



Lifespark – lifeshare

Victims and Forgiveness

June 2010

Table of contents

A Lesson in Forgiveness named Bill Pelke , by Amelia Baptista A personal meeting with Bill Pelke in Lucerne in March 2010	page 2
Victims and Forgiveness A survey with 20 participating lifespark members	page 3-6
Interview with Bill Pelke , by Ines Aubert Follow-up questions after the event in Lucerne	page 7-9
Victims and Forgiveness , by Anne-Lise Wood Thoughts about forgiveness and compassion	page 10-11
I am not Able to Forgive , by Robert Baumgartner About an inmate who is unable to forgive himself	page 12
Restorative Justice – An Interview with Lisa Rea , by Ines Aubert How meetings between offender and victim help to heal	page 13-17
Talk about Forgiveness with Klaus Bäuml , by Ines Aubert A conversation with a retired Swiss pastor	page 18-21
My Personal Experience , by Christine Alexander How trauma is passed on from one generation to another	page 22-24
Forgiveness - Do We Have the Right to Contact the Victim's Family? by Jasmin Jenni	page 25

A Lesson in Forgiveness named Bill Pelke



Lifespark has met Bill Pelke on Sunday 28th of February 2010 in Lucerne. Return to this afternoon full of sharing.

During this encounter with Bill, he explained the origins of the foundation *Journey of Hope*, which he has founded after the murder of his grandmother Ruth Pelke by three minors.

First in favor of the death penalty, Bill was of the opinion that only a physical extermination of the guilty could appease the suffering caused by the loss of a loved one. However the seeds of love and empathy which his grandmother, when she was still alive, carefully planted in his heart, reversed his original fight. The desire of punishment changed into a desire of forgiveness.

We were very moved by the dignity and the courage that out flowed from Bill.

Therefore the afternoon spent at the side of the founder of *Journey of Hope* has not been marked by the sadness and emptiness left by the loss of the loved one, brutally ripped out of life. Moreover, the committers of the crime were not described as unfeeling monsters.

Bill has actually delicately pulled apart the sad couple “*committer- victim*” until there was only the essence of 4 human beings left: 3 adolescents on the quest of love, acceptance and who were leading Today Bill condemns the acts that led to the death of his grandmother and which certainly have to be sanctioned – but not the responsible to whom he has granted his forgiveness.

At last the questionnaire on the victims and the pardon allowed us to approach one inseparable aspect of our correspondents which is the victim and his family.

Thanks to this thinking tool we have explored the misjudged compound which was before even little present in our correspondence with the condemned. The victim is certainly at the origin of the bond that unites us with our friends in the corridor of death but this trilogy leaves place to a history whose main protagonists stay and will always stay our correspondents and ourselves.

Bill’s point of view of a grandson of a victim and his personal journey towards forgiveness helped us to perceive what was happening to the ones who were forced to live with the weight of such a loss.

How do we manage our feelings towards our friends, their family, their victims and their families?

Please feel free to consult the questionnaire for further information!

Amelia Baptista, June 2010

Victims and forgiveness

The questions were answered in written at the event with Bill Pelke in Lucerne on February 28th 2010



Pen pal-ship:

1. Do you know about the victim of your pen pal? If yes, how did you learn about it?

- By what was said in the internet. They don't like to talk about it.
- Unfortunately no.
- Yes, he told me.
- The victim's son did write a book as he's a famous football player. But the main "victim" of my pen friend did survive.
- Yes, he told me. (Former pen pal)
- I learn about it through google.
- No.
- Yes, letter of pen pal/ official documents.
- No.
- Yes, he told me about the wife he killed. She left a little son.
- Yes, I do through my pen pal's legal documents and newspaper articles.
- Internet.
- He told me about it.
- I just heard that he shot someone.

2. Has your pen pal's victim ever been a topic in your correspondence? If yes; in what ways? If no; do you miss it? Do you think it would be helpful?

- No. I've never pushed the subject because I thought it could be harmful for my pen pals.
- Yes. The pen pal knew him, "hated but did not kill him".
- Yes, he tried to explain the situation.
- Yes, because my pen pals' story in the book was wrong.
- No. It would be something my pen pal needs to be aware of.
- No.
- Description of the crime.
- No. I don't miss it now, but wait for it.
- In our sharing about guilt and forgiveness. My pen pal cannot believe in forgiveness. The only person who could forgive him is dead.
- My pen pal is innocent, so he lost his loved ones.
- No.
- Yes, he says that he's innocent of killing someone.
- No. I don't miss it. It was a story of gangs so it doesn't matter to me.

3. How do you feel about your pen pal's victim?

- I'm thinking about them every time I think about my pen pals.
- Sorry, but I don't connect him with my pen pal.
- Too complicated to answer in one sentence.
- Sorry for the grief they had to go through, but the main one survived! So, it's not really a loss, more a traumatic event.
- Very sad.
- I feel sorry for his victim.
- Sometimes. Don't know.
- Since I don't know about the victim, it's no feeling.

- I think of her each day in my prayer.
- Human feelings... sadness!
- Very sad.
- I don't know.
- It's clear, I feel sorry, but...

4. In what ways does the victim influence your correspondence?

- It does not.
- Almost none.
- No way, well not personally, it does in his guilt.
- So far, it doesn't.
- I don't know yet.
- I feel very sorry.
- Question of being guilty.
- Nothing right now.
- It doesn't influence our correspondence I think.
- It's painful for my pen pal... we don't really talk about it.
- Not at all.
- In no ways.
- In no way.

5. Do you know anything about the victim's family?

If no; would you like to?

- No. Yes, but how?
- No, I would... and I, finally, should do it!
- No, I don't have to.
- A little from what is published. For me there is no need to get in contact with them.
- Know a bit about the family of the criminal!
- I frankly don't know. Perhaps.
- No.
- Little.
- Yes, I would like to know how they can handle the situation.
- No, I don't, but I would like to.
- No. Not really.
- Enough.
- No. I would like to know more about this family.
- No, I'm not interested; it's like in the mafia, it could hit anyone.

Victims:

1. What do you think would the victims and their families want us to do?

- Each family must be different. Maybe they don't want me to do anything, maybe they'd like to be heard.
- To take contact and try to understand, work on forgiveness.
- Stop writing with my pen pal.
- Show their point of view, that we understand their situation. Otherwise it's so one-sided.
- I think that many families cannot relate to the murderers at all. It takes a pure state of mind to forgive or even think of forgiving.
- I don't know.
- That we pray for them and find a way to forgive and apologize.
- To think of them, maybe pray for them.
- Anyone feels differently.
- Respect their loss and feelings about it.
- I think nothing.
- Hold them in thoughts and pray for their healing.
- I don't know, I think they can't understand us.

2. How can we show respect to the victims?

- By praying for them.
- To show that we feel sorry.
- If they would write, I would answer honestly.

- By acknowledging their suffering and their need to answers and their right for seeking compensation.
- That we take notice and contact with them.
- In not forgetting them.
- The same kind of respect to any other human beings as everyone needs compassion.
- To share their suffering.
- Again, holding them in our hearts with deepest respect and compassion.
- To listen to them.

3. What would you like to ask the victims?

- Do they support the death penalty? What would they like me to do, if possible?
- What I could do for them, since I am in between.
- How they are dealing with the crime.
- How do you feel? How can you handle the situation? How can you go along? Can you forgive? What help would you appreciate?
- How are you? Today?
- How could we help if we could do anything?
- What kind of person he/she was.
- What helps you to go on with life?
- Would you have shot my pen pal if he hadn't been quicker?

