

Stones to Silver

A transformative journey

By Ashok and Florina Xavier, MA'04

It was a warm summer day of 2008 when the war was still going on in Sri Lanka. Ashok and me were visiting some of the affected areas in Vavuniya. One particular village was quite eerie, there were hardly any people in the village. Those who lived there were living in fear, one of the fears as expressed by the women was fear of the ghosts. The women said that they saw shadows and the breeze would blow gently like someone was passing by etc. I was super scared and wanted to leave the village immediately but Ashok was still talking to some of the people and so I mustered the courage and began to walk alone. It was not dark and there were people all around and so I wasn't expecting any ghosts. I was troubled and wanted to cry, the emotions were running high, fear of the ghost, the war and the bombing, poverty, lack of facilities, name it and they had it, yet they lived.

As I walked I picked up stones, there were some beautiful quartz in that village. I was in a daze, just kept walking and picking up the stones. Along with the people I was also traumatized and walking through that village was a way in which I was coping. Ashok was back from his meeting and we were ready to leave. He saw me with my dupatta (Indian stole) full of stones. He asked me what I was going to do with the stones? As a response, all I could do was just stare at him. He knew from that look of mine that he couldn't reason with me. I brought back the 2 kilo of stones with me. After reaching home, I let it sit on the table, Ashok was not amused with a pile of stones sitting in the living room. It sat there for a couple of days and then he told me that I should do something about it. I was annoyed, after he left, I was going to throw the stones away, just I was picking them up, an idea struck me. I took some copper wire from one of the old electrical wires and wound it around the stone. The copper looked great on the quartz and I made a find turn of the copper and made a loop, now I had a pendant ready. I wore it on my chain and it looked good. I then made a few more and left it on the table. When Ashok got home, he saw it but didn't say anything, I was

disappointed. The next day when he got back home, he had a package for me, when I opened it, I found, silver wire, silver, earring hooks, a plier and a cutter. He brought me accessories and tools to make jewelry. I was thrilled, I made a few more and pendants and made earrings as well. He encouraged me. In a few days, I was leaving for Oxford to attend the Short term course on forced migration. He asked me to take my kit so that I could work on my jewelry there. While there spend some time every evening making them. One day one of my classmates came to me my room to borrow something and she saw the jewelry that I was making, and asked me about it. I gave her the whole story. She told me that I should share this and perhaps sell it to the people attending the course. We were about 80 participants from 60 countries.

Every weekend we had a party and that Friday she booked a table for me to display my things. I set my jewelry out so that I could tell the story. I wanted to tell the story and let people know what was going on in Sri Lanka. A lot of people came saw the jewelry and listened to my story, many also wanted to buy the jewelry. I was sold out in less than an hour. It was a grand success, I had some stones left in my room and I had some orders as well. I made around 500 pounds.

As soon as I returned home, Ashok made contact with the NGO which in turn contacted the village and the money was handed over to the people. To me it was true story of transformation. It was a personal transformation in which both of us played an important role. We were able to see how a negative energy can be transformed and made useful and special. We went back to the village in Sri Lanka and told them our transformative story. They were happy to hear that, they told us that they used the money to buy some solar lights for the village. The war had just ended when we went back and they were hoping that things will get better soon. We were glad that we were able to bring some light to that village.

Did You See?

**This poem was written on the 12 May 2009, during the peak of the war in Sri Lanka. I was in Trinco where the office vehicles were used to transport food items in the affected areas. This imaginary conversation is between the cycle tyre that is stationed in the office and the car tyre that returns from the field.*

Did you see the blood on the trees?
I heard you were out there in the carnage!
Did you see dead bodies floating in the lake?
While you drove through the village.
Did you see mothers wailing over their dead children
As you rushed through the slush
Did you hear the firing and shooting?
As you ducked your way into the bush

Said the cycle tyre to the car tyre

I saw mothers clutching children not knowing who they belonged to
I saw dogs run along their families, happy that they were together
I saw children hold on to their grand dads, hoping for one more day to live
I saw the trees move gently in the breeze reminding us that life will go on.

Said the car tyre to the cycle tyre

Did you see the children run into their mother's arms?
Did you see calves crying for milk?
Did you see the landmines explode?
Did you see the horror in the eyes of men who lost their loved ones?

Said the cycle tyre to the car tyre

I saw the river run red

I saw the harm that humans can do to each other

But somewhere in the corner, I also saw hope,

I saw the face of faith and mercy

And deep down in my heart, I knew that peace and justice will prevail.

Said the car tyre to the cycle tyre