



It was as though there was a new spirit alive in the land.... The tragedy of so many lives lost and so much destruction as a result of the earthquake and tsunami on 26 December 2004 led to an amazing outpouring of empathy and generosity from the Australian public. It was as though, for the first time, many in Australia were able to identify with some of the affected communities as 'our neighbours', even if it took the power of uncontrollable and devastating natural forces to bring us to the realisation and recognition of our common humanity.

Speaking at the summit in Jakarta called to generate commitments of aid from wealthy countries, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, remarked: 'The past eleven days [since the disaster struck] have been among the darkest in our lifetime, but they have also allowed us to see a new kind of light. We have seen the world coming together.... We have seen a response based not on differences but on what unites us.'

This is the same vision that gave birth to Believing Women for a Culture of Peace. Let us continue to be inspired by it. *Editor*

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Media Training Workshop

20 January 2005 Presenters Phil Dickie and Susan Brown

Put in a nutshell, the goal of the four-hour workshop was to help the eleven participants 'focus on what they think they need to do and know in order to make themselves understood and newsworthy'. The venue at All Hallows Convent, Fortitude Valley, was kindly made available by the local community of Sisters of Mercy. Here are observations from some of the participants.

The following were some of the ideas I thought valuable:

- Have a clear idea of why we want media involvement.
- Look broadly at all media outlets - newspapers and magazines, radio and TV, not just the ones to which we might be personally inclined. Analyse the slant of a paper/ particular journalists.
- Become aware of (empathetic) journalists/radio announcers who write about or interview people in our field.
- Take note of the best times (as given by workshop presenters) to approach journalists/announcers with a story.
- Realise we will not get any story 100% our way.
- Get into the journalist's contact book with a spokesperson ready to be contacted when an issue arises. Make sure relevant news media outlets have the group spokesperson's contact details.
- Use a 'hook' in articles, media releases, letters to the editor etc. Look for anything on which we can take a free ride. We need to be aware of what the media is interested in at any particular time.
- Be enthusiastic, provocative, not shrill, gently persistent, not discouraged, 'in for the long haul' as is necessary in any work for social justice. It is serious work but we need to keep a sense of humour/fun. (*Genevieve Caffery*) **cont. p2**

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This workshop provided information on resources which individuals and community groups require when engaging with the media to achieve successful outcomes. A constant theme prevailed: that to engage in this dynamic one cannot control the outcome and the best personal qualities to have are persistence, credibility and calm.

Other do's and don'ts:

- Do provide a credible self image through attention to personal appearance.
- Don't be 'sensitive little petals'.
- Do go with the flow, be co-operative and be prepared to provide quick responses to questions asked.
- Don't say anything you wouldn't want repeated in the public arena.
- Do realize that the media is a commercial enterprise first and foremost, therefore aiming to provide the stories that will sell best in the marketplace.
- Do develop a relationship with some credible media contacts who will be available to best serve the interests of your agenda.
- Don't 'lose it' – the media love to mud rake if there is an opportunity to do so.
- Do be aware that the media is at liberty to edit, publish (or not), in another simplified form, the information you provide. Let go of control – a spiritual exercise in itself!
- Do be judicious in the timing of the material you provide for the media.

Overall this workshop was a valuable opportunity to understand the media machinery and how to best capitalize on this resource when confronted or under the media gaze. The very practical insights offered on how to survive the process and come out with minimal damage also was beneficial. Always in this engagement, stressed the presenters, be constantly aware of the fickle nature of the media industry. 'The question to always ask oneself is: what outcome do I want from a media profile?' (Ganya Kordas)

This workshop

- gave me hope, because of the realization that there are some good journalists out there who care about and work for the community;
- made me aware that, in order to bring about change, we have to participate and be involved in matters that concern us, and make our opinions heard;
- provided a very valuable insights about how the media and journalists work. (Mia Leigh)

The presenters clearly practice what they preach. We were given an excellent insight into the workings of the media and some very practical tips on how best to deal with this most powerful force in our everyday life. What really struck me, however, about these two journalists was their personal and professional qualities - their spirited tenacity in pursuit of justice, their ability to think laterally, their knack of taking advantage of any opening that might lead to publication of that 'good story', their enthusiasm and good humour, no matter the obstacles in their path. They left us with a good model for our own group as we look for greater involvement with the media in our own attempts to influence public opinion. (Genevieve Caffery)

A very comprehensive report on the workshop content was prepared by Annette Shears and is available on request to the Project Officer.

Ceremony of Remembrance & Prayer

16 January 2005 South Bank Parklands

On the declared national day of remembrance for the victims and survivors of the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, some members of Believing Women and their families, along with interested women from Womenspace, gathered on one of the public lawns at South Bank for prayer and reflection. Some of the participants passed out small notices inviting passers-by to join in.

The fact that some members of Believing Women are Indonesians, including some from the island of Sumatra, added a special poignancy to the event.



Members & friends pray at South Bank



Remembering the victims & survivors

Hajj – a personal journey of spiritual rebirth

by Nora Amath, member of BWCP

In January 2005, I, along with 2.5 million other Muslims from over 70 countries, performed *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). For Muslims, the hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. It is a journey every Muslim, male and female, must undertake if they are mentally, financially and physically able. Although all *hujjaj* (plural of *hajji/hajja* – one who performs hajj) perform the same set of rituals and face similar hardships, the hajj experience is deeply personal for each one. For me, it was the most humbling, spiritual journey of my life, filled with peace, equality, and sisterhood.

