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STORIES OF WOMEN BREAKING BARRIERS

THE SMART COOKIES
WENT FROM FINANCIAL FARCE TO FREEDOM
THROUGH SUPPORT, COLLABORATION,
AND SMART MONEY MANAGEMENT



INSIGHTS FROM INNOVATOR,
AUTHOR AND AUTISTIC ADULT
**TEMPLE
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**KATHLEEN
KENNEDY
TOWNSEND**



A LESSON IN COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP:
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SHOCK AND AWE

A Campaign of Peace Through Commerce *By Emily Haggstrom*



“Fundamentally, there are only two ways of coordinating the economic activities of millions. One is central direction involving the use of coercion - the technique of the army and of the modern totalitarian state. The other is voluntary cooperation of individuals – the technique of the market place.”

Milton Friedman

Sitting stoically on a chair in the corner, dressed in thick black garments with a bright colored head scarf is Kaltom Sawaid, an Arab Bedouin woman from Israel, who has arrived in the warm humid city of Mobile, Alabama for a journey that will inevitably change her life. You see, Sawaid is the first person from her village to ever visit the United States. Her new friend and business partner, a Jewish woman named Sima Salima, sits smiling across from her on the bed; her journey has already begun. Outside of the program they are in together,

these two women are the most unlikely of friends. And although they share the same corner of the world in the north of Israel, their lives are truly worlds apart.

They are in Alabama with a delegation of women in the “AWESome Beyond Words” program; a ground breaking collaboration between an Israeli women’s organization focused on a multi-disciplinary approach to empower women and promote understanding and empathy; along with its alliance partner Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs (AWE). The work they are set to perform is meant to deepen their relationship and bring jointly made products to market through AWE and its extensive network of alliance partners.

The two women had met previously when Sawaid left her Arab village while seeking employment opportunities in Salima’s Jewish village. Their relationship took on a transformative dimension when Salima invited Sawaid to join her as a business partner in the AWESome Beyond Words program. The program focuses on helping women in war-torn Israel come together through deep healing and non-verbal communication practices to heal pain and decrease prejudice from generations of on-going conflict between Arabs and Jews - thereby bringing about peace and understanding.

However, pairing Jewish, Arab and Palestinian women of various religious affiliations from Judaism, Muslim, Christian, and Druze; and having them come together through war strife and embattled political regimes, to face each other and find the connection that they share can be a very trying process. And although the women come from different sides that don’t always understand each other, these two organizations have helped transform hundreds of lives directly and thousands if not more, indirectly through their personal and economic empowerment, since Beyond Words’ inception in 1995 and AWE’s in 2008.

Because of its success, the Beyond Words organization along with the group’s founder and director, Nitsan Gordon received an invitation and scholarship to bring the Arab and Jewish women of the program to Esalen, a retreat center in Big Sur, California that provides its guests with a place for spiritual and transformative healing. Along with the participants, Gordon invited six American women to join them, among them was Philomena Blees.

Blees, President and CEO of Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs (AWE), an initiative of Peace Through Commerce, launched AWE’s first global campaign in 2008 to catalyze the women’s empowerment movement. She explained that by “Accelerating Women

Entrepreneurs”, women could mitigate poverty, increase prosperity, advance peace and increase their level of economic freedom. AWE’s vision is, “A world in which all people enjoy peace and prosperity, with women fulfilling their potential as conscious leaders and entrepreneurs; the engines of innovation, wealth creation and social change.”

Gordon’s idea that feminine energy was essential to creating change in the Middle East sparked the interest of Blees and the AWE Board of Directors who believed that once women had increased strength and knowledge from their empowerment work, they could enter into the marketplace and take their rightful place beside men as equals and as leaders in their society. “Entrepreneurs do make the world a better place inherently, and yet the brand around business people and entrepreneurs is that they’re not the most wholesomely inspired group in the world. It’s usually the social workers seen in that light, and while their work is important, I think that business people are the ultimate social workers and entrepreneurship is the most creative way for them to express themselves,” said Blees. It is further evidence of the work being done by AWE’s parent company, Conscious Capitalism, whose principles state that conscious businesses led by conscious leaders can literally solve the world’s problems in a way failed diplomacy never will.

