

FOREWARD

Dear Friends,

“No half measures” says it all about Zahira. It can be truly said that without her the Dances of Universal Peace would not have grown and thrived in Australia. She travelled throughout the world to deepen in her own attunement and training.

When something needed doing, she simply got stuck in and did the service herself. In this mysterious process, in which devotion and willingness to serve are the key to the door, she became not only an inspiring leader of the Dances and Walks, but also a deep mentor and spiritual teacher for many. She walked her talk as a peacemaker with her activism in the Canberra community.

It is a privilege to know and work with her as a colleague. I would hope to emulate her courage, vitality and friendship, her ability to both know her limits as well as to give selflessly. Ya Hayy! Ya Awwal!

Love and blessings,

Saadi Neil Douglas-Klotz

Scotland, UK

27 September 2016

Reflecting with Zahira Madeleine

These reflections with Zahira, who is now in her 90th year, are offered as a celebration of her unswerving passion, generosity and leadership of both the Dances of Universal Peace in Australia, and her participation in the Canberra community. They celebrate Zahira's close engagement with her Sufi teachers, and do not include all those who contributed. In the course of these reflections since 2010, Zahira has consistently expressed her belief in Ubuntu: “I am who I am because of you; we are who we are because of each other.”

Zahira was born Madeleine Mary Newport Tinley in United Kingdom in April 1927, and in 1954 married David, becoming Madeleine Bullock. They had three children, Coralie, Christopher and Katrina. After being widowed in 1986 Madeleine set out from Canberra on a year long pilgrimage that spanned South Africa, United Kingdom and United States. Returning to Australia she was surprised to receive a clear inner message that she “must sing and dance”.

Madeleine joined a choir, and in January 1987 at the Change Agency attended a Sacred Circle Dancing workshop by Fiona Parr and Amida Harvey. The following year she travelled to one of Amida's weekends of Arabic Dances in Cornwall, and then attended the Glastonbury Dance Festival.

Madeleine began organising Dances of Universal Peace workshops in Australia. In 1989 she arranged for Fiona Parr to lead a dance workshop in Canberra and in other Australian centres.

In May 1990 Madeleine attended Amida Harvey's workshop in New Zealand, and the Peace through the Arts camp in UK. In January 1991 she arranged for Amida to lead a retreat in Canberra, and in April of that year Fiona Parr returned to lead a weekend of St Francis of Assisi dances which was attended by about 30 people.

In 1991 at the Canberra Showground (now Exhibition Centre), Madeleine facilitated the Dances of Universal Peace as part of a larger protest against the AIDEX ARMs Trade Fair. The organisers were deterred from holding another ARMs Trade Fair there for fifteen years.

In January 1992 Madeleine organised for Neil Douglas-Klotz (Saadi) to lead a Dances of Universal Peace week long training retreat including natural voice and the Aramaic Lord's Prayer at Blackfriars Priory in Canberra.

Madeleine travelled to United Kingdom and the Glastonbury Festival in 1992. On Midsummer Day at the local Sufi meeting she was initiated and named Zahira by Amida Harvey. Zahira then travelled to the Dances of Universal Peace Leaders Training Retreat at Lama, and visited the San Francisco home of the founder of the Dances, Murshid Samuel Lewis.

Amida Harvey led further training in Canberra in January 1993, 1995 and in Sydney in 2004. Saadi led training retreats in Australia in 1996, Saadi and Kamae Miller presented in Canberra and Sydney in 2001 and Saadi led dances from *The Genesis Meditations, A Shared Practice of Peace for Christians Jews and Muslims* in the Blue Mountains in 2006.

Zahira Madeleine Bullock embodied the dances and led dance circles to eat dance and pray together. Those touched by her passion for the dances and her hospitality, recall with affection the years when the dance meetings were held at her home at Weetangera early on a Saturday evening, and she would be shoeing twenty or more people home at midnight.

