

A Promise to Our Children

Your Child · My Child · The Enemy's Child



A Field Guide to Peace

by

Charles P. Busch

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It all depends on how big you think your family is.

Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*

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INTRODUCTION

A PLACE TO BEGIN

If it were your job to end war, where would you begin, at what place?

That question has been around for a long time and finds us all. Today it carries a particular urgency. Our world has become small. It is too close knit, mutually dependent, and vulnerable for the heedlessness of war.

A Promise to Our Children offers a place to end war. It is a simple idea, grounded in our common humanity. It compliments all peacebuilding efforts, and contributes something original of its own.

This *Field Guide* introduces the *Promise*—its words, its necessity, its power, and the four foundations which give it life: conscience, empathy, the power of the spoken word, and action in the world. We hope you will find these pages interesting and the *Promise* compelling.

Charles Busch
Fields of Peace
Oregon Coast, 2020

CHAPTER 1

A STONE WITH WINGS

A Promise to Our Children

A Beginning Story

A few years ago, my wife and I went to South Texas to visit her family. One morning I went to a coffee shop to read the Times. Seated near me was a small group of men about my age, in their 70s. One had on a yellow “Caterpillar” ball cap, the others were gray-haired and balding. When a latecomer joined them, he was greeted with, “What’s new?” He replied, “Same old, war and weather.”

Hearing the word “war,” I looked up and felt an impulse to go over. I imagined they’d ask where I was from and what I do. I’d say, “The coast of Oregon. I’m a peace educator.” We’d talk about the 50s—cars, Elvis, Marilyn. Then the 60s, and Vietnam. At least one of them would have been in it. Then somebody’d ask, “What do peace educators do?” I’d keep it light: “We remind each other that we’re all in this together.”

But I didn't go over. And when they left, I thought about what I really wanted to say. And the words came: "There will always be weather, but there's nothing inevitable about war, and not only war, but a single harsh word, shove, or moment of indifference to the suffering of another. Always there is a choice."

That moment in the coffee shop has stayed with me. So has the question it left me with: *After so many centuries of war, and today's ongoing wars, what can you and I possibly do to end war, to bring peace?*

This is not a new question. Each generation asks it and despairs of an answer. But today the question has become the shout of an emergency: the daily threat of a biological or nuclear attack. Peacemaking is no longer the calling of idealists, but the voice of the realist in each of us.

What can you and I possibly do to end war, to bring peace?

Two Traditional Approaches

Traditionally, there are two approaches to ending war: the *Moral* and the *Practical*. They provide the ground for social and political action.

The *Moral* approach views each person as a beloved child of God, and therefore, our brother or sister. Each life is understood to be precious, unique, and needed, and all life held in an invisible unity. Isaiah, the Buddha, and Jesus were early messengers of this approach. More recent voices include Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr, and Dorothy Day.

This approach to peace requires a refusal to participate in any act of violence—verbal or physical. Each step toward peace must itself be peaceful. This requires trust, an absolute trust in the power of love to transform the enemy. During the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., Rev. King preached this resolve:

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you... Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside

road and leave us half dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.

“A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” 1967

As challenging as the *Moral* approach is, hundreds of thousands of women and men have risen to its call, and successful nonviolent revolutions have resulted. In recent history they include: India (1947), the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1960s), The Philippines (1986), Czechoslovakia (1989), Poland (1989), South Africa (1990), East Germany (1991), Tunisia (2010), Egypt (2010).

The *Practical* approach appeals to reason, and is fact based. It looks to the allocation of resources, and the realities of a changing world.

President Dwight Eisenhower articulated this approach in his famous “Cross of Iron” speech in 1953. He warned against an economy based on a “military industrial complex,” and described the true costs of spending our nation’s financial resources on war and preparations for war.

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those

who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

Eisenhower's prophetic words have been much honored and much ignored. Today, half of every dollar the U.S. government spends goes to our military—its weapons, soldiers, far flung bases, and serial wars. In 2018, this amounted to \$571 billion dollars. The true cost? Today, the U.S. ranks 27th in the world in its level of healthcare and education.

The *Practical* approach also addresses the reality of an increasingly borderless world. Mass migrations, global business, and the internet have made our world small and increasingly interactive and interdependent. The twenty-year success of the European Union shows the peaceful potential of this reality. The war in Syria—its millions of refugees, armed involvement of other nations, potential of a widening war—shows how armed conflict anywhere in the world has consequences everywhere.

What has always been true is now obvious: Nations are no more self-sufficient than individuals. Our survival is mutual. And it depends upon our ability to relate and cooperate, to give up dominance in favor of friendship.

War has become obsolete because it is impractical.

Both the *Moral* and the *Practical* approaches to peace are crucial and compelling. We must learn and teach them.

BUT, they require long term education. And in the meantime, the number of wars in the world continue as many as ever, and hundreds of thousands of people are killed, and millions displaced.

What can you and I possibly do to end war, to bring peace?

An Old Story

Once upon a time in a mountain valley, there was a village. Like all villages it had a baker and blacksmith, a teacher and a gossip, lots of children, and a tailor. The houses were made of logs and there were gardens and chicken coops. On Sundays the children were given rides on a donkey.

One day a Giant entered the valley. He lived in a hut in the forest, but when the mood struck, he'd go to the village and demand food. He was a huge, shaggy, crude man with a big voice that sounded like the complaint of a donkey.

One afternoon, after a meal of 7 chickens, 12 ears of corn and many bowls of pudding, and after his usual bout of burping and other base sounds, the Giant felt like having a little fun. And just then, the tailor walked by.

"Over here, chicken bones!" shouted the Giant. The tailor was a little man who always wore the same black suit and walked with his chin on his chest. The Giant grabbed him by the collar and marched him to the market place.

People gathered around. They were curious, and glad that the tailor was "it" and not them.

"Who's strongest," shouted the Giant, "me or this spit-out piece of a thing? Let's have a contest. We'll see who can throw the farthest."

The Giant looked around for the right stone—one the size of a grapefruit. And the tailor looked for something he could throw.

“I’ll go first,” said the Giant. He took a great breath, leaned back and threw. The villagers gasped. The stone made a great arc, grew small in the air, and came down at the far edge of the village. Children ran to mark the spot.

Proud and smirking, the Giant said, “Now you!”

The tailor stepped forward, put a hand in his suit pocket, then raised and opened his hand.

There was a gray sparrow. It fluttered, turned its head this way and that, and flew off.

It went high and circled over the village, once, twice, then flew off over the forest and disappeared into the gray mist of the mountain.

This is an old story. Threatening giants have always been a problem in the world. They stride in and want what we have. And they want us to be small. The challenge to us, the town folk, is always the same: How to overcome the monster without becoming the monster. The tailor shows us how: Use imagination. Find a stone with wings.

The News of Numbers

Recently, I came across a report of a panel discussion on “Ethics and War” held at Stanford University. One of the panel members, Richard Goldstone (former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague) spoke about the dramatic change in the nature of war over the last 100 years. He said that in World War I, the ratio of combatant deaths to civilian deaths was 9 to 1. In World War II that ratio changed dramatically. Every 1 combatant death was matched by 1 civilian death. Today, following the Vietnam War, and now Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, the ratio has again changed dramatically: 1 combatant death to 9 civilian deaths.

In WWI, the ratio of deaths,
combatant to civilian was
9 to 1.

In WWII, the ratio became,
1 to 1.

In today’s wars, the ratio is
1 to 9.

So, in one hundred years, the ratio of combatant to civilian deaths has reversed: 9 to 1 has become 1 to 9. This is due to the effectiveness of modern weaponry—barreled firepower, bombs and the airplanes to deliver them, missiles, and drones.

The numbers 1 to 9 were news to me, and shocked me. I questioned them, and found the numbers confirmed in numerous United Nations and academic reports.

It is true: Far more children are killed in today's wars than combatants. War has become the killing of children.

What can you and I possibly do to end war, to bring peace?

A Stone With Wings

I have a son named Gabriel. When he was an infant and I held him for hours each day, I realized how little I had known about love—its vulnerability, and the tenderness which takes over. Suddenly, there was this person in the world for whom I'd gladly tear off an arm or leg, or give my life.

Gabriel is now an adult, but each time I see a parent with an infant in a grocery store or restaurant, I remember holding my son and miss that feeling of connection and warmth, of transmission. I want to ask, "Would it be o.k. if I held your baby for a minute?" But I am seldom that brave. I usually say, "What a beautiful child." And sometimes add, "Thank you for doing the great work."

Recently, standing in a checkout line next to a mother with a baby, I thought of Gabriel, and the numbers 1 to 9 came to mind. And something obvious occurred to me: The enemy, those people in a far off land who speak a different language and hold a different view of the world, love their children just as much, just as absolutely and desperately, as I love my child, and this mother in line loves her child.

What occurred to me is that this is shared ground. On this ground we already stand together. It is a place of love. It is a place where a new beginning is possible.

