

Stories of Hope

2008-2009

• Guest at Your Table •



• Celebrate UU faith in action •

Contents

Introduction

Story 1: Serafina (children's)	3
Story 2: Dalia (children's).....	7
Story 3: Maria (adults/young adults)	11
Story 4: 7 UUs (adults/young adults)	17
Story 5: Amina (adults/young adults)	21
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	25

Introduction

This book is full of inspiring stories about real people around the world who work with UUSC to improve people's lives. These friends of UUSC come from different countries, speak different languages, and work to protect different rights, such as the right to water and the right to free speech.

We know that you will learn a lot by welcoming them as Guests at Your Table. They will inspire you to join their struggle – because it's not just their struggle, but everyone's struggle!

When you share your blessings with your Guests at Your Table, you become a partner with UUSC and our friends around the world. Together, with your generous support, we are changing the world.



Environmental Justice Program. UUSC's Environmental Justice Program promotes and defends the human right to water. The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

Story 1: Serafina

Water is one of the most important things in our life. We need it to drink, to wash our hands, to take a bath, and to cook our food. We clean our clothes with it and give it to our pets.

But we almost never think about it. We just turn on our faucet, and out it comes.

Can you imagine if you weren't allowed to use water? If someone else decided how much water you could have? What if it wasn't enough and you ran out?

That is how it is for many people around the world. They don't have enough water to do even the most basic things.

In a country called South Africa, the water company controls how much water goes to each house. If a family is poor, they get less water than other families. This happens even though the laws of South Africa say that everyone is equal and that everyone has the right to use water.

One woman named Serafina thought that the water company was being unfair. She decided to work with a group of people to make sure that everyone had enough water, no matter how rich or poor they were.

Serafina is 71 years old. She is called *Makoko*, or granny, by all of her neighbors and friends. Everyone thought that if Serafina was ready to stand up for her rights, they should help her! Serafina's group of friends grew and grew! One of them is UUSC.

Together, they went to an important court house, called the supreme court, to tell their story. They told the judge what was happening with their water, that they didn't have enough to do basic things, like cooking and cleaning.

Outside the court house, people sang songs to show that they thought that the water company was wrong and that everyone deserves to have water.

Many months went by. Finally, the decision came back. The judge decided that Serafina and her friends were right, and they should get more water.

Serafina and her friends were very happy. They knew that they had helped to make things better for millions of people in South Africa. Now, they are teaching everyone, rich and poor, about the right to water.

It takes many people to change the world. Your support of UUSC will help UUSC and Serafina continue the struggle for water rights in South Africa and other countries around the world. Can you help us today?

* * * *

This story demonstrates a commitment to the following rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Equality;

Freedom from Discrimination;

Equality before the Law;

Adequate Living Standard — as well as

The right to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.



Civil Liberties Program. Civil liberties are the rights and freedoms that protect individual citizens from government abuses. UUSC's Civil Liberties Program partners with organizations around the world working to defend these rights.

Story 2: Dalia

There are many different countries in the Middle East, many different religions, and many different kinds of leaders, such as kings and presidents. There are also millions of different people, each with their own ideas, opinions, and beliefs.

But in some countries in the Middle East, like in other parts of the world, people are not free to say what they want, or write what they want, without getting into serious trouble for it.

Dalia lives in the Middle East, in a country called Egypt. She is a woman, a Muslim, a poet, and an activist. Being an activist means standing up for what you believe in, sometimes at great risk.

When Dalia was 24 years old, she heard about a

writing contest for young people to share their dreams for a better world. The contest was held by a group called Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance, or HAMSA for short. As one of HAMSA's partners, UUSC helps to organize the contest each year.

Dalia got to work right away. She wrote down her most important thoughts, about what it means to be free in the Middle East. As a woman, Dalia had lots of ideas about this. She had stood up for women's rights since she was a little girl, starting with talking to her own family.

She wrote, "In my world women are as many as raindrops. Yet they have no noteworthy impact on their societies. Despite our number, which is higher, and our abilities, which are larger than men, we – Arab Women – are still treated as second-class citizens."

The judges thought that Dalia's writing was very good. They liked it so much that they gave her an award. They also invited her to be honored at a celebration dinner.

Soon, HAMSA asked Dalia to help them to translate a book into Arabic about how ordinary

people in the United States helped to change their country through nonviolence. It took hard work and cooperation by everybody, including UUSC, but the book is now completed. It is being read by thousands of young people in the Middle East.

Dalia continues to work hard to show that people have the right to say and write what they think, even if their leaders disagree. She is also showing that women can be leaders too!

Being an activist means helping to change the world. Can you join UUSC and Dalia in helping to change the world today? All it takes is a few brave people.

* * * *

This story demonstrates a commitment to the following rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
Equality;
Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, and Correspondence;
Freedom of Belief and Religion;
Freedom of Opinion and Information;
Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the Above Rights.



