SUMMARY REPORT

An Assimilation Weekend:
North American Camps for the Middle East public peace process

The Fetzer Institute – Kalamazoo, Michigan
Friday to Monday, January 28-31, 2005

Prepared by Alexandra J. Wall

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During four days in January 2005, twenty six summer camp conveners and facilitators, women and men, ages teens to sixties, met by invitation at The Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. They represented the dozen known North American camps that support the Middle East public peace process of citizen face-to-face relationship building among Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians – Muslims, Christians, and Jews. They traveled from Israel, the West Bank, Canada, and the United States.

Perhaps the most significant finding was participant confirmation that this was needed initiative to finally meet each other and form expanded, ongoing, creative relationships.

While maintaining the individual nature of the camps, it was agreed that a loose federation or network of camps would be helpful. The programs want to remain distinct in what they do; some are faith-based, some are only for girls, one is for families, they are for different ages.

Post-camp follow-up "back home" is crucial – a universal imperative – perhaps the most important piece of this process. Sometime back in their hometowns participants know no others who have been through the same experiences and changes. They feel isolated, alone, misunderstood. If provided with a list of participants from various other programs, they would have a better chance of knowing someone supportive near them with similar camp experiences. And while campers often meet periodically "back home" with others from their own programs, a meeting of all participants from all the camps collectively could be beneficial. They would see that they are part of a much greater movement of youth and elders together.

One proposal was for participants to attend another, different program as they grow older, and eventually bring their families into the process by encouraging them to attend a family camp.

Establishing a network would also be especially beneficial to present the camps to the outside world as a model for change. Creation of a short film with clips from all of the camps could show that each one is not alone, and that each program is part of a greater movement.

It was also agreed that the camps could pool some resources like curricula and lists of "best practices," and even purchase supplies cooperatively. In seeking hard-won, competitive foundation and private funding, we wish to maximize a spirit of mutual affirmation and shared purpose among programs, while minimizing claims of better-than or different-than.

To maintain regular contact with each camp program, a part-time staff person might be helpful. A grant and salary would be needed. That person could also write a newsletter and put up a Web site with all of the camps linked to it. Setting up a listserv, too, would allow camp organizers to ask each other's advice and share programming and other ideas.

Toward the end of the gathering, a priority-setting exercise identified our six choices for follow-up initiatives. We chose the *first three to act on* during the year..

1) *An annual meeting*
2) *Regular internal communication between the camps*
3) *Resource sharing*
4) A Web site
5) External communication
6) Next steps

This first-of-its-kind meeting provided a windfall of concrete methods and inspiration to help make these and other camps and relationship-building programs the best they can be.

READING THIS DOCUMENT: The next section, "INSIGHTS ABOUT CAMP PROGRAMS," is the 10-page essence of weekend findings. Following portions reveal a more detailed running narrative over time of the weekend from its inception, enriched and humanized with two in-depth personal interviews.

This document, with other written and visual information about this landmark weekend, will remain on the Web linked from http://traubman.igc.org/campconf.htm.

With thanks to The Fetzer Institute, we offer this information to the world for the good of all, without exceptions.

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INSIGHTS ABOUT CAMP PROGRAMS

Camp purposes and goals

In a safe place near nature, youth from the Middle East – and those with ties to them – experience the power in coming together face to face to create community out of opposing views and conflicting narratives.

Most camps are for both genders, while some are for teen women only. One is a family camp that crosses three generations.

Programs combine structured workshops with living, eating, creating, and having fun together, all with the main goal of getting to know each other as individuals and equal human beings.

Eye to eye, the young women and men discover a new quality of listening and attention, and additional needed patience if through an interpreter.

These programs train both women and men to be effective and pro-active leaders in relationship building, and strong in creating more democratic states, more humane societies.

This is the first stage of a public peace process that allows finally discovering the humanity of the other. Thus, camps avoid the common pressure from the outside and potential participants for preconditions and promises of political stands and statements.

Increasingly, families of the youth are asked to become active in emotionally supporting their campers back home during the year between program sessions.

Before returning home from a program, ideally each camper would look in the mirror with new self-esteem and confidence and be proud of the person she or he has grown to be.

Why youth

The youth are interested, ready to travel, eager to make friends and transcend inherited agendas. They want to maintain their idealism and enact their dreams. They “get it” and feel it, and are competent in transforming “enemies” into partners. This is where the hope is.

Peacemaking comes much more naturally for children. Their hearts seem more open, their minds more accessible and seeking. With some exceptions, adults are not as attracted to this life but can be supportive of the youth.

The young participants are diverse. Some arrive already inclined toward relationship building, while others come with a negative attitude and thus experience the greatest transformation.

Some come from families who can afford to send them abroad. But more are economically in need and are helped by the camps to participate equally.

Beginning at a young age, these youth continue to become more communicative and fluent with language. They begin life with fewer stereotypes and prejudices. They return home with a stronger sense of personal and national identity, but with expanded identification as well. They learn at any early age to appreciate their similarities and differences.

These young ambassadors for peace often have more power to attract attention and be heard, because they are non-threatening and "only kids." Yet they are sometimes the real "adults" among us.

Process of change: Face-to-face listening, stories, bridging, teaching

Transformation and changes of heart and mind come from discovering shared pains, fears, interests, joys, hopes – shared and equal humanity.

From the beginning, great emphasis is placed on communication, especially on a new quality of stillness and compassionate listening without "yes, but." One participant said: "Talking to someone who listens to me helps me to analyze my own story and to understand my story more deeply. Great listening helps me listen to myself."

This process of change from the inside out starts at the heart, often with shared personal stories. "An enemy is one whose story we have not heard." Story is one of the most powerful, transforming, confidence building experiences in life. Participants are surprised to learn what they have in common with someone from the other side.

The process is about knowing people, so we know what has meaning for them and how to cooperate with them. "Just knowing them made such a difference," said one camper.

A counselor said: "Since I was a child. I was into politics until I got repelled, and then I found that getting to know people was much more powerful." At the same time, the camps intend to help youth relate about the political matters in an intelligent and professional way – first discovering what meaning the issues have for one another.

Trust must be developed before the big issues can be considered successfully. "Everyone has different feelings, and we have to know each other's stories, and where emotions and reactions come from to shape people's lives and worldviews."

The arts – film, theatre, written and photo portraits, music, painting – can help us ease into understanding people and issues, even if we do not yet trust ourselves to enter directly into relationship and dialogue.

One camp summed up principles it uses to begin their process:

- Listening is the beginning of peace.
- We are more similar than different, but understanding our differences is how we make peace.
- There is no more room for one-sidedness. We're redefining the language of the conflict. If you're pro-Israeli, you're pro-Palestinian, and vice versa.

The principles are transferable to other programs and conflicts.

In activities that call for participants to partner up, they select their partners themselves, while insisting that they pair up with someone who is an "other."

In the beginning the work is on identity politics . . . . understanding why identity plays such an important role.

Much of the learning really takes place outside of formal groups, when they're on the trails, eating, or relaxing. There may be sessions all day, but that may not be where the true breakthroughs happen.

Camps report that big collective breakthroughs commonly happen, but at a different point every camp session. The shift can happen the night before participants are to go home, or it may happen within five or six days of arriving. Affecting that dynamic among the youth are often identifiable opinion leaders whom the others tend to follow.

Those campers who transform do not all have the experience at camp. The inner change may take months to take root, or the young adult may change years later.

For those who are inspired, a natural next-step is to invite them to return to camp to teach what they've learned, and to become part of leadership. Since this is about growing leaders, they are hired as staff.

Pre-camp preparation

Traditionally, participants have traveled directly from home to camp. New thought includes first letting the youth stay in homes for a few days, to fully rest and adjust to the new environment. This also begins to challenge the preconceptions and stereotypes of Americans with which most campers arrive.
One early orientation exercise asks campers to identify their fears, personal challenges, and what responsibility they will take to learn as much as they can.

Camp counselors talk to the youth about stretching themselves, feeling comfortable and being uncomfortable. Campers are asked to stretch more than they're comfortable with, while deciding for themselves how far they want to go.

Staff preparation and role

Preparing staff in dialogue and facilitation skills is vitally important. It greatly helps if they have had personal experience in sustained dialogues.

Practitioners must continue to educate themselves on the conflict and stay neutral – for both peoples – and not take sides.. One camp leader said: "I have to center myself. My job is to listen to the stories of both sides and bring them together."

Like campers, staff members can feel frustrated and alone. The staff needs a place and time to share their own insights and concerns, and to express their emotions. Then, as with the campers themselves, they begin to work harder and have more fun. Then they start noticing a shift in the campers, too.

Choice of languages

English is the shared camp language, to be inclusive and not force conflicted individuals to learn the language of the other. Communication in English also creates a common language bond between the campers.

At the same time, everyone stays mindful that people open up more easily in their own language. When a person speaks in her or his own tongue, everyone can feel the heart, not just the words and intellect.

So in difficult situations, interpreters are needed to allow the participants to fully express themselves. When the youth interpret for each other, they are forced to get in another's shoes – a valuable exercise.

When campers are released to speak in their own language, Israelis and Palestinians both tend to stick together only among their own clans instead of intermingling with one another.

Especially when mistrust is high, participants are then likely to believe that they are being talked about in the language they don't understand. So they are encouraged to speak their own languages only when they are intentionally off by themselves. As relationships grow closer, they become less suspicious.

There are concerns about insistence on English fluency. A Palestinian in a refugee camp is less likely to have good English skills. And Palestinian teens fluent in English are more likely to be Christian, thus prejudicing balanced representation at camp.

Insisting on English too rigidly could be perceived as a usual story of a superpower imposing itself on others. So a balance is continually being learned, about freeing participants to talk in their own language at times.

Important messages, especially safety warnings, might be given in all three languages. This is when everyone must understand everything, never assuming that everyone can grasp all of the English language.

Another language consideration is words themselves. Some camps emphasize discovery of a new vocabulary for a new time in history. They try to avoid old thinking and obsolete slogans and boxes to put people into and thus include or dismiss them.

Inspiration, motivation, faith, religion

Camp leaders and participants have a variety of motives that get them to camp and sustain them.

For the youth campers, in the beginning seeking and protecting national identity – for oneself and one's people – is a strong motivator.

Some staff and participants are moved by principles of their religions, while others reject institutional faiths but are strongly faithful to principles of high universal standards of human rights equality, and the ongoingness of life.

Some have faith in the potential goodness of each human, who possesses a soul that remembers union and longs for reunion.

The idea of faith repels some people away from a work, while it could be a draw for others. One Muslim leader said that we must distinguish between what faith teachings prescribe and what individuals and institutions make of them for their own purposes.

Some Jews express being inspired primarily by the concept of "tikkun olam" – healing the world – or their principle prayer, the Shema – meaning to deeply listen and hear. Many Christians are moved by Jesus' instructions to love indiscriminately. And people of these two faiths share a deep love of Jerusalem and the Holy Land with Muslims, who cleave to many high principles of inclusiveness and treating people well.

The Palestinian-Israeli relationship and conflict clearly affects people of each of these faiths. Yet sometimes the Jews and Muslims unconsciously forget to include Christians equally in their thoughts, feelings, and deliberations. Christians express being more hurt by this than most people realize.

Camp staff and youth who are not averse to spiritual practices express an interest in partaking in each others' faith rituals, while at the same time creating new, shared ceremony.

Exercises and activities

New, effective camp activities are constantly being invented to help young women and men transcend that which separates them. These successful innovations deserve a separate document. A few will be mentioned.

The first exercise is always the compelling, courageous decision to leave home and traditional teachers. As in the universal Hero's Journey, these youth innovators and early adopters choose to confront life's ordeals – cultural taboos, peer pressure, national and personal borders, fear, doubt and hurt – in a search for more, some kind of boon for them and their people.

Once at camp, certain successful activities are universal to the diverse programs. Eating together, and sharing nature, recreation, and the arts are strongly unifying and humanizing. Listening is one of the most powerful things a person can do, as is the sharing of personal narratives – Story.

One camp helps Israelis and Palestinians begin talking to one another by having each group make a timeline of its own history. The can start wherever they want historically, and go to wherever they wish. This helps them get a visual sense of the history of the other side. Interestingly, the girls often don't know their own histories so well.

An experience about power proves to be dramatic because the Palestinians come in with the mindset that if they were in the position of power, they wouldn't oppress others as they experience oppression. Yet, given the opportunity, some of them take to that role very easily.

The Israeli and Palestinian youth probably have never physically touched each other. They may arrive with images of the other as inhuman, even aliens or monsters. In one program, they are asked to find someone they don't know well in the group, someone they consider "other." It may be someone they were afraid of, or still are afraid of. They are told to look at one another. And then, they are told to ask permission, and then find the pulse on one another's wrist. Then they do the same with the artery in their necks. Then they place their hands on the other's breastbone to feel their hearts, while they continue to look at each other. "This can be very powerful, because they've never touched their enemy, and they realize that 'she feels like me,'" says the program director.

Returning home – life outside camp

At the end of camp, it is important to ask participants what they will need when they go home. They commonly begin talking about what life will be like after camp.

There are many obstacles once a participant is back home. Most neighbors and others cannot understand the camper's experiences and changes, and do not want to hear about them.

"When I tried telling my classmates, many of them thought I was some kind of traitor or spy," said one. "It didn't make sense to them because it was so different from their experience."

Sometimes, the outside pressure to return to old modes of thinking can be overwhelming. This why sustaining relationships with one's new camp community is supremely important.

The summer is for getting to know each other, building relationships, and forming group identity. And returning home to their countries as better leaders hopefully will find them applying relationship-building tools and newly found spirit within their own communities and culture.

Both those who live in the Middle East and those who live outside it each have important roles to play. Sustaining and building on camp experience depends on ever-new perceptions, creativity, cooperation, shared resources, and emotional support back and forth.

Because this activity can be a strong sense of mission for both campers and staff, it is important to balance one's time with family and leisure.

Sustaining camper relationships

Follow-up programming once the youth return home is required to avoid losing all that they gain during the summer. Sustainability is the key that unlocks continued growth of the trust, confidence, deepening and maturity for campers to continue as leaders in their circles of activity away from camp.

Ways to do that are continuing to be discovered. They include cell and home phones, e-mail, and visits even at risk across difficult borders and distances. Campers who make deep connections with the principles and one another often refuse to be denied their relationships.

Future cooperation among the camps

Each program has thrived while remaining independent and true to its unique qualities and personality. As the newly-acquainted camps are becoming aware and appreciative of one another, there is an interest among staffs to visit one another and share knowledge and "best practices." This sharing of tools can conserve energy and avoid having to reinvent the wheel. Collective purchasing might reduce camp operation costs.

Similarly, while appreciating the energy and creativity in their small systems, there is also a need to show the world the camps are many and a growing family of programs. While remaining grassroots and basically not institutionalized at the core, there is a power in cooperation and communicating the collective story of how our shared future will look.

Leaders of the camps realize a need – even longing – for at least annual collective meetings in depth. They want a safe space to talk about the difficulties one comes up against in running these programs.

Ideas include forming a steering committee then writing a grant to fund a small umbrella organization for all the camps. With so much to pass on to others, they foresee educating and deepening one another, then facilitating and training yet others interested in launching camps elsewhere. Creating a newsletter and a video of all the programs could help this growing camp community.