What occurred to me is that you and I can do something to end war, to bring peace:

We can make *A Promise to our Children*. We can say,

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,*

These words dispel fear. They are words, I believe, we have all been waiting to hear. But someone must say them first. And they must be said out loud.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.*

These words acknowledge what you and I know: In today's world, only when your child is safe will my child be safe.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.*

To say these words, you and I need not feel peaceful and fearless. We only need to say them and let them take us where they will.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.*

*Not by bomb. Not by bullet
Not by looking the other way.*

I have heard that one of the distinguishing characteristics of a human being is the ability to make and keep promises. To the promises you and I have made and keep, we must now add *A Promise to Our Children*.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.
Not by bomb. Not by bullet.
Not by looking the other way.
I will be the power that is peace.*

Words hold the power of creation. Spoken, they travel farther than any one voice can carry. They are stones with wings. Air, light, wishes carry them. And they can be heard and repeated by others—other parents, grandparents, God parents, honorary neighbor parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, friends, teachers, social workers, coaches, rabbis, ministers, imams, choir leaders, nurses, elders, passersby.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason...*

To End War, To Bring Peace

War has become the killing of children. You and I have a Moral and a Practical responsibility to end war. Our children's future depends upon this, so may the survival of humankind. Governments and military factions will not do this for us. They are invested in old habits of violence: armies, dominance, and the next big weapon. But our world has become small, small enough for us to see that we are in this together. We at Fields of Peace believe that making *A Promise to Our Children* can end war on our planet.

In the following chapters, we present the four foundations which empower the *Promise*: Conscience, Empathy, The Power of the Spoken Word, and Action in the World. We hope they will speak to you. But you needn't wait to make *A Promise to Our Children*. It begins,

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child...*

Prompts


QUESTIONS

- Is there a particular word in the *Promise* that speaks to me? What prompts me to say the *Promise*? What makes me hesitate?
- To be peace, Mahatma Gandhi followed three guidelines: Personal Transformation, Moral Persuasion, and Sacrifice. In what ways can *A Promise to Our Children* help me pursue those guidelines?
- Is there anything I wish for my child that I do not also wish for every child? How far am I willing to go for that wish?

QUOTES

The only international language in the world is a child's cry.

Eglantyne Jebb, *Save the Children*



They have ripped up women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border.

Amos 1:14, Hebrew Bible



There is no such thing as somebody else's child.

Glennon Doyle



A journalist once asked my father (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel) why he had come to a demonstration against the war in Vietnam. "I am here because I cannot pray," my father told him. Confused and a bit annoyed, the journalist asked him, "What do you mean, you can't pray so you come to a demonstration against the war?" And my father replied, "Whenever I open the prayer book, I see before me images of children burning from napalm."

Susannah Heschel, *Introduction to Abraham Joshua Heschel, Essential Writings*

NUMBERS

- 420 million children—nearly one-fifth of children worldwide—are living in a conflict zone; a rise of nearly 30 million children from 2016.
- 142 million children are living in high-intensity conflict-zones; that is, in conflict zones with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year.
- Hundreds of thousands of children are dying every year as a result of indirect effects of conflict—including malnutrition, disease and the breakdown of healthcare, water and sanitation.

From *Stop the War on Children*, by Save the Children

READING

The Buddha and the Terrorist, by Satish Kumar, Algonquin Books, 2006, (144 pages)

NOTE

To arrive at truth, logicians use the syllogism—an equation composed of a main premise and minor premise which lead to a clear conclusion. Here is a *Field Guide* syllogism:

The killing of children is an absolute wrong.

War has become the killing of children.

Therefore, *I cannot support any war, no matter how lofty the reason.*

CHAPTER 2

THE EMPIRE OF LIES

1st Foundation: Conscience

The Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970. His writings chronicle the dictatorship, censorship, archipelago of prison camps, and the intentional starvation of millions of people in Russia, all in the name of communism. He wrote out of love and a terrible grief for his country which he called, “the Empire of Lies.” We remember him, not only for the service to which he put his words, but the size of his conscience.

... our first allegiance is to the human race.

As a young soldier during WWII, Solzhenitsyn was arrested for criticizing Stalin in a personal letter. He spent eight years in prisons and labor camps, and was determined to survive in order to speak for those who would not. In the camps, paper was scarce, nor could he risk being found out. So he committed himself to a feat of memory. He composed in his head, and at the end of each month he recited to himself, page by page, word for word,

the story he was writing. When at last he was freed, he wrote down his book and had it smuggled out of Russia. It was a testimony to the horror of life and death in the camps: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Concerning injustice, violence, the killing of others, Solzhenitsyn held two, tirelessly preached, convictions:

- Violence requires a lie, and lies require violence.
- It is ideology which allows us to feel good about ourselves and be praised by others while we ignore conscience and do evil.

A Beginning Story

Recently, I went to a local restaurant and bar for Happy Hour. I went with my wife Cathey and our friend Melonie. It was crowded and noisy, but we found seats in a corner and settled in. Before long, a man I recognized from town came in. I remembered his name, Brad, and went over and said, "Hi." We had met a couple of years ago and talked only that once, but it was for two hours. He had experienced a tragedy and needed someone to listen. A little later, the seat next to me came open and I motioned to him to come join us.

Brad is an intense, bright, inquiring man. Right away he leaned in and said, "So, what do you think of our President." I was a half-beer in, so in about 20 words I told him. He gave a nod and said, "Most mornings I meet a group of men for coffee. Yesterday, one of the men made an interesting case. I wonder what you would make of it."

The case Brad presented was a long one, and rambling. And probably his own. He began with the dawn of human civilization 10,000 years ago. He talked about hunters and gatherers, Egyptian pharaohs and the Promised Land. The Greeks and Romans. The Crusades. WWII. Urban growth. And ended with technology and robots.

I listened, following as best I could. When he was done, he looked at me. I hardly knew where to begin.

What I heard was the old argument about the survival of the fittest. How the strong overcome the weak, and how inevitable that is. And though often brutal, it strengthens the species, and advances civilization. It is the ideology of might.

That may not be what Brad said, or all that he said, but that's what I heard. And it was an argument I'm familiar with. And abhor. I said, "When people want to steal, murder, occupy, they have to come up with a story so they can feel good about themselves while they do it. The case you made is one of those stories."

I would've been happy to buy Brad a drink and leave it there. I liked him and knew he was carrying a load of grief. I also know the futility of bar talk.

But Brad looked at me. My answer was too short to honor the length of all he had said. So I added: "It's about conscience. Each of us knows right from wrong. But when we choose 'wrong,' there is a fierce need in us to feel good about ourselves. So we tell a story to stifle our conscience. For example, when our ancestors came over and took the land from the Native Americans who'd been here 30,000 years, they told themselves they were bringing Christ's salvation to heathens who would otherwise be damned. So their stealing, domination, genocide were really doing "God's work." An old example. I'd said enough.

Brad was looking down into his beer, and my wife and Melonie had their own conversation going. And a band

was setting up. “Where does conscience come from?” Brad asked.

A wonderful question. And without thinking, I lifted my hand, touched the tips of my fingers to the air, and then brought it down and placed my hand lightly on his chest where the heart is. We both smiled.

Brad’s food arrived. The band started up. And our conversation was over.

The Nuremberg Defense

At the close of WWII, the U.S. and its allies tried Nazi leaders for their war crimes. These tribunals were held in Nuremberg, Germany. Routinely, the defendants claimed they were not guilty because they were following orders which it was their sworn duty to do. This became known, and infamous, as “The Nuremberg Defense.”

The Court judged the defendants “guilty” on the grounds that sworn duty is superseded by the authority of one’s own conscience. Ultimately, each person is responsible to say “No” when faced with a crime against humanity.

This was a landmark ruling. It established as international law what everyone knows to be true: conscience is real, and universal. Its voice may be soft, but it can be heard. It says “Yes” or “No.” It says “Right” or “Wrong.”

A Lie

When I was seventeen, I joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. I raised my right hand and pledged that I would uphold the constitution and follow the orders of the Commander in Chief, the President. I was told what I already believed, “It is our military might which keeps us safe and works for freedom in the world.”

I got lucky. I was not called up to fight in Vietnam. And I joined in protest with millions of others in our country who saw the terrible mistake of that war. I remember President Johnson’s televised address in which he announced that the North Vietnamese had made an unprovoked attack on two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. This lie galvanized Congress and led to our all-out war in Vietnam.

Violence requires a lie, and lies require violence.

Keeping Good Company

The Vietnam War taught me to be wary of the words of political leaders and the system which keeps them in power. And other voices found me, including Solzhenitsyn, The Dalai Lama, Dorothy Day, and the inimitable Judith Malina (1926-2015)—actor, activist, co-founder of The Living Theater, and inductee to the Theater Hall of Fame. At age 80, in an interview by Romy Ashby, she tells about a pivotal event in her life.

When I was about 12, I went to the Beacon Theatre (in New York City) and saw a movie called Nurse Edith Cavell (1939) starring Anna Neagle. It was based on a real story about a nurse in WWI who was working with the ambulance corps on the battle fields. And she refused not to pick up any wounded man, whether he was a German or English or Belgian or American. She would simply not distinguish. And once a soldier was cured, she would send him back to his lines. One day she was arrested and sentenced to death for treason. The Germans took her out and shot her.

Hollywood added its glamour by showing us the burial of Edith Cavell in England with a scene of the choir singing, coming in for a close-up of Anna Neagle's face juxtaposed with the magnificence of the cathedral as she recited, in her

magnificent British accent, lines that Edith Cavell actually wrote on the morning of her death in her cell:

Standing as I am before God and eternity, I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone.

And I thought, I've finally heard something! It's absolutely true and it's so clear now to me!

I ran home to my rabbinical father who was trying to make people aware of what the Nazis were doing to the Jews, and I said, "Papa, I just learned the most important thing! I've learned the most incredible thing in the world!" I said: "Papa, we must not hate the Nazis."

