

Novel Rights

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The Tremendous Power of Literature/Foreword from “Freedom”

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A very famous Israeli poem, written by Shmuel Hasfari, called ‘The Children of Winter 1973’ describes the process by which the children who were conceived during the 1973 Yom Kippur War become disillusioned with the promises of the old generation of a peaceful future with no wars.

One line in the poem says: ‘You promised to do everything for us, to turn an enemy into a loved one’; it remained the echoing unfulfilled promise for the following generations. This poem became the pledge taken by one of Israel’s most loved prime ministers, Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by an Israeli citizen fourteen years ago. Rabin, who maintained for most of his public life the image of a handsome, brave and much admired soldier, decided to abandon the path of hate and dedicated his later years to keeping the promise ‘to turn an enemy into a loved one’. He used Hasfari’s poem as a source of inspiration, and in times of great grief allowed its words to fill him with the patience, strength and hope necessary to shed off the heavy armour of a warrior and wear the uniform of peace.

I am a child of the winter of ’73 and, like many of my friends, was conceived during the war. Life has this strange habit of continuing to create life, even in a reality of death and hate. And war has this strange habit of invading the very essence, the DNA, of the conceived children of this land and creating yet another generation of warriors, laying upon them the heavy burden of continuing the conflict and the hate. So by the time we enter this world, we are already filled with anger.

Our reality, packed with wars, fears and traumatic events, just triggers these feelings and turns them into a real burning hate, ensuring that no generation will be able ‘to turn an enemy into a loved one’ and war or conflict will continue forever.

War is not predestined; it is created by human beings. Even if we are full of anger, we can choose to control it and to fight ourselves in order to change the way we feel. Following this reasoning, I decided five years ago to abandon my way as a ‘warrior’ and to follow the tremendous power of literature, allowing it to take me into another reality.

My journey began with my involvement with an Italian novel by the name *Prima di lasciarsi* (*Before We Say Goodbye*),

whose author, Gabriella Ambrosio, is featured in this anthology with the story ‘Sticko’. The novel is based on a true story and describes the last hours in the life of a seventeen-year-old Palestinian girl from the Dheisheh refugee camp who committed a suicide bombing attack at a supermarket in Kiryat Yovel, Jerusalem, in 2002, and her victim, a young Israeli girl of the same age from Jerusalem. But this surprising novel is much more than story about two young girls who come from either side of the conflict and, ironically, also have a striking physical resemblance to one another. It offers readers an opportunity to wear a uniform of peace and to see every human in human eyes, to make even an enemy into a loved one.

The novel opened my warrior's eyes, as I believe the poem did Rabin's. It nurtured my depressed feelings of compassion and hope, and allowed me to shed my heavy armour and to wear the uniform of a human rights defender. It wasn't easy. My angry core – the warrior inside of me, mixed with the post trauma I had suffered as a result of my work as a TV news reporter, covering dozens of suicide bombings – had strongly welded the warrior's shield into my body and I was refusing to let it go. In order to walk along this new path, I had to adopt a point of view that would allow me to stop being scared and to judge my reality better, a point of view that was based on my personal judgement and a wider perspective of knowledge given to me by all kinds of sources, including Amnesty International's wonderful research from all over the world, Arab novels and poems, and much more. Unfortunately, these sources are still outside of Israeli mainstream conversation, therefore beyond most warrior's eyes.

Once I started walking down the path of human rights, I began to feel sorrow for all the years I had walked around with my infected DNA and had seen reality through an eye full of anger. I could no longer see humans as my enemies and I learned to cherish them more, and in this way to cherish myself more. Because of this, my warrior shield was slowly pushed away from my body, leaving me with a feeling of great relief and love that I had not felt properly before. I was able to develop for the first time a strong love for life, for humanity and for the tremendous power of literature.

Literature can be as powerful as life itself. It can be like our prophecy. It can inspire us to change our world and give us the comfort, hope, passion and strength that we need in order to fight to create a better future for us, as well as all humanity. We just need to keep on reading and to allow the tremendous power of literature to enter our hearts and lead us to our own path.

“Freedom” – A Collection Of Short Stories Celebrating The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights”. Published in association with Amnesty International. Stories by more than 30 renowned authors, including Paulo Coelho, A.L. Kennedy, Ariel Dorfman, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helen Dunmore, James Meek and Kate Atkinson, each focusing on one right in the Declaration.

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