps has featured interviews with more than 105,000 people, partnered with more than 4,000 community-based organizations, and produced nearly 600 broadcasts, heard nationally on NPR.

The scope and power of these stories create the conditions for social change and social justice: increasing tolerance of and respect for all people, and challenging inequality. StoryCorps content has been featured in exhibitions, multimedia performances, advocacy, academic research, documentary filmmaking, and in community health assessments. It is within this framework of listeners, participants, and organizational partners that the role of storytelling in efforts for peace and justice is revealed.

The effects of these stories are real. [Evaluations](#) of StoryCorps' content demonstrate that stories are powerful, not just for participants, but for listeners as well. Stories can validate one's own experience, increase understanding, develop empathy within the reader, heighten connections, and inspire action. StoryCorps' interviews, used by organizations, have strengthened long-term community empowerment and contributed to societal cohesion.

Last year, a single innovation forever changed StoryCorps. The organization won the \$1 million [TED Prize](#) and used the funds to develop and launch a free mobile app that makes the StoryCorps interview experience available to anyone with access to a smartphone. In March 2015, the StoryCorps app debuted, and since then, individuals and

organizations have used it to mobilize communities and raise awareness around a spectrum of pressing social issues. For example, a group of community members used the app to record "[Voices of Animas](#)," stories focused on the 2015 Gold King Mine spill into the Animas River, affecting thousands living in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

A StoryCorps colleague recently described the app as a "blank canvas for the world" on which to create new stories, while enabling individuals and organizations to increase their digital presence and preserve stories for future generations. Participating in a StoryCorps interview creates a unique opportunity for people to share their stories with the world. One StoryCorps participant who

Source: Flickr: NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center



*The StoryCorps app was created as a global platform for listening, connecting, and sharing stories of the human experience. The app is a free, cross-platform tool with built-in questions, a timer, and archive options at the Library of Congress. The first year after launch saw nearly 80,000 stories uploaded and 200,000 registered users. In an average interview of fifteen minutes, users share their most meaningful life experiences—on themes including: family, marriage, childhood, and war.*

# My 5 Most Memorable StoryCorps Stories

## 1. Miss Devine: James Ransom and Cherie Johnson



is a Director of Community and Program Services at a health facility noted, “These interviews brought meaning and dignity to the lives of our patients and their families. The CDs that are preserved at the Library of Congress will bring wisdom and insight to future generations about how those who are dying are also living and filled with important things to say.” Additionally, a student of StoryCorpsU, a youth development program, said of their experience, “I learned how to speak loud and brave so people can know I have a voice and that everyone’s voice matters.”

StoryCorps continues to improve access to experience, works to become more inclusive, and aims to continue bringing key social issues of diverse communities to public attention. StoryCorps works to deepen connections to community and increase individual self-worth—especially among members of historically marginalized or disadvantaged populations.

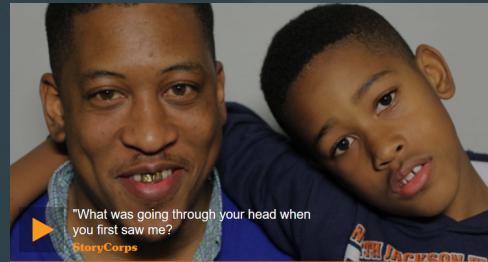
Across every culture, in every part of the world, humans have told stories to understand, share, and recall knowledge. We are like human kaleidoscopes—reflections of the people we encounter and the environment that shapes our experience. When I shared the story of finding and reuniting with my father in 2010, I did not know the impact I would

have on others. When StoryCorps participants record and share their stories, we cannot always foresee the impact it will have.

What I have learned through this work is that the affect of storytelling and the power of listening is transformative: reaching the heart has a profound ability to change the mind. Through storytelling, by sharing and listening, one of my greatest desires is that humanity can illuminate hope, and reflect back all that is good and peaceful in the world.

