

## Reflection and Prayer time: 1000 Candles, 1000 Cranes

Every few years on Peace Sunday (the Sunday closest to August 6 or August 9, in memory of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in World War II) my husband and I get asked to sing at church a song called "1000 Candles, 1000 Cranes." The 1000 candles refers to the actual aftermath of the bomb and 1000 cranes refers to the book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr based on the story of Sadako Sasaki. Sadako was said to have lived in Hiroshima and was diagnosed with leukemia from radiation. Her friend challenged her to make 1000 origami paper cranes because supposedly that allowed you to be granted a wish. The song is not about Sadako but references the 1000 cranes.

The song is exceedingly sad as it describes the grief of a mother for her sons who died in the war and the grief of a daughter who lost her mother in the bombing. It's hard to get through and I once had to practice it 18 times before I could sing it without sobbing or voice breaking. Yesterday before we sang it at church my husband drew a Kermit the Frog face and a unicorn and a rainbow to try to keep me from choking up. It's rough.

But the song is an important one in that at the end a relationship is formed that doesn't totally eradicate the sorrow for loved ones who passed away too soon, but that that shows that hope and love can triumph over the very worst of circumstances; that two people who have every reason to continue to have resentment and to sow and nurse hatred find a new way forward in a restorative relationship.

I encourage you to listen to the details of this relationship emerging between two unlikely people who found "family" and new deep rooted relationship. This is the duo Small Potatoes performing "1000 Candles, 1000 Cranes."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C48vLQxLtBw>

In 2003 my husband Dan went on a Witness for Peace trip to Nicaragua and wrote this blog entry.

### **This forgiveness is no small thing**

Dona Miriam is a determined, powerful woman. I met her in her village of El Regadio, a small town in Nicaragua. I traveled there this summer with an organization called Witness for Peace. Witness for Peace tries to influence U.S. foreign policy by educating U.S. citizens on our impact in Latin America.

Dona Miriam has lived her whole life in El Regadio. She makes her living by farming there and working in a farmer's cooperative.

In the 1980's, El Regadio was often visited by war. The U.S.-funded Contra paramilitaries were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government and, because El Regadio was such a firmly Sandinista village, the Contras made regular trips there.

Although war is never pleasant, it is evident that the Contras were not the "Freedom Fighters" that President Reagan declared them to be during his time in office. The people in El Regadio clearly told us this much.

Contras targeted civilian populations, kidnapping, killing and torturing men, women and children. The Contras were terrorists.

Dona Miriam knows. The Contras killed two of her sons.

And yet, when I met Miriam, she was sitting next to Jose. Jose and Miriam have worked together to organize the farmers around El Regadio.

Jose used to be a Contra soldier.

I was in the presence of forgiveness.

How did this come to be? How could Miriam put aside her feelings of loss caused by the Contras? How could she sit there – smiling! – next to this former terrorist?

I listened in awe as Don Jose told the group I was with how he had become involved with the Contras. He told us that he was “just a farmer.” That was all he ever wanted to be.

But in the 1980's, Jose told us that everyone was choosing sides – you had to be a Contra or a Sandinista. The CIA had been busy demonizing the Sandinistas, saying they were spreading communism across Nicaragua. The stories said that, if communism spread, so would poverty and loss of land.

And so, Jose joined the Contras.

The Contras agreed to lay down their weapons in 1990 when Sandinistan president Daniel Ortega lost the election. That was the end of the military fighting.

However, in the years that followed, Don Jose told us that poverty and loss of land was rampant. All he wanted was the right to farm his land in peace but being a Contra did not bring security to his farming, nor did ousting Ortega.

In the years that ensued, Jose realized that the war only led to destruction and hate and that his plight was with his fellow farmers. If he were to survive as a farmer, his allegiance would have to be with the farmers in El Regadio.

With Miriam.

And Miriam, for her part, smiled at her coworker and graciously acknowledged that it had been a hard time for everyone.

And that was it. Don Jose had been forgiven.

These fictional and true stories of forgiveness and restoration make me so glad that our organization leads in the important and life-changing work of restorative justice and reconciliation.

As we move forward today, may we be willing to remember the events of the past and learn from them and may we be bold enough to believe in the unlimited radical power of hope and love, fostered by empathy and compassion. Thanks be to God.