

## Care of the Earth - Turning Mines to Vines

*Heidi Kuhn*

The vision for planting the Roots of Peace on earth was etched in my heart as a mother of four children in September 1997.

Following the death of the late Princess Diana of Wales, it was truly an epiphany and a clear vision of turning MINES TO VINES—replacing the scourge of landmines with bountiful vineyards worldwide. The image of our Blessed Mother Mary giving birth to her precious child, Jesus, is an icon of a whole and beautiful child—never imagining the horrors of limbs or lives which are lost to the perils of landmines which would be planted in both the soils and souls of our one earth over 2000 years later.

And, so, as a mother of four children from a place in Marin County, I set out on a humble quest to remove landmines from our one earth. This journey led me around the world, and ultimately to the Fields of Bethlehem to engage both Palestinians and Israelis to do the impossible—turn ‘seeds of terror’ into ‘seeds of hope’ by working together to remove landmines in a Muslim village located only four miles away from where Jesus Christ was born. It took over a dozen visits and over half a million dollars to remove these deadly seeds of terror from The Holy Land, as our one earth is now ‘holy’ when there are landmines in the ground. The blood of Jesus deeply taught us to forgive the trespasses of those who maim or kill, and to dig deeper for peace.

Turning blood to wine, we are turning killing fields into vineyards and fresh grapevines worldwide. The roots of peace are planted in the ground, with faith that the fruit of the vine and work of human hands will cultivate a harvest of hope...

A landmines represents a seed of hatred—cold and manmade. Yet, there are an estimated 70 million landmines sown in both the soil and soul today in over 70 countries. The footstep of a child or the boot of a soldier are at risk to these indiscriminate seeds of destruction which continue to maim and kill long after the

war has ended. As we remove these landmines from our one earth, we are able to plant vineyards which literally embody the Biblical phrase, “I am the vine, you are the branches’. Together, we are able to see life emerge from the lifeless soil which was sown with war from within. The fruit of the vine and the work of human hands are intertwined with love, as economic empowerment for peace is defined for local communities to thrive. The business model for peace begins to emerge in modern times, and local economies are able to witness a logical reason to turn ‘swords into plowshares’ and ‘mines to vines’ as defined in the Isaiah prophesy (Isaiah 2:4-5). Such words from the Old Testament are respected by Muslims, Jews and Catholics alike, which respect the seeds we have in common rather than those which separate us. And, in countries such as Vietnam where there is no religion, we respect the human heart—which should remain whole—without the risk of a landmine blowing it apart.

*Roots of Peace* is a humanitarian, non-political, non-religious organization working worldwide. Yet, it was given birth to from the heart of a Catholic mother of four children. After working around the world for over seventeen years, it has become one of my own children, and the heart may never be cut out of its’ essence. It is the invisible hand which continues nurture from afar, as it guides the various programs with a universal message of love and care for the earth.

As we strive to heal our one Mother Earth from the perils of landmines, our life work impacts our *own* children. This is a brief overview of the impact from my own personal perspective, as I care for the earth and its’ people:

My footsteps have traveled the world with a universal message as a mother to ‘plant the roots of peace’ on earth. The Care of the Earth begins with the removal of a single landmine. From my humble perspective, it has been a small miracle to turn an idea into reality on such a large scale—impacting millions of farmers and families around the world.

My first visit to a minefield began during the first month of the new millennium in January 2000 to Croatia, to witness the aftermath of the Balkan War. The devastation of Vukovar, a panoramic city along the Danube River, was my first introduction to

the impact of war and the loss of limbs among neighbors. I vowed to return on Mother's Day with my own daughter, Kyleigh, age 13, to teach family lessons not found in a textbook. Witnessing the impact of war and landmines, she ultimately grew up to raise over 50 million American 'pennies' to remove landmines and build schools and soccer fields for girls in Afghanistan.

In September 2001, I took my oldest son, Brooks to the minefields of Dragalic, Croatia, with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jody Williams. Together, we were able to see the impact of our efforts to raise funds from legendary vintners in the Napa Valley such as Miljenko 'Mike' Grgich and Robert Mondavi who literally turned MINES TO VINES—replacing the scourge of landmines with bountiful vineyards across the world. Turning blood into wine, we cleared thousands of acres of land and restored grapevines.

As a young man, Brooks witnessed this work and met brave young landmine victims who fought internal battles as they adjusted their new prosthetic limbs to conquer a vineyard or play in a soccer field. This visit to The Balkans was only a few days prior to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the United States of America, as we flew home through New York City to see the Twin Towers. Witnessing such devastation with his mother on the sidelines of history left a profound impact, and Brooks ultimately chose a career path as a medical doctor to heal the hearts of many.

My youngest son, Christian, who I gave birth to following a diagnosis of cervical cancer, was a baby in my arms when I had the vision to turn MINES TO VINES. He was my 'gift of life' and my promise to give back life to others—never imagining the struggle. Christian has traveled with me to the minefields of the world holding my hand in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, and Vietnam. He is versed on the perils of landmines, and has grown far beyond his years. Christian has sacrificed both of his parents' time as they have traveled extensively to Africa to remove landmines in Angola. As a small boy, he understood that thousands of elephants were at risk due to the 'thunder in the ground' which they sense with their giant paws due to millions of mines planted by war. He understood as a child deep within his heart the need for his family to travel to war-zones, risking their lives so that other people and animals may live in peace.

And, my son Tucker, is the proud Director of Operations, and has served in Vietnam to DRAFT peace, not DRAFT war.

Raised in our Kuhn family, he deeply understands the risk of an estimated 3.5 million landmines and unexploded ordnance sown in Vietnam over 38 years after the war has ended. He has lived in Quang Tri along the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel for over 3 years to remove the landmines and teach the farmers to grow high value crops such as cacao and pepper, and redefine the economics of peace. Tucker will escort me to The Holy Land to meet with His Holiness Pope Francis in The Fields of Bethlehem—a mother and son—life goes full circle.

Peace is a family business. And, I am so very proud to be working closely with my husband, Gary, my life partner for the past 37 years. Together, we are turning MINES TO VINES—one minefields at a time—turning ‘seeds of terror’ into ‘seeds of hope’ for families around the world to live in peace.

This Spring 2014, The Taliban attacked my home in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing a young girl at my gates. Now, more than ever, I need to be strong voice for mothers around the world to lead with love, not hatred in their hearts. Together, we must remove these seeds of terror from our one earth, and plant the roots of peace on earth. May this message be heard from the heart of Bethlehem, where a mother once gave birth to a child...

The Care of the Earth begins in our hearts, our homes, our communities, our countries, and ultimately to our world.