

Lynne Golodner: Healing the World with Story

ONE EARTH
Writing



For this year's Jewish New Year and high holidays, we invited Jewish writers to contribute columns about ways to make a positive difference in the world. Our ongoing motto at ReadTheSpirit is: Good media builds healthy communities. No one embodies this in a better way than columnist, media expert and author Lynne Meredith Golodner. This is her story.

'ONE EARTH WRITING'

By LYNNE MEREDITH GOLODNER

I grew up in a suburb of Detroit where most of the kids looked like me.

During the Jewish holidays, teachers didn't assign work because so many students in my school were absent. There might have been five or six African-American kids in my high school, and no one wore a hijab in public.

My city is magnificent and unique but it is certainly segregated. And if today's newscasts are any indication, then it's not just my city.

I remember spending a Good Friday in Dublin, Ireland, in a Catholic church and feeling that the musical, candlelit service was strikingly familiar to my Reform Jewish services back home. I remember on my second plane ride to Israel, sitting beside a Palestinian man from Denver headed home to visit his relatives. We had deep, powerful conversations and came away feeling that we could be friends.

As a writer, I've spent decades seeking out stories about the ways in which people are similar, the beliefs we share, the customs we have in common. And so as I began to look for something I could do to make the world a better, more peaceful place, I realized it was staring me in the face.

One Earth Writing is a new nonprofit that brings together youth from different communities for writing workshops where they explore identity, belief and community. If we can plant seeds early on that people are people, help young people see that despite different skin color, clothing or religious beliefs, they look into another person's eyes, see the familiar sparkle when excitement takes hold, they will grow up knowing that humanity is a universal truth.



Figure 1 Lynne Meredith Golodner (left) with students in a workshop.

And maybe, one day, that will lead us to a world populated with stories of harmony and peace rather than a desire to eliminate all people who are different than us.

As the mother of four—two of whom are teens—I know this is a difficult age. They are grappling with who they are and what they believe and that's why this is the perfect time to engage in such meaningful explorations.

My kids don't see difference. They see people.

But somewhere in the future, if we don't act quickly, they, too, will join the throngs of people who perpetuate stereotypes, who fear whole communities or religions because they are unfamiliar. It must stop. And we can make it stop by replacing the unknown with the known.

When we sit at a table and share our fears and desires, our hopes and dreams, we connect. That's what the youth who write with us do. Paired with same-age, same-stage peers different from them, they ask questions, finish each other's stories, listen to the poems and paragraphs that are produced. They learn about themselves in the context of the other.

We talk about the words used to define ourselves, and decide whether those words work. Bossy can become leader. Big mouth can become outspoken. We make the conscious choice to use words that build an identity we can live with, rather than crumble under.

Sometimes, we write about those universal truths that we all know—the role of food in making meaning, anger at a parent, fear of not being liked. Emotions connect us, bolster us, give us the confidence to go forward.

Many people struggle with who they are all their lives. One Earth Writing seeks to change that. Once we know the sweet taste of yes, that's me, that's who I want to be, we can begin to leave our mark on this world.

This fall, we will welcome our first class of ambassadors. These are kids who apply for a six-month program to write monthly and co-facilitate some of our workshops with other teens. I'm willing to bet we'll see some of those kids leading our world in the not-too-distant future, and doing so with respect and understanding for the differences that make our world so beautiful.

I don't believe that I alone can fill the world with peace. But I do know we have to start somewhere, start small, so that each ripple of transformation leads to another and another and eventually, we are so far-reaching, we can't help but have an impact.

We live in a big world that has been made small by technology and social media. I believe these conversations, these writing workshops, these simple exercises of choosing to discard words that don't work for us and actively pursue those that strengthen, is the first step in ending the trend of hatred.

I can't help but take my talents and my passions and share them with others. I have to believe we each have a purpose in this life and my purpose is to show everyone how similar we all really are.

It's the least I can do—the least any of us can do.



Lynne Meredith Goldner is author of eight books, including [*The Flavors of Faith: Holy Breads*](#), and she is the founder and executive director of One Earth

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