*Tramaine Chelan’gat Hugie, the former director of community engagement at StoryCorps, is an integrated media specialist and social impact strategist who focuses on innovations that advance social justice, education, and economic progress.*

## 2. Albert Sykes and Aiden Sykes



"What was going through your head when you first saw me?"  
StoryCorps

## 3. Traffic Stop: Alex Landau



## 4. Yusor Abu-Salha and Mussarut Jabeen



"Hello, my name is Yusor Abu-Salha."  
StoryCorps

## 5. Paul Braun and Philip



"My American soldier became my Iraqi brother."  
StoryCorps



# Alternative Narratives and Counteracting Violent Extremism

Jasmine El-Gamal

**Alex was lonely and confused.** As a 23-year-old college dropout in a Midwestern town, Alex's friends had long since moved on without her. So when the news broke of journalist James Foley's death at the hands of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), she turned to the internet to understand why. She found her answers – and a new circle of friends – on Twitter. Her new companions sent her daily encouragement, gifts of chocolate and books, and provided her with a sense of belonging she had not felt in years. There was only one problem: her new friends were members of ISIS. Little by little – first through social media, then later through Skype and texting –

Alex's contacts persuaded her to convert to Islam and enter into a marriage with a 45-year-old jihadi as an 'ISIS bride.' Fortunately, Alex's family stopped her before she could depart for the Middle East. Yet Alex's **story** remains a cautionary tale of the persuasive pull of effective storytelling.

Counteracting Violent Extremism (CVE) experts and governments alike agree that the problem of extremism does not have a military-only **solution**. Rather, they find that working with communities to address their vulnerabilities is critical for sustainable peace, and that local contexts must be woven into response **strategies**—both

of which rely on the power of storytelling.

In today's advanced communication age, stories are shared instantly by millions of people across cultures and borders. Although the act of storytelling often has positive associations, it is also a powerful tool used to lure individuals and communities toward dangerous or extremist behaviors. This deadly potential – exemplified daily as extremist groups flourish across the globe – underscores the urgent need for individuals, NGOs, and governments to work across sectors, reinforcing one another's efforts to create alternative, anti-extremist messaging strategies.

Unlike counter-messaging—when an individual or organization responds to a particular message—an alternative message is distinct, proactive, and ongoing. Both types of response are necessary components of an effective CVE strategy. An alternative message, however, allows the protagonist to set the tone and therefore control the narrative, whereas counter-messaging, or counter-narratives, run the risk of empowering the antagonist (in this case, the extremist) by directly responding to—and inadvertently magnifying—their words or actions.

Regardless of ideology or religious identity, extremist narratives often employ the same formula: grounded in both psychology and marketing, the narratives draw on the intrinsic human desire to belong and feel heard. The formula involves: 1. Identifying a grievance through an empathetic protagonist; 2. Blaming an antagonist, someone who wants to stop the protagonist from reaching their goal; 3. Mobilizing would-be followers to “correct” the grievance; 4. Advancing a vision of a new order or society—a resolution—that would require a transformation and provide the recruit a sense of belonging.

Much like ISIS used this formula with Alex, where her problems would hypothetically be solved

by moving to ISIS-controlled Syrian territory, terror groups and charismatic individuals alike use these steps to influence their potential recruits. Even prior to his drafting of *Mein Kampf* in prison, Hitler’s rhetoric was able to sway the German people by taking aim at the suffering German state. By arguing that the “November Criminals,”—the politicians who signed the Treaty of Versailles—essentially stabbed the country in the back when it was poised to win WWI, Hitler identified the perfect antagonist for the German people suffering under economic and political hardship. The acceptance of Nazism was, of course, his solution to these wrongs.

While the Nazi party and ISIS both fall on the far-right side of the ideological spectrum, this formula should not be mistaken for a tool of only one side. Left-wing groups such as the FARC in

American President Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II. A master storyteller and believer in the concept of the alternative narrative, Roosevelt knew that Americans needed to believe in something noble, to feel they were a part of something bigger than themselves, if they were to make the necessary sacrifices to get America through the war. He worked across sectors in the United States and with allies abroad to create a powerful coalition against Hitler’s narrative.

Instead of simply repeating why the enemy was evil, Roosevelt told America’s story—what the country was fighting for, and what he believed they could achieve if they worked together. Through his fireside chats Roosevelt made Americans feel significant, connected, and validated. The chats felt honest and intimate, and they provided Americans

## *...an alternative message is distinct, proactive, and ongoing.*

Colombia and the Red Brigades in Italy are just as likely to utilize it as the Klu Klux Klan or Al-Qaeda.

In determining the most effective alternative narrative, CVE practitioners and policymakers should look to the example of the

a story in which they could see themselves as integral characters.

Today individuals, organizations and governments can work together to create a powerful storytelling ecosystem where each actor reinforces the efforts of the other based on their

own comparative advantage. Doing this successfully will provide individuals with positive stories. These stories offer an alternative that helps deny extremist organizations the ability to captivate the imagination of people like Alex and other vulnerable populations worldwide.