I have been used to praying five times a day towards the Kabah (a cube-like structure made out of brick and mortar, and covered by a black, velvet cloth embroidered with gold Arabic calligraphy). To actually see it in front of me moved me to tears. I had left my everyday life behind and come to a place filled with the all-encompassing presence of God. There, my life simply revolved around prayer, meditation and supplication. Even the ritual walk around the Kabah expressed my desire to put God at the centre of my life, something I sometimes neglect to do amidst the chaos of the busy Australian lifestyle. The peace I experienced with my devotion to God goes to the very essence of hajj. In the state of *ihram* (the sacred state) a *hajja* is required to be at peace with herself, with others around her, with animals, plants and the environment in general. To hurt another being, physically or emotionally, is strictly prohibited.

*Above right:
In the tawaf, pilgrims circle the Ka'bah seven times, reciting a prayer during each circuit.*

The hajj experience also reaffirms the beautiful diversity of people, yet their equality before God. All possible shades of skin tone are represented, from the whitest of the white to the blackest of the black. But dressed in the obligatory unstitched white clothes for men and simple garments for women, there is no marker of class or wealth present, only humility and devotion to God.

I especially observed this on the day of Arafat, which is the most important day of the hajj. From noon until sunset, all pilgrims, from your CEO to your cleaner, stand and weep before God to seek His forgiveness and ask Him for favours. After sunset, all go and spend the night in a place called Muzdalifah. This is a sight to remember as 2.5 million people are sleeping out in the cold open air, on bare ground. And no one is exempt from this act.



Nora Amath

The sacred state of *ihram* is completed by shaving off the hair for men and cutting a few locks for women; this signifies rebirth. It is an opportunity to start life afresh. Being back home in Logan, on the south side of Brisbane, I am cherishing every minute of my 'new' life and attempting to simply be a better person – a better mum, a better wife, a better citizen of this global village in which we live.



Other activities of members

6 January: a small working group began meeting weekly to prepare for BWCP's Harmony Day events.

19 January: Mia Leigh & Wendy Flannery participated in a 'Multi-Faith Prayer Service & Inter-Faith Dialogue on the Asian Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster', Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University Nathan Campus.

23 January: General meeting of BWCP to review past activities and set directions for 2005. Facilitated by Mary Tinney.

28 February 2005: First meeting of the BWCP book club, to discuss *The World from Islam: a journey of discovery through the Muslim heartland* by George Negus. Facilitated by Ganya Kordas.

Member profiles



Mira Orlich

My life's journey has taken me to three countries. I was born and raised in a farming village outside Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where my mother died shortly before I finished elementary school.

My family were believers but not churchgoers. Still, we celebrated the great Christian feasts, even after door-to-door re-enactments of the birth of Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men – something we really cherished in our hearts – were ridiculed and forbidden by the authorities.

After marrying, I went to Germany where my elder son was born. I watched the people going to the village church in their Sunday best but although I had a firm belief in God, I had never seen the inside of a church. For me, God watches over me, knows when I will come out of any difficulty and uses his strength in his own time. I have never given up talking to God.

In 1968 we left Germany for Melbourne. I have now lived for 27 years in Brisbane.

I am not connected to any particular church here but I am very happy to be with other believing women and have, for the first time in my life, the chance to find my way in a group and to share my beliefs with those who are seeking something similar.



Genevieve Caffery

As I recall my early brushes with what I later came to know as Indigenous and multicultural Australia, certain images, counterpointing a predominantly Irish-Australian Catholic country childhood, flash before me – the pear tree by our lagoon, sole survivor of the Chinaman's homestead garden; the White Russians up from Brisbane to fish; the incomprehensible exchanges with Belgian neighbours; the school desk shared with a girl of Papuan-German-Filipino heritage – and beneath all these, telling stories of encounters between the original inhabitants and the first white settlers.

Graduating as a teacher, I subsequently experienced life in several countries. A constant for me, since joining the Sisters of Mercy, has been my accompaniment of migrants and refugees. The opportunity of living for seven years in a house of welcome and support, with people from more than thirty far-flung countries, was a great gift. Gandhi's words struck a deep chord: *I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.*

So, for me, Believing Women for a Culture of Peace is a blessed continuation of this community-building, vital in countering fear and hostility towards the other – a not-to-be missed chance to celebrate our shared humanity while honouring our cultural and religious diversity through a search for deeper mutual understanding.



Website wisdom

At this mid-point of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001 – 2010), the Fundación Cultura de Paz has gathered information from civil society groups and organizations around the world about their activities to advance the aims of the Decade.

The foundation's website is www.decade-culture-of-peace.org

Upcoming events 2005

3 & 4 March: Information presence at the Women's Festival of Ideas into Action, Brisbane Powerhouse.

5 March: BWCP picnic to celebrate International Women's Day, City Botanic Gardens.

13 March: Celebration of Navruz, the Shia Muslim New Year, co-hosted by Nooreen Harris and Mojgan Vafaei, at the Harris home.

20 March: BWCP Women's Peace Walk (eve of Harmony Day).

21 March: BWCP Harmony Day event at South Bank – Glimpses of 'Heaven on Earth': a global window onto the rich diversity of faith traditions within the Brisbane community – screening of programme series broadcast on SBS.

Special commemoration

8 March: International Women's Day

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