And, oh! I've been in trouble from that day to this. I've been in jail in 12 different countries, only because I believe that. Not for anything I'm ashamed of. I've done plenty of things I'm ashamed of, but I never got busted for them. I got busted for believing this: that I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone. Nazis, Germans, Iranians. Al Qaeda.

A Lie

In 2001, following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City which killed more than 3,000 innocent people, we invaded Afghanistan seeking out the responsible Al Qaeda terrorists we thought were hiding in that country. Today, 17 years later, we continue to occupy and fight in that country. In 2003 President Bush told our nation that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which were an imminent threat to our nation, a lie which led to our pre-emptive attack and invasion of Iraq. This violence has spread and continues to darken our world. And our enemies have multiplied from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands.

It is our military might which keeps us safe and works for freedom in the world.

A Question

After WWII American novelist Kurt Vonnegut became friends with the German novelist Henrick Boll. Each man served in his own country's army during the War.

Over dinner, Vonnegut asked Boll what he thought the fatal flaw was in the German character. "Obedience," Boll replied, "Obedience."

I wish Boll had asked Vonnegut the same question about Americans. But he didn't. It seems to me an important question. I would answer, "Self-righteousness. Self-righteousness."

More Solzhenitsyn

As Solzhenitsyn's voice became the voice of conscience for his nation and beyond, the Soviet government could no longer tolerate him. In 1974 he was exiled and came to the U.S. and settled in a small town in Vermont. Although grateful for the welcome he found in America, he was no more sparing of the excesses of capitalism than he had been of communism.

The malady of the will of affluent people... is the chronic state of those who have abandoned themselves to a pursuit of prosperity at any price, who have succumbed to a belief in material well-being as the principal goal of life on earth.

In his novels, essays, and addresses, he articulated the folly of seeking peace by violent means.

Violence strides brazenly and triumphantly through the world, unconcerned that its futility has already been demonstrated and proven many times in history. It is not even brute force alone that is victorious, but also its clamorous justification. The world is being flooded by the brazen conviction that force can do all, and righteousness—nothing.

Solzhenitsyn was also relentless in identifying “ideology” as the cover we use to convince ourselves and others that the evil we do is really good.

Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobians by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.

Thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions.

He also offered a way in which humankind, one person at a time, can heal the state and bring a brotherly and sisterly love to our world.

We find, neglected by us, the simplest, the most accessible key to our liberation: a personal nonparticipation in lies! Even if all is covered by lies, even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way: Let their rule hold not through me!

From *The Solzhenitsyn Reader*, Edited by Edward E. Ericson, Jr., Daniel J. Mahoney

A Personal Nonparticipation in Lies

Hearing Solzhenitsyn's voice, I face the lie I have believed and gone along with and which each day I hear endlessly broadcast,

It is our military power which keeps us safe and works for freedom in the world.

What makes this a lie are facts.

- The fact that beyond our borders, in 70 foreign countries, the U.S. maintains more than 800 U.S. military bases. (England, France, and Russia combined have 30 foreign bases).
- The fact that our nation spends more on our military each year than the next 11 largest militarized nations combined.
- The fact that our wars do not reduce, but create and multiply our enemies.
- The fact that our nation finds a way to be continuously involved in one war after another.
- The fact that one-half of our nation's annual budget, year after year, goes to our military. In 2018, this amounted to \$700 billion. Dollars urgently needed for education, health care, and the growing number of hungry, homeless, hopeless citizens.

- The fact that we enable armed conflicts throughout the world by being the “gun store” for the world. We sell twice as many battleships, fighter planes, armored vehicles, guns and bullets as our nearest competitor, Russia.
- The fact that our wars are no longer fought to bring an end to war but simply to maintain an economy based on a military industrial system.

The list of facts goes on. But I’ll offer one more, and perhaps the most telling.

- The fact that in today’s wars, for every 1 combatant killed, 9 civilians are killed. And the majority of these are children. War has become the killing of children.

These facts are tiresome and inconvenient. And they confront. They confront the righteous idea we have of ourselves with how we actually act in the world.

They confront the lie,

It is our military might which keeps us safe and works for freedom in the world.

Story 101

In 1942 in Hamburg, Germany, a group of 500 middle-aged men were drafted into what was called, “Reserve Police Battalion 101.”

Only a few of these were policemen. Some were businessmen, others dock workers, truck drivers, machine operators, waiters, druggists, teachers.

This group of ordinary men were put in uniform, given a quick orientation, and then sent to take part in the Nazis’ “Final Solution in Poland,” the eradication of all Jews.

When the Battalion arrived, they were told that their duty was to round up Jews from the ghettos and force them onto trains. The destination was Treblinka and its gas chambers. When trains were unavailable, however, the Jews were taken into the countryside, forced to dig trenches, and shot in the head.

This became the work of Reserve Police Battalion 101: shooting, at point-blank range, old men, women, and children. There were days when they killed as many as 14,000 Jews. The details of this human slaughter are ghastly and indelible.

Yet, only a handful of the 500 men conscripted into Battalion 101 said “no.”

After the war the men from that Battalion returned to their former “ordinary” lives. In the 1960s, nearly 20 years after the War, the State Prosecutor of Hamburg interviewed 210 men who had served in the Battalion.

The men were blunt in their comments. Most said they felt pressure to conform and feared that if they didn’t carry out the killing, they would suffer punishment and damage to their reputations and civilian careers. They spoke of only doing their duty and felt that any moral responsibility belonged to those above them who gave the orders.

Only a few were ever prosecuted for war crimes.

When I first read about Battalion 101, I wanted their atrocities to be the behavior of a few psychopaths or the terrible flaw of the people of another country. I wanted to believe in my own goodness, and that of others. But the story of 101 serves notice. War crimes are committed by ordinary and ordinarily decent people. Philosopher Hannah Arendt describes a Nazi functionary as one who “does not regard himself as a murderer because he has not done it out of inclination but in his professional capacity. Out of sheer passion he would never do harm to a fly.” Arendt calls this “the banality of evil.”

An Answer

American poet William Stafford was a conscientious objector during WWII. He served four years incarcerated in work camps. When his draft board in Kansas asked him, “When did you become a Conscientious Objector?” Stafford answered, “I didn’t become one. I always was one.”

In his poem “Thinking for Berky,” Stafford writes:

*We live in an occupied country, misunderstood; justice will
take us millions of intricate moves.*

Lila's Story

In Michael Moore's documentary film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he tells the story of Lila Lipscomb whose son Michael was killed in Iraq while serving in the U.S. Army.

Michael joined the Army following 9/11, and Lila was proud of him. They were a family who flew the American flag in front of their home each day. Like their neighbors in Flint, Michigan, they were "patriots" who believed it was their duty to serve when their country is at war.

Seeing anti-war protesters on TV, Lila felt they were "a slap in my face." She believed America only fought wars which were necessary. Good wars. Just wars. She believed President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State Powell when they said that Iraq was an immediate military threat to the United States.

"I thought I knew," Lila said, "but I didn't know."

When Lila received the phone call that Michael had been killed in combat, it was as if she herself had been shot. She fell to the floor. In the following weeks and months, she read and reread the last letter Michael had written to her. "What in the world is wrong with George Bush?" he wrote. "Trying to be like his dad. He got us out here for nothing, whatsoever. I am so furious right now, Mama."

Lila made a trip to Washington D.C. She stood on the steps of Congress. She hoped to find some answers, some relief. What she learned was that out of 535 members of Congress, only one had an enlisted son or daughter serving in the military in Iraq. She learned the War was not about defense, but about a larger U.S. presence in the Middle East, about U.S. corporations making immense profits, and about oil. More and more oil. Lila learned her son had died because our nation's leaders lied.

1st Foundation

Listening to the voices and stories in these pages, it is clear to me that conscience is not an ethic, not an idea of humankind. It is a sense of justice inherent in each person, however we account for its origin. And it is foundational to how we live with one another and stay true to ourselves.

Conscience is the soft, interior Voice that—at every juncture—says, “Yes” or “No,” “Right,” or “Wrong.” Then we must choose. And through each choice we make, something in the world will change or not change. That something may determine what’s possible or not possible for all.

To the fact that war has become the killing of children, I hear conscience say “No” to war, any war, because the killing of a child, any child, is an absolute wrong. To act on this “No,” you and I can make *A Promise to Our Children*. Its words can change and move us and change the world.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.
Not by bomb. Not by bullet.
Not by looking the other way.
I will be the power that is peace.*

Prompts

QUESTIONS

- Is the United States “The Empire of Lies?” What would you have to change in your life, what would you risk, if your answer is “Yes”?
- Is there an ideology—social, economic, religious, political—you subscribe to that drowns out the voice of conscience in you when it comes to war, race, the plight of the poor, caring for our planet?
- What voices do you look to that teach the practical wisdom and spiritual necessity of nonviolence?
- Where does your favorite politician stand on next year’s Pentagon budget?

QUOTES

People are like newspaper, they’ll put up with anything you put on them.

Joseph Stalin



Naturally the common people don’t want war: Neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But after all, IT IS THE LEADERS of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple

matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is TELL THEM THEY ARE BEING ATTACKED, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. IT WORKS THE SAME IN ANY COUNTRY.

Herman Goering, Nazi war criminal, during the Nuremberg Trials



What unbearable suffering there is in the world today, all around us, in mental hospitals, in prisons as well as in war, and we know little more about them than the Germans claimed to know of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust in Europe.