Forgiveness:

1. Did you forgive your pen pal? Do you think this question is appropriate?

- No. I don't have anything to forgive, I don't judge.
- Yes, but: "Did you try to forgive...."
- Yes, I did. It's okay.
- What he is supposed to have done was long ago before we met. I don't have something to do with it.
- It is not my position to forgive.
- Yes, I forgave him although I don't know whether I have that power or not.
- No.
- It is.
- It's not up to me to forgive him.
- I have nothing to forgive to my pen pal. I wasn't there when "it" happened.
- No, because why should I forgive him. For what?
- No.
- Yes, I did. In this shooting it could have been he who was shot.

2. What do you think about forgiveness?

- Forgiveness we give or forgiveness we ask?
- It is one of the most important goals in life.
- Very important.
- Has a lot to do with understanding.
- It is an important part of life.
- Forgiveness is the way to all new level of existence as an individual to walk through this life.
- It is very helpful to ease the pain of a loss.
- A long process.
- It is most important.
- It's one of the most important things in life.
- We don't practice if often enough.
- It is something that we all work on in our lives. If you judge someone, how can you forgive?
- It is something for victims' families to do that.
- It is something each person should decide on their own. My own experience is that it's tremendously freeing.
- It's the best/biggest thing you can do as a human being.

3. What enables a person to forgive somebody who killed a family member?

- Once again, it's not for me to forgive. Who am I to think I have the ability to forgive when I know I am so far away from perfection?
- The understanding that there's more than total negativity.
- Revenge feelings.
- Hate, mainly their own feelings.

- A deep sense of the problems of life!
- Forgiveness appears as an open door to those who cannot/no longer refuge in the arms of anger every time pain is there.
- It depends on the person. Love and compassion for humans.
- Humanity, religiousness.
- Perhaps if they can't forget, if they don't want, if they don't take the help of others.
- A great strength... faith...love.
- I have no idea as, fortunately; I never had to go through such difficult times.
- Their own exposure to their philosophy of life.
- The faith in God and to see a person change their mind.

4. What questions do you want to pose Bill Pelke?

- What were the developments in this life that led to his ability to forgive?
- How can we address a victim's family when we are corresponding with an inmate? Do they want me to get in touch with them, really?
- How can we get in contact with the victim/his family, without hurting them?
- What was your way to forgive, what helped you?
- Why does he think that his crusade is important? What is/are his favourite argument(s) in regard to the death penalty being wrong?
- I have already done it.
- Was there a time when you felt like a victim?
- How much time did it take to get to this point?

Lifespark's homepage:

1. Do you think we should have information about the topic „victims” and “forgiveness” on our homepage or not? Why?

- There is something moralizing about this that I don't like.
- Yes. We should know and understand both sides.
- Yes, we could. I think it belongs to the writing as well as the offender.
- Sure, because this would show all sides of a crime or what led an inmate to this situation. Otherwise it shows that we are ok with the crime.
- I do think so. It would be one-sided to only consider the perpetrators of a crime.
- Good question... would a link be sufficient?
- Our forgiveness or that of the family?
- Yes, it would be interesting also for other persons.
- It's important to think “of both sides” above all because we're only in touch with the perpetrator.
- Yes, we could... but are we up to it?
- Sure. Open discussion seems always helpful when done with mutual respect.
- Yes, it's always interesting and touching. You can learn a lot.

2. What information would you consider appropriate for our homepage?

- Put the links of victims' websites so we can get in touch with them if we feel like it.
- Hot to get in contact (stepwise approach).
- Whatever people would want to tell, as long as it doesn't offend anyone.
- Counselling.
- Cases of forgiveness. Developments in victims' organizations.
- News from “Journey of Hope” for example. Stories with topics of forgiveness and victims' families of our pen pals.
- Any.

3. Do you feel lifespark should get active with regards to victims? How?

- I think we have already plenty on our plate.
- Yes, educating our members, how to do it.
- Yes, maybe, but I don't know just now.
- Listening to Bill Pelke is a good start. Don't know much at the moment.
- Delicate point. What is our role? How? Define our limits.
- Maybe, it there are persons who will help.
- A simple text remembering that victims' families are not forgotten would be enough.
- I believe when they, themselves, reach out.
- No. We are connected with the other part.

Interview with Bill Pelke – Follow up questions after the event in Lucerne

Questions posed by Ines Aubert

Do you think that it would be helpful if the crime and the victim were discussed in our correspondence with an inmate on death row?

It depends. If someone just wants to meet someone through writing letters just to offer support to them as a friend is one thing. If you are writing someone and want to help them with spiritual values, then that is another.

For the casual friend aspect, I would say it might not be so helpful. If it is for spiritual reasons, then I think those things should be brought into the conversation.

Do you feel that we free pen pals are called to carefully launch such a discussion with our pen pal?

This should be approached very carefully, and you must have the other person's trust. If your only motive is of a spiritual nature, then I think that trust will be seen, but if you have other motives, it may be more difficult to build that trust.

Most people don't want to talk about the crime they are charged with. There are many reasons for that, one being that because anything they say or write can be held against them.

You must show that you care for them and have compassion for them. If not then don't bother asking or bringing it up.

Generally, do you believe it's useful to know about the crime of our pen pal, regardless whether or not he talks about it? And if you think it is, why?

If it is a good friendship, he can tell you about the crime of which he was accused and for which he was found guilty, but again, anything he admits having done wrong in writing could really adversely affect him. It is generally their lawyers' advice to not talk to anyone about the crime. If you wish to know more about the person and the crime, then do a google search. You are then able to find out the charge against him as well as the victim. If you have a trust relationship and ask him a question about something you read, he can choose to either talk about it or not.

Can you understand that some members don't want to be confronted with the crime of their pen pal and not "judge" the past actions?

I can absolutely understand this, that is why love and compassion is so important. With love and compassion, you will be able to forgive their past sins, whatever they were. Then you don't have to worry about "judging" someone's acts.

Questions about victims:

It so happened that many of the participants at the Lucerne event would actually like to be in contact with the victim's family. What do you think about that?

I think that is a wonderful idea. It must be done properly so as not to be misconstrued as harassment by the victims' families. It is usually best if you can find the minister to the victim and arrange a meeting with him or her.

You know many victims families and you are yourself a relative of a victim. So perhaps you are able to answer this question: What do they want us to do?

The greatest gift you can give them is the gift of presence. Let them know you are standing by their side with no other agenda involved. Just let them know you are there for them.

How can those among us who want contact with victim's relatives pose our questions to them?

There is an organization called Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation (MVFR). Beth Wood is the Executive Director and would be happy to refer you to victim's families who would be happy to answer those sorts of questions.

Questions about forgiveness:

People who forgave refer to God. Do you think there could be another basis to reach forgiveness? If yes, what would that be?

Yes, it is the word love. Perhaps the greatest part of love is the forgiveness that that love brings. Love, love, love.

How does a concerned person realize that the state of forgiveness is accomplished?

When you no longer have a desire for revenge. When you want that person to do well and achieve good things.

And to ask you one participant's question: How long did it take you to get to this point?

It was a year and a half after my grandmother's death that I stumbled across forgiveness. There is no timetable for forgiveness and healing. For most, forgiveness is a process. When practiced, 70 times 7 becomes a habit.

By what is the former feeling of anger replaced?

You lose that heavy weight that has been around your neck, and you find it is easy to move forward with confidence because you know you have done the right thing. You will be at peace.

Can we forgive our pen pal although we're not affected by his crime and although we didn't know him at the time of the offense? Is it necessary that we forgive?