Also considered are the benefits of defining for the public the similarities and differences of the diverse programs. Most believe that a potentially competitive spirit can be avoided, and energy best used, by rather affirming the universal value of each program using versatile ways to accomplish same goals – transforming human relationships and spirit.

The 2005 Kalamazoo meeting of camp facilitators identified six most desirable follow-up possibilities, and finally the preferred *top three to act on* during the year:

- *An annual meeting*
- *Regular internal communication between the camps*
- *Resource sharing*
- A Web site
- External communication
- Next steps

Community outreach and funding

Having built authentic, sustained relationships, the last step of the public peace process is to cooperate for social outcomes – reach out into the community, include others, expanding the circle.

Leaders of this new family of programs realize there is now a much bigger "camp story" to tell. There are people to attract and new camps to birth, youth to inspire and communities to build.

Including more Arabs and Muslims – their input, ideas, presence – on camp boards and staffs are needed. They add a more whole view and authenticity. Their shared financial contributions would make this work more credible. At the same time, it is appreciated that not all Muslims and Arabs wish to be connected to the Israeli-Palestinian challenge.

The Christian community needs to be informed and included equally, and to put a face on the suffering and aspirations of both peoples. The root of their faith is in Jerusalem, and they have great heart, spirituality, intelligence, and resources to contribute.
Funding camp programs is a requirement and a big challenge. The power of camps and importance of the public peace process are not easy to demonstrate to donors, in cultures that are dependent on government professionals, authorities, and institutional power.

The first question asked is: "What's the sustainability of this?" Supporters look for evidence of enduring camp success and growth, and ongoing camper relationships and influence on their own communities.

Showing the "transformational moments" that young people experience can be a key to opening the public's minds to the effectiveness of these programs. Personal talks, published articles and film can help.

Individual financial giving is often based on personal relationships and trust over time. Most camps began through these gifts. Institutional funding is competitive and can be difficult to get. Yet, the public peace process is becoming more visible and validated. As it creates more measurable social results, funding will become more available.

Increasingly, mainstream citizens and institutions are financing camps and camp-like relationship building among youth. And the U.S. Congress allocates some money each year to global conflict resolution. Camp leaders are considering how to establish relationships to get access to that funding.

The Jewish Federations General Assembly and the Jewish Funders Network are but two examples of communities where interested funders might wish to be informed about camp programs and the youth leaders they create.

Only part of outreach is educating the public and gaining support. The mission includes influencing individuals and institutions in the Middle East to participate in these camps or begin their own camp-like programs.

Palestinians and Israelis now become aware of the camps by word of mouth, e-mail and Web sites, and news media. For Palestinians and others with limited access to computers, flyers for schools and public posters about the camp would help.

A trip by camp leaders to Israel-Palestine could send a strong message to the people there, and show that we are serious, have tools that work, and are here for them.

News media relationships

News media is a powerful tool to spread a hopeful message, and to help outreach and fundraising. As with the camp process, relationships with reporters must be cultivated and kept up. Elie Wiesel said: "People become the stories they hear and the stories they tell."

The media is eager for stories of "enemies" talking and Sustained Dialogue successes. Reporters respond to it as true news when it is authentic and ongoing. The news is that we're together. They usually treat camp stories with great respect.

To be effective, camp spokespeople must learn to tell their "camp story" of courage, learning and change – results – with an economy of words. Short news reports will select "sound bites" that strike to the core and essence of human experience and insight. It is important to speak from one's humanity, yet being aware to communicate experiences, principles, and facts that really matter.

While news media could be our helpful, needed voice to the world, caution is also prescribed. In a search for excitement (and viewer ratings), occasional producers will seek to build in artificial conflict and tension.

In public and for interviews, endeavor to have spokespersons for both peoples side by side. This is the most accurate and powerful representation of the camps.

If reporters visit camp, be aware of how the presence of outsiders might disrupt the sacredness of the relationship-building process. Interestingly, in some circles participants are hardly aware of cameras or journalists. The challenge will be to maintain intimacy and balance while allowing the public exposure and publicity that will pass on the camp story for the good of all.

PROPOSAL FOR A CONFERENCE

by Eric Nelson
Program Officer, The Fetzer Institute

OVERVIEW

This probe will focus on convening a dialogue between the facilitators of 12 different summer youth camp programs located in North America. The camps bring together Israelis and Palestinians, from both the Middle East and North America, in settings where "enemies" can meet on safe and neutral ground.

The intent of these summer camps is to support conditions that nurture trust, compassion, forgiveness, and ultimately, love and leadership. The camps have been very successful in healing divisive relationships, with many participants reporting a transformation of suspicion into friendship, antagonism into understanding, conflict into cooperation and hatred into compassion. A variety of methods are used to support this transformation including: yoga, silence, journaling, music, walking in nature, storytelling. Basic to each program are compassionate listening and dialogue, as well as a variety of creative, even playful social activities.

The benefit of bringing 12 youth camps facilitators together, for the first time, includes learning about new transformational practices, defining an emerging field of social healing, identifying a common agenda, building a network, and setting directions for the future. Fetzer would learn about the art and practice of convening individuals who hold conflicting perspectives in a setting that enables healing, forgiveness, and love. This learning would serve as a living example of the power of the human heart to heal long-standing hatred and violence even in the direst circumstances.

To maximize our learning and widely share the story, of these camps, we will invite a journalist who is knowledgeable and sensitive to Middle East issues to attend the meeting and compile a report. The report will chronicle, for the first time, what is being learned about the healing power of the camp experiences and provide insight into the role of forgiveness and love in transforming fear and hatred of the "other."

Specifically the report will capture stories, practices, and processes. It will conduct follow-up interviews of retreat attendees, and assess the challenges and opportunities for growing this work.

Finally, the probe will provide an opportunity to study the power of the camp processes to transform deeply embedded cultural hatred through the cultivation of trust, forgiveness and ultimately love. This is especially critical given the current state of relations among Palestinians, other Arabs, and the state of Israel. Some peace experts state that if the Palestinian-Israeli relationship can be healed it will serve as a beacon of hope to all in the Middle East and could mark a tuning point in how all the communities relate to one another. Contributing, even in a small way, to this vision of hope will support healing of

future leaders of these cultures, bringing greater peace and love into the hearts of a battle-weary population.

BACKGROUND

In May 1991, Libby Traubman, a retired clinical social worker and Len Traubman, a San Francisco pediatric dentist, helped bring a small team of Palestinian and Israeli citizen-leaders from the Middle East to a weeklong conference in the California redwoods. These women and men forged and signed a historic document, FRAMEWORK FOR A PUBLIC PEACE PROCESS, proposing political solutions and equally calling for concerned citizens of both communities to join in Dialogue. It prescribed an invigorated peace process that supports – and is accelerated by – sustained relationships and cooperation by citizens, a population the government peace process had excluded. This historic framework empowered common citizens who would benefit the most from healing the wounds of violence.

In July 1992, to bring this public peace process to life, Len and Libby Traubman recruited a small group of Jews and Palestinians in the Bay Area to come together in their living room to share personal stories and begin building bridges of understanding. The first meeting revealed peoples' genuine pain, struggles, and fears. Subsequent gatherings began to reveal a sense of shared hope and even community. Over many meetings, compassionate listening helped to transform suspicion into friendship, antagonism into understanding, conflict into cooperation and hatred into compassion. In September 2004, after 12 years and 150 meetings, there are now ten similar Dialogues in the Bay Area, and the idea has moved into many dozens of new towns and campuses coast to coast. The original Dialogue has served as an attractor and hub of communication for similar endeavors around the U.S., Middle East, and worldwide.

As a hub of communication for other Jewish and Palestinian initiatives, focused on healing the hateful relationship, the Traubmans have identified many promising programs, especially youth programs that bring together Israelis, Palestinians, and North Americans. The first such youth Dialogue began in 1979 in Virginia with the Legacy Summer Programs, now Global Youth Village. The next generation was birthed in Summer, 1993 when Seeds of Peace first modeled its globally recognized International Camp in Maine, dedicated to empowering young leaders from regions of conflict with the capacities that would set the stage for fostering reconciliation and coexistence with the "other." The following year, Building Bridges for Peace brought young women aged 16-19 from Israel, Palestine and the United States to participate in its intensive summer program in the Colorado Rockies. They began to learn compassionate communication practices, developed leadership skills, engaged in activities that cultivated inner and outer peace, and learned about the unique role of women as healers.

Now there are over a dozen known North American camps or camp-like settings that work with Arab and Jewish youth, from both the Middle East and North America. These camps build on the legacy of the public peace process and provide authentic hope for liberating the human spirit in the Middle East and around the world. Existing initiatives include:

- Building Bridges for Peace
- Face-to-Face/Faith-to-Faith
- The Children of Abraham Project
- Creativity for Peace
- Jacobs International Teen Leadership Institute
- Kids4Peace (3 camps)
- Middle East Peace Camp for Children
- Oseh Shalom – Sanea al-Salam: Palestinian-Jewish Family Peacemakers Camp
- Peace Camp Canada
- Peace It Together
- Seeds of Peace

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Learning more about the motive, methods, and outcomes of the 12 Palestinian-Israeli youth camps in North America would provide a valuable and untapped source of wisdom on healing and transforming mistrust, hatred and revenge into understanding, trust, forgiveness and ultimately love and compassion. While there is growing awareness of these similar but unique endeavors, the conveners of these camp experiences are largely:

- Unacquainted with one another
- Unaware of what others are learning and the practices they use
- Unaware of how others are creatively building friendships within extremely volatile circumstances

The camps operate from a deep spiritual base and inspire the parents (enemies in the conflict) to entrust their children to this peace process, which often results in parents being transformed by their children's camp experience. Given the continued divide between Palestinians and Jews, and the impact of this conflict on Arab views worldwide, it seems important to listen to what is being learned though the camp experiences and for the camp leaders to learn from one another.

SEASONS RETREAT ENVIRONMENT

To accomplish this end, we suggest convening a retreat at Seasons conference center by inviting one to two facilitators from each of the 12 North American youth camps. The group would spend three days together, January 28-31, 2005.

In advance of their arrival, participants will be asked to reflect on and write about:

1) the inner and outer qualities, values, beliefs that enabled healing with the "other."

2) the obstacles that block healing with the other.

3) contexts and settings that support healing with the other.

The Seasons meeting would open with a brief history of the public peace process, the camps, and the Sustained Dialogue process. The gathering would next move into the sharing of personal stories to reveal what led each participant to this work, what sustains them, and what challenges them. Based on stories that are shared the group will self-determine what would be most beneficial to explore, as well as discussing the areas listed in the Outcomes section below.

We anticipate the Dialogue will reveal many learnings, both successes and failures, and even deeper, practical questions of motive, method, and future direction. Some time will be used for reflective writing and inspirational moments such as music, videos, readings, walks, stillness, as well as lighter social interaction will be woven throughout the retreat to support the connection of each person's inner resources and wisdom to the Dialogue.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The collective wisdom of this creative group of youth camp facilitators will surely reveal a new body of knowledge about identifying, gathering, and supporting the transformation of hatred and violence through the power of understanding, love and forgiveness. Discovered will be what motivates and doesn't motivate, what are the mechanics and sequences of relationship-building activities, and what sustains this transformation. Specifically we anticipate learning more about:

- The role of understanding, love and forgiveness in healing relationships with the "other."

- The settings, practices, and processes that enable the healing of fear and hatred.

- The capacities needed to sustain the camp experience, once the campers return to their home environment.

- The impact of the camp experience on the youth, parents, and peer groups.

- The best methods for telling and publicizing camp stories that build interest within the community and education settings.

- The value of developing a learning network among the camps.

- The best directions for continuing this work.

FETZER INSTITUTE INVOLVEMENT

This is an opportunity to learn from people who are doing on-the-ground peace-building work with youth in very challenging conflict areas. Within that setting, we are hoping to discover how better understanding, respect and friendship and ultimately love, might spring forth from a setting where there is extreme animosity and hatred. This is primarily an opportunity to learn about the processes and practices these camps are using that support healing across the differences of nationality, culture and religion.

Middle East peace is not an area the Fetzer Institute has had much experience with, but it fits in with the institute's mission of building bridges between people of different cultures.

This is what we are calling a learning probe, to find where love and forgiveness is happening in the world, and to learn how it is actually happening, then assessing whether it is an area that fits in with our mission.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The following biographies of the participants were provided by the individuals, and therefore are, with a few editing exceptions, in their own words.

The conference facilitators are **Libby and Len Traubman,** who co-founded the 12-year-old Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group on the San Francisco Peninsula. These 30 women and men – Holocaust refugees and 20th generation Palestinians – after 152 meetings, continue learning how to change strangers into friends, "enemies" into partners. With face-to-face listening and relationship building, they initiate concrete projects that help people and invigorate the public peace process, here and overseas. Now there are nine similar Dialogues in the Bay Area, and many dozens more in cities and campuses across North America and beyond. Their community outreach includes modeling a new quality of compassionate listening and relationship-building skills in local schools, religious institutions, and even for the military. Participants are often interviewed in print and broadcast media.

Elizabeth "Libby" Traubman is a retired clinical social worker. In 1982, in response to the threat of global nuclear war, Libby was a founding member of the Beyond War Movement, now Foundation for Global Community, for which she is a trustee. In 1992, she co-founded the first Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group of San Mateo, based on her earlier experience organizing the Beyond War conference for Israeli and Palestinian citizen-leaders, which resulted in a historic signed document, "Framework for a Public Peace Process." Libby continues to administer and co-facilitate four of the nine dialogues now in the Bay Area. This winter she helped compile the publishing-first cookbook – "Palestinian and Jewish Recipes for Peace" – recipes for the table and for relationship-building. Libby is on the Board of San Mateo County 2000, and in 1994 was inducted into the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame.

Lionel "Len" Traubman retired after 36 years from his practice of dentistry for children in San Francisco. He was regional alumni President of Alpha Omega Jewish dental fraternity, and received the 1998 Distinguished Alumnus Award of the University of California School of Dentistry where he taught. In the 1980s, Len oversaw relations with 57 San Francisco consulates for the Beyond War Movement, while on the American editing team for the historic Soviet-American co-publication – "Breakthrough: Emerging New Thinking." He is a networker, overseeing a communication circle of more than 2,000 citizens deeply interested in the Middle East public peace process, to initiate and nurture sustained dialogue groups across America and beyond. For 20 years, Len has published on war and peace from personal experience with Russians and Americans, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and Jews and Palestinians.

