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DECEMBER 25, 2008, A PLACE WHERE TEARS ARE DRIED

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Welcome to Voices on Genocide Prevention. This is Bridget Conley-Zilkic. With me today is Anne Heyman, who's the founder of the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda. Anne, thank you for talking with me today.

ANNE HEYMAN: It's my pleasure to be with you.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: So to help our audience understand the project, what is the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, I'd like to start out by asking how you first learned about what had happened in Rwanda, about the 1994 genocide.

ANNE HEYMAN: I think, you know, it was, certainly, having been an adult during that time, I was aware of the genocide. But in the fall of 2005 -- I'm involved in a program at Tuft University, called Moral Voices. And we were doing our year that year was Moral Voices on Genocide. And we had a speaker, Paul Rusesabagina, who was the gentleman from the movie, Hotel Rwanda, that that movie had been made about. And I had dinner with him before the evening's program. And my husband said to him, you know, "What's the biggest problem facing Rwanda today?" And he said, "In a country where you have 1.2 million orphans, with no systemic solution to deal with them, there's no future for the country." Immediately it struck me that, you know, Israel doesn't have an orphan problem. After the Second World War, there was certainly a tremendous influx of orphans. And what did they do with them? They built youth villages. And so I, actually, even at the table that night, said, "You should build youth villages." And it was just, like, "Yeah, fine." You know, pass the salt, and dinner went on. But it was an idea that really stuck with me. And I couldn't let it go.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And can you tell us a little bit of background on what was a youth village that was created after World War II?

ANNE HEYMAN: So after World War II, when there was a huge influx of orphans into Israel, what they did was they put them in, almost kibbutz-like settings. So there were houses, really community settings where the kids learned how to farm, worked on the farm, but were also educated and taught life skills. Over the years, there's really developed a methodology and a philosophy in these youth villages. There's still about 60 in Israel today. And today, they deal largely with immigrant populations. A lot of Ethiopian Israelis begin their life in Israel in youth villages. Many of them, they call them orphans of circumstance. A lot of kids, for one reason or another, whether from the former Soviet Union, other places in the world, arrive in Israel -- even if they have parents somewhere else, they arrive in Israel alone. And they get put in these huge villages. So, essentially, the youth villages have, as I said, developed this methodology and philosophy for dealing with often traumatized youth. And it occurred to me that this was something that had been done before, was quite successful in Israel and obviously needed to be changed to fit the Rwandan reality. But the wheel did not have to be reinvented. It's something that we could take and bring to Rwanda.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And at that moment, so you'd heard about Rwanda, the genocide while it was occurring as a news story. You met Paul Rusesabagina and learned of the problem. What were you doing at that time for a living? You'd been to Africa before?

ANNE HEYMAN: Well, I'm South African by birth. So I had spent, you know, the first 15 years of my life in South Africa and had visited in various places. But I had never been to Rwanda. I really had no clue about anything about Rwanda until my first visit. So the connection with the genocide was much more what pulled me to Africa than any of the other -- there were many reasons that have evolved with this project, which we'll talk about a little bit, in terms of it being a development project. Which I think are great and wonderful, but it wasn't really so much the development piece as the genocide piece that drew me to it.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Did your family have a history with the Holocaust?

ANNE HEYMAN: Not immediately. You know, we were in South Africa. My grandparents had come from England. Germany was my one grandfather, who actually passed away before I was born. So they had all come out before that time in Europe. So, you know, there were relatives, but nobody in my immediate family.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: So how did you start going about, then, from this spark of a vision of how a model of a youth village could be adapted to Rwanda to actually making it reality? Because obviously that's the hardest part.