Economic Justice Program. Economic justice is essential for securing basic human rights, alleviating local and global poverty and achieving a more peaceful and just world. UUSC's Economic Justice Program embraces a vision of economic human rights, recognizing that workers' rights are human rights.

Story 3: Maria

Hello. My name is Maria. I grew up in Cuba, but I left for America in 1988 in search of a better way of life for myself and my family.

It took some time to find a new home, but I eventually moved to Mississippi and started working in a poultry plant.

There are many poultry plants in Mississippi. In 2007 alone, over 850 million chickens were produced in my state. But very few of these chickens are sold as “whole birds.” Most are first cut up and deboned before being packaged.

This is very dangerous work, with one in seven poultry workers being injured on the job.

I worked in a poultry plant for 11 years. During most of this time, I was treated unfairly by my employers.

As a woman and as an immigrant who was learning English, I faced discrimination, threats, and sexual harassment. Sometimes, on pay day, my employer did not pay me my full salary, even though I worked 11-hour days for minimum wage.

But my life changed when a coworker told me about MPOWER.

MPOWER is short for the Mississippi Poultry Workers for Equality and Respect. No matter what a worker's gender, race, immigration status, or country of origin is, MPOWER defends their rights. Workers with no one else to turn to know they can go to MPOWER.

Soon, I began attending solidarity classes about workers' rights that were organized by MPOWER. Money from UUSC provides workers with transportation to these classes and child care so that women can participate in MPOWER meetings.

Through MPOWER, I was able to learn some English and understand U.S. laws, especially the ones that protect workers. At the same time, my coworkers were able to learn some Spanish and U.S. laws. We could understand each other better and help each other.

With new confidence, I began to speak up for myself, and I encouraged my coworkers to speak up too.

But the managers didn't like this. They made my life more and more difficult. Still, I would not give up.

Soon I was faced with a difficult dilemma. My boss told me to either stop talking to my coworkers or leave. I had bills to pay and mouths to feed, but I saw only one option: to stand up for myself and help others stand up too.

Now I work at MPOWER as an office manager, and I am a U.S. citizen! I help to organize workers from all different backgrounds to defend their rights.

I am on a mission to help other people in my community to learn about their rights and stand

up for themselves against discrimination and abuse at work.

Now, I feel strong. I will continue to educate myself for the future, to be able to help my community. I have rights and I will never be victimized again. I am a free woman.

I also want to grow as a community leader and learn new ways to spread the message of workers' rights, especially among immigrant women. I want to give people the support they need to be strong and stand up for their rights.

It takes many people standing up together to make positive change. Maria knew that she couldn't do it alone, so she is getting the help of everyone in her community to improve conditions for workers in Mississippi. Your generosity through Guests at Your Table helps UUSC, Maria, and others around the world stand up for their rights. Will you stand with us today?

This story demonstrates a commitment to the following rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Equality;

Life, Liberty, and Personal Security;

Freedom from Discrimination;

Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions;

Adequate Living Standard;

Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association.



Learn by Doing. UUSC offers *JustWorks* and *JustJourneys* experiences as opportunities for you to learn by doing, and become part of a strong and growing base of committed human rights activists. **JustWorks** camps are short-term projects that help volunteers examine and understand the root causes and damaging effects of injustice. **JustJourneys** are educational travel experiences that focus on human-rights and social-justice issues.

Story 4: Seven UUs

In the spring of 2008, 7 Unitarian Universalists and 5 UUSC staff and guides traveled to Mexico on a UUSC JustJourney to see for themselves how NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) was changing people's lives.

From the outside, the Mexican economy seems to have boomed since the agreement came into effect in 1994. But when we take a closer look, the situation is very different. This “closer look” is just what the JustJourney group was after.

During their week-long Journey, the 7 UUs visited people from human-rights organizations, workers' centers, workers' unions, and the local community to see for themselves what was happening. They collected stories of migration, illegal arrest, environmental neglect, poor working conditions,

and hunger. They also collected stories of hope.

In Mexico City, the group explored how much it costs to make dinner.

Most workers in Mexico earn about 90 cents per hour. Because food is so expensive, many people have to work a 10-hour day just to pay for their family's next meal.

For example, a nurse makes about 66 pesos for a nine-hour work day, just above minimum wage. At the grocery store, the nurse will have to pay 72 pesos for a chicken and 11 pesos for a liter of milk.

“At these prices, that nurse would have to work 11 hours to buy just these two food items — more than a full day to buy a chicken and some milk!” exclaimed Carol Wilsey, a mom in the group.

The group was shocked! They started to realize how hard life is for the half of all Mexicans who live in poverty. They saw how NAFTA was helping to create conditions of poverty for Mexican workers by setting low labor standards.

Thinking about migration, they began linking this situation to the large number of Mexicans who

are willing to risk their lives to come to the United States.

The group decided that they would each do their part to spread the word that NAFTA was hurting Mexican workers and that it should be renegotiated.