You can forgive them for how they have offended you by their terrible crime. Forgiveness is a sign of love, and unforgiveness is a sign of the opposite.

If we forgive our pen pal, shouldn't he forgive us our misdeeds too, even if they're small compared to his?

Of course you should forgive your pen pal, and of course he should forgive you. But make sure you do the right thing and forgive.

You do the right thing.

Let him learn by your forgiveness so that one day he can forgive others, including you.

Questions about Lifespark:

Do you have any suggestions for our homepage?

Add www.JourneyofHope.org to your links page. ☺

What do you suggest is the next step for Lifespark to raise the level of understanding for the impact of forgiveness?

Continue to listen to powerful stories of people who have experienced the healing power of forgiveness.

Thank you very much, Bill, for answering these questions. Take good care of yourself.

June 2010



Bill Pelke meets with lifespark members in Lucerne, Switzerland

VICTIMS AND FORGIVENESS



Those of our members who were present at the 4th World Congress Against The Death Penalty in Geneva on February 24 to 26, 2010, and especially those who attended the evening dedicated to the victims at the BFM, "World of Victims-Voices of Experience", must have felt a tremendous emotion when they heard the victims testify about what they all went through.

Listening to them, I soon realized that, probably because of my involvement in my correspondence and friendships with Death Row inmates, I had been focused all along almost only on the United States death penalty. However, the World Congress Against The Death Penalty dealt not only with U.S. death rows but also with all forms of violence, torture, and death penalty as it occurs all around the world. Therefore, being present at the Congress enabled me to have a much larger vision. Although nothing was really new for me, it opened new doors and put me face to face with the terrible fate and martyrdom many people encounter in this world. And they looked all the more terrible when they were told by the victims themselves. Thus these deeply emotional moments I am sure all of you must have felt during the Congress.

I realized too that quite often I didn't include the victims in my thoughts and so I remembered one of our members telling us during one of our regional meetings that not a day passed for her without having a special thought for the victims.

Most, if not all of you, must have heard about Bill Pelke's organization "Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing", and those who were present in Lucerne on February 28, know what "The Answer Is Love and Compassion" really means, according to Bill's own words. I will always remember what he said as he was telling us of the long relationship he had and still has with Paula Cooper, the then fifteen-year-old girl who murdered his grandmother: that he would be at the gate when she would be released from prison, a few years away from now.

Forgiveness and compassion are really the only way to healing, all the victims told us. Hopefully, neither of us has had to endure the loss of a murdered loved one but if it were the case, I am certain that a tremendous effort upon oneself would be necessary in order to be able to resist the urge of a violent instinctive reaction, if not physically, at least psychologically. And we all have experienced the pain that is gnawing deeply at us as long as we keep having a feeling of revenge or resentment. It really is eating our heart and burning all our energy.

Forgiving those who have hurt us, as did Bob Curley, whose son was kidnapped by two men, tortured and finally murdered, is a living example of what is said in the scriptures (and believe me, I am not the type who often quotes the gospel): "To turn the other cheek". "Thou shalt not kill" is another one. There is indeed another way to react to violence and it demonstrates, if need be, how wrong and vain is the punishment by death. Of course, all of you without any doubt share this feeling; otherwise you would not be reading the present Newsletter.

But those supporting death penalty have quite an opposite opinion and seem to enjoy quoting *ad nauseam* the sadly famous Exodus 21:25 verse "An eye for an eye". However, Helen Prejean herself says: "An eye for an eye" should be interpreted as "Only an eye for an eye, only a life for a life". She

adds: "You know what else the Bible asks for death as a punishment? For adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, trespass upon sacred grounds, profane in a Sabbath and contempt to parents".

If we replace ourselves at the time of the Exodus, we observe that the Israelites are mentioned in 1210 BC by pharaoh Merneptah. Therefore the events of the Exodus can be traceable to a late Bronze Age era, between 1540 and 1210 BC. It is said that it took forty years for the Israelites to travel from Egypt to Canaan, which was to become Israel. Forty years during which it was not uncommon for an offended family or clan to slaughter entire communities in retaliation for an offence against one of their members. Thus the commandment in Exodus 21:25 that states: "You shall give [only one] life for [a] life, [only one] eye for [an] eye." (and nothing more adds Helen Prejean).

Yet pro-death supporters are not embarrassed when they still refer to a 3220-year-old law made for people who were nomads at the time, who therefore had no homes and even less prisons and when examples (execution) had to be carried out immediately to maintain discipline and preserve the entire community, a community said to have been amounting to about two and a half million, going into a desolate desert. Quite different from today's American way of life, isn't it?

However, have you ever thought how many times a day we have to make a choice between resentment and forgiveness? Personally I reckon I have to make this choice several times a day, most of the time for very petty matters. Even so, it helps me to keep things in perspective when I realize it could be so much worse if I were in the same situation than the victims' families who had and still must have to work very hard to achieve this goal, that is, to forgive their loved ones', and sometimes their own, torturer.

As I am writing this, I have a special thought for Curtis McCarthy, who was, like so many others, wrongly convicted and spent 22 years on Oklahoma death row, which is said to be one of the worst in the United States, before he was, at last, exonerated thanks to DNA tests. If you had the chance to cross his numerous steps all around the Congress premises, taking pictures of everybody and everything around him, you must have been amazed to see how he looked peaceful, serene, always smiling, apparently still as happy today to be back in the free world again as he must have been on the day he was released from his cell on death row. We have been told that the State of Oklahoma never offered him any financial compensation for all the years he spent in prison, although he was innocent. But nevertheless, Curtis kept on smiling, as if for him only the present really mattered. He must surely have forgiven them for all the lost years, in spite of all his suffering while in prison, the worst of all being the constant fear of being executed one day. Forgiveness does indeed help us to turn the page, if not to forget.

All the testimonies we heard, all the dreadful stories we were told, all these demonstrations of resilience we witnessed, showed us that forgiveness is the one and only way. Any other way would only mean more violence, more pain and more killing and loathing, instead of love. But all of you know this, don't you?

I have just read again the interview that Rodney Bowser gave to Ines Aubert. Rodney's sister Trina was killed by Glenn Benner who was sentenced to death and executed at the Lucasville prison in Ohio on February 7, 2006. Shortly before the execution was carried out, Rodney told his sister's murderer that he forgave him. He says that talking with Glenn was a healing process for both of them. Later, Rodney was told by the prison's chaplain that when Glenn learned that he was forgiven "he had been tearful" and, according to Rodney's words, his words of forgiveness were the greatest gift Glenn ever received in his life, and one he had never imagined he would ever receive.

Maybe it was him I saw the last time I was in Texas, in June 2009. An execution was carried out that day and my friends and I went to Huntsville where we gathered together with a few people who were protesting silently. After the execution took place some of them spoke and among them was a man who told us about how he had forgiven his sister's murderer. Of all the different statements that were made at the end of this sad day, his was the one I found the most moving and, as strange as it may be, given the place we were standing next to and what had just happened within its walls, it held a great deal of hope, as far as love, forgiveness and healing were concerned.

For me, all these testimonies can be summarized in one sentence: As we hope for forgiveness, so we must forgive.

Anne-Lise Wood, April 2010

I am not able to forgive myself

Almost six years ago I started visiting a young man in a Swiss prison. I do that on a regular basis in intervals of about two weeks. At the beginning I knew nothing more than the fact that due to an act of violence, one of his children died a few days later. It was at that time my sincere wish not to investigate the case. I wanted to meet the man and was convinced that some day he would start talking on his own about his guilt.