Representing **BUILDING BRIDGES FOR PEACE** were **Melodye Feldman, Inas Radwan Said and Lama Tarayrah.**

Melodye Feldman was born in Queens, New York, descended from Jews who fled Spain in the 1400s, then pogroms of Czarist Russia. In America, her ancestors strongly supported the Zionist movement, wishing to finally make a safe place for Jews. Melodye was brought up in a liberal Jewish home working for civil and human rights. "But," she says, "When it came to the Arabs, they were our 'enemies.'" She earned her Bachelor's degree in Education and Human Services, at Northeastern University, Boston, then her Master's of Social Work at the University of Denver. For over 25 years Melodye has worked primarily with women and children. She began traveling to Israel in the 1960s. In 1987 Melodye witnessed the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada. While well-versed in the Israeli~Jewish perspective, she began to equally explore Palestinian narratives while traveling through Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Today, Melodye is the Executive Director of Seeking Common Ground, which she co-founded in 1993 when the historic Oslo peace agreement made the environment ripe for bringing Palestinian and Israeli teen girls together in her Building Bridges for Peace program. Today, she also helps shepherd the newly-created Face-to-Face/Faith-to-Faith program that brings together Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu teenagers from around the world: Northern Ireland, the Middle East, South Africa, and the U.S., to develop a new generation of leaders. In 11 summers, over 500 young women have participated in Building Bridges, who have then returned to their communities to pass on a new spirit and practice to hundreds of other young women leaders. Melodye has spent extensive time in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza meeting with government officials from both sides as well as meeting and interviewing many private Palestinian and Israeli families, peace activists, and human rights organizations

Inas Radwan Said is a student in the Arab American university, majoring in hospital management. She lives in Jenin and studies there as well. She started with Seeking Common Ground in 2002 and she is now on staff and a home leader. She says: "I love this work. It gives me the spirit to go on and keep living. I hope, one day, not being so alone in this work here in the Jenin area. At least, I do not know anyone interested in this work, and hope that one day we live in peace and I hope that my kids will have a better condition in life and have a life that's full of hope. My dream is that one day all the kids of my country will not care about their religion or color, and live together in the same place without hate and blood."

Lama Tarayrah was born to a Muslim father and a Christian mother, in a family of five other siblings, on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. She has lived through the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, she says, "with all its horrible perspectives. I have lost my only uncle, two of my cousins and saw my father for the first time when I was four years old, after four years he spent in Israeli prisons! I did well enough in school to get a full scholarship to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where I'll be studying for the coming four years of my life. I joined Building Bridges as a participant in the summer of 2003 and since then, my life has never been the same!"

FACE-TO-FACE/FAITH-TO-FATH was represented by **Melodye Feldman** and **Brie Loskota**, who joined the University of Southern California Center for Religion and Civic Culture in 2004 as senior project manager. Prior to CRCC, she was a special projects

consultant for small businesses and nonprofits. She has been involved in interreligious dialogue over the last several years, including directing the **Face to Face/Faith to Faith** summer camp in New York. She received her Bachelor's degree in Religion and History from the University of Southern California and is completing her Master's Degree in Jewish Studies at Hebrew Union College.

Representing **KIDS4PEACE** were its founder **Henry Carse,** and its three regional directors **Nancy Brockway, Laura Castle, Richard Newland** and **Ethel Wright.** Also representing **Kids4Peace** was **Maha Husseini**, a Jerusalem advisor.

Originally from Vermont, **Henry Carse** has lived in the Middle East for over thirty years. He is Special Programs Director at St. George's College Jerusalem, and founder of Kids4Peace. "As a practical theologian and educator, I have been consistently involved in interfaith dialogue and faith-based response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and dream of the day when Jerusalem will become – as it must – a model of interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue and community," he says.

Nancy Brockway says: **"**During a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and St. George's College, I was moved by how the violence that was spinning out of control in the region had impacted so many innocent people, especially children. I felt compelled to try to find a way to do something that might bring a ray of hope in a situation that seemed so hopeless. Following much correspondence with **Henry Carse,** founder of **Kids4Peace**, and a face-to-face meeting in Boston with Henry and **Ethel Wright**, it was decided we would bring **Kids4Peace** to the Diocese of Atlanta. The experience has been beyond our wildest dreams, as we have seen the impact it has had on the lives of the children, their families and the adult advisors in both Jerusalem and Atlanta. My hope for this weekend is to learn from others about their programs and about what has worked and not worked as their programs have matured. In my professional life, I serve as the Chief Program Officer for the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Laura Castle is Kids4Peace session Director in Houston. She is also married to a banker and the mother of three at the University of Texas, Laura is in her fifth year directing the summer camping program at Camp Allen. With 28 years experience in many forms of youth ministry, Laura has been involved in Juvenile Probation, 5 years teaching both gifted and at risk children in the public schools, and years as both a volunteer and paid youth minister in the Diocese's smallest and largest congregations. She also serves on the Diocese of Texas Youth Ministry Steering Committee as well as the Bishop's Advisory Committee for Christian Formation.

Richard Newland is a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada, the Diocese of Toronto. He is a trained counselor and therapist as well. His involvement with Kids4Peace began in 2003 through a parish connection and since then, he has assisted as the Christian Advisor for the camp experience in Canada. His vision for the program is "to enable children to recognize that they are all children of God and to learn that they have a common faith-ancestor in Abraham. Working forward from this common ancestry, he hopes that someday, a child involved in the program will lead his people into peace."

Ethel Wright is an elementary school teacher in a multi-cultural school in a suburb of Atlanta, teaching the academically gifted students in a pullout program. She says, "Following a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2001, I was struck by the impact of the violence on the lives of the children. There was such a need for them to have a safe place where they could play and get to know one another across the bounds of religious and political divides. On hearing of similar programs with older children, I was struck by how children of the pre-teen years are so open to new experiences. When **Henry Carse** took 12 kids to Houston in 2002, I was moved to share the "Camp Mikell magic" and include Peace Pals from Atlanta as buddies. I think that this has been a wonderful experience for the kids on both sides of the pond; they have learned that their similarities as kids and Children of Abraham can bridge their differences and give them hope for peace. My hope for the weekend is to learn about other programs and what has worked for them.

Maha Nubani Husseini is from Jerusalem. She has a bachelor's of science degree in Nursing, and a Master's Degree in Public Health. She works part-time at Hadassah Medical Organization as a staff nurse in Cardio-thoracic surgery, and lectures at Al-Quds University in the School of Public Health. She started working with **Kids4Peace** in 2004. She says, "My daughter joined the K4P in 2003, and my son joined the Seeds of Peace. Both of them had a great experience, and as a family, we hope that peace and justice will prevail all over the world."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE CAMP FOR CHILDREN, Seattle, was represented by its co-founders, **Susan Davis** and **Maha Gebara.**

Susan Davis has worked as an educator, activist, interpreter, writer and as the director/ coordinator of several non-profit programs and projects in Seattle and in Washington, DC. She is currently the director of Kadima, a progressive Jewish community with a mission of supporting peace in the Middle East, and is a co-founder of the Middle East Peace Camp. Susan has a Bachelor's degree in English from SUNY at Buffalo and degrees or certificates in: ASL interpretation, Video Production, Jewish Studies, and Nonprofit Management. Susan has a life-long interest in how cultural groups define and structure themselves and how they relate to others. She says, "As a mother I feel more personally motivated than ever to make this world better and to act as an agent for positive change. It is our belief that when people meet and get to know each other at the human level, many of the barriers that divide us will dissipate. By creating a space where Arab and Jewish children and young adults can learn about each other and build friendships, understanding, and compassion in a relaxed and fun environment, we encourage partnerships that will foster the social and political change needed to achieve peace between the Arab and Jewish people."

Maha Gebara is a Christian Lebanese Peace activist, a co-founder of the Middle East Peace Camp and board member of the Arab Center of Washington, a non-sectarian Arab cultural organization. She earned her doctorate in Biochemistry in the U.K. and went on to do her postdoctoral training at Johns Hopkins University. Maha is also founder and director of the Arab Children's Dabke dance group and the co-creator of the Arab Peace

Tree Project. The Peace Tree was the central theme of the Middle East Peace Camp's first original Peace Play which was performed at the camp and around town in 2002. Maha arranged the music and choreographed the Arabic dances for that production. She also brings her love of science education to the camp. She says, "I believe that the road to peace begins with opening our hearts to each others' humanity, and that peace will come with respect of the basic principles of humanity, justice and dignity for all."

CREATIVITY FOR PEACE CAMP, New Mexico was represented by its founder, **Rachel Kaufman**, and two of its staff advisors, **Silvia Mansour** and **Samia Zeidan.**

Rachel Kaufman has been working in Israel and Palestine for many years. She says, "I simply bring 30 girls together in a safe environment so they may courageously share their feelings and describe their reality of growing up in violence and war. Through the process of deep listening and authentic speaking (along with many fun endeavors) the barriers dissolve and real understanding and friendships blossom. I know that during our time together will be a great learning experience for me. Furthermore, I truly wish to create new vocabularies and even a new dictionary for future peacemaking and co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Silvia Mansour is a Palestinian Israeli who is Christian. She is divorced and a mother of two. She lives in Nazareth, and works as a social worker who helps divorced women and widows. She is finishing her Master's Degree in Women's Studies and Art Therapy through the Leslie College in Netanya.
She says, "As a child I lived among Jews and therefore I know from my own personal experience that co-existence is possible. Through my own inner work, my work with women and teenagers, I want to empower myself and them for leadership in the peace process. This is my big dream, empowered women opening the hearts of the people to self-love and to love their neighbor, be they Muslim, Jew or Christian, Bedouin or Druze.

Samia Zeidan is a Palestinian mother of four children and the administrative secretary of the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development. She is also a volunteer "house mom" and chef for Creativity for Peace Camp. She says, "I always want to help improve the feelings of peace between Palestinians and Israelis. I want to learn from everyone at the conference about becoming a more skilled peacemaker."

PEACE CAMP CANADA was represented by its co-director **Forsan Hussein** and **Michael Bavly.**

Forsan Hussein is a Sunrise Fellow at the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies-Johns Hopkins University (SAIS). Since the age of 10, Forsan, a Palestinian-Israeli, has been involved in various organizations that promote peace and coexistence in the Middle East. Currently, he works as the Public Affairs Officer for The Abraham Fund Initiatives, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting enhanced coexistence between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel. Forsan is also the co-founder and co-director of Shalam, a not-for-profit organization that promotes people-to-people peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. He attended Brandeis University after receiving the

Slifka Coexistence Scholarship where he created his own major, "Peacebuilding" and studied Sociology and Economics. At Brandeis, Forsan created and co-hosted the first Coexistence radio show called "Just Like You" and broadcasted weekly in Arabic, Hebrew and English. Through Shalam and the Abraham Fund Initiative, Forsan has helped to create tens of dialogue groups around the country and has visited universities, high schools, synagogues, mosques, churches and community centers, spreading his vision of peace through a series of lectures. Forsan's work has been covered by NPR, The Boston Globe, The Jerusalem Post, Haaretz, Hope Magazine and New England Cable News, among other media sources. A member of USA Today's 2000 All-USA College Academic Team and a member of the Academy of Achievement Summit, Forsan is pursuing his Master's Degree in International Relations and International Economics, focusing on international development with a regional specialization in the Middle East. After graduating, he plans to pursue an MBA.

Michael Bavly graduated from Suffolk University Law School (May 2003). There he initiated a Middle East Forum, and a mock International Court of Justice advisory session for presentation of oral arguments on the right of self-determination as applied to the Jewish people and the Palestinian people. He was recently admitted to the Massachusetts Bar Association. Michael is an Israeli Jew who grew up in Herzelia, and now resides in Harashim, a small community on a top of a mountain in the Galilee. He graduated from Brandeis University in May, 2000, with highest honors for his thesis on Second Track Diplomacy. At Brandeis he majored in an independent concentration, "Peacebuilding," a program in Peace and Conflict Studies, and a minor in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. During their stay at Brandeis University, Michael and Forsan Hussein were awarded the Karpf peace award for their peace-related work. Michael served for four years in the Israeli Army and attained the rank of Lieutenant. In his last year in the service he was a company commander in charge of 60 soldiers and five officers. In the summers of 1998 and 2000, Michael worked with the Center for Humanistic Education of the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. At the same time, he initiated four dialogue groups in Israel involving high school students – Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druz. In Boston, Michael initiated and facilitated many projects to promote understanding between Arabs and Jews, including dialogue groups, a radio show, and a peace agreement. Since 1999, he has visited universities, high schools, synagogues, churches, and community centers, spreading his vision of peace through a series of lectures. In the summer of 1999, Michael worked as Research Assistant for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. In Fall, 2001, he was an assistant to the legal advisor at Conflict Management Group (CMG) in Cambridge, MA. During 2002 Michael assisted in the planning and instructing of a unique multicultural graduate level course for Arab and Jewish social workers in Tel-Hai College, Israel.

OSEH SHALOM~SANEA AL-SALAM PALESTINIAN-JEWISH FAMILY PEACEMAKERS CAMP, in California, was represented by **Ann Gonski** and **Melek Nasr-Totah.**

Ann Gonski is associate director of Camp Tawonga, near Yosemite National Park, California. Raised in South Africa, she left Johannesburg 20 years ago because she saw no future in Apartheid. Ann earned her Bachelor's degree at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. During her 18 years at Tawonga, she has watched with joy as thousands of campers have blossomed and grown in a loving Jewish environment. She has felt privileged to see to it that all children, regardless of family circumstances, can benefit from all that the camp has to offer. Tawonga has enriched and deepened her own love of nature, of Judaism, and of the community which she serves. Ann has championed and overseen planning of the innovative Oseh Shalom~Sanea al-Salam Palestinian-Jewish Family Peacemakers Camp at Tawonga.

Melek Nasr-Totah was born in Des Moines, Iowa. Her father grew up in Haifa, Palestine, in the 1930s and '40s before fleeing in 1948. Melek graduated from Drake University in 1988, majoring in International Relations. She later earned her MBA in International Business. Strong on volunteerism from childhood, Melek was volunteer Chief Financial Officer for the non-profit Grady Community Council in Atlanta, Georgia, to establish pre-school programs for inner-city children. Melek was Senior Finance Manager for Microsoft Corporation, before giving birth to her son, Raymond, last year. She is now a Finance Director for The Gap Corporation. Melek has been a strong public spokesperson and panelist for Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue. She is on the planning committee for the annual Oseh Shalom~Sanea al-Salam Palestinian-Jewish Family Peacemakers camp, which her family has attend both of its years.

PEACE IT TOGETHER, Vancouver, BC, Canada was represented by its founder, **Reena Lazar**, and an advisor, **Omar Kassis**.

Reena Lazar founded a not-for-profit organization called Creative Peace Network in 2004. Inspired by similar programs from around the world, its first initiative was **Peace it Together,** a summer program that brought Canadian, Palestinian and Israeli youth together in Vancouver to apply creative practices to transform conflict. Reena has been working and training in conflict transformation and Compassionate Listening for the past five years. After attending a Compassionate Listening delegation to Israel and Palestine in 1999, she joined the Palestinian and Jewish Women's Dialogue Group for Peace and has been an active member ever since. Reena was also trained in conflict resolution at the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and completed the advanced training in Compassionate Listening in Washington State. Reena co-facilitated Compassionate Listening and Dialogue sessions at **Creativity for Peace**, a summer program that brought 11 Israeli and Palestinian girls together in New Mexico in July 2003. Reena's academic background is in architecture and international affairs.