Dorothy Day, *Dorothy Day, Selected Writings*, edited by Robert Ellsberg



Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence

Irshad Manji, *Allah, Liberty, and Love*

NUMBERS

In the 6 years of WWII, 70 to 85 million people were killed. An average of 1,465 killed every hour (the equivalent of the World Trade Towers attacks every two hours).

READING/VIEWING

Nobel Lecture, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1972 (69 pages)

Cabaret, 1972 movie about Berlin in 1931, directed by Bob Fosse, starring Liza Minnelli, Michael York, and Joel Gray

NOTE

In Russia today there is a moral successor to Solzhenitsyn: Svetlana Alexievich, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015. In her book *Zinky Boys*, she presents the testimony of soldiers, nurses, mothers, and widows whose lives were changed, terribly, by the Soviet War in Afghanistan (1979-89). The title refers to the zinc coffins in which dead soldiers were shipped back home to Russia.

After reading her book, the mother of a son who died in that war, wrote to Alexievich:

You are saying that I should hate the State and the Party. But I am proud of my son. He died an officer in battle. His comrades loved him. I love the country we used to live in, the U.S.S.R., because my son died for it. And I hate you! I don't need your scary truth.

CHAPTER 3

I WENT AND STOOD BY THEM

2nd Foundation: Empathy

In a 4th grade classroom, a group of students sit in a circle on the floor. It is the first day of the school year. They are excited and a little nervous. They are waiting for the arrival of what the teacher said will be a “very special surprise.” The door opens, and in comes a mother holding her 6-month-old infant, Evelyn.

The mother and child join them in the circle, spreading a green blanket for the infant to sit and roll and rest on. Every three weeks throughout the school year Baby Evelyn and her mother will return, and the children will come to know Evelyn. They will observe her development, her ability to sit up and express her desires and emotions. They will learn to name her expressions—hunger, tiredness, frustration, joy, anger, contentment. And the students will learn the proper way to hold an infant, and, one by one experience Evelyn’s warmth and fragility, and her preciousness.

This classroom experience is part of a curriculum, *Roots of Empathy*, created by Canadian educator Mary Gordon.

She identified empathy as the essential human ability for relating to one another and building a more caring, functional society. She believed it could be taught, and created *Roots of Empathy*, an experiential curriculum centered on a simple idea: introduce an infant in the classroom as a teacher to help children learn the unique worth of each person and our fundamental sameness. The goal: to raise world citizens who stand up for the rights of each person, especially the most vulnerable, and work for the common good. Or as Mary Gordon put it,

A society of compassionate and caring children who will pass on the legacy of empathy to their own children.

In the classroom where Baby Evelyn became the teacher, the students soon claimed her as their own. They welcomed her arrivals with singing and gifts—drawings, paper necklaces, poems, and flowers. They loved her and wished they could take her home with them.

The first *Roots of Empathy* class began in Canada in 1996. Today, the curriculum is taught in 12 countries and has reached more than a million children. And the results are measurable: as empathy increases, aggression decreases, and kind behavior becomes the norm.

A Beginning Story

In *Early Morning: Remembering My Father*, William Stafford, poet Kim Stafford shares this story about his father as a boy in Kansas in the 1920s:

...When he was first in school, he came home to report that two black children on the playground had been taunted by the others.

“And what did you do, Billy?” his mother asked.

“I went and stood by them.”

Billy’s footsteps across that playground are steps I want to follow. He risked unpopularity and harm and did not mirror the ugly behavior of those who taunted. I want to be like Billy—step out of the crowd and go stand with.

Rights of the Child

There is universal agreement by the people of every country on the basic rights of children. These inherent rights were written and adopted in the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* of 1924 and in the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* ratified by the General Assembly of the U.N. in 1959. In these *Declarations*, it is understood that “the child, by reason of his or her physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection.”

These early agreements were further articulated in 1990 by the member states of the United Nations in *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It details the distinct civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights of children (under the age of 18). This *Convention* is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. Today 196 countries are party to it, including every member of the United Nations except the United States and Somalia.

The *Convention* has 54 articles. They include:

Article 6: Every child has the inherent right to life. State Parties shall ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

Article 9: State Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will.

Article 19: State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 22: State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receives appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present *Convention*.

Article 38: States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. And, ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

Imagine This

Imagine yourself on an airport runway. It is early morning, barely light. You are wearing a pilot's jumpsuit, and behind you is a huge stealth bomber, black as a bat. Standing with you is a five-year-old girl in a pink party dress. The two of you are alone. You don't know her and she doesn't know you. But she is looking up at you and she is smiling. Her face has a copper glow, and she is beautiful, utterly beautiful.

Inside your pocket is a cigarette lighter. Before you fly the plane, you've been ordered to do up close what you will do later to other children from 30 thousand feet. You are to set her dress on fire, to set her on fire. You've been told the reason. It's a lofty one.

You kneel, and look up. The girl is curious, still smiling. You take out the lighter. She has no idea. It helps you not to know her name.

But you cannot do it. Of course you can't.

Violations Against Children in Times of War

Today one in four children live in a country affected by conflict or disaster. UNICEF reports that they are vulnerable to six grave violations of their innocence, lives, and futures.

- 1. Killing and maiming.** Far more children are killed and maimed in today's wars than combatants.
- 2. Recruitment by armed forces or armed groups.** Tens of thousands of girls and boys under the age of 18 are recruited and used in conflicts worldwide. They are taken by force and used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or sexual slaves.
- 3. Attacks on schools or hospitals.** The intentional targeting of schools and hospitals by armed forces is a growing, and alarming trend.
- 4. Rape or other sexual violence.** In times of war, children are subjected to rape, sexual slavery or trafficking, forced marriage/pregnancy, or enforced sterilization.
- 5. Abduction.** In areas of armed conflict, children are often captured or abducted. Some are held as hostages.

- 6. Denial of humanitarian access.** In conflicts around the world, armed forces and armed groups block humanitarian aid from reaching millions of people—many of them children—who are in desperate need of food, water, shelter, and medical treatment.

A Story of Two Fathers

Rami Elhanan is an Israeli, the son of a Holocaust survivor, and a combat veteran of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. He and his wife Nurit live in Jerusalem. They have three sons, and a daughter Smadar who was killed by Palestinian suicide bombers when she was 14.

Smadar was walking with four girl friends on Ben Yehuda Street in the center of Jerusalem. It was the beginning of the school year and they were shopping. Three Palestinian men appeared and detonated the bombs they wore, killing themselves and the five girls. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, Thursday, September 4, 1997.

Smadar was a beautiful, joyful, exuberant child. She swam, played the piano and loved to dance. Her name comes from the Song of Solomon and means, “grape of the vine.” Rami called her Princess.

In the months following her death, Rami was debilitated by grief and felt angry and disoriented. He fantasized revenge but dismissed it. To cause pain to someone else would not bring Smadar back, nor would it ease his pain. He wondered what would cause someone to hate so much that they would kill the enemy’s children.

An acquaintance invited Rami to a meeting of the Parents Circle—an organization of Israeli and Palestinian parents

who have lost an immediate family member to the other side and are willing to work together to end the conflict. They had been killing one another for 60 years, and brought nothing but more separation and more death. Rami went to the meeting, listened to the stories of others, and told his own.



Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian, an Arab, a Muslim, grew up near Hebron in a cave—a choice spot, cool in summer, warm in winter. His father herded goats in the nearby hills. His mother raised 15 brothers and sisters.

As a boy, Bassam and his friends would tie a Palestinian flag to a tree or fence, then run. If caught, it meant a year in jail. At 17, he and a couple friends happened upon an old box in the desert. In it were hand grenades. They threw two at an Israeli army jeep. The grenades fizzled, but Bassam was sentenced as a terrorist to 7 years in an Israeli prison. He was beaten often and brutally. He hated Jews, hated Israel, hated the Occupation.

Near the end of his time in prison, Bassam watched a documentary on television about the Holocaust. He wanted to see Jews killed. But watching the film—seeing a mound of naked dead bodies, men, women, children—something happened in him: he felt for the victims and cried.

Released from prison, Bassam married Salwa and they had a son, Araab, and daughter, Abir. Life under the

Occupation was hard, at times impossible, but he refused to give in to hatred. He and four Palestinian friends met in secret with seven former Israeli soldiers who also were done with violence. They listened to one another's stories and continued to meet. In 2005, they created Combatants for Peace—former Israeli and Palestinian combatants committed to nonviolent opposition to the Occupation.

On the afternoon of January 16, 2007, Bassam's 10-year-old daughter Abir was shot in the back of the head with a rubber bullet fired from a passing jeep by an Israeli border guard. She was coming back from buying a candy bracelet at a neighborhood stop. Abir died—a beautiful, skipping, pony-tailed girl who liked to draw crayon pictures of bears and of the sea.



Rami and Bassam met at the Parents Circle. The two men felt an immediate affinity. Hearing Bassam's story, Rami knew that the love he felt for his daughter was the same love Bassam felt for his daughter. Hearing Rami's story, Bassam knew that the grief he felt at the death of his daughter was the same grief Rami felt at the death of his daughter. Together, they hit upon a radical idea: To go out and tell their stories side-by-side. Jew and Arab. Israeli and Palestinian. Former soldier and former fighter.