So it became my duty once again to learn to be patient. I wanted to create a basis of trust before our discussions became more profound. I am not so sure who learned more in that phase of our relationship.

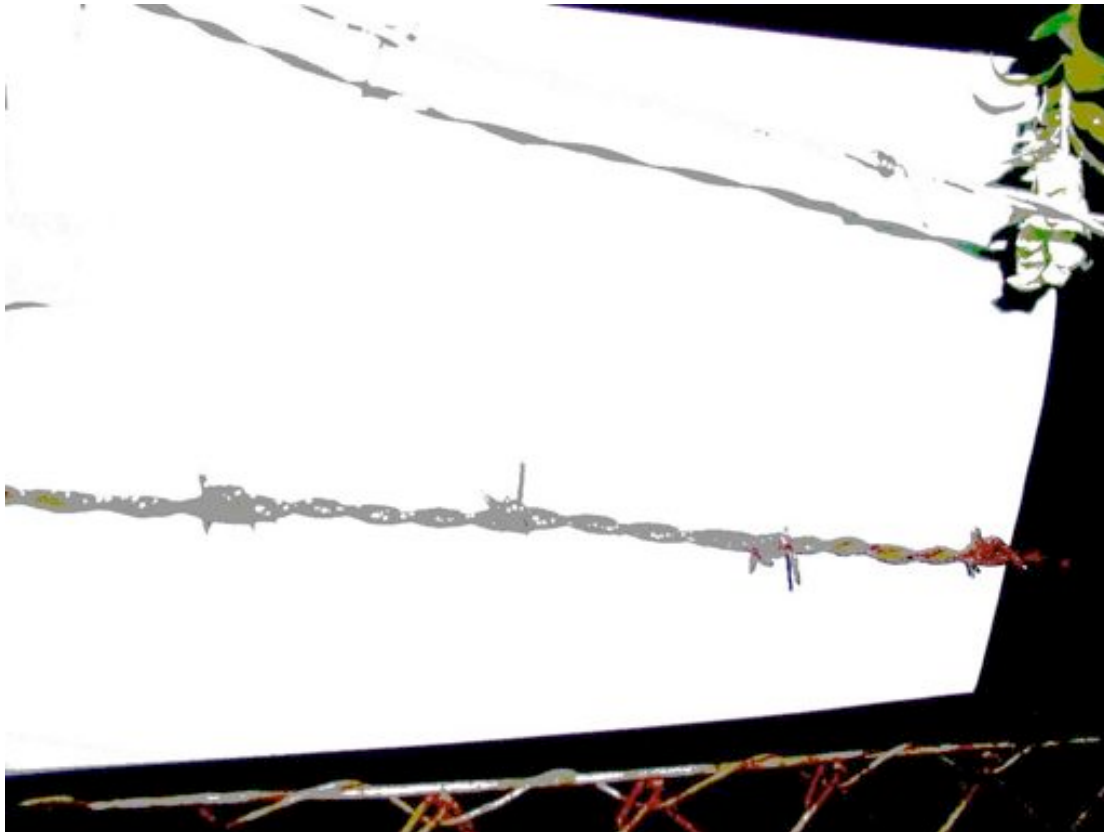
I started praying to our Father in heaven and gradually our relationship became more open and trusting. I then accompanied the man before the court in order to at least give him some moral support as a non-lawyer.

There I heard a lot of details about the criminal act and later on, back in prison, I was told more details than were revealed to the officials and lawyers. At this point I realized that this was the beginning of a deep friendship.

His family and his late son had so far been the central point of discussion in almost all of the more than one hundred visits up to that point. So almost automatically, we were now talking about how he could live with his guilt. As a Christian, it is and was my belief that no human being can forgive completely, down to the depths of our soul. We need forgiveness from our Lord Jesus Christ for our wrongdoings and only this will empower us to forgive others and consequently also ourselves. After many months and years, my friend once expressed that in the following sentence: "I know that God has forgiven me and I believe that my wife will one day do so too, but I am not able to forgive myself!"

Personally I am convinced that in the long run we shall overcome this obstacle as well. We need the help of our Creator and Saviour.

Robert Baumgartner, March 2010



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Definition by Lisa Rea in a 22 minutes long video of lifestyle magazine:

<http://www.lifestyle.org/article.php?id=64>

What is Restorative Justice: It's a new vision for the Criminal Justice System. Right now, when we respond on crime in the USA we say: Crime is a crime against the state and the offender has to pay back the state by serving time. But it's not a crime against a victim, a crime against a real human being. Restorative justice says we're gonna turn that on its head. So, it's a paradigm shift, it says, no the offender needs to be held accountable to the victim. The criminal justice system needs to understand crime enters victims and crime enters communities, so restorative justice says "What can we do to change that paradigm and hold the offender accountable and also restore and heal the victim as much as possible?"

The Sycamore Tree Project

The Sycamore Tree Project (STP) is an intensive 5-8 week in-prison programme that brings groups of crime victims into prison to meet with groups of unrelated offenders. They talk about the effects of crime, the harms it causes, and how to make things right. The STP has been used around the world and has been very valuable according to the victims and offenders who participated.

<http://www.pfi.org/cjr/stp/introduction>

Example

A victim of a sexual assault and attempted murder meets offenders who were incarcerated for violent crimes, including rape

"As a survivor of a violent crime, I am a firm believer in the power of restorative justice programs to transform both the victim and the offender. I learned about victim offender conferencing shortly after surviving a violent sexual assault and attempted murder.

Although I was unable to meet with my offender, as he had not taken responsibility for his crime, I began participating in victim impact panels inside prisons. Although I was not speaking directly to my offender, I was telling my story to others who were incarcerated for violent crimes, including rape.

Much of my healing took place inside maximum security prisons as a result of the dialogue I engaged in with these offenders. If someone had told me at the time of the crime that this would be the case, I would have told that individual they were crazy! I participated in these panels because I thought I had something to offer the offenders. I learned that the process, if properly conducted, is mutually beneficial."

By Penny Beerntsen

Lisa Rea

Lisa Rea is a national and international restorative justice expert and founder of The Justice & Reconciliation Project (JRP). She heads Rea Consulting providing consulting assistance on government relations and victims-driven restorative justice.

Lisa is a strategic consultant at the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, a division of Prison Fellowship International at www.rjonline.org. She is a correspondent for the restorative justice blog at the Centre.

Lisa is a board member at the Journey of Hope: from Violence to Healing.

She Ms. Rea is also a frequent contributor to "Freedom from Fear" an online magazine produced by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute (UNICRI).

Interview with Lisa Rea

The questions were asked by Ines Aubert



Lisa, Bill Pelke introduced you to me. Can you tell me about your work and about what led you to found the Justice & Reconciliation Project JRP?

I started JRP because I saw a need to reach out and educate crime victims about the positive benefits of restorative justice. I lobbied on criminal justice issues in the California Legislature in the '90s. I came in contact with crime victims and some who advocate for justice reform. But I noticed that while often our only response to crime is to increase the sentences of offenders that those legislative actions do not translate into healing in victims or increased victim satisfaction. Thus, I founded JRP. I also see crime victim as a powerful voice for change.

Restorative justice opens doors for healing in the victim as well as in the offender. Oftentimes, victims do not know that restorative justice exists. Victims-driven restorative justice, a phrase I prefer, describes a set of principles that puts the victim in the center of the system after crime is committed. It sees crime as injury to a victim, as well as the community which is also affected by crime. Restorative justice seeks to make things right, as much as possible, between the offender and the victim (or victim's family). It stresses offender accountability in ways that lead to transformation (change) in the offender and healing in the victim.