Omar Kassis was born in Vancouver, to a Palestinian father and a French-English-Canadian mother. He says, "My interest in Palestine-Israeli peace has been lifelong, thanks to my own identity, my passionate love of learning and politics and the values inculcated in me by my father, a (now retired) professor of Religious Studies and a leading scholar of Islam. I am a teacher working with marginalized populations including Aboriginal youth involved with the justice system and addiction, and learning-disabled youth seeking psychological help. The Peace It Together camp opened my eyes for the

first time to generous, accepting friendships with Jewish and Israeli people – both my Canadian organizing partners and the youth I met from overseas – and I am eternally grateful for that. I believe interpersonal communication, friendship and play are essential factors in building trust among divided people. They are one necessary part of the urgent process of change. A more fundamental part is political justice, and that is a harder goal to fight for. But when it does arrive it will be vital for people, especially the young who are the future, to be able to look each other in the eye with trust and that is why this camp was important. When I am not "Peacing It Together," I enjoy food, literature, art and media and I participate in several sports including hockey. I am active on a few community boards and groups and give what time I can to peace marches and political causes.

JACOBS INTERNATIONAL TEEN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, San Diego, was represented by its director, **Yaakov Schneider** and a counselor and staff member, **Aviva Goldstein.**

Yaacov Schneider was born and raised in Israel and experienced the excitement of being a part of a new nation being built by its people. He says, "For the past eight years I've been living and working in the Unites States. For the first five years, I served as the Israeli Emissary to the United Jewish Federation of San Diego County and continued with being the director of JITLI. During my 30 years of professional work I have always been involved in educational programs and initiatives which brought together people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions. I did so in Israel and overseas, including two years in Durban, South Africa. I was one of the creators of the Jacobs International Teen Leadership Institute six years ago, and I'm honored to be the director of this program for the past four years.

Aviva Goldstein became 18 years old on November 10, 2004 and is a senior at Francis Parker School. English is her second language, after Spanish, and she speaks Spanish at home. She grew up in Tijuana, Mexico and at the age of 8 moved to San Diego and attended the Jewish Academy until 8th grade. Her family origins come from Mexico, Spain, Romania, Russia, and Argentina. Her parents are Mexican and American. She has an older brother, Alex, who's 19, and younger sister, Aliza, who's 14. She has a golden retriever named Pasha. She enjoys playing softball and soccer and she has participated in Israeli dancing for three years. She attends a competitive dance festival in Mexico City every March. She says, "I have been selected as the youth counselor for JITLI, a position I'm very proud of and take with great responsibility. I attend a Jewish-Mexican community called the Ken, and was a youth counselor for my youth group for two years. We are a very close community and I have been raised in it since I was born since my parents too belong to it. Not only is it a youth group on Wednesdays and Saturdays but it's a community that gets together for all types of events, we have a home, and we all know each other, making, life long relationships. She enjoy traveling and have been to Israel three times (once with family, once with the Scott Stone Teen Group of San Diego, and once with JITLI). I am planning to go in May to plan our JITLI program at a seminar and then again in the summer as the youth counselor."

THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM PROJECT was represented by **Brenda Rosenberg**, its executive producer, and **Victor Begg**, its Muslim advisor.

Brenda Rosenberg is president of Pathways to Peace Foundation, and executive producer of **The Children of Abraham Project**. As a former senior vice president of several major fashion corporations, she has turned her creative energies from the world of fashion to creating peace. **The Children of Abraham Project** began with her dream about how a four-step healing process that utilized the performing arts could create social healing. She looks forward to networking with others who share the dream that peace is possible ... manifesting the dream by empowering our children with tools to transform our world.

Victor Begg, 56, a Muslim, has been married for 30 years and is the father of three adult children. He has an MBA from the University of Detroit. A businessman, he is the founding chair of Interfaith Partners of National Conference for Community & Justice as well as a board member and Co-Chair. He is also vice president of the Bloomfield Hills Board of Education and a member of the Governor's Interfaith Panel. He is the founder of the Muslim Unity Center Mosque, Bloomfield Hills, and is vice chair of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan. He served on the Community Service Commission for eight years, appointed by Governor John Engler. He says, "The path to a peaceful 21st Century is through religious tolerance. Religious intolerance is everywhere, whether in India, the Middle East, Africa, Europe or in our own backyard. There is a lot of ignorance about other faiths. Children of Abraham play offers the opportunity to bring the Abrahamic faiths closer – especially the young people that we are preparing to be productive in a rapidly changing and a highly competitive global economy. Celebration of diversity comes from interaction. Stopping stereotyping and getting to know each other is very consistent with American values. The path to achieving peaceful end is to discover what others are all about and to then respect and value our diversity. Hard to hate when you get to know someone. Ignorance is the root of the problem. Despite our differences, we must learn to live and respect each other.

This report was prepared by **Alexandra J. Wall**, a staff writer at j., the Jewish Newsweekly of Northern California, formerly known as The Jewish Bulletin. In her 10-plus years in Jewish journalism, she has won numerous awards from New California Media (the state's ethnic press association), the Society for Professional Journalists, North Jersey Press Club and the American Jewish Press Association. She has also been published in The New York Times and on Salon.com. During her tenure at j. weekly, she has covered many activities of the various Jewish-Palestinian dialogue groups. The daughter and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, she has participated in a Jewish-Palestinian dialogue group for almost four years. In the future, she hopes to embark on a much larger project about the dialogue process.

THE PROCESS: INTERVIEW OF A CAMPER

Following is the story of Lama Tarayrah, a participant in the Building Bridges for Peace program of Seeking Common Ground. The story illustrates the process of how a program participant arrives at camp full of fear and anger, and emerges full of love and compassion for the other side.

Palestinian Lama Tarayrah didn't meet her father until she was 5 years old. He was sentenced to four and a half years in an Israeli prison when her mother was eight months pregnant. His "crime" was writing and distributing articles against the Israeli occupation. Lama's uncle – her father's only brother – had been shot by the Israelis in a demonstration two years before she was born. He died not long after, from being beaten in prison. Her father always mythologized her uncle. He spoke of him often, calling him a hero.

Lama was born in 1986, and grew up in East Jerusalem. Her mother is originally from Nazareth and is Christian; her father, a Muslim, is from Hebron.

Lama's mother often talked about the night the soldiers came and took her father away. They entered the house and ransacked it, breaking things in their search for whatever materials that might incriminate him. Her father tried to remain strong, and told her mother: "Don't worry, I'll be back in a few days." But the soldier in charge knew better. "He's a liar," he told her. "He'll be gone several years."

Whenever Lama's mother would go visit her father in prison, she'd have to travel a great distance. She'd be gone all day. Lama's older brother knew her father, so she would bring him along. But it was too difficult to travel such a great distance with a baby. Plus, Lama had never seen him. So a nanny would come to stay with her.

Lama's mother would be gone the entire day, and occasionally returned with bruises. Even after a long, difficult day of travel, the guards at the jail could cancel visiting hours for no specific reason. The prisoner's wives (mostly) like Lama's mother, who had risen at the crack of dawn and had spent half the day negotiating checkpoints and busses, would get very angry. The soldiers would restrain them, and hit and bruise them in the process.

Lama grew up knowing that Israelis were the enemy, but she has a very powerful memory that told her otherwise. She was about four, and her mother had taken her brother to visit her father. They had left very early, and a nanny was en route to take care of Lama, but got stuck at a checkpoint. This was during the first Intifada, and the Israeli army called a curfew. Lama was left all alone for the entire day. She remembers sitting at the kitchen table, crying hysterically because she was scared to be all alone, and she was hungry.

A jeep of soldiers passed by on patrol, announcing the curfew. One soldier heard her crying, and entered the house.
"It was the first time I ever saw a soldier that close, and he was exactly as my mother described," she said. "He had a black gun and black boots. I was so scared because I didn't do anything wrong, and I didn't want to go to jail, but I knew that soldiers like him had taken my father to jail."

The soldier asked Lama why she was crying. She was terrified, but managed to tell him that she was hungry. He went to his jeep and returned with a chocolate bar. He gave it to her, and kissed her on the cheek.

"I'll never forget his eyes," she said. "No other man had ever treated me this way before."

Lama found this interaction very confusing because a man whom she knew was supposed to be the enemy was the first man in her life to act fatherly toward her. She believes that in part, that soldier might have played a role in her decision to go to camp.

"Maybe some soldiers did brutal things, but he was there to feed me. Maybe I thought that in the camp, I might meet this man, or others like him."

When Lama's father finally was released from prison, Lama found it very hard to adjust to him being home. "I really didn't like the man," she said. "He was a complete stranger. And when he was in prison, I used to sleep next to my mom. But when he came back, he took my place. I didn't want him to be there. It was really hard to accept him after all this time."

So this is how Lama grew up. Meeting a Jew was never something she thought about. But when her friend told her about the camp, her curiosity was piqued. She agreed to read about it, and consider the idea.

What she read excited her, but for this particular reason: "I wanted to go and sit in front of the Israelis and tell them that I hate them, and that if I had a gun I would kill them. And that if I had the power that they have, I would do the same as they had done to my uncle and what they've done to me and my family all my life. I didn't want to go there to make peace."

That was her mindset, but it was enough to make her want to go. Neither of her parents supported her, but they didn't dissuade her, either. Her mother mostly deferred to her father, who said it was her decision. Lama felt she was letting her father down, that he was disappointed in her. Nevertheless, she convinced him it was what she wanted to do. Lama fully realized how much admiration she had for her father when he told her that he didn't want her to go, but signed the permission form anyhow.

Lama had another friend going as well, so she felt comfort in that. When they arrived, they saw that the 21 girls were to sleep in the same big room together.

Like most of the others, Lama was in for a shock.
"I had no idea they are putting us all together," she said. "I stood at the door and asked one of the staff, 'Is this where I'm going to sleep? And the Israelis in the same place?' She said 'Yes,' and I said 'Why?' I couldn't understand it. It was so hard."

The Palestinian girls all grouped themselves on one side of the room, and the Israeli-Palestinians were all in the middle. The Israeli Jews were on the other side.
That first week, they talked mostly about the issues, like borders and refugees. "We didn't really get the idea of the camp, and I would always spend most of the time with my friend," said Lama.

But the pivotal moment for everyone came when the group visited the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. Lama said what she saw in the museum made her feel horrible. But the sight of the Israeli girls crying so much frustrated her. "They were crying about the past, but this is happening in the present in Jenin, and Ramallah," she said. "Everyone in the camp shared the idea that what happened in the Holocaust was wrong, but why don't we share the idea that what's going on now is wrong?" she felt.

Though one Palestinian girl was obviously not as moved. When they got to the end of the exhibit, there was a guest book, where visitors could leave their thoughts. The Palestinian girl wrote "I hate all Jews" in Arabic. One of the Israeli girls could read Arabic, and read what she wrote.

While the girls were not supposed to talk about their visit to the museum until the next day, an explosion happened when they got back to camp that night.

"The Israeli girls were all shouting at this girl who wrote this, and cursing at her," Lama recalled. "But when she was given the chance to talk and share her story, everything changed."

This girl had not told anyone her story, not even the group leaders. Just a few months before coming to camp, her uncle was killed at an Israeli checkpoint. She had kept this to herself, and came to camp obviously still very distraught, and full of hatred toward the Israelis.

"When she told her story, the Israeli girls began to understand why she wrote this in the Holocaust museum, even though they knew it wasn't right," said Lama. "And the fact that they understood her, made her begin to understand that what she did wasn't right."
Lama continued, "We had begun talking to each other behind the whole refugee situation and borders and all that stuff, but now we began talking about what we feel and what happened to us in our lives. It made a big difference because we started from the heart."
Lama remembers waking up later that night, and feeling a great change within herself. She didn't see the Israelis as Israelis anymore, she saw them as human beings.

“I knew they understood my pain,” she said. “When I said ‘I’m afraid,’ they got it. The Israeli girls knew what it’s like because their fathers might die on the bus. I had never thought about that before.”

The following week was “amazing,” Lama said, because after a breakthrough like that, the girls could now actually begin to make friends.

“I just started questioning why I wasn’t allowed to know the [Israelis] before,” she said. “Just knowing them made such a difference.”

Like most participants of these programs, Lama did not have an easy time of it when she returned home. Most people she talked to of her experiences did not want to hear about it. Her mother would listen, but she knew better than to talk about it with her father. Lama was made to feel that by befriending the enemy, she was forgetting about what happened to her uncle, and more importantly, that she was immune to her own people’s pain.

“When I tried telling my classmates, many of them thought I was some kind of traitor or spy,” she said. “It didn’t make sense to them because it was so different from their experience.”

She also had the realization that for the first time, when a terrorist attack happened in Israel, she worried about her Israeli friends and their families. “In the past, I used to worry about my family in Ramallah and Hebron,” she said. “Now when there was an attack in Tel Aviv, I realized one of my Israeli friends could be dead.”

While the girls have follow up programs once they return, inevitably, some girls drop out because it becomes too difficult. Sometimes, the outside pressure to continue in the old modes of thinking can be just too great.

“Many of my classmates would say things like ‘They changed you. If you want to be good and patriotic for Palestine, you should hold the gun and fight in Jenin.’ But at the follow up meetings, you meet the people you are struggling for, and you know you’re not the only one. You see there’s someone struggling on the other side.”

Whenever one girl stopped coming, the whole group would feel pained by it, she said. “But then there are those moments when you tell a friend about it, and she asks questions and is interested about going to camp. Such moments are glory,” said Lama.

Lama stayed in the follow-up program, and returned as a leader in training the next summer. Right now she is on a full scholarship at Brigham Young University in Utah. This summer, she’ll return to the camp to be on staff.

When asked why she remains so dedicated to this work, Lama told the following story: “About a month after I returned from camp the first time, my 10-year-old cousin was shot and killed by a soldier,” she said. “He was playing on the roof. Sometimes, when I really

think about it, I think about how my uncle was killed, my father was in prison, I was treated horribly in the checkpoints, one of my favorite cousins was killed for nothing, what am I doing? But when my cousin was killed, this made the whole difference. Because he was shot after I had been to camp, I realized how bad it is. That if I didn't do anything, many of my other cousins might be shot. Anything that I might be able to contribute to the process of change, and meeting and knowing the other side, might prevent a child from being shot. It doesn't have to be one of my relatives. I have a lot of motive to do what I'm doing. I want to live normally. I have the right to choose what to do, and change my life into one that might look better for my brothers. Someone has to do something or nothing will change."

Lama's experience at Building Bridges for Peace exemplifies what these camps are trying to achieve. As she herself said, her sole motivation in coming to camp was to be able to tell the Israelis how much she hated them. The fact that "the others" were suffering as well was lost on her, as it is on most people in the Middle East who have no contact with the other side. Lama blamed only the Israelis for her misery; and it was only when she came into close contact with "the other" that she was enabled to see how much the other side suffered too. That is what caused her transformation and change of heart.

THE KALAMAZOO WEEKEND: A running narrative

Beginning with ceremony and our stories

Friday afternoon the participants greeted each other at the opening reception and continued becoming acquainted during dinner. After mealtime, everyone gathered for the weekend's opening circle with the first of eight weekend ceremonies begun by lighting a large "source" candle and one smaller candle for that first session. This ceremony was to mark time and remind us of purpose. By Monday's last meeting, all eight small candles would be lighted together around the source candle. As participants engaged in the brief candle lightings, they would offer their personal words and meanings to the moment.