*CVE. From 2011-2013 she was the country director for Syria and Lebanon at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy. From 2013-2015, she served as a special assistant to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Views represented in this article are her own.*

*Jasmine El-Gamal is a Truman National Security Fellow and a civil servant at the Department of Defense, where she focuses on*

## **Short Stories: Darfur's Hakamat Singers**

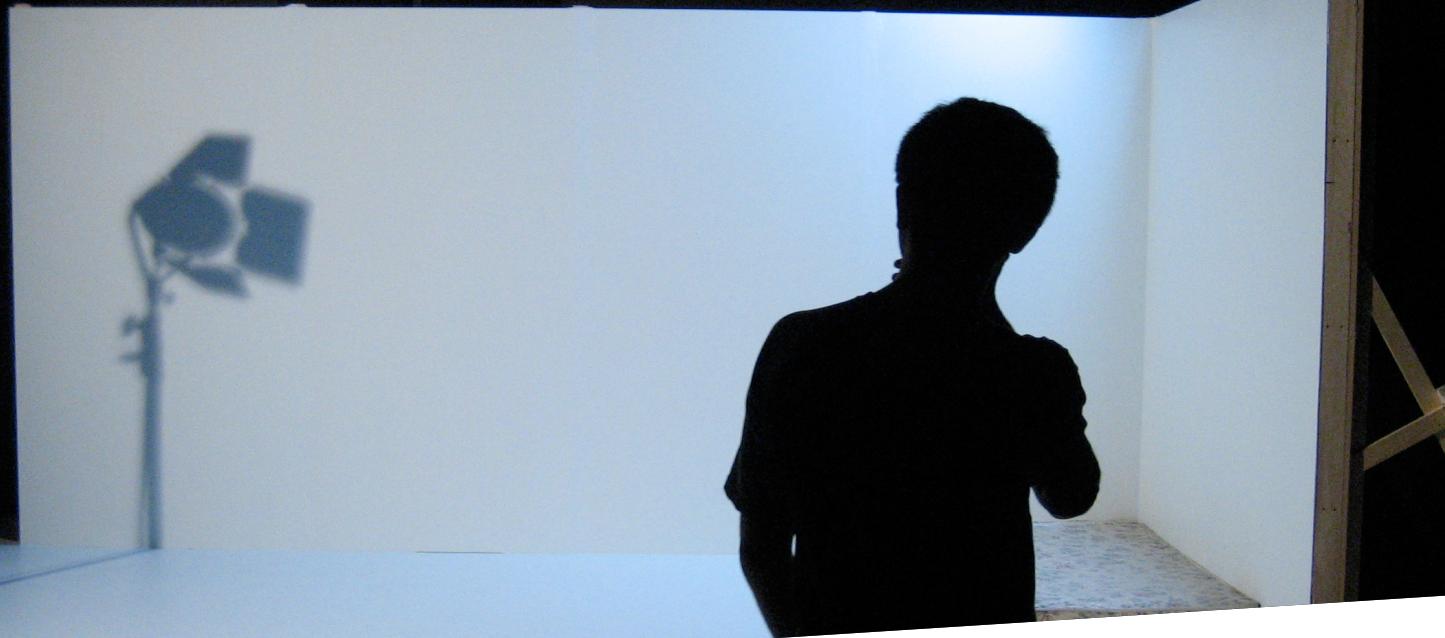
In Darfur, in the Western region of Sudan, an influential group of women, known as the Hakamat, are beginning to change their tune. The Hakamat hold a special place in Darfur's tribal society, serving as voices for war and conflict.

Historically, their songs extoll the masculinity of the men who are willing to take up arms against rival tribes, while decrying those who would attempt to solve their quarrels peacefully. Collaborative for Peace in Sudan (CfPS) seeks the support of these women to break the cycles of violence that have characterized the region. Today, the Hakamat are beginning to sing songs of peace.

According to Raha El Fangry, the co-coordinator of the project, the process has not been easy. CfPS contends with age-old precedents, a culture that celebrates the bravery of warriors, and payment by tribal leaders to sway public opinion.