Gordon joined AWE, and its first on-the-ground program was launched in Israel in July 2009. “AWE Local” as they refer to it, is a three-part program that combines training and support for each woman, her venture, and her community. They offer programs aimed at eliminating poverty through market-based solutions supported by social, legal and economic freedom, and carried out consciously with empathy and responsibility.

Through AWE Local, Gordon reached out for the first time to Palestinian women in the West Bank. These women met regularly at safe houses; at the risk to their own safety and well-being because of the cultural barriers they were breaking to be a part of progress. The Jewish women that were currently enrolled in the program formed teams with the Palestinian women to create “products of peace,” which AWE markets through its alliance partners in the United States.

Sawaid and Salima’s journey to Alabama, along with the other women of Beyond Words, was a way for them to continue their empowerment away from the stresses of daily life and deepen their ties with AWE. Blees emphasized that, “Each woman receives highly

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effective personal empowerment and awareness practices for deep inner peace as a woman, while balancing the stresses of being a leader and entrepreneur. Her enterprise, she continues, “Has assisted in gaining access to global markets, growth capital, and strategic mentors to exponentially take it to scale. Her society benefits as she becomes a catalyst for establishing and expanding social, legal and economic freedom.”

The AWEsome Beyond Words staff works with women to initiate using the intangible tools available to them that their governments have historically taken for granted or suppressed. It is intangibles such as natural resources, human ingenuity and creativity which are most often ignored, but overall the missing piece to operating an efficient economic system. Through their own economic empowerment and empathetic responsibility, these women engage their communities, men and women alike, in a call to action for a market economy that mirrors the diverse commerce of their communities.

It is Blees’ hope that by understanding business and economic models, the local women of these developing and war torn countries experiencing uneven distribution of their economic freedoms, can eventually clear the path for women and men in their communities. It is the ultimate goal to create countless traditional and social enterprises and move participants from subsistent entrepreneurs to catalysts for sustainable peace and prosperity. The program has the possibility to become a model that these women can replicate with their families and teach their communities.

However, the alignment of AWE and Beyond Words is not without concern to the status quo and draws speculation into how each entity can exist in an area that has been ravaged by war off and on since 500 B.C. Because of recent military offensives by Hamas and Israeli soldiers, it is the inherent nature of the locals to fear one another and wonder whether they will be safe in their own communities. “My husband said he is dead if I come to this program, he won’t speak to me,” said Sawaid sadly.

Challenges and resistance such as these arise constantly from males in their communities, however, slowly but surely they are overcoming this opposition. In a male driven society with male rules, women are now slowly being able to educate and support their husbands and sons with the teachings they’ve learned themselves. The tools of economic and personal empowerment become the fabric of who they are, strengthening everyone around them. The transformation will not occur

overnight, but the gradual effects will be seen in years to come.

"Change me no, inspire me yes, strengthen me yes. When we do things together we get to know one another, and then we can become friends and it won't be Arab and Jewish, it will truly be of friends. We will work together as a team accomplishing as a team," says Salima. "Peace starts with each one of us. You need peace within yourself to be able to truly communicate with another person."

Still, with the work these women do in AWEsome Beyond Words, they will have the ability to withstand the hardships of life, of war and of famine, and to embrace what they know of the principles of economic freedom which remain true and constant at all times. Through their personal work they can sustain good times and bad by living, loving and facing adversity together. "We communicate with our hearts," says Salima, "we took away the barrier of education, language and tradition, because when we are human we share the same things, core things."