That first evening began with an experience of Dialogue, beginning with "story" and compassionate listening by two exemplars – a Palestinian and a Jew.

Melek Totah, a Palestinian-American, told her narrative beginning with her father, a Palestinian immigrant to Iowa. Before 1948, he lived peacefully in Haifa, coexisting with his Jewish neighbors. When violence began, he and his family, including elders, were forced out of their family home while leaving most of their belonging behind. He had a lot of anger toward Jews which was transmitted to Melek when she was growing up. Her father tried to assimilate completely, marrying an American woman, changing his last name from Nasr to Nash, and only speaking English to his children.

Melek didn't meet any Jews until college. She was curious about them, having these preconceived notions of what they were like in her head from her father.
After college she got involved in Jewish-Palestinian dialogue.

"I inherited a lot of his anger," Melek said. "I realized the injustice and was angry about the situation, and angry about Jewish people and Israelis. For me, the dialogue process has been important in making me understand we're all humans, and that you can't just say because of those events they're all bad."

Melodye Feldman grew up in a strongly Zionist home. Her grandfather came from Russia to the United States, and was very active in helping to found the State of Israel. As a child growing up in an area of Florida with a small Jewish population, Melodye experienced a lot of anti-Semitism. She was called "kike" and "dirty Jew" and was once pushed into a puddle of water. Another time, girls rubbed her head looking for horns.

Melodye was involved with interfaith efforts at a young age, and even helped write a play about Arabs and Jews. One trip to Israel turned out to be transforming. She had decided to become Orthodox, and met with an Orthodox rabbi. He told her, "Do you know what's going on in this land? I know that you know the narrative of the Jew, but do you know the narrative of the Palestinian?"

The rabbi told her to go home and learn it. It took a few years, because she was terrified, but she soon overcame her fear and met with Jewish peace activists who introduced her to Palestinian peace activists.

"It changed my life," she said. "Once that door was opened, I couldn't close it."

Melek and Melodye each reflected back what they heard from each other's stories in front of the group, and then everyone broke down into pairs, or dyads, to listen deeply to one another's stories.

After spending almost half an hour in pairs, we came back together as a group. It was obvious that even among a group of veterans who have deep practice in compassionate listening, people were still visibly moved. Some commented on how it felt to be listened to, and others were struck by the courage of their partners to open windows to themselves.

Reena Lazar reflected in the circle: "We all have our breakthroughs. If they haven't happened yet, they will and can, and this process is all about that. The first time you go and meet the others, you learn that they're a loving human being like me. I am sure that everyone here has had such a breakthrough and we all know people who have not, yet. But it's all a matter of time."

"When you listen to anyone, there's empathy," said Omar Kassis. "Especially with forced listening and you can't talk. You put yourself in the other's shoes immediately and have empathy. I can't see how it can lead to anything but liking of the other person and finding things in common."

Silvia Mansour from Nazareth said that "talking to someone who listens to me helps me to analyze my own story and to understand my story more deeply. Great listening helps me listen to myself."

The first evening ended with inspiration – a 14-minute slideshow of images from all the camps, set to music. And the candles were put out.

Exploring Inspiration and Motivation: The role of faith

The first morning, Saturday, began with the brief candle lighting ceremony and us getting into groups of four to discuss our various motives: "What makes us do the work we do?"

The answers were varied, especially when it came to religion. Clearly for the Christians in the group, "faith" was the primary motivator, yet that took on varied meaning and was complicated in itself.

"For me, it is a personal faith, and we each had an element of that, or spirituality, that motivated us. But then we talked about organized religion, and the role that organized

religion has had in perpetuating the conflict," said Nancy Brockway, a Christian from Atlanta, Georgia. "How do you reconcile that?"

Victor Begg, a Muslim from Detroit, also said he was motivated primarily by faith. "We must distinguish between what faith teaches and what people make of it," he said.

Melek Totah, from San Francisco, said she felt that faith was difficult in that it could both repel some people away from this work, while for others it could be the draw.

For those who live in the Middle East, it was personal. Forsan Hussein, Palestinian-Israeli Muslim, said, "I don't want my brother to grow up the way I did."

Inas Said, a Muslim from Jenin, West Bank, said how problematic it was for her that it was impossible to visit her friends from camp inside Israel, and that when she was older, she hoped there would be open borders.

For Inas, even while the camps open minds, there are so many obstacles once participants go home. While it has not been easy to travel back and forth between Israel and Palestine in the last four years, she said, the separation wall has made it virtually impossible.

Samia Zeidan, from Ramallah, said she saw a generation of Palestinian children growing up in the most horrific of circumstances. She described their games being almost entirely of a militaristic bent, and said she wanted them to have the same opportunities other kids had.

The Jews seemed to be motivated primarily by the concept of "tikkun olam," healing the world.

Reena Lazar, Jewish and from Vancouver, BC, Canada, said some of what motivated her was purely selfish. "I do this because I really enjoy it," she said. "I love to be inspired by people. It keeps me feeling alive. Spreading that kind of inspiration for me is one of most valuable things I can think of. We're working in an area where there's a lot of darkness and despair, it's one of the darkest places you can work, and therefore, contrast to the light is so rewarding."

Alexandra Wall, Jewish, from San Francisco, whose grandparents and mother were Holocaust survivors, and Ann Gonski, who grew up as a Jew in apartheid South Africa, both said their early experiences with hatred motivated them. They agreed that they felt lied to about Israel in their childhood education, and doing this work helped them come to terms with that. Ann and Alix agreed that neither had been taught that Jews were capable of acting in negative ways they have observed in recent years and which go against Jewish values.

This led Silvia Mansour, from Nazareth, to say "if the Jews raised with so much suffering are now pointing guns at civilians, what's to say that the Palestinians won't do it to the

next generation? How can we prevent personal suffering from turning into abusive power later on?"

Eric Nelson reminded us how shared popular culture creates bonds among the youth, and how easy it can be for the younger generation to relate to each other on that basis. He also said, "love and hate are very close to one another, and a small shift, or catalyst, can shift one to the other."

Maha Gebara, an Arab Christian from Seattle, described part of her motivation: "I can't leave the subject alone. Since I was a child. I was into politics until I got repelled, and then I found that getting to know people was much more powerful."

For Henry Carse, a Christian Jerusalemite, the exercise made him realize how both those who live in the Middle East and those who live outside it each have important roles to play.

He said that within this conflict, he felt the "wholeness of the earth. We are part and parcel of each other, on some subliminal level, and we need a different context, to get out of ourselves. Some of our motivations are personal, and some are associated with traumatic experiences. I would love to be able to erase them, but that needs a larger world that is softer and more accepting and more loving."

Melodye Feldman, Jewish, from Denver, emphasized the importance of balancing one's time with family, and reserving leisure time as well, a lesson she learned from her students.

Melodye: "I have a son, and if he ever grew up and was asked, 'What does your mom do?' and he said, 'She makes peace in the world, but is never home for me,' I would have failed. There's a lot of things that you can do and should do so you don't burn yourself out."

Brenda Rosenberg, a Detroit Jew who spent 25 years marketing in the fashion business, said she suddenly had an epiphany after spending many years, "trying to get every woman to buy big hoop earrings." She continued, "Now we have the most incredible message possible, that people have achieved incredible things together."

After a viewing of the trailer for "Breaking the Ice," a documentary about a group of Israelis and Palestinians who made history by traveling on an expedition to Antarctica to climb an unclimbed, unnamed mountain, the group reconvened and spoke about the role publicity plays in these camps.

Telling the camp story through the news media and other publicity

At Kids 4 Peace, said Henry Carse, they had been grappling with the idea of a flag, and what it represented to the outside world, and what message they wanted to represent.

He added, “We’ve all been grappling with the extent to which we allow these children to have personal dialogue with each other without their experience being showcased as a public demonstration of an idea.”

Len Traubman said in his experience the media was hungry for stories of sustained dialogue, of enemies talking, and that reporters respond to it as true news when it is authentic and ongoing.

Victor Begg said he felt it was necessary to have public expression “especially if you’re doing something so needed. The media will respond if we have a story to tell. They already have enough bad stories.”

Melek Totah described a danger that sometimes what appeared in the media was not the right message. The dialogue process takes time, she said, and sometimes the media is guilty of just going for the quick sound bite.

In Forsan Hussain’s experience, “Media is an amazing tool to spread the hopeful message,” and to be used for outreach and fundraising.

Reporters need to be cultivated like donors, Forsan said, and relationships with them must be kept up. “They are my voice out to the public that I can’t reach.”

At Peace Camp Canada, Hussain said, they decided not to allow any media until the second week, when the kids felt comfortable enough with each other. Of course allowing cameras in distorts the dynamics, he said, with kids all trying to look good for the media.

Melodye Feldman said that news media could be a great thing, but some guidelines should be in place. Once a 60 Minutes producer who was interested in doing a segment on the camp said, “But we want to make sure there is some sort of conflict while we’re there. It would be really great if a bomb goes off in Jerusalem while we’re filming.”

Susan Davis shared how a TV segment on their camp was introduced with opening shots of tanks and other atrocities. This was very disturbing to her, but since then the coverage has gotten much better.

“Why does media respond to you? Why do they call you?” Len Traubman asked.

Yaakov Schneider said that in JITLI’s case, media was generated when the city of San Diego recognized the program, and they were able to visit City Hall.

“When we took a picture at city hall, it was very important for one of our Palestinian educators to be there. He finally felt he had a place in the world.”

In visiting the Israeli Knesset, JITLI youth also got a lot of attention. They hope to visit the Palestinian parliament in the future.

"The news is simply that we are together," said Schneider. "This is the story, because most of the people are not getting this chance of being close to each other. We are giving the opportunity to be with the other side."

Nancy Brockway shared how her camp got great exposure purely by chance. One of her pre-teen campers was out and about with his parents, when America declared war on Iraq. A reporter was doing "man in the street" interviews, asking people's reactions.

The reporter asked the parent what she thought, and the boy piped up: "We need to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict first." The reporter took his name and phone number and the next time there was a bombing in Jerusalem, the reporter then showed some of the kids from camp, who are trying to think and treat each other differently. "Reporters are looking for the positive when they can find it," added Nancy.

Omar Kassis, a Palestinian-Canadian, said it was important to remember how the presence of outsiders could disrupt the sacredness of the dialogue process.

The group then interacted more about the earlier 10-minute video of "Breaking the Ice," the historic January, 2004 grassroots Palestinian-Israeli expedition to Antarctica. The film showing was intended to be inspirational.

Brie Loskota said she didn't mean to be cynical, but she was troubled by how much money was going into the expedition and making a movie like this.

While the video was only a trailer for a much longer feature length film, it revealed that great tension broke out in the group because the expedition flag had been signed by Yasser Arafat after a group agreement that the endeavor would not be political.

And Richard Newland said he felt cheated by the film. "They were all incredibly strong people just like we are, but how incredibly fragile this peace is. It was broken in the movie because the dialogue stopped. Someone stuck a signature on the flag, and as soon as they stopped talking, the whole initiative was then in jeopardy."

Recruiting campers: Building trust, and new language

Saturday afternoon was meant to share information about camp methods and logistics, yet only the tip of the iceberg was revealed.

Participants divided into small groups, and chose to focus mostly on recruitment – how to discover campers for their various programs. The following large group discussion additionally included the use of language.

Samia Zeidan's first recruiting step was going to the refugee camps. She wanted to find girls that were economically disadvantaged, and not those whose parents could afford to send them abroad.

Forsan Hussein said that Peace Camp Canada purposely looked for those who "still had some fight in them," not the peacemakers. "We looked for the ones who had a negative attitude, because those are the ones who experience the transformation," he said.

Lama Tarayrah shared about her first day of Building Bridges for Peace. "Melodye told us: 'Every girl would look in the mirror and be proud of the woman she's grown to be in this program.'"

"I thought, 'What is she talking about? Why would I be proud that I am betraying my people by talking to the other side?' Later, I did see that change. I want to see that change in more people."

Ethel Wright said that since Kids4Peace deals with younger children, the families who applied – not only the child – had to pledge a commitment to peace.

Brie Loskota summarized for her small group which was interested in English fluency. Some camps utilize interpreters, and applicants are asked if they have the patience to listen through an interpreter. At other camps, candidates must be fluent in English.

There was concern that insistence English fluency is automatically limiting, since a Palestinian in a refugee camp is not likely to have good English skills. Furthermore, most of the Palestinian teens who are fluent in English are more likely to be Christian, thus skewing the camp population even more.

Forsan Hussein felt that having young participants who could express themselves well in English was crucial, but he also recognized that it limited who could go to camp.

Melodye Feldman said her girls mostly spoke English, but interpreters were sometimes needed, when things got particularly difficult.

Yaakov Schneider pointed out the pitfalls of using English all the time, as some ideas and emotions tend to get lost in translation. "Part of what we're doing is respecting everyone's whole story, and language is not only a tool of communication. It's more than that."

Schneider amplified his point. Since his program was sponsored by an American organization, insisting on English would be the usual story of the Superpower imposing itself on others. "It's a learning process for our American founders to learn the importance of letting them talk in their own language."

Aviva Goldstein said that in her experience, it was much easier to get people to open up if they could do so in their own language.

Forsan countered that by letting people speak in their own language, you often saw the Israelis sticking together and the Palestinians sticking together. An English-only rule

helped fix that. "They had their own time to speak their own language in their rooms, but you have to be sensitive to cultural differences."

Yaakov added the humor that, when people are allowed to speak in their own languages, it is the American conveners who feel left out. "It's a typical American response, that they're preventing us Americans from understanding what's going on all the time."

Melodye elaborated on that theme, saying that when the girls don't trust each other, they are likely to believe that they are being talked about in the language they don't understand.

"But as they grow these relationships, they become less suspicious. Then they still need opportunities to speak their own language, but they're more willing to translate." Michael Bavly said that with their decision to only speak English, both sides felt the same limitation. "A side benefit of forcing them to communicate in English was its creation of a common language bond between all the campers."

Susan Davis, who has worked as an interpreter, said that when kids interpret for each other, they are forced to take the other's role, which is a valuable exercise.

And Len Traubman added, "When a person speaks in her or his own language, you can feel the heart, not just the word and intellect."

Lama said she doesn't speak Hebrew and never wanted to. So Building Bridges for Peace provided her a place where she could meet the enemy and not have to speak Hebrew.

Nancy Brockway emphasized that when they are dealing with safety issues, Kids4Peace gives warnings in all three languages, because it is crucial that the children understand everything. "We never assume that everyone can understand."

Len said that in his group, he learned more about the identity of the Palestinian-Israeli, and how "some of the Palestinians in Israel have actually lost part of their story."

Aviva Goldstein described her group's exchange about the handling of "hot button topics." She described how trust must be developed before these issues can be brought up. "Everyone has different feelings, and we have to know each other's stories, and where emotions and reactions come from to shape people's lives. That helps us to know where they come from, to try to understand their views."

One group discussed the difficulty of finding Palestinians, moreso than Jews, for sustained dialogue in America. They said that in the Middle East it is the opposite, with Jews being the more reluctant.

"Something happens to us when we've left," said Maha Gebara, "and it takes us years to let go. You feel guilty, and that you should be living in the past. You're judging yourself."