For more than a decade, Rami and Bassam have gone wherever they are invited: homes, meetings, schools,

conferences, auditoriums. Their message meets an aching need for peace, and not only in their homeland. Today, invitations come from New York, Paris, London, Berlin, and their stories are told in articles and interviews, a documentary film, and most recently, a novel.

I, too, am taken by Rami's and Bassam's stories. I am moved by the beauty of their friendship, and the courage of their mission. I am heartened by their commitment to nonviolence. And I hear their mission, to end the conflict and its killing of their children, as affirmation of *A Promise to Our Children*. Thanks to them, I hear more deeply and sorrowfully the words: *Not by bomb. Not by bullet. Not by looking the other way.*

Aloysha's Story

In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, two brothers are conversing. The older brother, Ivan, is angry at the suffering of humankind and has turned his back on religion. His young brother, Aloysha, has a pure heart and aspires to be a monk.

Ivan: Imagine that you are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the end, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture to death just one tiny creature, that same child (we just saw) who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears—would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth.

Aloysha (speaking softly): No. I would not consent.

Shared Ground, Shared World

Empathy can move us to go stand with someone who is being attacked. Empathy can stop us from participating in the bombing, the setting of others on fire. Empathy can lead us to forgiveness, allowing us to live in peace with those who have injured us. Empathy can lead us to love our neighbors in the world without exception.

Educator Mary Gordon understood that the key to a safer, kinder world was the development of empathy with one another. And she was inspired by a simple idea: Teach the next generation the unique worth of each person by placing an infant as teacher in elementary classrooms.

As adults, you and I are given the very same experience in the arrival of our own child, and in the children who come into our lives by way of extended family, friends, and neighbors. Holding and caring for them, we experience their uniqueness and preciousness, and somehow know that we belong to one another.

This is love's deep ground and one of life's most common experiences. Peoples of all nations and cultures feel the same absolute love for their children and the same desperate desire for their safety and fulfillment.

In today's world, where war has become the killing of children, the shared ground of love for our children can be

the place for a new beginning. We can end war; we can make our world a safer, kinder place for all of our children by making *A Promise to Our Children*. The words are potent. They reach in as well as travel out. They help us, as Mary Gordon would say, “Find the humanity in ourselves so we can find the humanity in others.”

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.
Not by bomb. Not by bullet.
Not by looking the other way.
I will be the power that is peace.*

Prompts

QUESTIONS

- In the section “Imagine This” in this chapter, “you” are unable to set the dress of the little girl on fire. What makes this impossible to do?
 - Is it conscience, your knowledge of the absolute wrong of killing a child?
 - Is it empathy, seeing that the little girl is like your daughter, niece, next door neighbor?
 - Is it the mysterious, inviolate sphere which surrounds every child?
- Would I give my life to save my child? Would I risk my life to save a child I do not know from a threatening car or bus? Would I risk the disapproval of others, risk speaking out against war, to save thousands of children by making *A Promise to Our Children*?
- There is no word for a parent who loses a child. A wife who loses her husband is a “widow.” A husband is a “widower.” A child who loses both parents is an “orphan.” But there is no word for a parent who loses a child. Why is that? Can you suggest a word?”

QUOTES

Our good at the price of one child? Are we willing to pursue that?!

Ursula Le Guin



Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.

Ian McEwan



The great adventure of our epoch is to discover who inhabits the world, one individual at a time.

Theodore Zeldin



It all depends on how big you think your family is.

Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*

NUMBERS

In 2018 alone in the Syrian War, 1,106 children died in the fighting. This is only the number the UN has been able to verify, which means the true figure is likely much higher. 2018 also saw 262 attacks in Syria against education and health facilities.

From UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore

READING/VIEWING

Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child, by Mary Gordon, 2005

Apeirogon, by Colum McCann, a fictionalized novel about Rami Elhanan and Bassam Aramin, 2020

Of Gods and Men, 2010 film about an Order of Christian monks in Algeria who must decide what to do when their lives are threatened by terrorists.

NOTE

Taha Muhammad Ali (1931 -2011) was born in the Galilee village of Saffuriyya. His family had lived there for generations tending orchards and raising crops. In 1948, when he was 17, the village was bombed by Israeli war planes and inhabitants were forced to flee, never to return. In 2006, five decades later, Muhammad Ali, a world-renowned poet, wrote “Revenge.” It is a deeply human reckoning with both the desire for revenge and the imaginative possibilities that lie beyond.

Revenge

At times ... I wish
I could meet in a duel
the man who killed my father
and razed our home,
expelling me

into
a narrow country.
And if he killed me,
I'd rest at last,
and if I were ready—
I would take my revenge!

*

But if it came to light,
when my rival appeared,
that he had a mother
waiting for him,
or a father who'd put
his right hand over
the heart's place in his chest
whenever his son was late
even by just a quarter-hour
for a meeting they'd set—
then I would not kill him,
even if I could.

*

Likewise ... I
would not murder him
if it were soon made clear
that he had a brother or sisters

who loved him and constantly longed to see him.
Or if he had a wife to greet him
and children who
couldn't bear his absence
and whom his gifts would thrill.
Or if he had
friends or companions,
neighbors he knew
or allies from prison
or a hospital room,
or classmates from his school ...
asking about him
and sending him regards.

*

But if he turned
out to be on his own—
cut off like a branch from a tree—
without a mother or father,
with neither a brother nor sister,
wifeless, without a child,
and without kin or neighbors or friends,
colleagues or companions,
then I'd add not a thing to his pain
within that aloneness—
nor the torment of death,
and not the sorrow of passing away.

Instead I'd be content
to ignore him when I passed him by
on the street—as I
convinced myself
that paying him no attention
in itself was a kind of revenge.

From *Hymns and Qualms: New and Selected Poems and Translations*, Peter Cole (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2017), by permission of the author.

CHAPTER 4

THE MOMENTUM OF A WORD

3rd Foundation: The Spoken Word

There are words each of us waits to hear. Words like *Welcome... Friend... May I help... I forgive you*. And the big one, *I love you*. We wait because they are the kind of words which must be freely offered. And how good it feels when we can say them in return, *I love you too*.

There are other words we wait on together as humanity, words which assure us of a unity and peace we cannot yet see. Such words were spoken by the ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

These words, spoken 3,000 years ago, have stayed in the air. They have been heard and passed on generation to generation. And they come to us today with the insistence of a dream repeated night after night.

Plus two lines added by Isaiah's successor, the prophet Micah.

They shall sit each person under his own vine and under her own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.

These words, I believe, describe what we all want: to live safely with those we love under our own roof and in the shade of our own garden. For this prophecy to be realized in our day, in our world, Micah points the way: Make no one afraid. Make no one afraid of you, or the nation of which you are a citizen.

How? By saying words which dispel fear, words which you and I and humanity, aware or not, have been waiting to hear. They are the words of *A Promise to Our Children*.

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.
Not by bomb. Not by bullet.
Not by looking the other way.
I will be the power that is peace.*

Dabar

The power of the spoken word is a mystery. A compelling mystery. One of its explorers is novelist and preacher Fredrick Buechner. He writes:

In Hebrew the term dabar means both 'word' and 'deed.' Thus to say something is to do something. I love you. I hate you. I forgive you. I am afraid. Who knows what such words do, but whatever it is, it can never be undone. Something that lay hidden in the heart is irrevocably released through speech into time, is given substance and tossed like a stone into the pool of history, where the concentric rings lap out endlessly.

...When God said, 'Let there be light,' there was light where before there was only darkness. When I say I love you, there is love where before there was only ambiguous silence. In a sense I do not love you first and then speak it, but only by speaking it give it reality.

From *Wishful Thinking* by F. Buechner

I am helped by these words of Buechner's, and often return to them. He reminds me of what I know. Words are the instruments of creation. What is possible waits—invisible and aching—to be realized, to be brought forth by a word. And words, once spoken, remain in the air—intact and

imperishable—waiting on the wind. Today I hear Micah saying, “And none shall make them afraid.” And I say,

I will not be a part of the killing...

The Momentum of a Word

The following episode happened during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. It is reported by Christian theologian, Walter Wink, who was there.

One evening, during the turbulent weeks when Selma, Alabama, was the focal point of civil rights struggle, the large crowd of black and white activists standing outside the Ebenezer Baptist Church was electrified by the sudden arrival of a black funeral home operator from Montgomery. He reported that a group of Black students demonstrating near the capitol that afternoon had been surrounded by police on horseback, all escape barred, and cynically commanded to disperse or take the consequences. Then the mounted police waded into the students and beat them at will. Police prevented ambulances from reaching the injured for two hours. Our informant was the driver of one of those ambulances, and he had driven straight to Selma to tell us about it.

The crowd outside the church seethed with rage. Cries went up. "Let's march!" Behind us, across the street, stood, rank on rank, the Alabama State Troopers and the local police forces of Sheriff Jim Clark. The situation was explosive. A young Black minister stepped to the microphone and said, "It's time we sang a song." He opened with the line, "Do

you love Martin King?” to which those who knew the song (an old Negro spiritual) responded, “Certainly, Lord!” “Do you love Martin King?” “Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord!” Right through the chain of command of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he went, the crowd each time echoing, warming to the song. “Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord!” Without warning he sang out, “Do you love Jim Clark?” The sheriff! “Cer...certainly, Lord” came the stunned, halting reply. “Do you love Jim Clark?” “Certainly, Lord” –it was stronger this time. “Do you love Jim Clark?” Now the point had sunk in... ”Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord!”

