

Rejecting Retaliation

Victims of Violence Work for Peace and Security

Terry Greene

In 2006, on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, members of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows joined with others from around the world who were also personally affected by violence. Each has rejected the idea of retaliating with further violence. Instead, they have successfully built bridges between groups previously in conflict and have formed organizations to promote justice, reconciliation, and genuine peace. Together, we launched the International Network for Peace to turn our grief into action for peace across the world.

The stories of these men and women can help us educate ordinary Americans about the real costs of war – the civilian casualties, families torn apart, hopes denied, children dying or living in fear – that we so seldom hear. At the same time, their successes promoting conflict resolution and healing offer a vision of peace that is achievable and sustainable.

Here are a few stories of victims of violence who have rejected retaliation.

Joanna Berry, UK

In 1984, Jo's father was killed when the Irish Republican Army (IRA) planted a bomb in a hotel where he was attending a conference. Jo decided to draw meaning from this tragedy; her path led her to Ireland, to other victims of the IRA, and to victims who had suffered on both sides of the divide – Catholic and Protestant. In 2000, she met Patrick Magee, the man who planted the bomb. Jo's story and her meeting with Patrick were recorded in the BBC documentary "Facing the Enemy." Since their first meeting, they have worked together for peace. Jo is the founder of Building Bridges for Peace.

I have been on a long journey since my father, Anthony Berry, a member of parliament, was killed in an IRA bombing. In the days after

the bomb I wanted to somehow bring something positive out of the tragedy, and I began a journey of healing. The last 25 years have been full of remarkable experiences.

In November 2000, I met Pat Magee, the man responsible for planting the bomb, and we have now become friends. For me, the question is about whether I can let go of my need to blame, and open my heart enough to hear Pat's story and understand his motivations. The truth is that sometimes I can and sometimes I can't and this choice is always there.

I wanted to meet Pat, to hear his story and see him as a real human being. At our first meeting I was terrified. But as soon as we met, we



Patrick Magee and Jo Berry



The IRA was the military wing of the Irish independence movement that has fought British colonialism for many years. In the map above, independent Ireland is a darker shade than Northern Ireland, which is still part of the United Kingdom.

talked with an extraordinary intensity. I shared a lot about my father, while Pat told me some of his story. I realized half-way through that first meeting that I was at the beginning of another journey.

I still have feelings that are painful. I still get angry. But I have learned that these feelings can be transformed into passion for change. At first, I wanted to stop the cycle of violence and revenge in *me*. Now, I want to help create a *world* in which violence is not seen as a viable way of resolving conflict.

My commitment is to see the humanity in everyone. Building Bridges for Peace is now an umbrella for all the work that I do to participate in creating a peaceful world.

Jean Baptiste Ntakirutimana, Rwanda

At age 29, while Jean Baptiste was studying theology in Kenya, he lost his parents, nine brothers, sister, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces in the 1994 Tutsi genocide committed by the Hutu. Currently he is the Country Director of Orphans of Rwanda, Inc. He is actively involved in many peace-building and reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda and the region. In April 2008, he visited his mother's killer in prison where he is serving a 28-year sentence.



Tutsi and Hutu are social/ethnic groups in Rwanda. Due to longstanding tensions, made worse by Belgian colonizers, a conflict erupted in 1994. The Hutus, who controlled the government, killed more than half a million Tutsis in 100 days.

When I met Mr. Turikunkiko, the man who killed my mother, he was trembling and afraid to look me in the eyes. My heart was beating twice as fast as normal. I was fortunate to have taken along a friend, Joseph Nyamutera, who had agreed to mediate and be there as a support.

Joseph started by explaining the reason for our visit: I had come to learn about what happened to my family and to initiate my own healing process. I also wanted to offer Mr. Turikunkiko an opportunity to initiate his own healing and relief from the memories he had been carrying with him for 14 years.

I inquired first about his life in prison, his family, and his state of mind. He told us that he was living very miserably. He felt disowned and abandoned by his wife and children. He told us that he was expecting me to want to kill him,



Jean Baptiste Ntakirutimana

which he said would be justice since he had killed my mother.

He described how my people were put in a regional stadium and slaughtered. He added that no one had dared to kill my mother, so she was brought back to her home village by two militia men where they called for others to come forward and kill her. Still no one wanted to do this, until finally Mr. Turikunkiko volunteered. He told us that no one was allowed to loot from Tutsis before killing all family members and since they thought I had already been killed in Kigali, the only hindrance to taking all the family property was my mother. So she had to be killed.

When he started explaining how he killed her, I partly lost consciousness. I prayed to God to revive me and give me more strength to continue, as I felt this was my mission. Miraculously, I then felt warmth spread from my head to my feet. I felt a big rock melting from my chest and head. I felt very refreshed. I cleaned up my tears and carried on the conversation, feeling tremendously relieved throughout my whole being.

Mr. Turikunkiko cried for most of the time. I told him that I was coming to him in the spirit of forgiveness. It was as if a huge veil lifted from his face; he started smiling, full of words of gratitude. He took hold of my hands, telling me many other things about himself and the truth of what happened during the genocide. He also agreed to meet with other people whose family members he had killed.

He was a totally transformed person, as indeed I was, which was the last thing I had expected. I had gone there to help him, but in fact I had got more from the visit than I would ever have personally expected. As I left, I felt as if I was carrying only half my weight.