Ann Gonski said that sometimes there's a struggle before the dialogue even begins, as some participants want to know the views of those they will be dialoguing with. "The struggle can be in what to say before the dialogue in order not to alienate anyone before they get there," she said.

Reena Lazar shared that the Palestinians in her community said they wouldn't support her camp unless she made a political statement against the occupation. Even though she was against it, she wanted to stay away from such statements by the camp.

Michael Bavly said that in his work of Shalem, they've steered away from the traditional political discourse and especially language. "We put a lot of emphasis on using a new vocabulary, and avoiding the same old slogans people use over and over."

Forsan Hussein shared how Peace Camp Canada was started by an 18-year-old Israeli high school girl who got the chance to see things differently. The daughter of the Israeli Ambassador to Canada, Michal Divon lived in Ottowa for several years. While there, she met and befriended the daughter of the Ambassador from Jordan.

Michal began to realize what an incredible opportunity she had been given, and wanted to give that same opportunity to others. She then got in touch with Forsan, and they became co-directors of the first Peace Camp Canada.

Silvia Mansour said that perhaps it's easier for Hebrew and Arabic both to be translated, with English as a buffer. "I feel that now we're not ready for that translation from Arabic to Hebrew and Hebrew to Arabic. Maybe now we need the English."

Eric Nelson, our Fetzer Institute host, said he realized that not everyone is ready to engage in this kind of work. "Maybe like with 'Children of Abraham,' in a theatrical performance, people who cannot enter into it yet themselves can at least listen to it. It creates a space for listening, and dialogue can happen a bit more safely."

Demonstrating possibility with inspiring films

Saturday evening we shared dinner together, then our candle ceremony and a 10-minute, inspiring video about the Hand in Hand Arab-Jewish schools in Israel. All three schools follow the same model, with a Jewish and Arab teacher in each classroom. Students learn both languages and both narratives of history.

Libby Traubman said she felt so hopeful in watching the film because peacemaking comes so much more naturally for children, when their hearts are still so open. "It doesn't have to be that you're 18 or 20 before your heart changes from being fearful. Those kids are so ready. They want to go and make friends. The more schools and camps

there are, the better, because the adults aren't doing it. They're helping it happen in some cases, but it's the children who get it, and who feel it. That's where the hope is."

Forsan Hussein said he had two nephews going to one of these schools, and he thought they were getting a rare opportunity.

"They sit at the same table, from a very early age, so not only does their Hebrew become fluent, but all the stereotypes that people grow up with – they don't have that. When the students go back to their parents, their national cultural identity is strengthened. They learn to appreciate their similarities and their differences from an early age, and really become ambassadors for peace."

We then screened a motivating introductory video of "Building Bridges for Peace," before all the participants circled up for an opportunity to "download" their impressions of the weekend so far.

Getting creative with ideas and priorities

Yaakov said that besides the practical information he had learned, he had loved watching his young protégé, Aviva, become friendly with her Palestinian peers, Inas and Lama, during the weekend. He was imagining how their friendship could take them together on a totally new path in their lives.

Victor wondered how he could start a camp in Detroit, while Brenda said she wanted to market this momentum so it could spread to a wider audience.

Libby said she got a greater appreciation for having already-established, expertly-organized Camp Tawonga to bring Palestinian and Jewish families to, as opposed to the daunting task of starting from the ground-up.

Melek proposed that expanding the larger camp process could include more families. Graduates of the various camps could come with their families to Tawonga's Family Peacemakers Camp – the one program that hosts whole families for this Middle East public peace process.

Len said he felt he gained new insight into the story of the Israeli-Palestinian. "A lot of Palestinians in Israel really do not know their story. They've lost it because of the educational system that does not properly document their historical narratives, or they haven't asked their elders. And I want to be part of correcting that as soon as possible. And that applies to both peoples' stories. Story is one of the most powerful, transforming, confidence building experiences in life."

The Sunday morning of January 30 was a wide-ranging brainstorming session. While comments were all over the place, the nitty-gritty of why we came was becoming very clear. And people began to surface and crystallize their priorities.

Melodye began. She felt a necessity to show all the young participants that they are not alone. She suggested creating a video with segments from all the various camps, to show all the camps, campers, staffs, funders – the world – that "it's not just here."

Melodye: "I like working in small systems, but I think it's important for us to be able to show the world that it's not one, it's many. I love grassroots to the core, and being not over-institutionalized, but I think there's power with a group."

In general, everyone agreed that sharing knowledge and "best practices" was key, while the camps should remain independent, with their own unique qualities.

Len shared that he had recently received an e-mail from the Open House in Ramle, which got word of the gathering in Kalamazoo. The e-mail suggested that perhaps some Open House Jewish and Arab youth could attend some of these camps next summer.

Ann said that as a director of a Jewish camp, she attends many conferences on Jewish education and for Jewish educators. She said she'd love to see someone give a presentation on these camps at such a conference, to show that "there are many more options of education than what we're currently hearing."

Melodye agreed with Ann, and added that some Jewish communities might not be so welcoming to this work. Because of fear, there are those who could be hostile to this work. "But it's time for us to be more active in saying that 'this is the future' and open up the doors," she said.

Len told how he and Libby presented several workshops at a conference of CAJE, the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education. It is for thousands of Jewish educators.

There was a suggestion to present to the General Assembly of Jewish Federations, considered a worthy but not easy challenge.

Forsan spoke about the Jewish Funders Network, and said it would be a worthy group to network with. Even though it's invitation-only, he said, once there, there is the opportunity to meet highly influential people with substantial resources. Melodye said that they have panels before they meet, to decide whom to invite. Establishing a meeting with them would be desirable.

Yaakov said that Gary Jacobs, the funder of JITLI, came from the mainstream Jewish community, and surely there must be others like him out there. He thought Jacobs would be an ideal speaker to some potential funders, since he comes from the mainstream.

Brenda said she believed showing those "transformational moments" that the young people experienced was the key to opening people's minds to the effectiveness of these programs.

"Most people are very cynical, and the first question asked is 'What's the sustainability of this? They have a great experience, sing Kumbaya for two weeks, and what next?'" Brenda said that Weight Watchers was so successful because the participants had to return weekly.

Melodye said she had always realized that sustainability was key, and that's why the follow-up to her program was so crucial after the girls returned home. She suggested a once-a-year meeting in Israel/Palestine, for participants from all camps to come together. "Imagine the power these kids would feel, and what they could be teaching each other, and how they can form groups we haven't even begun to think about."

Omar suggested bringing the kids to the World Peace Forum happening in Vancouver in 2006.

Reena said that camps with similar purposes have been formed in Europe as well, and they should be part of the network.

Michael introduced getting the Arab/Muslim community on board, for both participating on boards, and giving money. "This makes us more credible. When people see just as many Arab as Jewish names, that means hopefully that they're being represented in their needs, too."

Libby expressed a great frustration in getting as many Palestinians as Jews to participate in dialogue in America. "There's a tightness, not freedom. Sometimes, they are instructed not to participate, and it's to their great loss because people's thinking cannot change if they don't know each other's stories, cultures, backgrounds, qualities." She added that the Arab community is nowhere as organized as the Jewish community, which makes it hard to do outreach.

Maha Gebara described how many Arab-Americans are immigrants who were still concerned with establishing their lives in America.

Victor said that he knew that some Muslim organizations had been blacklisted by Jewish organizations, branded as ones that Jews refused to deal with because their views were considered "extremist."

Susan believed that just having Arab names on board, even if they are not giving as much as the Jews, is important.

At one meeting that Yaakov attended, he learned that not all Muslims want to be connected with the Israel-Palestine agenda. He was told: "We are 40 countries, and we have a different Muslim agenda."

Brie spoke of her difficulty over years trying to do fundraising within the Muslim community. In her experience, Muslims tend to give to the local mosque and Muslim

charities, including programs for their own children. Trying to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a priority.

Brenda said that both the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches made very harsh statements this year about Israeli policies, and perhaps they wouldn't do so if their leadership saw the positive initiatives going on..

Laura said that the head of the Episcopal church was coming to Texas, and she wanted to do a presentation on the camp movement as a whole. "Right now the diocese of Texas is raising funds for Kids4Peace. They would want to see that when kids get older, they can go to yet other camps, that there's an ongoing interest and ministry to the people in this conflict that it's more than just Kids4Peace."

Laura continued: "The Christian community needs to know what's going on. They do not know or have not put faces to the suffering. Christians need go to Jerusalem and need to go to Ramallah. They need to see what's going on across the world and then do something about it." Donations were nice, she added, but she wanted to see more than that.

Melek thought the group should decide how it wants to be identified.

Nancy followed: "I think we each have a unique program, and I don't think anyone wants to sacrifice that. But I am hearing that a loose confederation can serve as a support group, can share ideas and resources, and can gain from each other without losing our identities. I think there's benefit from coming together like that." Nancy liked that a participant could go from one camp to another, "making this their life's work."

Acknowledging the power of the youth

Aviva spoke to the power of youth. She said that whenever they speak about JITLI, they emphasize that they are youth who are taking on leadership roles. "A lot of people ask: 'How can a 16- or 18-year-old make a difference?' But they're eventually going to be mothers who teach their children. A lot of graduates go on to college and create a lot of programs and dialogue groups. As a youth, we have more power. We get attention because 'we're only kids.'"

Exploring a variety of shared ideas for funding, curricula, more

Forsan returned to the funding issue. In his experience, it was nearly impossible to raise money from the Arab community. Those involved with the conflict were more likely to give to helping the nascent Palestinian state.

"The most valuable thing I was able to bring was the human resource, the fact that an Arab or two would come to the organization with joy in the effort, without any financial aspect. I just want them there," said Forsan. "I want their input, their presence, and ideas. That is much more important than money."

Melek suggested writing a grant to help fund the start of an umbrella organization for all the camps.

Melodye said she wanted a safe space to talk about the difficulties one comes up against in running these programs.

Omar said that for the outside world, it would be beneficial to outline what the similarities and differences are among the programs. He said a similar meeting with more people next year would be helpful. He would like to see a newsletter as well.

Omar further suggested approaching the corporate world, as many big corporations have people "sitting in board rooms seeking ways to write a check."

Brie said she'd love to see a Web site as well as a newsletter.

Yaakov said not to forget about organizations we could encourage back in Israel and Palestine.

Rachel said maintaining each camp's uniqueness was important, but sharing tools could help prevent having to reinvent the wheel for each new camp, too. She expressed that being together was extremely helpful to her professionally.

Yaakov suggested forming a steering committee, that would help spread the word of this work.

Maha G. recommended visiting each other's camps to get a greater idea of what each program is doing.

Omar pointed out that the camps needed to be thoughtful in fundraising, since there was a limited amount of funding out there. "We're chasing the same sources, so it's really important to work together on that," he said. (This appeared to be a reminder to avoid elevating one camp while diminishing another in the eyes of a funder. All programs are treating all peoples equally, and transforming "enemies" into sustained partners for the good of all.)

Reena suggested sharing each other's manuals and written materials. She also said that if there is a Web site, personal testimonials of participants would be extremely valuable.

Melodye is most interested in education and training. "We can educate each other and train each other and then facilitate other groups that may be interested," she said. "I get a lot of phone calls from groups who are interested in how to start something like this. This group has so much information to pass on to others."

Melodye suggested a trip by this group to Israel/Palestine. She said it would send a strong message to the people there.

At this point, many people chimed in, favoring the Web site, newsletter, and video of all the camps. Melek questioned what it would take to get money for a part-time person to coordinate these initiatives.

Michael suggested researching how the camps might cooperate to collectively cut camp operation costs.

Inas said that having a contact list of all the participants could be extremely useful. When she travels, especially for recruiting new camp participants, it would be helpful to know families along the way, especially if she gets stuck somewhere.

Forsan said that the U.S. Congress allocates some money each year to global conflict resolution. We could learn how to establish relationships to get access to that money.

Len emphasized reaching further out to the Christian community, which has shown a great interest in this work. "Some of them are so generous and so spiritual," he said. "We could go to their meetings and tell our story, the camp story."

Libby has learned from experience that going to Washington to meet with funders and policy makers works much better than seeking support and applying for money from California. "A trip there shows you're serious," she said. "If you can go in person, it makes a huge difference."

Nancy expressed gratitude for this weekend's informal time as well formal sessions. A conversation she had at breakfast was quite meaningful, she said. "We get so wrapped up in the mechanics and logistics, and often don't get fed by sharing the stories," she said.

Maha Husseini, from East Jerusalem, suggested advertising the camps on posters and flyers, as not all Palestinian children have access to computers and the Internet. She suggested distributing information in schools.

Richard said it was important to talk about how faiths play a role in these camps, because there are some groups to whom religion and politics are so intertwined. "There are many faith groups, not just in the Christian world, but I think we can find some radical fundamentalist Muslims and Jews as well who would not be supportive of this work," he said.

Ethel said she'd like to see Kids4Peace youth moving on to the other camp programs as they get older.

After lunch, the group was bused to Western Michigan University to join a sold-out auditorium of 500 citizens for a performance of the "The Children of Abraham Project." This musical play was conceived by group participant Brenda Rosenberg, its executive producer. It was written and performed by Muslim, Jewish, and Christian youth of

Detroit's Mosaic Youth Theatre. Back at Fetzer, the group expressed their responses to this community experience.

Admitting issues of religion: inclusion and exclusion in the room

That Sunday evening's discussion was a difficult one, beginning with Nancy voicing her feelings that the Christians were being excluded or dismissed as less important at this gathering. She felt that their voices were not as valued.

She said that being referred to as a "supportive other" was funny at first, but as time went on it got to be more and more painful. To her, it came to represent the sentiment that "you can be an observer, but you are not part of this."

"I feel that I have a piece," said Nancy. "What's going on in the Holy Land is going on in the birthplace of my religion also, so while I don't share a stake in it with those who live there, I think I share as much a stake as a Jew born in Los Angeles or a Muslim born in Dearborn, because this is the birthplace of my religion."

Nancy said that many of the people there were viewing the conflict as one between warring peoples – Israelis and Palestinians – but others of them were looking at it from a faith perspective, and neither were right nor wrong, but equally valid.

"I've never experienced being a minority, and I want to remember that pain because it's important for me to feel it when I'm working with the children in my program," she said. "But it also makes me feel a much stronger kinship to my Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters because I understand they're feeling excluded whenever the conversation turns to Palestinian, Muslim, and Jewish." Nancy's narrative sparked a heartfelt exchange.

Melodye said she had this conversation often, since one of her programs was more faith-based. But she also said that as an American, she felt she very much had a stake in what was going on in the Middle East.

Victor, an Indian Muslim, has often asked himself how he fit in, as well. But in his interfaith work, he realized that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects everyone.

Lama said that there is a big difference between Muslim and Christian Palestinians at camp, and it is important to have both groups represented. She said that the majority of those who are really suffering the effects of the occupation are the Muslims. The Christians are more well-off, and speak better English, and it is very rare to find a Christian living in a refugee camp.

Richard took Nancy's sentiments further by saying that he found some of the weekend's language exclusionary to the Christians. The term "'supportive other' makes me feel as if I'm such a minor component of the Middle East conflict, when I maintain that faith is

such a major part, because the three major religions call it their cradle. Whether they practice or not, it's there."