Rev. James Bevel then took the mic. “We are not just fighting for our rights, he said, but for the good of the whole society. It’s not enough to defeat Jim Clark – do you hear me, Jim? – we want you converted. We cannot win by hating our oppressors. We have to love them into changing.”

From Jesus and Nonviolence, A Third Way, by W. Wink.

Words Create Worlds

During the Vietnam War, the revered Jewish theologian Rabbi Abraham Heschel left his academic tower and took to the streets to speak out against the war. His words were absolute.

To speak about God and remain silent about Vietnam is blasphemous.

His words were also an instruction.

Words are themselves sacred, God's tool for creating the universe, and our tools for bringing holiness—or evil—into the world. ... Hitler did not come to power with tanks and guns, it all began with uttering evil words, with defamation, with language and propaganda. Words create worlds.

“Everything today comes down to that—everything.”

Hillel was a Jewish sage (110 BCE – 10 CE) who founded the House of Hillel, a world-renowned school in Jerusalem. When he died at the age of 120, he was the spiritual leader of Israel. Today, he is a legend, and many stories are told about him, his holiness and wisdom. I like to tell this one:

One day in the market place, a gentile man came up to Hillel and challenged him. “Tell me the Torah while standing on one foot.”

How was Hillel to answer? How could anyone give the entire message of the five books of Moses, the Mishna, the Gemara, the law and the oral tradition which comprise the Torah, in the length of time an old man can stand on one foot?

Hillel was a humble man, and took the stranger’s challenge as a sincere inquiry. He lifted his right foot and said:

What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah. The rest is commentary. Go study.

I wish Hillel were here today. I’d stop him and ask the big question: How are we to bring peace to our warring world?

But Hillel is gone. But, I believe, there is a sage in our time who answered that question: Fr. Daniel Berrigan (1921 - 2016), Jesuit priest, poet, scholar, anti-war activist, and self-described “jail bird.”

In June, 1980, Fr. Berrigan was in a Pennsylvania courtroom about to be sentenced by a judge and sent to prison. The crime: He and seven others had entered a secret General Electric nuclear factory, and hammered two unarmed warheads and poured blood, their own, over the warheads. This became known as the Plowshares Act. Standing on two feet, Berrigan said:

It's terrible for me to live in a time where I have nothing to say to human beings except, "Stop killing." There are other beautiful things I would love to be saying to people. But I cannot. Because everything is endangered. Everything is up for grabs. Our plight is very primitive from a Christian point of view. We are back where we started. Thou shalt not kill: we are not allowed to kill. Everything today comes down to that—everything.

Imagine This

A grandmother weeding her garden stands up to straighten her back. She has a granddaughter, Molly, age 4. She smiles over the green line of carrots and says, *I will not be a part of the killing of any child.*

A taxi driver passes an elementary school and out his open window says, *Not my neighbor's child. Not my child. Not the enemy's child.*

A Vietnam veteran sits alone in the dim sanctuary of a neighborhood bar. Over his glass, he says, *Not by bomb. Not by bullet. Not by looking the other way.* The bartender hears, but does not look up from washing glasses.

A group of mothers are watching their children on a playground. One mother takes a card from her pocket and reads *A Promise to Our Children* to her friends.

A yoga instructor ends her morning class with the words, *I will be the power of peace.*

A congresswoman about to step into a press conference says to herself, *I will be the power that is peace.*

A farmer steps down from his tractor. He looks out over the rows of plowed earth which run straight to the sky. He lifts his hat and wipes his brow. *No matter how lofty the reason. No matter how lofty the reason.*

The congregation in a synagogue in Brooklyn, a Unity church on the coast of Oregon, a mosque in Detroit, a sangha in Santa Fe, a Friends Meeting in Philadelphia end their morning worship by saying the *Promise*. They do this every week. They've been doing it for a year.

An old man sits each morning in his back yard, sun warming his back, and says just the beginning and ending lines of the *Promise*: *I will not be a part of the killing. I will be the power that is peace.*

A CEO hands out copies of the *Promise* to her Board of Directors. She asks each member to name the youngest child in his or her family. Then she asks them to say the words of the *Promise* with her:

*I will not be a part of the killing
of any child,
no matter how lofty the reason.
Not my neighbor's child.
Not my child.
Not the enemy's child.
Not by bomb. Not by bullet.
Not by looking the other way.
I will be the power that is peace.*

4th Foundation: Action in the World

A Patriot

As a young theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer prepared for a life of writing, teaching and ministry. But with Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933, and the rapid cutting off of civil liberties and enactment of laws against Jews, Bonhoeffer, who loved his country, felt compelled to speak out. In a radio address shortly after Hitler took power, he called on German Christians to:

Question the state. Aid victims of the state, even if they are not Christians. Work against the state if necessary.

When the Lutheran and Catholic Churches were co-opted by Hitler, Bonhoeffer helped found the "Confessing Church," an alternative body which refused to be part of the Reich Church. Then, he created an underground seminary to train the next generation of pastors.

There is no way to peace along the way of safety for peace must be dared, it is itself the great venture and can never be safe.

The list of crimes made legal in Nazi Germany is the old list of power possessed: arrests without charges, secret prisons, torture, assassinations, preemptive wars; and all this accompanied by a rhetoric of "freedom" and idolatry of the flag.

What did a patriot look like in Germany in the 1930s and 40s? The same as a patriot in any country today. Not the one in step. Not the one who says, “My country right or wrong.” But the one who hears, *If I permit this evil, what is the good of the good of my life?*, and then takes action.

A Resolve Building

Saying *A Promise to Our Children* morning after morning, I find myself changing. I feel a resolve building in me to do more to end war and its killing of children. And I am confronted by my complicity in the system which demands war. More and more I understand Dostoyevsky's words:

Each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all.

From *The Brothers Karamazov*

But how to begin to *do* more to end war?

I read the biographies of peace builders, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fr. Daniel Berrigan, and I am inspired by their commitment and courage, but daunted by the price they paid in loneliness, prison, beatings, and death. Reading Berrigan's writings, I'm stopped by this paragraph:

I think of the good, decent, peace-loving people I have known by the thousands, and I wonder. How many of them are so afflicted with the wasting disease of normalcy that, even as they declare for peace, their hands reach out with an instinctive spasm in the direction of their loved ones, in the direction of their comforts, their home, their security, their income, their future, their plans—that

twenty-year plan of family growth and unity, that fifty-year plan of decent life and honorable natural demise.

... We cry peace, peace, and there is no peace. There is no peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war – at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.

From No Strangers to Violence, No Strangers to Love

These are unsparing words, and I shrink from them. Martyrdom is not something to be sought. But events—the rise of a demagogue, prejudicial laws, arrests without charges, assassinations, preemptive wars—require that I stand up and risk what must be risked.

The resolve building in me through the *Promise* leads me to modest acts of peacemaking which I trust will build and contribute to the collective work of ending war. Perhaps they will call out to you too.

Keep good company. Join a peace organization. Make friends with those who are already doing peace. I am a member of The Fellowship of Reconciliation, Veterans for Peace, and the Just Peace team in my church. I grow in this company. There are many organizations in need of our presence and talents, including Code Pink, World Beyond War, The War Prevention Initiative, Nonviolent Peace Force. The list goes on.

Add the *Promise* to what you already do. If you crochet, crochet the *Promise* on a pillow for everyone to see on your couch as they enter your home. If you are a poet, include the *Promise* in your next public reading. If you're a clerk, wear a pin that says, "Ask me about the *Promise*." If you are willing to be a little crazy, stand on a street corner and hand out copies of the *Promise*. I write about peace, and send letters to the editor.

Vote for peacemakers. Vote for political candidates who promise to decrease the military budget and increase what makes life better for us all. By post card, e-mail, phone call, let every candidate know that your vote depends on their not going along with one more aircraft carrier, stealth bomber, M-16 rifle, armor piercing round.

Foster a Child. Come to know one child by name who is suffering the effects of war—injury, illness, hunger, homelessness, abandonment—and hold that child with your prayers, dollars and interest, by fostering them through a charitable organization that supports at risk children and refugees globally (e.g. Plan International, UNHCR).

Speak up. Speak up when someone at your table or in your group says that war is inevitable or necessary. This is hard to do when your heart is pounding and voice may shake. Regretting the many times I have failed to speak up, I've found a strategy that helps: I compose a short answer ahead of time. Then, when necessary, I am able to say what

I want to say. I don't need to be eloquent, or win or be right. I just need to speak up. In this, it helps me to remember a story which Don Eaton, a Santa Fe singer and songwriter, told at a gathering I attended.

Years ago, I was asked to do an anti-drug program at a large high school. It was held in the auditorium with about 1,200 students.

I sang and gave my message, and invited students to send up requests for songs or any questions they had. Printed on the front of one of the notes was, "Ask me to stand up," signed, "Kevin." So I called his name and he stood and the spotlight found him. Then, he stood on his chair. "Don," he said, "please read my note." I unfolded the note and read:

My name is Kevin and I'm a student here. I don't care if you are tall or short, skinny or fat. I don't care if you are black or yellow or red or brown or white.

I don't care if you are a nerd, jock or cheerleader. I don't care if you are attracted to boys or girls. I don't care if you are a straight-A student or flunking. You are safe with me.

Standing on his chair in the spotlight, Kevin then held out his arms in a gesture of open welcome and vulnerability. "I just thought you should know," he said, "No sarcasm here. No nicknames. No put downs. No pressure to be cool. You are safe with me."

