

**My Journey Toward Peace:
Acceptance Speech on Receiving
the 2024 International Courage of Conscience Award**

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In the closing days of World War Two, a family physician in Bayonne, New Jersey, delivered a baby and turned to the new mother. Instead of saying "It's a boy!", he reportedly said, "It's a doctor!" That baby was me. And that physician was my Uncle Lou, who, because of his caring and kindness, was my role model as I was growing up. I chose to become a physician and I recognized that I could not only treat patients, as my Uncle Lou did, but I could also prevent them from getting sick in the first place.

Over many years, I completed education in both medicine and public health, and residency training in both internal medicine and preventive medicine. I worked as an epidemiologist for the Centers for Disease Control for three years. And then, I joined the faculty of the new University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, where I established a program for teaching, research, and prevention of work-related diseases.

In 1980, I was deeply moved by news reports about the plight of thousands of Cambodians, who had survived years of war and genocide and had recently become refugees in Thailand. I joined a medical team, which was sponsored by Cornell University Medical College and the International Rescue Committee, and I worked for two months in a refugee camp there, providing medical care and training public health workers. I have vivid images of that experience: An eight-year-old boy whose left arm was paralyzed from a gunshot wound. A seven-year-old girl recovering from malnutrition, who weighed the same as my one-year-old son back at home. And an eleven-year-old boy who had been unable to see since witnessing the execution of his parents three years earlier. I vividly recall the resilience of the refugees, most of whom had lost everything -- except their spirit and determination to seek a better future. After I returned home, I shared my experience by speaking to many medical and community groups, by writing an article that was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and by co-editing a book on the refugees and the international humanitarian response to their plight.

About 10 years later, in 1991, I began collaborating with Victor Sidel, a physician who was a pioneer in both social medicine and the dangers of nuclear weapons. Over the next 25 years, we worked together to increase the understanding of the medical community and the general public about the health impacts of war, including injuries that cause death and disability, malnutrition and communicable diseases, and mental disorders that have lifelong and intergenerational consequences. We edited six books -- on the health impacts of war, terrorism, and social injustice. And we wrote journal articles and book chapters, presented lectures to students and the general public, and advocated for the prevention of war and the promotion of peace. We also developed a vision of a world without war.

Six years ago, Vic passed away. Since then, I have continued the teaching, writing, and advocacy work on which we had collaborated. I wrote a book, entitled "From Horror to Hope: Recognizing and Preventing the Health Impacts of War," in which I described the health impacts of war and how war can be prevented -- by preventing conflicts from becoming violent, by addressing the underlying causes of war, and by strengthening the infrastructure for peace. As I was writing the book, I realized that I needed to include in it tangible examples of hope. So I wrote and added to the book profiles of 18 health professionals who have inspired me. For example, an obstetrician-gynecologist in Africa, who, after having treated hundreds of women who had been raped during war, became a global advocate for the prevention of gender-based violence. A surgeon who treated landmine victims in Southeast Asia and then became an architect of the global treaty to ban landmines. And an American physician who left her practice for four months each year to work with Doctors Without Borders, treating children in warzones.

War can feel like everything horrific happening all at once. In contrast, peace is silent and invisible. Peace means not only the absence of war, but what is possible for humankind. It includes respecting human dignity and caring for one another, like my Uncle Lou did. It requires resilience and determination to seek a better future, like the Cambodian refugees had. And peace is interwoven with human rights, social justice, and the rule of law.

We humans are imperfect. War captures and holds our attention. I often find it difficult to filter out war and focus on peace. This dove will remind me every day of the possibility of peace and what we can do, *indeed we must do*, together to achieve and maintain peace. Our survival as a species depends on it.