Brie said that at Face to Face – Faith to Faith, a faith-based program, oftentimes the Americans feel somewhat left out, like they don't have a place. "It's very hard because a lot of the methodology is about dialogue and life experience, and the Americans feel left out," she said. "This continues to be an issue with us."

Susan said she and Maha G. had run up against this problem, too. They use the "other" term, but they still didn't know how to handle it.

Since people were airing their grievances, Yaakov said that he felt funny on Friday night, when no acknowledgement of Shabbat was made. Considering the large amount of Jews in the group, he felt candles should have been lit, at least. Alix agreed with him, and wondered how to do it in such a way not to exclude people of other faiths who might like to participate. She also felt it could have been a great opportunity to partake in each others rituals.

The Christians felt the same way about the possibility of doing Eucharist on Sunday morning. They did it privately, but wondered about asking others to participate, or at least watch. They had decided against it. The group seemed to agree there should be a way to partake in each other's rituals without feeling obligated to.

Establishing our group's priorities for the coming year

The latter part of the evening had Richard facilitating a brainstorming, priority-setting exercise designed to take all the people's ideas and distill them down to our six most important priorities.

Step by step, we divided into pairs and then successively larger groups. When everyone came back together as a whole, it was calculated with an accounting system what the weekend participants most wanted to happen. It was decided that the first three actions were realistic to pursue in the beginning.

1) **An annual meeting**
2) **Regular internal communication between the camps**
3) **Resource sharing**
4) A Web site
5) External communication
6) Next steps

Presenting descriptions of our camps

At Monday morning's seventh session, clearly there was not time to cover all the intended subjects. The greatest need and desire was to hear a brief presentation about the essence of each camp.

At **Kids4Peace,** an American child is partnered up with a Jerusalem child, and they call each other their "peace pal." At each camp – Texas, Georgia, Toronto – a common program has been the "Abraham Tent." It allows the youth to introduce to one another their religions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism.

Laura directs Camp Allen, outside of Houston, with over 1600 children every summer. She described the difficulties of planning for Kids4Peace within Camp Allen's already-large program.

Henry acknowledged one year's mistake – bypassing the vitally important training of staff in dialogue and facilitation skills. Two facilitators got into a political argument in front of the children, he said, and the campers were in tears.

"We've learned from that," he said. "And we've put the interfaith aspect at the center because we feel we can do that without endangering the souls of the kids. At the same time, we must deal with the political issues in an intelligent and professional way."

Maha H. spoke about Kids4Peace post-camp follow-up. Campers from Jerusalem continue to meet twice a month. "We encourage them to make home visits," she said. "We visit the Muslims during Ramadan, and the Christian families during Christmas and the Jewish families at Chanukah. The children enjoy that very much, and this sustains connection between the families, as well. The parents stay together when the kids are together, and the families have to commit to meeting all year round."

Nancy said that a service project is also always part of camp, so the children learn the importance of giving back. One year they helped build a peace garden with a Habitat for Humanity team.

Susan described how the **Middle East Peace Camp for Children** in Seattle came together with co-sponsorship by Kadima, the progressive Jewish community of Seattle, and the Arab Center of Washington. Originally, it was a response to 9/11. This camp is mostly for American children of Jewish and Arab descent, with some youth who are neither Jewish nor Arab. It is not residential.

Each year has had a different theme. One year it was about a peace tree, another learning about olive oil and how to make it, and a third year focused on the environment.

Parents attend the program's last night. One year's fond memory was of a Jewish and a Palestinian artist who worked together with the children to make a shared mural.

Forsan, with Michael Bavly at his side, spoke about **Peace Camp Canada**. It was the dream and initiative of one Israeli high school student, Michal Divon, living in Canada. She is now in the Israeli Army.

Michal and Forsan became co-directors. They brought to Ottawa 10 Palestinians and 10 Israelis, a mix of Muslims, Christians and Jews, in their late teens.

"We wanted to get them at a critical stage before they go off to the army and before the Palestinians are going to university or into the labor market, and talk to them about real issues," Forsan said. "During the first two days, we hired a group called Human Inertia, who teaches about group dynamics and trust building."

Ample time was also reserved for cultural activities and a drama project. And all the time three messages were constantly before the campers:

1) Listening is the beginning of peace.
2) We are more similar than different, but understanding our differences is how we make peace.
3) There is no more room for one-sidedness. We're redefining the language of the conflict. If you're pro-Israeli, you're pro-Palestinian, and vice versa.

Forsan shared a document that the campers wrote together, and which he considered a watershed from the camp experience. "This document was not encouraged by us," he said. "This is their own commitment, and their promise to what they're going to do in the Middle East."

Their written statements evolved out of a need for each group – Palestinians and Jews – to show the other side that they fully understood the narrative of the "other." They worked in two separate groups, with the facilitators out of the room. The English was only tweaked a bit for style purposes. Their two statements are attached at the end of this document.

Ann and Melek spoke of the Camp Tawonga weekend – **Oseh Shalom~Sanea al-Salam Palestinain-Jewish Family Peacemakers Camp**. It is but three days a much bigger program of an established Jewish summer camp.

Participant ages range from early childhood to 80s – whoever will sleep in a cabin. Once at camp, mutual listening and understanding, and relationship and trust building, come naturally. The biggest challenge is recruiting Palestinian families for the weekend. The first summer, the ratio was about two Palestinians to every three Jews, but the next year saw much fewer Palestinians.

A curriculum and creative programs, including compassionate listening activities, continue to be discovered and refined. Ann said that the Israeli staff members who have worked the summer at Tawonga usually extend their visas to work this Peacemakers weekend, which falls close to the anniversary of 9/11. These young Israelis, having just finished their IDF service, have usually never met a Palestinian so personally. And they have some amazing breakthroughs.

Rachel Kaufman described **Creativity For Peace**, like the Peacemakers Camp in its third year. The program had 11 young women in its first summer, and now is up to 30 participants in two sessions. The age range is 14 to 17 years. There is also a year-around Sustained Dialogue program back home in Israel and Palestine.

Rachel began with a budget of $40,000 and is now up $106,000 annually. The camp accepts Israeli Jews, Israeli Palestinians, and West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, as well as Druze. And they plan to expand to include some Bedouins as well as Jews of Ethiopian descent.

The girls live and cook together in a private vacation home. Rachel said mostly compassionate dialogue and journal writing are used for the girls to explore their feelings toward each other. "We have translators on hand for when it gets really emotional," said Rachel. "And the meeting room is sometimes known as the "crying room."

The camp emphasizes integrated arts – photography, dance, drawing, pottery and music – to help each camper discover her creative voice.

Since the program is for teenage girls, they do some teen girl activities as well. "We go to the mall. We have pizza parties. We hike, and in the evening we knit or dance."

The first year, Rachel said, her main goal was to get the girls to listen to each other's stories. "We saw their understanding evolve and their perceptions change, and we didn't even ask for this," she said. "The bonding was incredible. When the last group flew back to Ben-Gurion, they knew they may not see the girls from Gaza for a long time. The parents were there, and it took two hours to separate them. They would not let go of each other."

The end of camp is marked by a Blessing Circle. At one Circle, several Israeli Jewish girls had mixed feelings about serving in the army. In contrast, last year a Palestinian girl said to an Israeli camper – her new best friend – "I want you to get assigned to Ramallah, so I can ride in your jeep and you can come to my house and we can have a slumber party."

Reena and Omar told about **Peace It Together**, which Reema initiated after after spending a summer volunteering at Creativity For Peace.

Reena didn't realize Peace Camp Canada was happening on the other side of the country that same year, and the two groups were meeting in Kalamazoo for the first time.

Reena first enlisted help from the Vancouver community, and got about 50 volunteers to sign up. Campers all came from Jerusalem and Bethlehem, chosen because the two cities are close to each other.

While some mistakes were made, Reena thought overall the program was successful. They will skip a year and reconvene in 2006.

Their three-week program began with the youth staying with host families when they first arrived. They were paired with someone of the "other."

After six days at a camp, they went on a 3-day wilderness adventure. They also presented a large public event for the Vancouver, BC community. Reena said the logistics of the event and the camp were exhausting. "One challenge is how to create intimacy, and balance that with all the public exposure and publicity," she said.

Omar said that the campers all really loved the fun stuff. They did a mix of kayaking, Frisbee, drama, and arts. "They were very reluctant to get into the heavy stuff. They told us, 'We have these great friendships and if we have to talk about the hard stuff, it will ruin our friendships.' We said, 'Too bad, we're going to do it anyway,' but they knew that's what they were there for."

Omar described an exercise they called Fishbowl. A national group sat in a smaller circle in the middle of the room. The group in the fishbowl had to answer questions that the participants had directed to each group beforehand.

"Some of the questions were really harsh, like 'Do you support suicide bombings?' Omar said. Everyone had to listen in complete silence, while each group answered the questions.

"People wanted to respond, but that they couldn't and had only to listen. That was the most intense part of what we did," he said. "It caused a lot of people to cry, and friendships to be momentarily damaged. But ultimately, it worked to bring people together, and led to dialogue afterwards."

Aviva and Yaakov from **JITLI, the Jacobs International Teen Leadership Institute** had spoken earlier. But felt moved to highlight what they believe is important: emphasizing and ensuring that participants were going to take leadership roles when they returned home from their shared journey that included training in San Diego, Spain, and Israel. It will include Gaza this coming summer.

"They are selected because they have some leadership experience," said Aviva. "We want them to be the next generation that makes a difference."

Len closed this seventh session by commending the weekend participants for "courage to move out of your own communities and toward the other. Whether we were coming at this from a faith perspective or not," he said, "in the lives we live every day, we are trying to heal the planet. I just feel really grateful that we all could do this."

Closing with ceremony and news media presence

After Sunday's lunch, the eighth and last session began with nine participants lighting the Source candle and eight others, while sharing their deeper thoughts. This session was

planned to model the last of step the public peace process, which includes cooperating and social outcomes – reaching out into the community, including others, expanding the circle.

Print and broadcast media were invited. Local television was present in the meeting room. The story of the camps and this weekend were told to the people of Michigan.

Channel 8 television broadcast the camp news that evening. "Peace-camp leaders build resolve in meeting here" headlined the Kalamazoo Gazette article, whose text included:

"'We have been part of a bigger movement to create peace between Israel and Palestine, but it has felt like we have been separate entities,' said Henry Carse, director of Kids4Peace, an interfaith initiative that sponsors summer camps linking children from the Middle East with young people from the United States and Canada. "Now I feel like we are part of a team. I also feel like we have been challenged to mature to become better peacemakers.'

"For the first time since the peace-camp movement in North America began in Maine in 1993, representatives from the camps met to share stories, discuss approaches and offer support to one another.

"'I always thought that peace wouldn't happen in my lifetime, Now I think it might be right around the corner," said Maha Husseini, a Kids4Peace supporter who lives in Jerusalem. "I want to thank the Fetzer Institute for having us here.'"

Elie Wiesel said: "People become the stories they hear and the stories they tell." We had begun by listening to one another's personal stories. In that lodge, in those sessions, we all affected one another. We ended by telling the larger community the story of the camps, ourselves, our weekend together. We went home closer, more prepared for life, better – not unlike the campers.

EXAMPLE CAMP OUTCOME: JOINT STATEMENT

This document was prepared by the participants of Peace Camp Canada 2004, on their own initiative. It was signed by all 20 participants.

The Palestinians:

After all we have been through, we would like to share our thoughts for the sake of the friendships that have been planted in our hearts in the past ten days.

We will never forget a single moment that we spent here or those wonderful people that we met. We thought at the beginning that the Israelis did not want peace – but we were wrong. And now, we promise to continue this path of friendship, peace and harmony by keeping in touch with you all. We promise to work together for keeping the same goal we came all the way to Canada to achieve – to understand the other side, and to listen to them and also to share our opinions.

Peace Camp Canada showed us that these goals can be reached. We understand your points of view, and we will always look for the truth before even thinking of judging people... and remember that we are all human beings despite the differences in our race, religion, and beliefs.

We used to believe that peace is something that is far away, that we cannot achieve, but now we would like to say that peace is the ability to communicate with others. We understand that we all have a right as human beings to exist and have an identity in an independent, free country.

We will share our lessons as Palestinians with our own society and encourage others to live and be a part of this experience.

The Israelis:

We, the Israeli delegates are proud and fortunate to be here with you at the first Peace Camp Canada. Our views have changed and developed and we hereby pronounce our obligations to you and to Peace Camp Canada.

We believe that the Palestinian people have the right for their independent country in Palestine, and this belief grew stronger and deeper throughout our days in Peace Camp Canada.

We will do our best to help others see and feel what we have seen and felt.
For us, Peace camp Canada does not end after 10 days, rather the real challenge is to make our friendships last and keep promoting peace back home. We commit ourselves to help as much as we can to make sure others can experience what we have.
During our discussions, as heated as they were, we Palestinians and Israelis together have managed to stay calm and listen to the other side. We will do our best not to be blinded by anger and events when we return to Israel, and always try to see the full picture.
We each oblige ourselves when in the army to always act in a humane manner as our conscience dictates to us.

You are all our friends and we are privileged to have shared this experience with you.

THE PROCESS: INTERVIEW OF A FACILITATOR

Melodye Feldman is the executive director of Seeking Common Ground, the organization that supports two different programs. Building Bridges for Peace is the first, and Face to Face, Faith to Faith is the second.

Melodye is a social worker by background. Before starting Building Bridges for Peace she worked with battered women. Melodye has been working in this field for over a decade, and therefore has a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't. She is one of the most experienced Middle East camp conveners in the world. An interview with her follows.

From her work with battered women, Melodye wanted to develop a program that was pro-active. Additionally, she "saw the power in bringing people together to create community" out of people with opposing views. The Middle East became her area of focus because she had spent a lot of time there.

She envisioned a program where teenage girls would build relationships with each other. They would learn how to listen and dialogue with each other, while training to be leaders.

"I call my work pre-conflict management," said Melodye. "There is conflict management, and mediation, but I call this pre-conflict management because of the group I'm working with. I believe that we're in the first stage of the process of having to build a relationship with each other."

These programs combine structured workshops with living, eating, and having fun together, all with the main goal of allowing the girls to get to know each other as individuals. Melodye was coming from a social work model. When she began, she had to think about why she was doing it in the first place. Only then, could she begin to think about methodology.

Melodye wanted a small program, to create intimacy. From the outset, she envisioned the summer program as phase I, realizing that without follow-up programming once the girls returned home, all that they gained that summer would be lost.

"The summer is for getting to know each other and building relationships. Having built these relationships and formed a group identity, the follow-up is going back to our countries, and looking at these issues intra-country and the other is inter-group, meaning the issues in their community."

At Building Bridges, the girls come from three distinct groups: Israeli Jews, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. There are also Americans, both Jews and non-Jews.

Melodye explained that she chose to have only teen women after talking to Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East.

“You’ve got to involve the community you’re going into,” said Melodye. “I was an outsider as an American, and I’m not just doing this for me. I asked questions about what they need.”

The people Melodye met with told her that there was lack in leadership programs for young women.

While some have criticized her for this, saying that men are the ones who are creating all of the problems, Melodye was told that women need to be involved in the process as well, especially in building a more democratic Palestinian state.