Can you give us an example for your work?

I have been working in the restorative justice field since 1992. I have worn many hats. I have worked with offenders, ex-offenders as well as with victims of crime. Most of my work has been focused on changing laws that shape the justice system. I am a public policy expert and lobbyist. Here in California I wrote a number of pieces of legislation that injected restorative justice principles into the system. One example of that public policy work includes affecting key legislation in California that later became the state's community corrections statute. Community corrections provides for alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. I was able to inject restorative justice principles into the legislation which include adding provision that encouraged the use of victim offender mediation.

I also I directed an in-prison victim offender programme through Prison Fellowship International (PFI). This project is called the Sycamore Tree Project. This first program was tested in Texas in 1998. It is an excellent example of restorative justice at work. It is some of the best work I have ever done in this field. The project is ongoing through PFI.

What convinces you so strongly of the idea of restorative justice?

It is clear that the justice system is broken. It does not matter where you live in the world. We are all battling the same problems: an over-reliance on incarceration (for all offenders--violent and nonviolent). We do not understand that crime injures victims. By not acknowledging that crime injures victims there is a lack of understanding that to change offenders (and their conduct) they must be held accountable. When you are looking to drive down crime rates, you must look at how offenders are held accountable. You also must look at whether or not victims are satisfied once they are a part of the justice system.

Much of the anger of crime victims in the U.S., in particular victims of violent crime, is because they are forgotten. The needs of victims are ignored while at the same time victims are also used by those in the justice system who are seeking convictions, and longer sentences.

Do you have a personal history linking you to the idea of restorative justice?

I am asked that often. I come to the justice system as someone who cares deeply about justice and the existence of injustice. Civil rights issues are also a great concern to me. I first became involved in prison reform work as a pen pal to a lifer in Georgia, much like the work of your organization. But once I learned about restorative justice I was hooked. The philosophy behind restorative justice made so much sense. Restorative justice acknowledges the need to transform a broken justice system and take into account the injury to human beings: victims and offenders. It acknowledged the need for deep, systemic reform. Because of my legislative background, I was hooked! I have been an advocate ever since.

How do interested people get in contact with you? Do you also approach them with your service?

You can reach me directly through Rea Consulting at rea@mindsync.com. I am active through various groups (at linkedin.com and blogging at PFI's restorative justice blog at www.rjonline.org). You can also reach me through the Journey of Hope and its website. We are just establishing a restorative justice committee. I will be the primary contact for that effort.

If your members are seeking to participate in a victim-offender dialogue it is possible. But it takes time. Such dialogues are often generated by the crime victim. I believe that is when it is most successful. But saying that, I do not discourage any person from seeking to meet their victim or offender after a crime has been committed. However, both sides, victim and offender, must willingly participate. The offender must take responsibility for his/her crime. The victim must choose to participate in the dialogue. Often restorative justice meetings (another description for victim offender dialogues) are mediated by a trained facilitator. There is a good reason for this. But at the same time I know successful dialogues which occurred without such mediators. But guidance for the participants is important and needed. There is also the possibility that a victim will choose not to participate. Or the victim might say "no" at one time but years later choose to participate in a dialogue.

Rea Consulting helps to connect those who want to meet their offender or victim with the services they might need. We connect the dots, as it were. We also believe that telling the stories of victims who have experienced some kind of healing through restorative justice-type meetings is very important. That is how I met Bill Pelke, the founder of the Journey of Hope. Through the stories of victims like Bill Pelke the justice system can change. Those who write the laws that drive the justice system (policy makers/legislators) listen to crime victims. That is particularly true in the U.S. But it is also true in other countries around the world. The voices of victims in support of restorative justice is growing.

Do you generally also offer your service to the families of the both parties?

Yes. We work with families of victims (or victims themselves) and families of offenders.

Do you recommend that every victim and offender participate in restorative justice?

I think restorative justice has great value for all injured by crime: victims, offenders and as well as communities. There are many ways to participate in restorative justice. Being a part of a victim offender dialogue or restorative justice meeting is one way. I think of it as "pure" restorative justice. But there is also something called "circles" or circles of accountability. That is defined as a victim offender meeting that involves family members of both the victim and the offender. These are increasingly used and quite successful.

There are many ways to take part in restorative justice. But what is key is that crime victims must be brought into the equation. All reform of the justice system is not necessarily restorative justice. There is confusion about this point. There are times when surrogate victims are used in restorative justice programs where the end result has been successful or positive. That would mean real victims and real offenders coming together but in unrelated cases. That describes The Sycamore Tree Project which I mentioned earlier. We used surrogates. The first project in Texas was very successful. I believe the project planted a seed in each victim and offender to consider some day meeting their own offender or victim (or the victim's family).

At first I thought using surrogate victims (and offenders) would not yield positive results. I was wrong. In fact, in some ways the participants in my project were not ready for one on one victim offender dialogue.

Are there some offenders or some victims who should never consider restorative justice?

I think all should have the option to meet--particularly the victim should have that option. Some might never choose to sit down have that dialogue. But the option to should be there. For offenders, I think all offenders should be able to meet their victim if that victim is agreeable. This is where some standards must be set. I do not believe doors should be shut on lifers, for instance. If an offender takes responsibility for his/her crime then that act and the sharing of that remorse for the injury caused could mean a great deal to the victim/or the victims family. I know what it means to the victims I have worked with.

You read the answers that the participants of the lifespark event with Bill Pelke in Lucerne filled in the questionnaire and you found it very interesting. What was it that affected you most?

I was very glad you conducted such a survey in Lucerne. What I noticed the most is that there is a need to educate the public about restorative justice and what value it brings to victims and offenders and all those who care about justice. Having worked for organizations who work on behalf of both offenders and victims, I know that what is needed the most is to open doors for healing and restoration. All injured by crime need that. How do you get there? Restorative justice can guide that process.

Also, some would think that most victims of violent crime want their "pound of flesh." The intensive work I have done in the last 10 years has convinced me that most crime victims want to experience some kind of restoration or healing so they can move on with their lives. Those who work only with offenders might not consider this point.

What do you generally think about people like our members who do so much for inmates on death row?

Since I first came to prison reform/justice reform work (in 1989) as a pen pal to a lifer through Prison Fellowship Ministries then I, of course, understand those who choose to seek to respond to the great need of others in our society in this way. Those in prison around the globe are often the most forgotten in our world. My concern for those in prison came from my faith.

Lifespark offers much information about how to better support the inmates. I guess you know that our members feel very much for their pen pals on death row. In some ways we consider ourselves "family" of the offender. Do you agree that we are in some ways "family" of them?

I can certainly understand that close ties come from being in contact by letter or in other ways. Since many inmates, whether they are on death row or serving life, are without family then pen pals can be critically important as a link to the outside world. The need is great.

What could our role in a restorative justice be?

You could learn more about restorative justice and be a link to those who are doing restorative justice work, as you are doing here through this interview. Support restorative justice as a means towards systemic reform of a broken system. I think those offenders who are interested in restorative justice should learn more about it.

Do you think we should address our pen pals with the idea of restorative justice?

Yes. Some might say that educating offenders about restorative justice, especially those serving life sentences or on death row, only sets them up for something that will never happen. I do not believe that. I can think of cases where the impossible happened. But it is not easy. In fact, it is often very hard work for the offenders and the victims. But the fruit that comes from restorative justice is real and can bring hope to all those who have been deeply injured and violated.