Zahira's devotion to spreading the message of peace through the Dances of Universal Peace, her friendship and correspondence to those who came, was constant both before and after an organisation was established. Annual General Meetings held in conjunction with the Easter retreat made decisions on consensus and looked for ways to ensure that all those who wanted to attend retreats and training in Australia and overseas could do so, and ensured international leaders were able to teach in Australia.

For almost a decade Zahira edited the *Australian Regional Journal for the Dances of Universal Peace*. When the International Dances of Universal Peace

decided to coordinate through a networker in each region she became the first Australasia Regional Networker and also wrote articles for the international journal *We Circle Around* reflecting progress in the Australasian region.

When Saadi Neil Douglas-Klotz established the Abwoon Study Circle Zahira followed his guidance for many years. She was drawn to his interpretation in *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, and *Dancing with the Aramaic Jesus*. The Native Middle Eastern tradition offered “a path that transcended political and religious conflicts”. Zahira studied this wisdom and spirituality, travelling to the Middle East with Saadi, and other communities overseas where she was well received. During many years of study, Zahira regularly led the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes in Aramaic, and the Nuri Mohammed Cycle particularly at Christmas, Easter or Eid. For five years from 2006, Zahira opened her home to a weekly Sufi study group, where her belief in unity, and “simple presence” shaped her leadership and hospitality.

In Canberra at Garema Place, she was instrumental in the weekly vigil of the local group of Women in Black, where for a decade between three and thirty women stood, in all weathers, in a public display of peaceful activism to communicate and actively oppose injustice.

More widely Zahira offered her friendship in and through a *Chorus of Women*. This Canberra based, collaborative, democratic group are supportive of each other and the community. They sing for the purpose of achieving peace through justice, singing the story of those who need help, for example those affected by the Canberra bushfires, and for the men, women and children asylum seekers who lost their lives when their boat sank coming to Australia in October 2001. Zahira extended her friendship practically and by writing letters and receiving replies internationally. This included letters of support for Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani woman who advocated for girls' education.

In her 80's Zahira joined the GOLD (Growing Old Disgracefully) community dance class for movers and non-movers over 55. Her commitment to fitness, inclusion, participation and creativity were demonstrated and shared in the context of increased confidence and well being for seniors.

From 2013 - 15 Zahira continued meeting on a weekly basis with members of the Canberra Abwoon circle. Although by this time she had suffered a mild stroke which affected her ability to speak fluently, through the practice of singing the Aramaic Lord's Prayer, Zahira's voice grew strong so as to powerfully embody the heart of the prayer for all present. These sessions will always be treasured by the group as enduring sacred moments which permeated their daily life.

Over three decades the inner guidance that she “must sing and dance” has uncovered her natural voice and developed the inner feeling of unity which is

greatly appreciated by those who journey with her. Zahira's simple presence and profound friendship manifest amongst her closest family and friends and in the community. Zahira's intact, pre social media archive of meticulous records covers almost a quarter century of her involvement in the Dances of Universal Peace.

Zahira was made a Life Member of the International Dances of Universal Peace. She has consistently inspired dance circles and mentored dance leaders. Her training with international leaders of the Dances of Universal Peace, the retreats she organised and the support she offered generously have sown the seeds for the foundations of the Dances of Universal Peace community in Australia.

She continues to be celebrated as a much-loved and vibrant matriarch of the Dances in Australia. She maintained tireless commitment over many years to igniting interest in the Dances, organising Dance events and spreading the word through her extensive network of friends and community groups throughout Australia and beyond. No half measures. Always enthusiastic, dependable, conscientious, responsible and trustworthy. She truly lives up to her Sufi name - Zahira - often translated as not only brilliant, shining, luminous, radiant but also helpful, supporting, blossoming and flourishing. Zahira's passion for the Dances of Universal Peace, her love and wisdom are deeply appreciated. May she continue to live in Peace.