I don't know how many students joined Kevin after the program. Maybe the miracle happened and one-by-one they came and stood around him. But maybe no one gathered, each one too embarrassed, too unsure to admit the size of his or her need.

But Kevin's invitation stands, and you and I, long past high school, know that to join him is to become him: to stand up, arms open, hearts exposed, and say out loud, "You are safe with me." By speaking up and saying, "There is nothing inevitable about war, and not only war, but a single harsh word, shove, or moment's indifference to the suffering of another. Always there is a choice."

Write Your Own Version of the Promise. There is nothing sacred about the words of the *Promise*. They are meant to create in you, through repetition, a growing passion for bringing an end to war and its killing of children. You may want to change a word or line, add or subtract. Or, start from scratch with your own corollary as our Board Member, Michael Olson did:

*I will fully respect the other—
Including my most feared enemies—
Engaging them in dialogue
that seeks to uncover the truth
from which their perspective arises.
And in so doing, I will be changed and I will be
mitigating war and the killing of children at the same time.*

Be a Student of Nonviolence. Do your homework. Read a biography of Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day. Know the basic philosophy and successful history of nonviolence, read Kurlansky's *Nonviolence*; Nagler's *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*; and, Kim Stafford's *Every War Has Two Losers*. Enjoy Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughter-House Five*, the poems of Naomi Shihab Nye; Stanley Kubrick's film, *Dr. Strangelove*.

Choose work that is life giving. Avoid employment that contributes to war—to weapon making, to the thousands of industries that promote and profit from war. Buddhists call this choosing “right livelihood.”

Promote the Promise. If you belong to a reading group or faith community with an adult education program, ask that *A Field Guide to Peace* be its next choice. Copies, plus a *Facilitator's Guide*, can be ordered from fieldsofpeace.org

Be a guide to young graduates. When someone you know is graduating from high school or college and considering the military, mention other options to them: Ameri- Corps, Peace Corps, teaching English as a second language, working on a cruise ship, volunteering with an NGO doing medical or refugee work. Young people seek independence and adventure. They needn't do it by signing a contract to kill on command.

Advocate for a National Service Requirement. Today, with no military draft and a “volunteer army,” our nation's

wars go largely unquestioned and unreported. And, the young who serve are disproportionately among the least advantaged in our society. A National Service Requirement would enlist every 18 year-old to serve their country with nonviolent options.

Gather a group of friends to explore ways to take action, to live the *Promise*. Meet in a home or coffee shop, or in a park watching children play. Start small. Be responsible to one another. Act. Give your group a name.

The above suggestions are only a starter list. You will find or create your own ways of living the *Promise*, of doing peace. What has happened to other good nations and other good people can happen to us. We can become the one others fear, and find that we are not who we started out to be and thought we were. Or we can say with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other peace heroes, *If I permit this evil, what is the good of the good of my life*, and then act.

Prompts

QUESTIONS

- Are there words you say daily, alone or in a group? The Lord's Prayer, a mantra, favorite psalm, Pledge of Allegiance, Serenity Prayer? Will you add *A Promise to Our Children*?
- Poets can seem incidental in a society, as if they were luxuries or poetry a pastime for "the few." Yet, when a demagogue takes over—e.g., Spain in the 1930s or Cambodia in the 1980s—poets are among the first to be rounded up and shot. Why is that?

QUOTES

A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a person deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred.

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*



There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.

Toni Morrison



What would be the outcome of tenderness and solicitude in such days as we endure, when our charges are not sheep but children, the innocent, the victimized, the noncombatants, women, the aged, the refugees—all the endangered?

Fr. Daniel Berrigan

READING

Fahrenheit 451, by Ray Bradbury

NOTE

In 2007, I visited my friend David Duncombe in his home in White Salmon, Washington. He was retired from his ministry as a chaplain and professor. I went to interview him for a Fields of Peace video about his lifetime as a peacemaker and activist. Among other recollections, he shared this.

One evening at home reading *The Washington Post*, he came across an article about sub-Saharan Africa. It reported that 19,000 children were dying there of starvation each day. That night David had trouble sleeping. Behind the number 19,000, he saw children with faces, names, racked bodies, and helpless mothers and fathers. “I felt,” he said, “unquiet in my heart.” He got up and sat alone in the dark. “I knew that I had to do something. I knew I could not do nothing.”

David thought of *Jubilee 2000*, an international coalition movement to get the world’s richest countries to forgive

the debt of the world's poorest countries so that efforts to end starvation could work. And it came to him: "I can fast. I can go to Washington D.C. and fast on the steps of Congress on behalf of the starving children."

In Washington each day, David called on representatives of Congress urging them to vote for Jubilee 2000. He did not mention his fast. But as the weeks wore on, as he became gaunt and frail, as he entered their offices with a cane, then a walker, and finally a wheel chair, the representatives got it: *This is what starving looks like. Through me, see the suffering children of sub-Saharan Africa.*

His fast lasted 45 days. A year later he returned to Congress to do another 45-day fast, and then again a third time. "A fast of 45 to 50 days is easier than you might think," he told me, "but at age 77, the last one almost killed me."

Ultimately, the U.S. Congress made good on its promise to forgive 760 million dollars in third world debt.

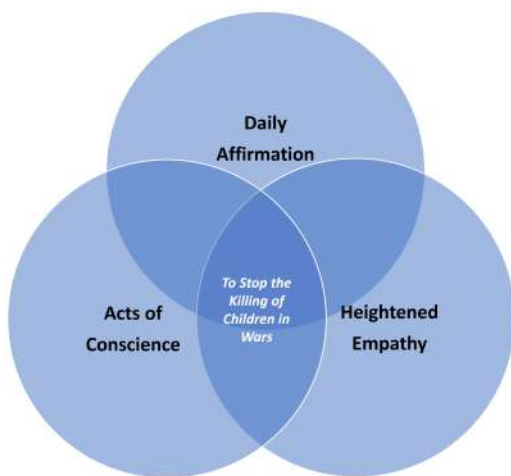
"Over the period of my life," David said, "there have been moments when I felt unquiet in my heart and knew I could not do nothing. And through action I was able to see myself better and what I needed to be doing.

"When you step-out you see more of what is inside of you and do more with your life."

CHAPTER 5

THE PROMISE AT WORK

It has taken time for me to see how *A Promise to Our Children* actually works. Thanks to the insights of my colleagues at *Fields of Peace*, I now see that the *Promise* involves a dynamic of three interactive components. It looks like this:



The circles overlap, and you and I can begin where we feel led: the Daily Affirmation, or an Act of Conscience, or simply, Heightened Empathy. Each involves the other, and all combine to stop war and the killing of children.

Looking at the diagram, I see that *A Promise to Our Children* is really a moral imperative grounded in our common humanity, and an ally to all who work to make our world safe for children.

Looking at the diagram, I'm reminded of the words which inspired our name, *Fields of Peace*:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
There is a field, I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
Doesn't make any sense.*

Rumi (translated by Coleman Barks)

CHAPTER 6

ADDRESSING DOUBTS

First Doubt: Are the numbers real?

When I first read the numbers—9 civilian deaths to every 1 combatant death in today’s wars—I stopped and read them again. And thought, “Is this true?”

The numbers were in an article about a panel discussion, “Ethics and War,” held at Stanford University. In it, reporter Cynthia Haven quoted panel member Richard Goldstone.

He noted that at the beginning of the 20th century, there was one civilian casualty for every eight or nine soldier casualties. With WWII, the ratio became 1 to 1. Over the last 30 years, the ratio has flipped: Now, every combatant casualty is matched by nine civilian deaths.

From *Stanford/News Service*, 1/24/2011

I looked up Richard Goldstone's name and learned he was a world-renowned jurist and human rights lawyer. In his home country, he had served as a Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and was a leader in ending apartheid laws. On the world stage, he was the first Chief Prosecutor of the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague, and one of the authors of UNESCO's *Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities*.

Goldstone is clearly credible. But I needed confirmations and found them in multiple sources:

- *Body Count*, 2015, Physicians for Social Responsibility
- "Civilian Casualties in Modern Warfare," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 8/28/2013
- "Human Development Report," U.N. 1998
- *American Journal of Public Health*, June 2014
- "Casualties of Conflict," 1991, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.

Among these and other confirmations, the most foundational was Graça Machel's 1996 ground-breaking report, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. Serving as expert of the Secretary-General of the U.N., her study of modern wars showed that 90 percent of the casualties were civilian. Machel concluded,

Armed conflict kills and maims more children than soldiers.

In war, civilians are killed in their homes, market places, hospitals, schools, school buses, restaurants, on roadways, at social gatherings, and while collecting wood or tending their fields. They are killed by bombs, drone rockets, bullets, fire, improvised explosive devices. Some are kidnapped and executed for purposes of revenge or intimidation. Civilian deaths can happen weeks or months after a battle as a result of exposure, untreated wounds, vulnerability to disease, and hunger. In most war zones, the majority of civilians and the most vulnerable are children.

There are credible voices who question the 90 percent number, including Adam Roberts in his article, “Lives and Statistics” (*Survival*, June/July 2010). Roberts is correct in saying that accurate accounts of civilian deaths in wars are notoriously difficult to come by, and can vary widely. Battle zones are chaotic, and often inaccessible, and governments and militias are reluctant to admit to causing civilian deaths. However, there are a number of independent organizations committed to keeping track of civilian casualties, and are able to estimate casualties with considerable accuracy. They include: Save the Children, Human Rights Watch, Humanium, Department of Peace & Conflict Research at Uppsala University, Amnesty International, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, UNICEF, UNESCO and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The numbers keep coming:

350 million children are living today in war zones from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the U.K.