Participating in a restorative justice meeting has great benefits. However, it does not affect the sentence of the offender. That is something that often concerns crime victims and those who advocate for victims' rights. The benefit comes from the healing that is possible. I have seen the value in the lives of both victims and offenders. It is tangible.

Is it possible that some victims would like to talk to us although we are pen friends of offenders and live in Switzerland?

Perhaps. It would be a question of why they would choose to speak to you. Often victims would want to tell their stories to you, and the pen pals in prison you correspond with. You have probably heard of victim impact panels which are panels of victims that go into prison (usually upon invitation) to tell their stories to inmates. This is a way of exposing offenders to the pain crime victims have experienced. This would be a way of doing the same thing but via letter. I would hope that this kind of communication could lead all parties to experiencing restorative justice more directly.

Would it be possible for our members to get in contact with victims and talk to them?

Yes, I do think there are victims who would speak to you about this subject. Not all victims are at the same place in their lives as Bill Pelke, for example. But there are increasing numbers of victims in support of restorative justice worldwide. They have stories to tell and they are stories of hope.

**Lisa, I'm delighted about all I learned through this interview and I'm sure a lot of our members will be too!
I wish you all the best in your important work!**

Talk about Forgiveness with Klaus Bäumlin* and Ines Aubert

A conversation with a retired Swiss pastor



Ines: My pen pal Steve is one of the greatest challenges in my life. In addition to murder, he has committed various criminal acts on random individuals and has told me about them in detail. Steve traumatized entire communities with his vile acts and robbed many people of their belief in their own or their children's safety.

I feel very close to my pen pal, but the knowledge of his past and the extent of his crimes weighs heavily on me. I realize that it is not possible for me to forgive him for these crimes, and this is another burden for me.

Steve understands that his crimes have caused my world to be unsafe. At the beginning of our correspondence he asked me to forgive him with the following words:

"I was part of the real dangers that always exist in the world you live in, and that threat you are continually aware of, thus feel personally. The emotional, mental, and physical effects of my guilt remain. Even though I feel contrition and have asked for, and I believe have received, God's forgiveness, you continue to feel the effects of my guilt. For causing you to feel this, I sincerely apologize, and ask your forgiveness of my offense against your spirit."

I ask myself, am I even in a position to forgive him?

Klaus: Steve asked you to forgive him for telling you in detail about his terrible deeds, thereby troubling and hurting you. And, as you yourself write, this is true. Through his evil deeds, using Steve's own words, you became aware of the threats that can face us at any time in today's world. Especially as a woman, such knowledge must frighten you. You can forgive the fact that Steve hurt you by sharing his guilt with you. That is something between the two of you.

If I understand his words correctly, then he didn't ask you to forgive him for his deeds. He believes that God has forgiven him.

You cannot forgive him for his crimes, you have realized this yourself. That is between him and the victims of his acts - and between him and God.

Ines: That means that I don't have to forgive him for his deeds, but only for telling me about them. Then I would be burdening myself unnecessarily. That would make things a lot easier.

Klaus: Only God can forgive him for his crimes, not you. In the end, forgiving a sin means getting rid of it. According to the Prophet Micah "and thou shalt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7,19). Damage that people do can often be compensated or healed. There is evil which is in our power to get rid of. However throwing a murder into the depths of the sea is beyond our power. Only God can do that, if he so wishes.

We will certainly come back to the topic of what it means when and how God forgives sin. But since you know about Steve's sins, and also that he is contrite and has asked God for forgiveness, by letting him feel your friendship, you have shown him solidarity, not with his deeds, but with him as a human being, who is more than the crimes he has committed. And that is already a heavy burden. Your knowledge, your solidarity with him, can be a sign of God's forgiveness.

Ines: So you think that my friendship with Steve can be interpreted as a sign of God's forgiveness, even though I am not aware of it? Hm. I want to be sure I really understand you. What I can do is to forgive Steve for the things that affect me directly, namely confronting me with his past. I can't forgive

his deeds, but my solidarity with him is a sign of forgiveness of the only one who can forgive him, God. Is that right?

Klaus: Exactly, that's how I meant it. You can see Steve in the light of God's forgiveness.

Ines: What does God's forgiveness mean? What does it mean for Steve and for his victims? Under what conditions does God forgive?

Klaus: Now I have to divert a bit. In the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments, the Last Judgment is mentioned. At the end of the present time, God will sit in judgment of world history and of each individual. „For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad“ writes the Apostle Paul in the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians (5.10). According to Christian belief, Jesus Christ will return at the end of time to “judge the living and the dead“. Everything we have done or failed to do will come to light in God's truth. That is true for all of us, also for Steve and the victims of his crimes. The judge who will sit in judgment on the Last Day is no one other than Jesus Christ, who Himself became the victim of injustice and violence. And Paul wrote about Christ in the same Epistle “in Him was not yea or nay, but in Him was yea.”

God doesn't remain unmoved by our misdeeds, like a weak father, who may react to his son's pranks with a comment like, oh it's not really so bad. God takes our sins seriously. But He is God, and also love and compassion. Mercy and compassion have the last word in His judgment. We are unable to combine judgment and mercy, punishment and forgiveness. For us they are contradictions. What falls apart for us, remains connected and whole for God and belongs together.

The final verdict concerning Steve and the victims of his crimes, has not yet been spoken, or at least not to our knowledge. It will be different from what we can imagine. It will be a wonderful, creative judgment, one of resurrection. And in the light of resurrection, the fate of the people who Steve harmed, will appear in an entirely new light.

I cannot answer the question under what conditions God forgives. We are too attached to our calculating way of thinking: what must I give and do so that you (for)give me (for)something? This too is different with God. I would like to return the Last Judgment again. I imagine (although we can't really imagine this, it's just to stimulate our thinking) that in the Last Judgment, even those people who in their lives neither acknowledged nor repented their misdeeds will have shock and intense contrition overwhelm them, because they will then recognize God's truth. A person, like Steve, who feels contrition for his deeds, has already put his life under God's Judgment and most probably won't repeat them.

And something else: God knows us better than we know ourselves, better than others know us. He sees our entire lives, our deeds and suffering; he sees who we are in a way no earthly court can know or judge us. Therefore God's judgment is harsher than any earthly court, but also infinitely more merciful - creating something new. “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known (by God)” (1. Cor. 13,12) to quote Paul once again.

Ines: Yes, God's forgiveness is a mystery to me. The fact that, in contrast to God, things within us fall apart, I recognize.

That's the way I feel when I think about the two different sides, which make up Steve. I feel an intense affection for the person he is today, and on the other side a great aversion to the man who could perpetrate such horrible acts. This situation of inner conflict is very disturbing for me.

I ask myself about the forgiveness which we human beings can give. What do you think would happen if one of Steve's surviving victims forgave him?

Klaus: A surviving victim can give the offender a sign of forgiveness by letting him understand that he sees in him not only the perpetrator of the evil deed, but also the human being as a whole, who is more than that deed. The victim can give him the understanding - with his words and behavior, that he sees him in the light of God's judgment and mercy. The same is true not only of the victim. You too, Ines, give Steve signs of forgiveness by writing him letters, visiting him, taking part in his fate, letting him experience your friendship. By these actions you are letting him know that you don't only see in him the evil-doer. You offer him, who is condemned to death, human dignity. That I believe, is a strong sign of forgiveness.

Ines: Is it possible that what I call solidarity, you consider to be signs of forgiveness? You speak of both forgiveness and signs of forgiveness. Can you explain the difference?