Additionally, she said, “there were some leadership programs for men and women, and more men were showing up. For women, part of it is the culture, and part of it is intimidation.”

Also, some parents are more comfortable sending their daughters if they know the program is for only young women.

“This also gives them the ability to learn self-confidence and self-esteem, then later to feel more comfortable working with men.”

Melodye has discovered that the techniques she uses with Building Bridges for Peace are transferable to her other program which young men attend as well.

The follow-up program is for leadership and training. “Bringing people together on an ongoing basis reinforces what they’ve learned,” said Melodye.

Financially, it was impossible to bring every participant back. So in the leadership and training program, the girls recommit to meeting for another year.

“Once you teach someone to be a leader, it makes sense to allow them to lead,” said Melodye. “So we started hiring them as staff.”

She doesn’t believe that one has to go through the program to fully empathize. However, when it comes to leadership training, it is additive and helpful to give someone the ability to teach what she’s learned.

In the beginning, Melodye had a lot of college students staffing the program, but now 98 percent of staff members are past participants. The staff-to-participant ratio is almost 1 to 2 – 20 staff members for about 40 girls.

These days there are more Palestinian returnees than Israelis, for a simple reason: most Israelis go into the army. “We lose them for a number of years,” said Melodye.

There is a positive side of this. The Palestinians were more leery of the program, and now they are less so.

When the girls first arrive in the United States, they don't go immediately to camp. They stay with families for a few days. This is for a number of reasons, Melodye said. One, they simply need to get used to the altitude of Denver. Also, most of them have their own stereotypes about Americans, and it's a good way to get them challenging their own preconceptions right away.

An early orientation exercise asks the girls what their fears and challenges are. They are also asked "What responsibility will you take in your learning while you're here?"

The girls are divided into integrated groups. "That gives them the opportunity to hear that they're not the only one who wants to leave, or is terrified," said Melodye. They are also asked what they are most afraid of.

They are told that their learning process is their own responsibility. "We say that it's not only the staff teaching you, but you have to take some responsibility for your own learning," she said.

In another exercise, the girls team up with a buddy who is not from their own ethnic group. They take turns tracing each other's outline on butcher paper on the floor. Parts of their outlines intersect each other. They then fill in the outlines with qualities about themselves, and in the section that overlaps, they fill in the characteristics they have in common.

"We ask them questions like 'What do you in your spare time?' 'What's important to you?'"

"This is a way to enter them into dialogue with each other, without being too threatening to begin with," said Melodye. "It's a way to see how they come together on matters that have meaning for them."

Inevitably, the girls are surprised to learn what they have in common with someone from the other side.

Before going to camp, they also do a day-long ropes course. It's good for team-building, and serves as both a group challenge and a personal challenge.

"This is a metaphor for our philosophy – it's a challenge by choice," said Melodye. And they are able "to see how far they will go, whether they will stop or go further."

Then, they go to camp. Even at this point, many of the girls who have begun to befriend the "other" are surprised to learn that they will be rooming with the "other" as well.

The program begins every morning with what Melodye calls a "peace pole." She stressed that it is important to have recreational time in between the workshops. The workshops can be tense, she said, and it is a good exercise to reduce that tension with recreation before the next phase of the day.

Additionally, she is a stickler for time. Just as a therapy session lasts only 50 minutes, sessions must end on time, even if things are left unresolved.

Melodye emphasized that in any activity where the girls must partner up, she allows them to select their partners themselves, but insists that they pair up with someone who is an "other."

"I'm encouraging them to make the decision as to how far out they want to go," she said.

"We also talk about stretching yourself, feeling comfortable and being uncomfortable. I tell them that this is a two-week program, and you may not have this opportunity again. This is a safe environment to explore and experience, and we're always going to ask you to stretch more than you're comfortable with."

In the beginning the work is on identity politics. "We're trying to instill in them where we come from with our perspectives, without attaching value judgments, but understanding why identity plays such an important role," said Melodye.

The girls are asked how they identify themselves. In a workshop on identity, the girls are asked to write their names in the middle of a circle they draw. In smaller circles around the first one, they are asked to write adjectives that describe themselves. Then, they pair up with someone who is an "other" and talk about what they wrote.

Over the years, Melodye has seen that it is the Palestinians who are most likely to identify themselves as Palestinian first, while to the others nationality is less important.

"The other kids identify more with a variety of adjectives, and this is important because it helps the groups understand each other," she said. "We also ask them to talk about their names, and where they derive from."

By doing this, she said, it helps the girls put a name to a face, and it helps them move away from objectifying the enemy. They see that person as someone more than just an object.

The identity discussion is always interesting, Melodye said, especially since at one time Palestinians didn't have Palestinian passports. Now they do, but the East Jerusalem residents still don't have them.

Great emphasis is placed on communication skills in the beginning, she said. The girls need to know how to listen to one another.

"The girls already want to start talking about the issues," said Melodye. "We don't tell them they can't, but they get impatient. So we bring them together and let them."

Melodye explained how a usual dynamic can be expected. Once the girls are told they can discuss the difficult issues, they are quiet at first, but then the silence quickly evolves into a shouting match.

"What we're trying to show them is that they don't have skills to listen, and this frustrates them even more," she said.

Shortly after, the staff leads the girls in an exercise done with paper bags. The bags are taped against a wall, with "trigger" words attached to them, like "settler, Zionist, terrorist." The girls anonymously write their associations with each word on slips of paper, and drop them in the bags. Then butcher paper is put on the wall, and all the responses are written out on the paper. The girls are then allowed to see what their peers have written, without knowing who said what.

"This becomes very negative, very fast," said Melodye. The girls are made to discuss the issues again, and they still don't have the skills.

Melodye explained how in between these difficult workshops is a lot of time where the girls do art projects and physical activity, and have free time and recreation. She is a stickler for time, she said, just as a therapist always ends a session right on the dot.

"We need for that tension to be there," she said. "Plus, much of the learning really takes place outside of these formal groups, when they're together and do something else. We could be in session all day, but that's not where the true breakthroughs will happen."

To get the girls talking, another experience involves each group making a timeline of its own history. "We say to them they can start wherever they want historically, and go to wherever they want."

This exercise helps the girls in a visual sense to see the history of the other side. The girls often don't know their own histories so well, and forget important dates. They also argue with each other over when certain events happened.

Melodye recalled one summer when two girls had people they knew who died in the same bombing of a Haifa restaurant. That restaurant was known as friendly to both Arabs and Jews who ate there regularly. In that tragedy, both campers, a Jew and an Arab, had lost somebody close to them.

The girls usually continue to ask the staff when they can really talk. Melodye explains that they still need to learn to listen properly, but that they are free to talk about whatever they want, whenever they want.

They often get frustrated through the listening exercises. "What they really want is a showcase to really 'show the other' how much 'you've hurt me,' and I won't buy into that," said Melodye.

Melodye leads the teen women through discussions about gender, and does exercises that unite them as women. Too, they watch films on the conflict, to trigger interaction.

There's also an experience about power, which proves to be dramatic because the Palestinians come in with the mindset that if they were in the position of power, they wouldn't oppress others as they are oppressed. Yet, given the opportunity, some of them take to that role very easily.

A big breakthrough commonly happens, but at a different point every summer, Melodye explained. There always comes a point, she said, when the majority of the girls are really ready, but some are holding back. There are those who the staff can see as the leaders, and the others tend to follow.

Melodye and the staff are always watching the girls, to see where they are in their own process. "My staff and I are always reevaluating the participants, and there must be some fluidity in the programming," she said. "It's a delicate balance. As a therapist, I go into it with what I'd like to see happen with the client, but I don't have a whole lot of say over that. I have to see where the client is, and where they might be ready and not ready to expose more of themselves."

Melodye described last summer (2004) when she had a group of girls that was noticeably more difficult than in years prior. "I was finding myself angry at some of the participants, and my staff was kind of lethargic," she said. "At a certain point, we agreed that 'something's not right here. We need to figure this out.'"

The staff meets on a daily basis, so finally, Melodye asked her staff to figure out together what was preventing the breakthrough from happening.

"If we're stuck, the kids are stuck, and we're reflecting what they're going through," she said. "So we had a meeting to talk about what was going on for us."

The staff shared their own frustrations, and had a good cry together. They acknowledged that they had to work harder, and at the same time, have more fun together. And then slowly, they started noticing a shift in the participants, as well.

"The shift occurs at different times," she said. "Sometimes, it's the night before the kids are going home. Sometimes it happens within five or six days. That summer, it happened three days before they went home. At a certain point, the girls no longer are asking permission to talk, they're just doing it. And at a certain time, they start to speak up and take more ownership."

Toward the end of camp, they have a night of silence, where they have a ritual after dinner, to guide them into being silent, and they don't speak until the following morning after breakfast. The idea is to get them to reflect about what it's going to be like for them once they go home.

The silence is broken with an exercise that Melodye calls “Heart to Heart,” in which each girl is partnered with another who is not of her nationality.

“These kids have probably never physically touched each other,” said Melodye. “They come with images of the other as aliens or monsters.”

The girls are asked to find someone they don’t know well in the group, someone they consider “other.” It may even be someone they were afraid of, or still are afraid of. They are told to look at one another. And then, they are told to ask permission, and then find the pulse on one another’s wrists. Then they do the same with the artery in their necks. Then they place their hands on the other’s breastbone to feel their hearts, while they continue to look at each other.

“This can be very powerful, because they’ve never touched their enemy, and they realize that ‘she feels like me,’” said Melodye.

Then they start talking about what it will be like when they go home.

At some point, Melodye said, she needs to give the girls what she calls the “Melodye speech.” She tells them that they’re not working hard enough.

“I tell them: ‘This is your opportunity and you’re letting it go by.’ We get into the statistics of how many people have died on each side. ‘Is this what you want for your family?’”

Melodye tells the girls to work harder. She explains the follow-up program, and how they will attend a retreat and have to be responsible for continuing to stay involved.

As for the breakthrough, Melodye said she can never ensure that it’s going to happen. Commonly the staff, themselves past participants, are much better than she at evaluating where the individual participants are in the process. They’ll often tell Melodye which participants may be saying what the staff wants to hear, but inside, has not made the shift.

“As the practitioner, I have to be vigilant and aware as to whether a breakthrough has happened or not, and what more is needed in the absence of change. It has never not happened, but sometimes with certain individuals it doesn’t appear in the form one expects.”

Melodye recognizes that she doesn’t have the ultimate power to ensure that each girl will go through that transformation. And she also recognizes that some girls may not experience it while at camp. The inner change may take months to take root, or the young woman may change years later. “The way I see it, they’re learning something while they’re here, but it could be months or years before they really make this change,” she said.

Melodye shared a stunning story about a past participant, an Israeli Palestinian, who seemed to authentically connect with the staff and her fellow participants. At the end of the summer, a brunch was arranged for many of the program's funders and supporters.

Melodye chose the Arab girl to speak about her experiences. In front of the large crowd of camp supporters, she fell back on her old rhetoric.

She called the camp a "sham" and said that Melodye was a racist. She said the staff treated the participants like the Nazis treated the Jews.

Melodye was shocked. "It was a defining moment for me as a practitioner, because I realized that I just don't have the power over these kids. They are individuals and their own people, and I just don't have that power over them. It was a great learning experience for me."

Melodye went over and hugged this girl, and thanked her for her comments. She also thought that this was the end of the program, that these funders would never give her money again.

But rather, the opposite happened.

"The next day I got all these phone calls," Melodye said. "People said 'What a fantastic program, and the fact that she could say this out loud in front of all these people. You must be doing something right, because it proved wrong where she said they weren't allowed to be themselves and express their feelings."

Yet, the staff remained upset. The girl went home, and Melodye did not hear from her for several years. But then she heard through the grapevine that the young woman was doing peace work within her community.

Then, Melodye heard from a peace organization in Jerusalem where the woman was applying to work. She had put Melodye as a reference. Melodye called her up and they had a great conversation. But Melodye had to ask her why she said those things all those years ago.

"I told her, 'I want to take you back and remind you of those things you said, not because I want to embarrass you and because I'm upset, but because I want to ask you what led you to where you are now.'"

This woman, now in her mid-20s, told Melodye that she was young and very angry at that time. While Melodye can't remember her exact words, her explanation was something like the following: "This program was the first place that allowed me to express my anger and my feelings. And when I had the opportunity to thank you, instead I trashed you and the program. I did it because I was scared of all the feelings I was having. My whole life, I was told to hate Jews, and experienced a lot of discrimination. And in that group, I

didn't experience any of it. I needed to assimilate it, and I needed to make you angry with me."

The young Israeli-Palestinian was awarded a scholarship to go abroad for college, but she decided to stay in Israel and attend Hebrew University. She said: "At a certain point, I recognized that I had to take responsibility. Not only the Jewish-Israelis were wrong, but people were wrong in my own community as well. We had to change things, too, and changing things meant I had to stay in my community. I needed to have a little more maturity to see all of that."

Melodye warned that there has to be a "consciousness on the part of the practitioner to understand human behavior. I approach it from this psychological, social perspective. There are so many layers of complexity, and so many points of positive change, that it's not so easy to see it all, as we are making our friendships."

When peace comes to the region, Melodye believes that the girls who have gone through her program will be leading the way as the peacemakers. "These are the kids who will have something to remember that was positive about the 'other,' and be able to make these friendships last. I really believe that."

Melodye also stated that it is vital that practitioners continue to educate themselves on the conflict and stay neutral – for both – and not take sides in the conflict.

"I have serious concerns with groups that take sides," she said. There are too many groups out there that call themselves peacemakers that are more pro-one side than the other," she said.

"I have to center myself. My job is to listen to the stories of both sides and bring them together."

PHOTOGRAPHS

Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, Michigan

We began with personal stories, in dyads

We explored our personal motivations, in groups of fours or fives.


Returning to the large group, we assimilated what we were discovering together.

Mealtime – more learning and bonding.




More inspiration, spontaneity, and socializing.


Growing closer.

The Palestinians read their poetry.


Alexandra Wall documented the weekend


Sharing collective joy and inventing the future.


Moments to ponder what matters.

Off to Western Michigan U. for inspiration.


Program Director Eric Nelson and President Tom Beech of our host Fetzer Institute.


At “The Children of Abraham Project” with a sold-out Kalamazoo audience of 500.


Deep exploration always included joy and ceremony.


Maya, 4-month-old daughter of Reena Lazar from “Peace It Together” in British Columbia, Canada, was at nearly every meeting. She reminded us of our purpose.


TV and press reporters attended our last meeting, before we left after a fruitful weekend.

Kalamazoo's Channel 8 television news reported on the weekend.

The story of the camps was told the next morning in the Kalamazoo Gazette Tuesday, 02 Feb 2005.

Len Traubman is among those participating in a group hug Monday, ending a weekend retreat that brought together leaders of youth camps that promote healing between Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Peace-camp leaders build resolve in meeting here

By Chris Meehan
388-8412

Peace-camp workers from all over North America ended their meeting Monday afternoon with the lighting of candles and heartfelt expressions of hope for the future.

Gathered in a circle at the Seasons Retreat Center at the Fetzer Institute, Israeli, Palestinian, Christian