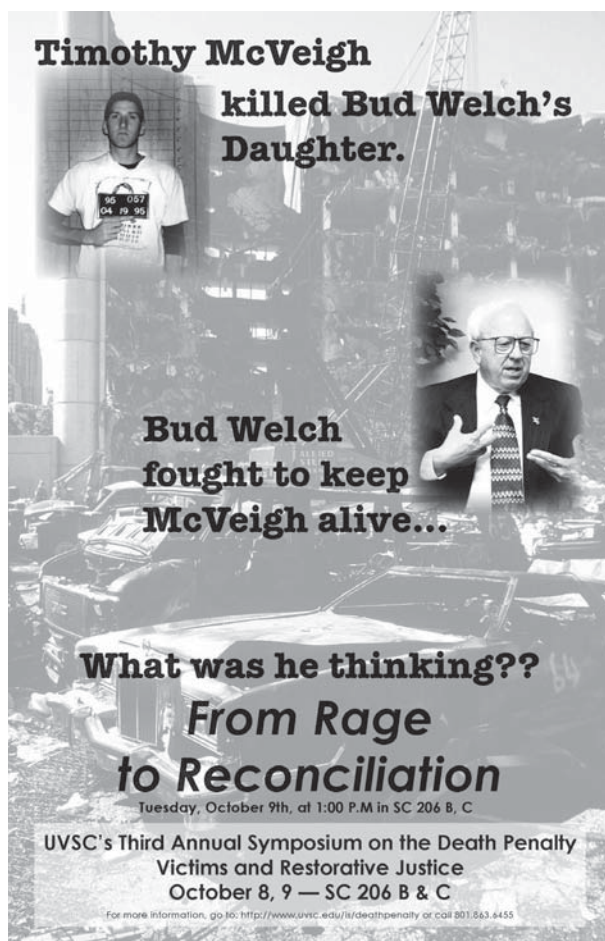
BUD WELCH, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

After his daughter Julie's death in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, Bud became an outspoken opponent of the death penalty. He has testified before the U.S. Congress, State Senate, and House Judiciary Committees and has met frequently with the father of Timothy

McVeigh, the man who detonated the bomb. Bud is the president of Murder Victims Families for Human Rights. In 2001, Timothy McVeigh was executed for his part in the bombing.

Three days after the bombing, as I watched Tim McVeigh being led out of the courthouse, I hoped someone in a high building with a rifle would shoot him dead. I wanted him to fry. In fact, I'd have killed him myself if I'd had the chance.

Unable to deal with the pain of Julie's death, I started self-medicating with alcohol until eventually the hangovers were lasting all day. Then, on a cold day in January 1996, I came to the bomb-sight—as I did every day—and I looked across the



Poster from a symposium on the death penalty held at Utah Valley University in 2007.



In April 1995, Timothy McVeigh set off a bomb in front of the federal building in Oklahoma City. The explosion killed 168 people and injured 450. He was seeking revenge for the FBI's killing of 76 people in Waco, TX in 1993, which happened after a 50-day siege and gun battle between U.S. authorities and members of a Protestant sect that was stockpiling weapons.

wasteland where the Murrah Building once stood. My head was splitting from drinking the night before and I thought, "I have to do something different, because what I'm doing isn't working."

For the next few weeks I started to reconcile things in my mind, and I finally concluded that it was revenge and hate that had killed Julie and the 167 others. Seeing what Timothy McVeigh had done with his vengeance, I knew I had to send mine in a different direction. Shortly afterwards, I started speaking out against the death penalty.

I also remembered that I'd seen a news report on Tim McVeigh's father, Bill. He was shown stooping over a flowerbed, and when he stood up I could see that he'd been physically bent over in pain. I recognized it because I was feeling that pain, too.

In December 1998, after Tim McVeigh had been sentenced to death, I had a chance to meet Bill McVeigh at his home near Buffalo. I wanted to show him that I did not blame him. His youngest daughter also wanted to meet me. After Bill showed me his garden, the three of us sat around the kitchen table. Up on the wall were family

snapshots, including Tim's graduation picture. They noticed that I kept looking up at it, so I felt compelled to say something. "God, what a good looking kid," I said.

Earlier, when we'd been in the garden, Bill had asked me, "Bud, are you able to cry?" I'd told him, "I don't usually have a problem crying." His reply was, "I can't cry, even though I've got a lot to cry about." But now, sitting at the kitchen table looking at Tim's photo, a big tear rolled down his face. It was the love of a father for a son.

When I got ready to leave, I shook Bill's hand, then extended it to Jennifer, but she just grabbed me and threw her arms around me. She was the same sort of age as Julie but felt so much taller. I don't know which one of us started crying first. Then I held her face in my hands and said, "Look, honey, the three of us are in this for the rest of our lives. I don't want your brother to die and I'll do everything I can to prevent it." As I walked away from the house I realized that until that moment I had walked alone, but now a tremendous weight had lifted from my shoulders. I had found someone who was a bigger victim of the Oklahoma bombing than I was, because while I can speak in front of thousands of people and say wonderful things about Julie, if Bill McVeigh meets a stranger he probably doesn't even say he had a son.

About a year before the execution I found it in my heart to forgive Tim McVeigh. It was a release for me rather than for him.

Terry Greene's brother, Donald Freeman Greene (pictured below left with Terry), was aboard United Flight 93, which crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. She joined September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows after it became clear to her that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were fueling, not stopping, terrorism and creating unimaginable civilian casualties that dwarfed our own terrible losses on September 11th. Watch a video of Terry Greene and other Peaceful Tomorrows members at <911stories.org>. This article was compiled from <www.buildingbridgesforpeace.org/founders_story.html>, and <theforgivenessproject.com>.