Klaus: I think that solidarity and signs of forgiveness are not exactly the same. Of course your friendship, your solidarity with him are signs of forgiveness. But I would like to consider something more concrete as signs of forgiveness, for example the letters you write him, the visits to him, etc. However I will grant you that these can also be considered signs of solidarity. Forgiveness is something very big and all-encompassing. One used to call it „restitutio ad integrum“, meaning a restitution of the integrity of both the offender and the victim. Human forgiveness can often not reconstitute the victim's integrity. Therefore it remains incomplete and weak, whereas God's forgiveness is just to both victim and offender, and restores the integrity of both. Signs of forgiveness which we humans can offer, are signs which show the offender that we see him in the light of God's magnanimous forgiveness, which can do what we are unable to do: be fair to the victim, to see them in the light of life too.

Karl Barth, the great theologian, attempted to define „resurrection“. I would like to quote his words here, because they clarify in a wonderful way, what the Last Judgment and the resurrection really mean: “Our lives are hidden under a blanket. This blanket represents the present time. In the resurrection, this blanket will be pulled away and our entire lives will be viewed in clarity, in their unity with Christ's life, in the splendor of mercy, of grace and the power of Christ.” Perhaps it is not even necessary to explain these things; we only need to look to Christ, to stay connected to Him and to live in the hope of the revelation of our lives which will appear in His light.

Ines: In this talk, reality on two different levels has become clear to me – the godly and the earthly. God forgives and reconstitutes the integrity of both victim and offender, the mystery we have already spoken about.

We human beings can only forgive what affects us directly and that only as a sign of demonstrating godly and all-inclusive forgiveness.

How important do you consider the expression „I forgive you“ in comparison to other signs which show that one sees the offender as a human being?

In case studies one can read how a person from the victim's family says these words, often in a personal conversation, and sometimes just before an execution. Are these words perhaps necessary so that the person who they are addressed to can recognize the signs of forgiveness- the visit, the personal contact? Upon hearing these words, prisoners often react emotionally, even with feelings of happiness.

Klaus: Yes, in this sense, members of the victim's family can say to the offender, „I forgive you. In the light of God's mercy I see that your sin can be forgiven.“ And this applies not only to the family, but also to those who may be close to the offender. In this way, the offender can comprehend the signs of forgiveness. I can imagine that for someone condemned to death, such a statement can have the effect of an absolution. The signs of forgiveness show him that forgiveness is real and meaningful, not just empty words.

Ines: What happens to a person who has been told he is forgiven for his crime?

Klaus: Forgiveness is a creative thing. As in the Biblical story of creation where God puts the darkness aside when he says „Let there be light!“ and makes it possible for life to begin, so does his forgiveness create a new being out of a guilty person: „he is a new creature: old things are passed away.“ (2. Cor. 5,17). Therefore the signs of forgiveness which we give to someone can work creatively, giving new understanding, new strength, hope, encouragement, and courage too, to bear a difficult fate, even perhaps happiness, as you said.

Ines: Dear Klaus, in your answers there was a lot of talk about light: light in God's forgiveness, light in God's mercy, in the light of life. In your last answer you quoted the Bible „Let there be light!“ That's exactly how I feel about my initial question: talking to you has brought a lot of light into my difficult situation. For that and for your willingness to participate in this talk, I thank you most sincerely. I wish you all the best for your future projects.

Klaus Bäumlin, 1938, Protestant minister; active in various fields and projects, 20 years as a writer for church publications, most recently minister of the Nydegg Church in Berne. Klaus Bäumlin is married, has two children and four grandchildren.

June 2010

My personal experience: How trauma is passed on from one generation to another and how, hopefully, I can stop this

I was born on January 1st, 1960 to Hans and Machteld, both Dutch. They met in Nice (France) in 1957 and married in Amsterdam in 1959. I also have a younger brother and sister.

1. The story

During World War II, my father was in Rotterdam, where he was born and lived with his parents whose lives were destroyed by the Germans. By this I mean the city was bombed by the Nazis in May 1940 and a part of Hans's family died. His elder sister, a chemist, was at the other end of the country and was forced by the Germans to work for them. His elder brother, Marten, chose to escape and join the Resistance. So, with his younger brother, Henny, he stayed as a prisoner in his own house: all the boys from 16 years of age on had to work for the Germans because Dutch people were considered Aryans. My grandparents created a hiding place for them and another neighbour. They had to go through a cupboard to reach an area under the roof. They had to sleep there on some mattresses and were able to listen to the BBC on the radio. My grandparents had to buy food and other things for them on the black market (for as they are not supposed to be there, they didn't receive food ration cards).

I would like to point out that the coldest winters of the 20th century were during those war years. At the time, the Germans appropriated everything (crops, industries, radios, paintings, watches, furniture, money, gold and so on). At the end of the war, Rotterdam was again bombed, this time by the British and Americans. And people nearly starved in 1945 because of the blockade of Rotterdam imposed by the Germans.

The War in the Netherlands ended on May 5th 1945, in Europe on May 8th 1945.

All this time, my mother was in Indonesia, on the island of Java. Her grandfather had founded a university there at the beginning of the 20th century. Her father, Frederik, was then the rector and pastor for the area around Djogdjakarta. (today Yogya). My uncles, who were both older than my mother, were brought to the Netherlands to study in 1939. The same year, the boat of my grandfather's brother-in-law was torpedoed and he was killed. His widow went to Indonesia to see her brother. Two brothers of my grandfather and their families, one brother and one sister of my grandmother were also working in the same area (as medical doctors).

After China, Malaysia, and the Philippines, the Japanese attacked Indonesia, where the few existing troops tried to stop them. At first all the soldiers were put into camps, then later the European civil population (except the Swiss). In the beginning, there was enough to eat, but as the years passed, life became more and more difficult. There were also cases of torture by the Japanese. It was complicated because it was a culture clash. What the Japanese found normal, the European didn't, and vice versa. From the European viewpoint, you can understand the reactions of a Nazi, since you both have the same basic culture. A Japanese is a different story. And at that point in time, nobody knew anything about the Japanese culture, and the Japanese didn't know anything about European culture. My grand-father was tortured in different ways (facial injuries, a Japanese soldier who jumped on him...), but on the other hand, he got permission to translate the New Testament into Malay and they gave him a silver cup to be able to give Holy Communion to the prisoners. I still possess this cup.

One of my granduncles, Bernhard worked on the Bersiap train line. My grandfather and his brothers were in a camp, my mother with her mother and aunts and cousins in another called "Lampersari camp" in Soerabaja. Two aunts were in another camp in the centre of Java and one of them died just before the end of the war. She was killed by a bullet fired by the Indonesians fighting against the Japanese troops. Life's irony. Of course, there were also collective punishments and torture (sitting on your knees in the sun with a bamboo stick between your knees for example), people were often beaten with or without a reason being given.

At this time, my mother, Machteld, (15 – 18 years), was with her mother, some aunts and cousins. One of those cousins, also named Machteld, is still alive today and told me many things my mother never did. She went to a psychologist because she had problems at work and went through a long therapy where all those events came up and she had to heal from all the pain, suffering, and feelings she had put away.

My mother always refused to do this. In reality, my mother went through a psychotic phase in the camp and the camp doctor had to put her into a room alone because she was violent towards everybody. She stopped talking and she didn't want to see anybody, except one of her cousins who acted as the go-between my mother and my grandmother for months. After the end of the war, it took

three to four months before my mother spoke again and much longer before she laughed again for the first time. My grandfather tried to talk with her, but she wouldn't respond. He was very patient, but he was aware he couldn't solve the problem. My grandfather tried to get her to a psychologist. My mother herself told me proudly that she had constantly lied to the psychologist and stopped the therapy after a while. She never tried anything again, even if many opportunities arose, which would have been paid for by the Dutch State. For her whole life, she remained a border-line case with psychotic crises sometimes. But she seemed socially adapted and never had anything other than some somatic claims that she never related to her past.

