

What peace means to me

[...] "It was late July. It was hot, the air was dusty and I could not breathe. There was the sound of war, the war that had only been distant news was now pressing us against the wall. You were asleep. We had to leave the house immediately. I took our documents, clothes, I also wanted to take your photo off the wall. He told me not to, to leave it, because we would come back, later. Then I realized that those words, spoken with a smile, were only meant to comfort me, because we never returned. I went down the stairs and in the meantime I heard the shots. I was afraid to go downstairs with you in my arms, I should have gone through the other part of the house. I decided to throw you. I didn't think you might get hurt; I only thought you wouldn't lose your life to a bullet".

That's what my mother thought in 1993, the year when the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh reached the city where I was born.

I was only one-year-old when my family had to give up everything they owned. I didn't live through the war, but I have lived with the consequences of war my entire life.

[...] The situation between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the border was calm, but last year in April the truce was violated. The ceasefire that had lasted since 1994 failed. War returned, still knocking on my door. But this time it was stronger, because it did not ask me for land, not the house, not even my childhood. This time it asked me for something more important, more precious: my brother, my family, my everything.

I have only one brother and two years ago he left for military service, the same time I chose to come to Rondine. My parents used to say we left at the same time: one to make peace and the other to make war. The war that took place last year is also called the "Four-day war". In just four days, 200 soldiers died, 200 soldiers from each country.

That day in April I had a lecture at the University in Florence. I received a voice message from my brother, who never wrote because soldiers are not allowed to use their phones. I couldn't hear well. I only remember the words "Talk to mom more often, we have already left" and then I heard the military signals.

I don't remember how I left class, or how I took the train, how I got to Arezzo. I only remember that I stopped on the road to Rondine, hearing a loud cry inside me, saying not to go, not to stay there anymore. Because I couldn't believe it anymore. The peace that had grown in my heart at Rondine, no longer made sense. It was just a lie. I was wondering "why Rondine can change our reality, if the war started this morning already has victims and their number is increasing every hour". I was scared to find my brother's name and my friends' names among them.

In my country we place the flag under a soldier's coffin. I imagined it and at the same time I tried to push that thought away, not because I am pessimistic, but because I was taught as a child to be ready for the worst. At that moment, I remembered my mother's words when I was little " If it weren't for these Armenians, our life would be better ". I was walking and repeating the same " If it weren't for these Armenians ..."

At Rondine two students from Armenia were waiting for me. I immediately met one of them, an Armenian guy named Artsi. We didn't say "Hi". We didn't say a word, we just looked into each

other's eyes with a deep, fixed gaze. In his eyes, I saw my own fear, my own anger, the hatred I was feeling in my heart. His brother was also at the border, at war.

My name is Ulviyya, I am 24 years old. I've spent all my life wondering what peace means to me. That day I realized that peace is the moment when I realize that I care about my enemy's brother, for his mother, for his loved ones. Today peace is not the absence of conflict. For me peace is discovering yourself within the other.

Instructions

- Individually, read the testimony and identify elements of the 3 levels of the relationship (concrete, unconscious, imaginative). You can underline the 3 levels with 3 different colors.
- In small groups, arrange an online meeting and compare your exercises.
- Reflect on it and create a shared document with your impressions.
- Upload the document to the shared folder