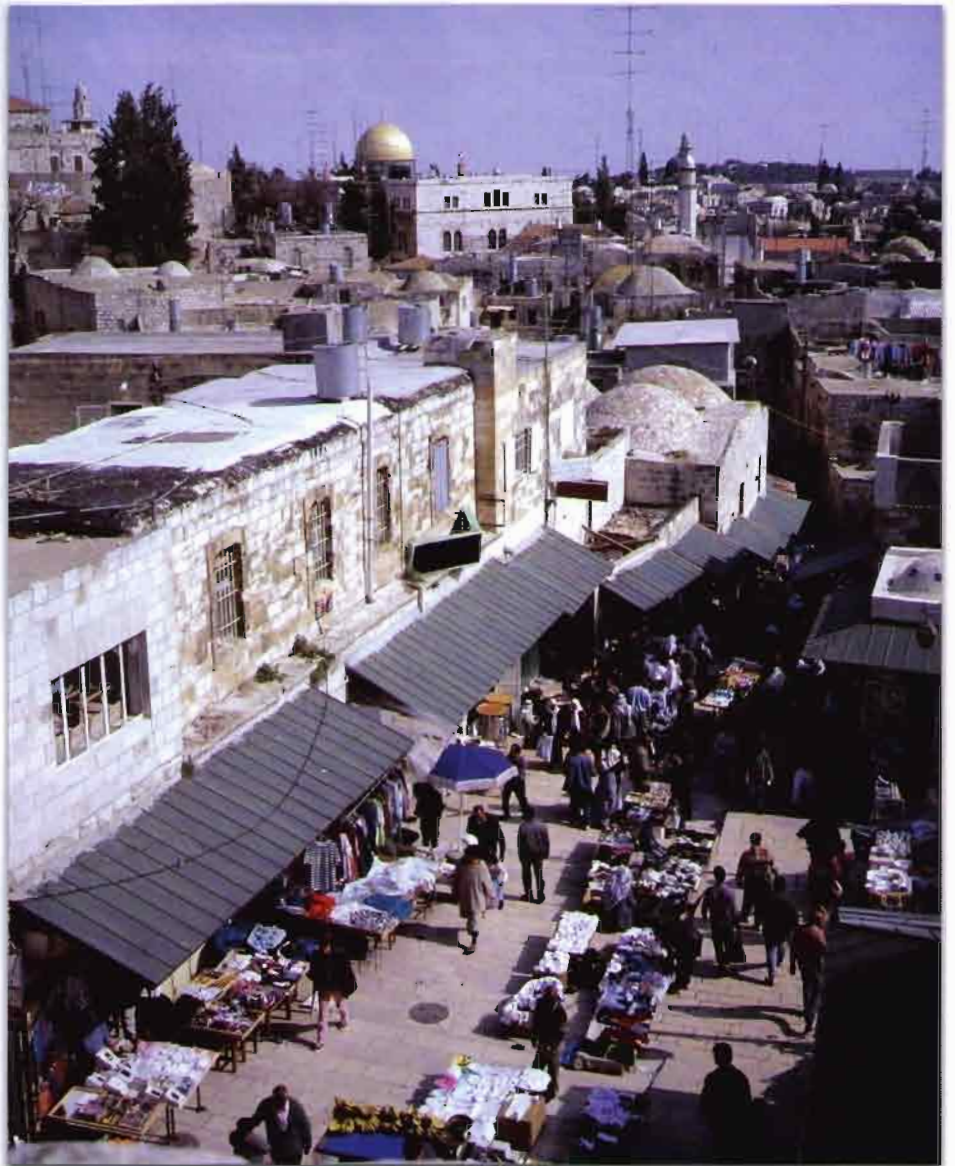
So while the AWE Local program is just finishing up its inaugural year, Blees and Gordon continue to work day and night to ensure its continuous success. "It's a center where everything you do matters. The eyes of the world are on Israel," said Gordon. If they succeed in Israel they will prove that their work is advantageous to each person they touch and that peace can be achieved through the marketplace anywhere in the world. Beyond Words will become a leader in local and global outreach programs, designed to be carried over to any country where people face adversity, whether it's personally, culturally or economically.

To find out more information regarding Philomena Blees and Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs, an initiative of Peace Through Commerce, Inc. please visit www.peacethroughcommerce.com.

For more information on Nitsan Gordon's work with Beyond Words or to donate please visit www.beyondwords.org.il.

For Sima Salima and Kaltom Sawaid's beautiful handmade gourds and baskets from Israel, an effort of Jewish and Arab Women Weaving Peace, please visit www.salima.co.il.

Emily Haggstrom has a B.A. in Journalism and Media from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is a member of the Level One Society in Denver, Colorado and sits in on various charity committees. In an effort to impact her local community she also volunteers for Whiz Kids Tutoring, Inc. as well as Denver Health Medical Center. ▲



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