

WORD IN ACTION

# Going beyond all borders



Photo (5): @RunforUnity

## Breaking down the walls

**Noé Herrera (Mexico):** Walls divide nations, cultures and people. I grew up in front of a wall that separates two great nations: the United States of America and

Mexico. My name is Noé Herrera and I was born and raised in a town in northern Mexico called Mexicali, which stands for Mexico and California.

Ever since I was young, I wondered why it was so difficult for us to cross the border to the USA. I always saw

that these two countries have many things in common. In fact, we share some aspects of our cultures and we have developed a new culture that unites us in terms of food, language and even in many economic interactions. I also have many friends on both sides of the border and many

people, including me, go back and forth from Mexico to the United States and vice versa as an everyday routine. However, I also saw how this border represents great sufferings for our countries. I saw it in the many families that are separated – in the immigrants that struggle to survive to find a better future, and in many prejudices we have created about each other. Yet, I’ve seen that people are indifferent about this situation. Why? Because we have become accustomed to this division.

**Josef Capacio (USA):** I can’t say that I’ve had the same experience with the wall that divides our countries in the same way that Noé has, but I can say how it’s much easier crossing into Mexico from the USA, compared to the difficulties experienced when entering the United States from Mexico. My name is Josef Capacio. I’m from a city in Southern California called San Diego, which runs along the border with Mexico.

I’ve also seen division in the United States, but fortunately, I’ve learned since I was very young to live for unity.

Here is a selection of just three of the experiences shared by young people at Genfest 2018.



Through the years, a new perception of the world has developed within me. Growing up, exposed to multiculturalism, I not only tolerate it but welcome it! I think it's part of the reason why Noé and I are friends. I'm not just Josef of the US, born into a family that immigrated from the Philippines or Noé from Mexico, but we're all that and more. We're two citizens of the world. And I'll never forget the circumstances of how we met.

After spending a year away from home, where I attended a formation school for the youth of the Focolare in Italy, I was excited to return and support our local activities in California. One of my friends suggested that I join the efforts for a project in Mexicali. In all honesty, I was immediately reluctant to get involved, but fortunately, after having met with Noé, I ended up deciding to go with a few close friends. The day was beyond what words could capture. It was wonderful!

**Noé:** We were very happy to have some people from the US joining us for our event. The main purpose was to showcase our view of a united world by running together alongside the wall with a group on each side of the border in Mexico and in the United States. There were about 200 people running on both sides sending out a single message: 'We can be divided by a wall, but we are together to build a united world.' Many people of all ages and backgrounds joined our event and, from then on, it is becoming an annual appointment in which we have been able to involve the local governments on both sides of the border.

After that first big event, our goal of building a united world was made more visible. Josef and I, with other friends from our countries have had many opportunities to interact by working in various social activities, but also, through time, we have developed a real friendship with our neighbours from across the border. I discovered that our values, goals and vision of the world are very similar. This experience made me realize that we are all equal and I can love his country as I love mine.

**Josef:** People who have had the privilege of looking down upon our planet from outer space often speak of this overview effect. This cognitive shift in their perception of human life here on earth comes about because from up there, there are no borders. The international lines and boundaries that we've developed, vanish. They're invisible and quite frankly, non-existent. The rationale for why we continue to engage in the different conflicts that constantly divide humanity become small. There's an astronaut who's even said that from up there, 'it's crystal clear that on earth we are one humanity.'



Photo: @Silvano Soliveres

Jaime Zaya (right) from El Salvador

## Change your square metre

**I'm Jaime Zaya.** I come from a country in Central America called El Salvador. It is a small country, but rich in natural resources and indigenous history. However, El Salvador has been afflicted for many years by political instability, social injustices and poverty - which has generated different forms of violence and social upheaval. In recent years, the violence has intensified and thus created a lack of trust among citizens because each person poses a threat to you. Many times the situation right now is overwhelming, and leaves me feeling powerless in front of such a complex social problem.

In 2014, I lived for a while with other young people in a small town in Argentina called Mariapoli Lia. It is a place where the law of the town is the law of Love. We always tried to put into practice the golden rule to 'Do to others as you would have them

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do to you'. I realized how beautiful it would be to build a society in which we all care for each other.

However, when I returned to El Salvador I faced again the struggle of my country. The situation was really difficult. It had become more violent and it was even risky to go out on the streets at any time during the day. I used to go out to the local sports fields by bus, and even this had become dangerous. You never knew whether you would get home at night in one piece.

Given the difficult situation, my parents, my sister and I thought of leaving the country. But, after talking together about what we should do - we decided to stay, in order to be a light in these dark times.