With a renewed commitment to spreading economic justice, the 7 UUs returned home. They contacted their local newspapers, wrote letters to the editor, talked to their neighbors, held meetings in their churches, and wrote to their elected officials.

As one participant noted, “A trip like that makes you want to commit your whole person to a cause.”

If you want a new perspective, all you need to do is leave your home and meet new people. That's why JustJourneys and JustWorks change lives. For the people who join UUSC on these experiences, and the partners who share their stories, life is forever changed. By sharing with your Guests today, you help UUSC to continue changing the world, one person at a time.



Rights in Humanitarian Crisis. In disasters and wars, people are affected differently. Their race, gender, class, and other characteristics determine whether or not they will be able to rebuild their lives. UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program helps to ensure that all people have the chance to recover.

Story 5: Amina

In a region of Sudan called Darfur, millions of people have been living under the threat of violence and turmoil since a conflict began in 2003.

As a result of the fighting, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their villages and live in makeshift camps, which often have little or no food, water, or firewood for cooking.

To help provide for their families, women and girls often have to leave their camps on foot, sometimes walking miles before finding what they need.

But they face lots of hidden dangers along the way. They can be attacked by armed groups, the same groups that are attacking and burning their villages.

But in seven camps, UUSC is supporting women's centers, where women can organize together to improve their safety. Women can learn about their rights and find new, safe ways to earn money for food and firewood.

These women are also experimenting with different projects to see what is useful for them, not just what other people think is useful.

One day, the Sudanese government announced that people in one camp must return to their villages. Many people resisted, knowing that it was not yet safe for them to return. The U.N. police commander asked Amina, a UUSC staff person in Darfur, to talk with women in the camp.

Amina invited the women into her tent, where they could sit on the floor and talk.

One woman spoke for the group, saying, "We cannot go. How can you ask us to go? You don't know the suffering we've seen with our own eyes."

As emotions poured out, Amina said that she understood their fears. "We will listen to you, to what you say," she said.

Then Amina invited the police commander in so that he could hear their stories. With Amina, the police commander listened to the women, and he understood that the women should not return.

Afterward, a young woman who was pregnant approached Amina and asked her what her name was. She said, “You are the first person to listen to us. Thank you. I am going to name my baby after you.”

To protect the women even more, Amina has led trainings for camp directors, who are mostly men, to understand what makes women vulnerable to violence in Sudan. Many of these men have formed committees to help address the challenges that women face.

Many obstacles remain to ensuring that Darfurian women and girls are safe from violence. But together, we can work to provide better protections for these women.

When it comes to helping other people, the first step is to listen, like Amina and the U.N. police commander do. Only then can we join others, as partners, to help them solve a problem. By sharing your blessings with Guests at Your Table, you can

make it possible for Amina and UUSC to continue listening to the needs of people around the world. Won't you join us today?

So many rights as laid out through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are affected in crisis. Some are the rights to:

Equality;

Freedom from Discrimination;

Life, Liberty, and Personal Security;

Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment;

Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile;

Free Movement in and out of the Country;

Asylum in other Countries from persecution;

Own Property;

Desirable Work;

Rest and Leisure;

Adequate Living Standard;

Education;

Participate in the Cultural Life of Community.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Sixty years ago, on December 10, 1948, the nations of our world voted into existence the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then, its guarantees and promises have supported countless human-rights struggles around the world. It is one of the guiding documents of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in its work to advance human rights throughout the world.

Now that you have read Stories of Hope, consider these rights which have been endorsed by nearly every nation. Consider how these rights apply to your everyday life. What would it be like if suddenly you could not depend on your right to equality? Or if you could not protect your right to earn enough money to feed your family and provide them with a home? Consider the courageous people UUSC partners with in the United States and around the world, thanks to the generosity of people like you. Imagine what life would be like if all of our rights were honored.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
abbreviated

1. Right to Equality
2. Freedom from Discrimination
3. Right to Life, Liberty, and Personal Security
4. Freedom From Slavery
5. Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment
6. Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law
7. Right to Equality before the Law
8. Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal
9. Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile
10. Right to Fair Public Hearing
11. Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty
12. Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, and Correspondence
13. Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country
14. Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution
15. Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change Nationality
16. Right to Marriage and Family
17. Right to Own Property
18. Freedom of Belief and Religion
19. Freedom of Opinion and Information

20. Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association
21. Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections
22. Right to Social Security
23. Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions
24. Right to Rest and Leisure
25. Right to Adequate Living Standard
26. Right to Education
27. Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community
28. Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document
29. Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development
30. Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the Above Rights

Additionally, the human right to water has been recognized in international treaties and national constitutions since 2002. This right entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

Remember: Before you bring your Guest at Your Table box back to church, be sure to complete the form so that UUSC can thank you for your generosity. Family and individual gifts of \$100 or more are eligible to be matched by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, in Manhasset, N.Y. That means you'll do double the good work!

• Guest at Your Table • Celebrate
UV faith in action •





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