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We live in a world consisting of more than seven billion people, and although the differences among us are vast, we do share many similarities. One similarity in particular, is that each and every one of us has a story, and it is in the story where lives come to life and life stories

effect change. For the past nearly 20 years, I have fought social justice issues by teaching individuals how to orally tell their life stories.

My life and career choices have evolved around helping others. I was my mother's support and confidante from a very young age, I have written about this in detail in a memoir devoted to her

in Herstory in the late 90's.

I began my career as a counselor providing direct treatment and counseling to those affected by addiction and domestic violence. I was one of the founding members of "Domestic Harmony" a nonprofit organization for prevention and treatment of domestic violence among south Asian immigrants in US. During this time I met with Erika and had experience of working in Herstory. This was a transformative experience where I learned to dream, and by putting my dreams on paper somehow was able to pursue them. As I found courage to begin lifting the veils surrounding my memories of my mother, I myself found freedom to move on with my life.

So that after about 15 years of working in treatment field in NY I shifted to prevention work and began working with International non- profits in the Asia region. This work allowed me to see many faces of poverty, deprivation, exclusion and vulnerabilities. Services, handouts and donations only brought temporary relief. The path out of these difficult and what seem like unsurmountable conditions almost invariably involved empowering our communities. Giving voice to the voiceless was the first step for any meaningful change to occur. This was done in various settings urban, rural, educated, non- educated men and women through forming support groups, and local committees where the communities could come around and raise their issues. Even in some of the most conservative communities I saw the value of few women meeting in a women's circle and becoming a support to each other. Avid reader of Jung and Fried, I knew early on the benefit of catharsis and sharing. It was in sharing in these safe places that women were not only finding cathartic relief but also coming up with solutions to their problems and becoming agents of change.

I heard many stories and sometimes wrote after my field visits. These articles and stories became part of the program reports and were compelling cases when we were writing to our donors or government departments. I have personally experienced the value of writing, although have not used it in any systematic way within my programs other than a brief engagement with Erika in the Rio Grande Valley with ChildFund International where she provided two sessions to the ChildFund staff from the different ethnic backgrounds (Native, Hispanic and African American) implementing programs in the US along with Regional Program Director from Panama.

As of 2020 I have ended my full-time engagement of work and have returned to USA. Throughout my career and travels somehow the contact with Erika persisted. Sometimes going for years without connecting and then an email would come encouraging me and reminding me of the work I had begun so many decades ago. I am so glad that finally I was able to complete the story about my mother “Longings from behind and beyond the walls” is a commitment I made to my mother to tell her story, it took a lot of courage but finally it has been published as of August 2021. It is available at; https://www.amazon.com/Longings-Behind-Beyond-Walls-Rukhsana/dp/163728747X/ref=sr_1_3?crid=2E9LCMT4QRDTA&dchild=1&keywords=rukhsana+ayyub&qid=1629499162&srefix=rukhsana+ayy%2Caps%2C165&sr=8-3

As I begin the next phase of my life I am not sure what the future holds and where I will end up. Due to the ongoing pandemic and my advancing age I am not sure if I will take any long term position internationally. But one thing I am sure of is that I would like writing, storytelling to be a major part of my life.

I am based in Florida and I am very much interested to take advantage of the Facilitators training. However my passion for working towards equity, justice and human rights continues and what other outlet it will find I know not. One thing I am sure as long as I live I want to devote my life in ways big or small in raising awareness and addressing gender and social inequities. The skills that the Herstory facilitators training will provide will guide me in finding newer outlets for my passion.