Today, one in six children live in war zones. Around half of those, some 165 million, live in “high-intensity” conflicts—Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia.

Save the Children



4,500,000 children under the age of five will need treatment for life-threatening malnutrition this year (2018) in the most dangerous conflict zones.

An average of 1,600 children under the age of five die from extreme hunger every day, or one child every minute.

Save the Children



At least 2 million children have died in the last 10 years as a result of wars, whether they were civilian targets or killed in combat as child soldiers. The number of children wounded or disabled is three times as large.

Humanium

Second Doubt: Can such a simple idea change anything?

A Promise to our Children is a simple idea—a few words of peace to be said each morning, like a psalm. I confess that there are moments saying the *Promise* when I wonder, “Can this work? Can these words really change anything?” The answer I get is, “It is changing me.”

True. More and more I see my complicity. I see the little shadows that go out from the way I live, from my heedlessness, my denials, my self-involvement. And they contribute to the collective darkness—the fear and the killing. Still, I am far from being able to say,

Each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all.

~ Dostoyevsky

Will the *Promise* catch on? Will it be heard and repeated by millions. Will it become action in our lives? Will it prevail against the entrenched powers? Many simple ideas have, including these examples from the lives of Gandhi and King and a girl named Greta.

At dawn on March 12, 1930, Mohandas Gandhi began a walk of 240 miles from his ashram in eastern India to Dandi, a village by the sea. With him were 78 ashram

members, including Hindus, Muslims, and a Christian. The purpose of their walk to the sea was to launch a campaign for India's independence from 100 years of British rule.

At the Dandi beach, Gandhi planned to pick up a handful of salt left by the out-going tide, and pocket it, thus breaking the law protecting the British monopoly on the production and sale of salt. This symbolic act would serve notice that the people of India were taking back control of their lives and nation. Gandhi notified the British authorities of his intention, but they chose not to arrest him. They dismissed his "Salt March" as "quixotic" and "childishly futile."

Each morning, keeping a fast pace, Gandhi led his column of followers down the hot, dusty road. At each village, crowds lined the way and threw flowers and rupees in their path. And each evening, Gandhi held an open air prayer meeting. He reminded the villagers that, in their hot climate, salt was as basic to survival as air and water. The British, he told them, had no right to seize salt and tax it.

That Salt March took 24 days, and when the marchers arrived at Dandi on April 5, the procession numbered in the thousands. Among them were wealthy admirers from cities, farmers, villagers, the poor, the "untouchables," and activists from around the country. Following a ritual cleanse in the sea, Gandhi knelt on the beach and took up a handful of salt, then stood and pocketed it.

News of his act swept across India, and people throughout the country responded by harvesting their own salt. Thousands were arrested, beaten, and jailed. Independence would take another two decades of struggle, but independence came. The British left India. The world's greatest empire was defeated without a single bomb or bullet being fired at them.

It was a simple idea: Take up a handful of salt in defiance of an unjust law. The idea caught on and the 300 million people of India achieved freedom. His idea was not “quixotic” and “childishly futile.”



On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks, an African American woman, got on a bus to go home after work. She sat in the front row of the “colored section” in the back of the bus. When the bus became crowded, the driver ordered her to get up and give her seat to a white man. She refused. Her refusal violated the city ordinance requiring African Americans to sit in the back of the bus, and to yield seats to white riders if the front half reserved for whites was full. Rosa Parks was arrested.

Four days later, the African American citizens of Montgomery began a boycott of city buses. They pledged to persist until segregated seating was abolished. Although African American passengers represented more than 75 percent of bus riders, the city refused the protesters demands. The NAACP filed a lawsuit against the city in U.S. District Court.

The 40,000 African Americans of Montgomery, to a person, boycotted the buses. They formed car pools and accepted rides from supportive citizens. But most of the protesters walked the miles to and from work. Community leaders, including Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., helped organize, support, and give voice to the protest.

There were arrests, threats, beatings, and bombings. Also, job losses. But the buses remained empty.

The boycott lasted 381 days—Dec. 5, 1955, to Dec. 20, 1956. It ended when the federal court ruled that any law requiring racially segregated seating on buses violated the 14th amendment which guaranteed all citizens, regardless of race, equal rights and equal protection in state and federal law. The ruling was appealed, but the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Montgomery to integrate its bus system.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was the first large-scale civil rights protest in the U.S., and its success launched the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. The struggle would take a decade, but won the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It was a simple idea: Refuse to ride city buses until segregationist seating is abolished in one city. The idea caught on and ended segregation laws in the U.S.



In August, 2018, in Stockholm, Sweden, Greta Thunberg walked out of her high school classroom to sit on the steps of the Swedish Parliament. She sat there all day holding a hand-lettered cardboard sign declaring, *Skolstrejk for Klimatet* (School Strike for Climate). In science class she had learned that global warming was threatening catastrophic changes to the earth, and the inheritors of this devastation would be her generation. Yet, the adult leaders of nations were doing little about this crisis other than paying lip service. This depressed her. She could not sleep. She could not go on with life as usual.

Greta had a simple idea: Call the students in her school and country to go on strike until the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement were met.

Greta posted notice of the Strike on social media, but that first day she sat alone on the steps of Parliament. At 3 p.m. her father came and they bicycled home together. The second day a stranger joined her. “That was a big step, from one to two,” she said. In the days that followed others joined her. Two became eight, then forty, then hundreds. Then thousands.

Her example and message traveled, and millions joined her. She had not been alone in her outrage at the lack of meaningful action by governments. Within 16 months of her first day on the steps of the Swedish Parliament, she was invited to address the U.N. General Assembly.

Her words to those adult representatives were blunt and stern.

We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tale talk of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

You say you love your children above all else. And yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.

It is difficult to measure the effect Greta's message will have on government legislation and on your and my ecology at home. But already tens of thousands of students have gone on school strikes across Europe: the Friday for Future movement. In New York City, 250,000 have marched. In Germany, 1.4 million have taken to the streets. From Antarctica to Papua New Guinea, from Kabul to Johannesburg, an estimated 4 million people of all ages have showed up to protest. And Greta is on a world tour talking to religious and government leaders.

We can't continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow. That is all we are saying.



School Strike for Climate is a simple idea, and it has some striking parallels with *A Promise to Our Children*.

PARALLELS

- Both initiatives take on issues with long, seemingly intractable histories: war and climate change.

- Both began with shock at a few hard numbers. For Greta, the apocalyptic reality which will arrive within 10 years if radical reductions in today's 7.6% greenhouse gas emissions are not made. For us, the fact that in today's wars, for every 1 combatant killed, 9 civilians are killed, the majority of them children.
- Both began small. Greta—one teenage girl on strike holding a hand-lettered sign. Fields of Peace—a handful of friends committed to saying a 48-word *Promise*.
- Both address the failure of governments to protect our children, today and tomorrow.
- Both believe the peoples of the earth are ready to respond.
- Both require a first act which appears ridiculously slight and quixotic: To strike from school every Friday, to say the *Promise* outloud each day.



Today, you and I get up in the morning, step outside, and say out loud *A Promise to Our Children*. A simple idea driven by the fact that war has become the killing of children.

What will the *Promise* movement look like? At first, I imagined it coming from the bottom up. But then I read Gandhi's response to a reporter who asked what he thought an independent India would look like. He replied:

A structure composed of innumerable villages, with ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villagers, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but very humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

What a beautiful description: an oceanic circle. Nobody up or down. Just a plane of connecting circles contributing to the life of every other circle. And at each circle's center, an individual committed to the good of all.

CHAPTER 7

FIELD NOTES

In the great forests of the world, botanists have recently discovered that, deep down, the roots, tendrils and fungal threads of the trees seek one another and join together in an intricate web. On the surface, individual trees may seem to be in competition for sunlight and space, but, in fact, deep down, they seek and form one underlying organism.

In harsh seasons, the strongest trees send nutrition to those that are struggling. And in droughts, the older trees send their moisture to the youngest trees. Trees also trade airborne signals, fragrances, to alert neighbors to an attacking species.

Trees are more than social. Their individuality is given over to the feeding and healing of one another, especially to keep their sick and their young alive.

In the great forests of the world, the tallest trees and the oldest trees are always those with the most numerous connections to other trees. In the White Mountains of eastern California, there are bristlecone pines that are five

thousand years old. They were about a foot high when Abraham and Sarah left Ur to seek the Promised Land.



In J.D. Salinger's novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, the main character is 16-year-old Holden. He has run away from prep school and gone to New York City where his parents live. After making the rounds to a few night spots, he sneaks into the family apartment to talk to his little sister Phoebe. She is 12, adores Holden, is worried about his waywardness, and confronts him. He answers:

You know what I'd like to be? ... You know that song 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye'? ... I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be.

Standing at the edge catching children, that is the work of Fields of Peace. And it's where *A Promise to Our Children* takes us. Join us there, arms out. It's a big field.

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Fields of Peace is a nonprofit founded in 2007. Our home is on the Oregon Coast. Our Mission is to end war and its killing of children.

We enjoy and seek alliances with peace organizations, international children's organizations, and all friends who work to end violence through nonviolent means.

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