Yet CfPS' efforts have not been in vain. The Hakamat women have, little by little, begun to come around to the proposition of singing for peace rather than conflict. This change has come because many Hakamat have paid a personal price for the violence. Raha recalls that one such singer confessed, "I already lost a brother... If I continue singing it could be a son this time round." It is this sentiment that has convinced so many of these influential women to raise their voices for peaceful resolution to local conflicts.

Raha El Fangry has served as the co-coordinator of the Hakamat project since its beginning in 2006. Prior to working with CfPS, she was a member of A Voluntary Body for Youth, which ran initiatives to bring students together for peaceful discussion and debate, as well as the Sudan Social Development Organization.



# FILM, TRUTH, AND THE PURSUIT OF PEACE

Cara Mertes

**Film has power as a pathway to peace.** In a certain kind of filmmaking, the ends and the means are inseparable; the way that a film is made is reflected in the final product. Gandhi has said the same about peace. Seen in this light, the process and product of socially-engaged films are inextricably linked, and though the content of a film's final cut remains fixed, its effects are dynamic as new audiences engage with the material.

These films and filmmakers are architects of peace, and are as

central to the process as legal actors, activists, journalists, and politicians. Socially-engaged filmmaking is collaborative and cooperative, entails countless decisions and compromises, and – because it seeks on-screen narrative resolution through building relationships based on off-screen trust – propels dialogue and dynamics that can be harnessed to build community. For instance, new forms of leadership, voice, and power are developed: first through the making of films, and then in audiences who are activated

by them. This kind of creative expression, rooted in community, is a potent force for justice.

My appreciation of such filmmaking has led me to support and champion a wide array of artists and projects in what I see as almost a spiritual practice, though many of these artists would not apply this term to their work. Many examples come to mind: Leonard Retel Helmrich, Rithy Panh, Laura Poitras, Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffman, Thet Sambeth and Rob Lemkin, Pamela Yates, Paco de Onis,

and Joshua Oppenheimer. These individuals have collectively spent more than a century pursuing cinema projects that function as peacebuilding tools. Their themes include: genocide,

perceptions,’ and that suffering is inherent in human nature. Each of us has the capacity to both inflict and relieve suffering. Nhat Hanh describes deep listening as communication that resolves

Academy Award-nominated Director Joshua Oppenheimer (*Act of Killing* | *Look of Silence*) reminds us that a camera does not simply record reality, but instead provokes a witnessing and rendering of reality that reveals deeper truths. His two films together pose the problem of truth for the perpetrators and victims of genocide in Indonesia as both groups continue to live in intimate proximity. Director and producer Laura Poitras, investigates the implications of a post-911 world in her trilogy of films (*My Country, My Country* | *The Oath* | *Citizenfour*). Yates and de Onis take on genocide and their work has been an integral part of the justice-seeking process in Guatemala over decades in *When the Mountains Tremble* and *Granito*. Their documentary, *Granito*, tells the story of how their first film, *When the Mountains Tremble*, was used as evidence for bringing the indictment for genocide against former dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt.

## **Combining storytelling, history, witnessing, and forgiveness, these filmmakers create cinema that is itself an act of justice.**

secrecy, impunity, and corruption.

Their films propose that the resolution of generational trauma requires an encounter between perpetrators and their victims in a way that recasts original power dynamics. Each must witness to the others’ realities, and the audience become the final witness. They further suggest that the question of justice must be raised, whether through legal mechanisms like a court, or a focus on the most human of acts: individual forgiveness. Sometimes one can lead to the other. This is the heart of the truth and reconciliation process. Combining storytelling, history, witnessing, and forgiveness, these filmmakers create cinema that is itself an act of justice.

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh echoes, and is restated by many spiritual leaders, in proposing that all suffering is the result of, ‘wrong

conflict and promotes peace. Such peace is more than the lack of violence and instability—it is the presence of compassion, an ongoing process, and a dynamic that we must continually work toward. Film can be an act of deep listening: its power is linked directly to its ability to ease suffering. These socially-engaged filmmakers have developed this approach over many years and through many films. Their stories have had extraordinary impact—shifting the course of history in ways large and small.

Such artists bring to mind the original meaning of ‘cinéma vérité’: their work provokes not by imposing an outsider’s perspective but by capturing the realities of life as they unfold. They do not, as French philosopher Edgar Morin described it, pretend to present truth; rather they present the problem of truth. And truth demands a response.

