

Steps on a Journey from Grief to Forgiveness, 2001-2011

David Potorti

My brother died in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. My grief led me to the hope that others would not experience my loss and pain. Since speaking out about my brother's death, I've been on a journey with countless people in the U.S. and around the world who have taught me that terrorism, violence, and war have touched the lives of everyone. Their fellowship has been a comfort and a joy, and has made my path much easier. I'm grateful for what they continue to teach me.

See www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras for discussion questions and lesson plans. -- ed.



In December 2001, family members of 9/11 victims participated in a Walk for Healing and Peace from Washington, DC, to New York City. People didn't quite know what to think of our small group as we made our way up Broadway that day. The wreckage of the Twin Towers was still smoldering a few blocks away, and there was still a great deal of fear and anger in the air. From this experience, our group, September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, was born.

In 2003, we edited a book entitled, *September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows: Turning Our Grief into Action for Peace*. I was thrilled to learn that it was being translated into Japanese. The publisher sent us to Japan so we could speak about our book. Because of Japan's tragic experiences with the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and its national constitution which renounces war, our group's stand against violence held great interest for the Japanese. They mobbed us wherever we visited.



Here I am with Peaceful Tomorrows members. Behind us is the Stone-walk memorial to the "unknown civilians killed in war." It was created by the Peace Abbey. Members and supporters of Peaceful Tomorrows pulled this memorial stone from Boston to New York City in 2004 to highlight civilian losses to terrorism, violence, and war.



In March 2005 I drove to Fayetteville, North Carolina, to lend my voice to veterans and members of military families announcing the launch of the “Bring Them Home Now” campaign. Joining me was Michael Berg, whose son Nick had been murdered in Iraq a year earlier. He and I spoke to the largest antiwar rally in the city since the Vietnam War. I’ve kept in touch with Michael ever since, and feel a shared bond of loss.

Several Peaceful Tomorrows members went to Oklahoma City in April 2005 for the 10th commemoration of the terrorist attack on the Alfred P. Murrah federal building. Pictured on the right is Bud Welch, who lost his daughter in the bombing. Bud is the president of Murder Victims Families for Human Rights. (See pp. 42-43 to learn more about Bud Welch.)



In 2005, I traveled to Spain. I was deeply moved by meeting family members of those who had been killed in the Al Qaeda train bombings in Madrid in 2004. In Guernica, we met with survivors of the 1937 German bombardment of the town. The survivors, all children at the time, retained vivid memories of the aerial attacks, which had occurred almost 70 years earlier.

In 2007, I spoke at a Veterans for Peace convention. It was the first time I was able to talk about my father, a veteran of World War II, to a group of other veterans of U.S. wars. Dad had given me a book recounting his experience. In it, he wrote: “May you never know the obscenity of war with all its pain and sorrow and destructiveness.” I was honored to share his words with those other veterans. Also speaking were Howard Zinn and Daniel Ellsberg, who appear in this photo with me.



Today one of my greatest pleasures is volunteering as a second grade Sunday school teacher at our church. Peace begins in each one of us. This opportunity to be a role model and to give kids a grounding in spirituality is my way of changing the world, one person at a time.

David Potorti is a founding member of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows.