

## SEEDS OF PEACE

### **CHRISTINA DeANGELIS AND ACTION for LIFE**



*'Be the change you want to see in the world'*

**Christina DeAngelis** is one of a number of young Australians who are creating ripples of peace across the world by combining a commitment to personal peace and change with building new relationships with others from many different cultures, faiths and backgrounds. Together with fellow Australians Clara Cheong, Natasha Davis, Nigel Heywood, Chris Lancaster, Mike and Jean Brown and Wal and Val Nuske, Christina was part of a diverse group of 40 people who lived together as a 'mobile community' in various parts of Asia for nine months (November 2003 to July 2004) as part of the **Action for Life (AfL)** initiative. The effects then and since have been inspiring, cultivating compassion and connection and enlarging the circles of love. As the *AfL* peace pilgrims put it:

*'AfL was an experience of two parallel journeys – an inner journey within an outer journey. The outer journey took us to 14 countries throughout Asia; to dusty bumpy roads, shining new highways, simple village homes, luxurious city apartments, fields of organic wheat, colourful palaces, crowded slums, hi-tech industries, government offices, dynamic grassroot organisations, grand historical sites and futuristic space-age cities. In all these places we met fascinating people who are making a difference to the situations around them. These encounters provided us with new perspectives, challenges, inspiration and hope, and encouraged us on our inner journey of discovering the depth within ourselves.'*



*Action for Life* came out of a 'crazy idea' of Ren-Jou Liu, a Taiwanese teacher, and has developed into an experience-based leadership program for young people who want to commit themselves to the moral and spiritual development of their communities and nations. Participants learn from and work with individuals and organisations who are bringing change in India and other parts of Asia. It is facilitated by **Initiatives of Change** (formerly known as Moral Re-Armament), an international network of people from all races and faiths who share the aim of engaging every person in the process of building a new world, starting with transformation in their own lives.

*Action for Life* is highly engaging: involving life story telling, one to one mentoring, learning about India and Asia, discovering other cultures, faiths and traditions, developing music and drama, guest speakers, family workshops, developing individual initiatives, team building, exploring cities and villages, and doing it all as a team! Always it is about learning by doing: practising the discipline of silence and inner listening; learning to live core values of honesty, purity, selflessness and love; sharing experiences of transformation and spiritual growth, study conflict; and being alongside individuals taking their first steps of personal and community transformation; *taking 'action for life'*.

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### Creators of Peace

As part of her personal follow-up to the Action for Life program, Christina DeAngelis (pictured left with Colette Samoya, former Burundian ambassador to the UN in Geneva) went to Uganda as part of an international conference run by *'Creators of Peace'*, a network of women around the world which is part of the outreach of *Initiatives of Change*. The Creators of Peace network have also developed a *'Women's Peace Circles'* program, a format and structure for a women's discussion group, looking at how peace begins in the home, and fellow Australian AfL-er Cheong has been part of one these groups in Sydney in recent times. Christina writes of what she experienced in Uganda:



*We gathered together over 5 days, 93 foreigners from 25 countries (13 of which were African) and 120 Ugandans, to discuss in plenaries, community groups and workshops how to stand up for peace, for a Clean Africa, for leadership of integrity, but most of all to hear each other's stories both of pain and of hope. Being in such close proximity to people who had suffered so much and many who were still suffering intensely, I realised that I was afraid to open my heart to Africa. I feared that if I did all that pain would overwhelm me. During those five days I went through my own transformation and learned that opening my heart to the pain of others did not lead to despair. I understood that what is required is not that I take on the suffering of the world, but rather that I be responsible for the small part I am asked to play in making it better. In opening my heart to the pain, I was then able to also see the hope that allows these amazing women to not only go on, but do incredible things.*

### An Australian experience in Africa

Ironically, in meeting and listening there to Jackie Huggins (an Aboriginal women from Queensland and co-chair of *Reconciliation Australia*), Christina also discovered in Africa the challenge of making peace between cultures at home. As she says with remarkable honesty:

*Meeting Jackie and hearing her story opened my eyes to the fact that while I have always thought reconciliation is a good idea, like so many other young Australians, it has never cost me anything. I have never made any real effort to learn the history of Indigenous Australians, to meet them, understand their culture, or take part in the reconciliation process. I decided that if I truly believed in reconciliation in Australia, it would need to be more than skin deep, and would require an active commitment on my part.*

*The conference left me transformed and I could see around me that it was the same for others... 'For the first time we have been able to live and share together with Congolese without fighting', a Rwandan delegate reported... Many delegates from regions in crisis found hope and encouragement in sharing their stories... They realised they are not alone in their suffering. Vital links were forged for on-going dialogue and action for peace.*

### Sources and more information

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