ANNE HEYMAN: Yes. And in retrospect, it's only been two and a half years, and it's quite unbelievable. I'm not even quite sure how it came about. But what I did was just one step at a time. You know, I researched youth villages. Somebody said to me, "Have you heard of Yemin Orde, this youth village, which is really phenomenal?" I contacted Dr. Chaim Peri, who was the head of that youth village at the time. Talked to him about my idea. He said, "You know, when you come to Israel, we'll chat." I went to Israel. He put together a group of people. It was just sort of one thing led to another. That was Passover of 2006. I determined that we had a replicable model. In May, we went to Rwanda, and I didn't even know a Rwandan. I literally called everybody that I knew, and I said, "Who do you know that knows anybody in Rwanda?" And I connected names, phone numbers, emails, and I contacted everybody that we knew of in Rwanda and just asked people to meet with us. And there's a lot of people working in the area of genocide survivors, orphan, health. Issues that would've been related to our kids. And I really just wanted to get a sense of whether this was something that would work in Rwanda, was wanted in Rwanda, that was needed in Rwanda. You know, there was no way to tell until we actually went on the ground in Rwanda. And we, actually, got a tremendous reception. So much so that I went back to Israel, put together a group of Ethiopian Israelis, who had graduated from Yemin Orde. And this is the generation that had grown up, they had left Ethiopia, walked to the Sudan. Many of them lived in refugee camps for up to nine months, left family along the way. They came to Rwanda in July of 2006 with me to tell the story, both, of the philosophy of the village. But also, of their lives and their experiences, and the fact that they were now working, college educated, productive members of society, with families. I mean, they were really inspirational. So that was the summer of 2006. And then, I came back to New York after that summer. I was in Rwanda in July, Israel in August, back in New York in September. And at that point, I realized that I had a model. I had people that really wanted it to be replicated. And it was me and a friend of mine, who had quit her job as a financial services project manager. She had come to me and said, "I want to be your project manager."

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Oh, wow.

ANNE HEYMAN: And I said, "Okay. We just don't have much of a project. But come, you know, welcome aboard." So it was really just the two of us at that point. And over the summer, I had, actually, through work that I'd done on the Save Darfur campaign, I'd met a wonderful Rwandan woman, who became the Executive Director of the project, and still is. She has since moved to South Africa, but she's still working with us in Rwanda. Her name is Sifa Nsengimana. And my friend, who is the project manager, is Tina Wyatt. And we came back to New York. And I was in the position of what do I do now? Do I create my own INGO, International Non-Governmental Organization? Do I find a local one to partner with? You know, I didn't really know how to move forward.

So I contacted Will Recant, who I'd done some work with, and who had been advising me a little bit, at the JDC, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. And I said to him, you know, "This is what we have. And I need somewhere to house it. I need somebody who knows how to do this work. I need some kind of partnership. Can you help me try and figure out what to do here?" And he said, "Give me a week." And he called me a week later, and he said, "Why don't you house it here?" And so we became a special project of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. And it has been a phenomenal partnership. We could not have done what we've done without a lot of partnerships. But this, obviously, was the first one and a key one. And the notion of bringing -- there are a lot of Jewish connections with this. I mean, to me, obviously, the genocide is the big connection. But there is a wonderful Herzl quote that I don't have in front of me here. It's from *Old New Land* in 1902. It has everything to do with how Africa, when he is done saving his own people, he needs to turn his attention to Africa. And the notion of Ethiopian Israelis, who made Aliyah, to do what? You know, it wasn't about moving to the slums of Florida. It was for a greater purpose. And the notion that these people can come back to Africa as Ambassadors and bring this knowledge, which is so desperately needed, is to me, the ultimate fulfillment of the Zionist dream. So there's that aspect of it.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And what is the philosophy that you keep referring to? The larger ideological model for helping orphans in that situation?