Around that time I read an article about Youth for a United World from the Middle East. They shared how they have decided to stay in their country in spite of the war to be ready to help injured people after the attacks. Their experience inspired me and reinforced my determination to stay and meet the sufferings of my people.

We decided to launch a campaign called: 'Change your Square Metre'. This means building peace in your own local space. We know our country's problems are complex, but we can make a difference with the people we meet on a daily basis. For example: to help my classmates prepare for a difficult maths exam, or to create positive relationships with my neighbours.

This has also encouraged us to begin to change our society. Together with the Youth for a United World in El Salvador we have involved other people by building a better environment in a local park: like painting the walls, cleaning the streets, collecting rubbish, and installing rubbish bins. We launched a book campaign which sends books to towns with high student absence rates. We also collaborate with other movements by visiting elderly people, and by collaborating with institutions that provide meals and shelter for the homeless. Adults support us in collecting food and open their homes to let us cook. It's amazing how the food is always enough for all those who don't have a home!

We may not be able to change our country at once, but square metre by square metre we can make a change!



## Experiencing God's Providence

**My name is Jean Paul Muhanuzi from Burundi.** My country witnessed a political crisis because the outgoing president wanted to extend his term of office without proper elections. It was during this period that I was seriously injured. I was waiting for a bus to return home, and met a young man. He had arrived in the city the previous night and was living with his brother in one of the most dangerous areas. I felt that it was risky for a young man who was a stranger to travel to that area alone in the night. I suggested that he spend the night at my place.

We waited for the bus for a long time because of the crisis. Eventually, we decided to walk home. On our way we were attacked by six young men. They beat us up and threw me into a ditch thinking that I was dead. I was unconscious for about an hour. When I came to, I realized that I couldn't move my body from my chest down. I started to scream and my new friend came to my rescue. He was not as badly hurt as I was. With the help of two police officers, I was taken to a nearby hospital. The love I had shown to this new friend saved my life. If he hadn't been there I would have died. He had returned my generosity with love.



Photo: ©Silvano Soliveres

Jean Paul (left) with his friend Egide

They discovered I had a serious spinal injury. After a few weeks of hospitalization I was transferred to Kigali, Egide's town in Rwanda. I had to stay in bed and couldn't move because I was paralyzed and in acute pain.

**My name is Egide Nduwayezu, from Rwanda.** I felt his pain as if it were in my own body. However, I was amazed that he kept smiling after what had happened to him. He gave joy and hope to all of us who visited him. I would say that he radiated light in that very difficult situation.

When I saw him, I knew that he needed someone to look after his needs on a daily basis. Severin from Burundi stayed and cared for him, but he needed to go back to school to study. I offered to take his place. This wasn't easy because I had a small job that sustained me financially. I decided to leave my job and to help Jean Paul full time. My mother couldn't understand how I would leave my job for this. She believes that even a small job is a good start in making a better future. However, I was determined and she let me go.

It was difficult at first because Jean Paul was in great pain even when it came to simple tasks such as changing

his clothes. But we had support from God, our friends and family from all over Rwanda and Burundi who kept visiting us and kept him in their prayers.

**Jean Paul:** After a few months, I had an operation at King Faisal Hospital which helped me to sit up again. It was a miracle because many people after the accident didn't believe that I would ever be able to move by myself again. Also it was a miracle because all the money was raised to pay for this treatment by people who know Youth for a United World.

After a few days we had to move to a rehabilitation centre so that I could start physiotherapy to help me walk again. The physio was very hard but I didn't give up, exercised with all my strength and in the end it was a success. After a time I could walk on crutches even though my left foot was not good.

**Egide:** Our relationship soon caught the attention of the nurses, the doctors and other patients – I was Rwandese and he was Burundian.

Throughout the time we spent together at the hospital and the rehabilitation centre, J.P suffered much but he still kept on smiling. Many people including myself were astonished by his attitude. Many were converted by his courage and determination.

In fact, with the help of the entire family of Youth for a United World and our friends who visited us, we were able to overcome all sufferings and live beyond all borders.

I remember one day we received providence of meals from friends in Rwanda. Immediately Jean Paul asked me to go around and distribute some of it to those who didn't have anyone to look after them. I did it with joy, informing those I gave the food to, that this was a gift from another patient.

**Jean Paul:** I still go to the rehabilitation centre where physiotherapists are helping me to walk without crutches. I thank God for the help he gave me over those seven months. He kept me strong and gave me the courage not to quit.

**Egide:** I learnt that the one who gives away everything for love is never alone. After the time I spent with Jean Paul, God rewarded me! I received funding to go back to school. I found a better job than the one I left behind. I also thank God for doing what everyone believed was impossible by helping Jean Paul to recover. 🍀

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Genfest experiences to be continued next month