As a filmmaker-journalist, Thet Sambeth worked with Rob Lemkin to uncover the truth of the Cambodian genocide in *Enemies of the People*. Rithy Panh’s extraordinary opus, including works like *Rice People* and *The Missing Picture*, is rooted in the same genocide. Leonard Retel Helmrich’s trilogy

*(Eye of the Day | Shape of the Moon | Position Among the Stars)*

follows three generations of an Indonesian family who conduct their lives under the rule of fear. Reid and Hoffman's *Long Night's Journey into Day* defined for many, South Africa's struggle against apartheid. These stories are for new generations to know, because it is in our nature to deny our capacity for indifference and violence. These films present a stark reminder of that dark side of human nature.

These films have also opened spaces in which people can finally speak and be heard by new audiences. At their most powerful, they shake the foundations of our assumptions and destabilize our certainties. This is what peacebuilding requires; a recasting of the previous *status quo* towards a new, more stable and generative one. Film is an art-form that can help accomplish this feat by offering us a way first to understand the past and present, and then to imagine a new path forward. An accumulation of such stories provides steady reinforcement for critical inquiry and strengthens our ability to transforms our assumption that the ways things are is the ways things must always be. Such questioning is the beginning of peacebuilding. You can see it in the actions of the subjects of these films: the drive to reveal, to

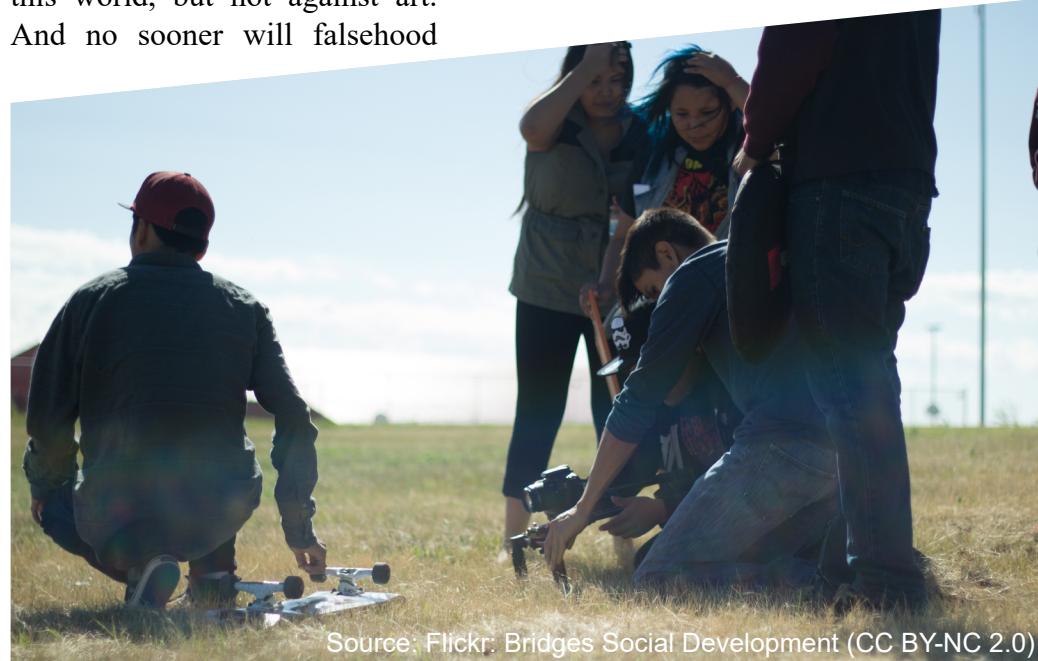
recount, to witness, to reimagine.

Seeing film and justice as intertwined is a hallmark of Ford Foundation's commitment to human dignity. For over 50 years, supporting essential stories and new modes of storytelling that remind us how dignity feels, and what the road to it looks like, has been a core Ford value. The impact of these films can be seen in the way they have become touchstones for eras and movement, a shorthand for entire historical events, and a way of understanding history that has been transformed by the films themselves.

In his 1970 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted: "Falsehood can hold out against much in this world, but not against art. And no sooner will falsehood

be dispersed than the nakedness of violence will be revealed in all its ugliness—and violence, decrepit, will fall." These films and filmmakers are creating the conditions for justice to be expanded and reproduced and for peace to be realized—conditions that are crucial to imagining a future where peace is possible.

*Cara Mertes is the director of JustFilms at the Ford Foundation. For more than two decades, she has been a leading voice for the power of artist-driven nonfiction film to animate public discourse on contemporary issues.*



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