The war ended in Asia on August 15th 1945, but immediately thereafter the War of Liberation began for the Indonesians, so there was still not more security for the civil population. My grandparents and my mother came back on the second ship going to the Netherlands in February 1946.

They arrived in a country not yet recovered from the War, where nobody listened to them, nobody understood them and they were accused of being the "bad rich who exploited the poor Indonesians".

Nonetheless, the Foundation for the History of World War II was created in 1946. And another for the Victims of the War in Asia some years later, with the possibility of receiving physical, psychological or financial help for victims of first and second degree. And nowadays, August 15th is seen as a memorial day for the end of World War II in the Netherlands.

THESE ARE THE BASIC FACTS YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND, AS FAR AS I AM ABLE TO RECONSTRUCT THEM TODAY.

2. The way to consciousness, healing and serenity

I am four years old, I am standing in the kitchen, I am stroking the cat, which is lying on a radiator. My brother is on the "poo" in form of a duck. The maid is busy with the washing machine, you know, the old sort, which moved from left to right and right to left. My mother is doing the washing up. I remember her blue dress, which I liked much. But she has no face. My mother has no face for me.

In Hebrew, having no face for somebody or not seeing someone's face means not recognize the other as a human being. My mother didn't consider me as a human being, someone to care for, to dialogue with, to respect. This realisation of course, came 40 years later!

In fact, I realized very young that my mother was using me and not able to love me. As a baby, I had to restore her self-esteem, her ability to love, all the things the Japanese had destroyed years ago. When my grandmother died, I was used as a mother for my mother. She was violent with me till I grew old enough to be able to tell it about to my father. She was rough in all the bodily care a young child needs. It made me search for autonomy in all the possible ways and also stay as much as possible away from our home (a frequent scenario when children are mistreated). Even nowadays, I don't like to stay at home and after two days of being ill, I try to get out of my own home as quickly as possible. Home was not a safe place. As an adolescent, I fell in love and studied at university. I left my parental home as soon as I could. There was no discussion possible with my parents about emotions, feelings, conflicts. "Speaking can lead to death" was one of the things my mother taught me, unconsciously.

For years and years I had nightmares about the Japanese camp. As if I had been there. I never spoke about it. I feared that my mother would deny it all and treat me as if I were crazy. For my mother, I was crazy; she said she couldn't understand me. Indeed, she didn't. But she took away my energy to live.

Afterwards, I understood my mother behaved like the Japanese did in her eyes: violence without explanation or discussion, shouting, beating, accusing us (especially my brother and me, less my little sister) of things we didn't do or things we didn't understand why they made her angry. She was also very anxious about many things. There was no closeness, no kindness, there were no physical signs of love (kisses, hugs...). Even with very good work at school, at the music school or at sports (I was National Champion of Basketball with my team), all I did was never enough, she was never satisfied, never recognizing any worth in me.

All this made me unable to choose a loving man. My first love let me down because he was afraid I could earn more money than him. Another one tried to kill me, another was violent in words and sexuality. I tried to commit suicide.

I did five years of therapy between the ages of 29 and 34. It helped me to become myself, to feel like a human being. I began to confront my parents with their mistakes. I began to ask about my family history. I divorced and began a second therapy at 43. There I discovered all the perverse links between my husband, behaving like my mother, and myself. After divorcing my husband, I had to cut the link between my mother and me. This was very long and hard, it first brought me anger, then indifference, then forgiveness. I also inquired about the past in different places, with all the people I met.

Now I am married to a loving and caring husband, my children grow up in a loving and calm atmosphere. I am going to be a grandmother for the second time in July. I have found a job that suits me and does not demand too much of me. I meet people who are positive, who care for me, who don't ask me what I can't give but who are happy with my joys and sad with my problems. I am able to

speaking about my feelings, about the way my life went and to be close to those I love and care for. I am also able to take into therapy not only the victims of violence, abuse or neglect, but also the perpetrators of the violence. From this confrontation with evil and perversion I become stronger, I lose many fears and I feel more alive.

3. Forgiveness to large groups

One issue took me some years to solve: "How could I forgive the Germans and the Japanese as two peoples that hurt my family and myself?" My parents taught and transmitted their hatred to me. But after studying history, after meeting Germans (first) and Japanese (later), I was annoyed with this hatred as with a piece of baggage which did not belong to me, on the one hand, and on the other, I didn't know to whom complain about what had happened and caused so many difficulties in my life. And all the people I spoke about the subject were as ignorant as I was. Because there really is no answer

Mandela's idea of "Reconciliation" is a possible way. But it has not been practised in Europe. We invent rites to help us to remember and to let go (celebrating the end of the War, of the Camps' liberation). This is also helpful because with time, speeches are no more full of anger but with the necessity of wanting peace in order to have a better future.

Things that helped me:

1. Meeting nice people from those countries
2. Learning to appreciate the country, the food, the culture of the Germans and the Japanese.
3. Discussing with other people in similar situations (surviving Tutsis from Rwanda, people who survived the Nazi, Russian, and Japanese camps and/or their children).
4. Reading books describing this problem from a historical, social, medical, psychological point of view or from eye witnesses.
5. There is also the strong will of the first European countries to create a space without war. For me, for my generation and that of my parents, it is a form of healing also. In our eyes, it is really a pity Switzerland refuses to participate in it. Perhaps because it didn't participate in the war and its suffering?
6. I am thinking of going once to Japan and to Indonesia with my sons as a sort of last step to close the story as far as I am concerned.

Christine Alexander, June 2010

Forgiveness – Do we have the right to contact the victim’s family?

At the World Congress in Geneva, I had the opportunity to talk and listen to many people about the meaning of the word forgiveness. Some Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights members attended the congress and held speeches one evening to raise their voices against the death penalty. Each one briefly told their story and closed their speech with "...I oppose the death penalty". Talking about forgiveness and being strong, surely they know what they are talking about from their heart.

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” Ghandi

Having a pen pal on death row somewhere on this planet involves more than just that person’s family and history. Their crime as well as the victim’s family may be a part of it as well. But do we have the right to get in contact with the victim’s family? What is the reason that we as pen friends try to contact them? At some point, it’s even hard to get in contact with a pen pal’s family, so extending that to the victim’s family causes even more difficulty. Some family members take the position that he or she is in prison for a reason and that causes even more suffering. So do we really need to contact another family suffering from a crime that happened long before we befriended that inmate? Does this give us permission to contact the family?

Personally, I think being a pen pal doesn’t give me permission to contact my pen pal’s family. What would be the main reason for getting to know the victim’s family? Do I want understanding from them? Sure!

But expecting something more than that would be simply weird; they lost someone whom we as a pen pal don’t even know, and needless to say, we don’t even know the circumstances. I feel a step farther away from being a family member; personally I would feel strange if someone came to me and told me, “I’m a pen pal of your son’s murderer”. I seriously doubt that they would embrace me and cry because they have been wanting to become acquainted with me for such a long time.

All I care is about my pen pal and his family. The victim’s family is certainly beyond my business. They are in my thoughts because they went through a hard time, but aside from that, I don’t see it as my right to contact them. I can’t ask them for forgiveness, I can only hope that they have already found it in their hearts.

Jasmin Jenni, 2010