ANNE HEYMAN: Right. So the key premise is this. Everyone has a timeline in their life. There's a past, a present and a future. And for these kids, there's been a break between their past and their present. Some format that doesn't even really let many of them live in the present. Forget about dreaming about having a future. So the question becomes how do you repair that break? The way that it's done at Yemin Orde, and actually, we've taken this piece of the philosophy with us to Rwanda and, in fact, used the terms of heart, *tikkun halev*, preparing the heart, and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. And what they mean in this context is the *tikkun halev* therapies are those individual therapies that are necessary for the particular child. So it could be art therapy, music therapy. It could be meeting with a psychiatrist, social workers, whatever

that particular child needs. But then, there are a whole layer of therapies, which are referred to the tikkun olam therapies. This is really built around creating programming, where every child in the village is required to be engaged in something for someone who is less fortunate than themselves. So it manifests itself in activities for the outside community. And it can take any shape. But the real notion is, is that it's really through helping others that you heal yourself. And at the end of the day, what you have, after four years -- we're talking about a high school now. So after the four years that the kids spent with us, they will be very much taught about how important it is to participate in your community, and to take responsibility for your community, and to share what you have with others. And so that is really the philosophy that is core and central to everything.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And are there any ways that you've had to adapt the model to meet Rwandan realities, and Rwandan history and traditions?

ANNE HEYMAN: There have been some relatively minor. You know, for example, in Israel, the model Yemin Orde, is the children live in a house. And the whole idea is that the village is built-- I'll just jump to philosophy for a second, and then, I'll come back to this. The village is built in a way that the children are housed in houses. The staff live in houses amongst the children. On the far side of the campus is a school, where the teachers come and the teachers go. So you've created a "normal" environment. Where kids wake up in the morning at home, go to school, come home. If life is terrible at school, they've got people who can advocate for them, who are the informal educators, who live with them in the village. If they're good at something out of school, they get a chance to blossom. It's really to create as "normal" an atmosphere as possible. So within this context, in the village in Israel at Yemin Orde, the people who live with the kids are almost peer counselors. They tend to be university age students, who wake up with the kids in the morning, send the kids off to school. Then, go to their own classes and then, come back to the village in the evening, and spend the afternoon, late afternoon and evening hours, with the kids.

It was felt very strongly by the Rwandans, and the way that we Rwanda-ized our model was we put together an advisory group in Rwanda, who spent two weeks with us at Yemin Orde, looking at the model, learning the model. And sharing with us what they felt would work and wouldn't work. So after doing that they said they felt very strongly that the children in Rwanda needed a mother figure. They needed an actual mother to live in the house with them. And then, they could have these type of peer counselors to do after school activities with them and meet with them in the evening. But the central figure in their life and their home needed to be a mother. So one of the sad consequences of the genocide in Rwanda is that there are a tremendous amount of widows. And widows who lost their children. And so there are, at the moment, we have eight housemothers. Our first class of 125 children are moving in December 15. We'll get to that in a minute. But the women who are the housemothers are really widows from the genocide who have lost their families and are now replacing them with these children.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And that's a beautiful way to bring together the losses of both the adults and the next generation to try to build something better. So you said they're coming in now, the first class. You've broken ground, you've built the schools, the houses. What's happening then on December 14?

ANNE HEYMAN: December 15.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Fifteenth. What will be going on?

ANNE HEYMAN: The first 125 children will be moving into the village. We're not calling it an opening. We're trying to be very low key. We're not inviting anybody, other than staff and people who are working on the project. We really want them to get a chance to get to know their new surroundings, get to know their new "family." The people who are going to be living with them, caring for them. Understand what the program is all about. And they're going to start school in January. The school year in Rwanda goes from January through December.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And these children, where would they have been living previously?

ANNE HEYMAN: The vast majority of them, they're all orphans from the genocide, age 15 through 18.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Oh, so they're older.

ANNE HEYMAN: Yeah, well, the genocide took place 14 years ago. So we are really catching that tail end of the actual genocide orphans, although, many, many, many orphans who are younger are a direct result of the genocide. You know, one of the tragedies of the genocide was that rape by AIDS infested soldiers was a weapon of genocide. And so today, you have women dying all the time as a result of the genocide and leaving behind children. So, you know, there are many generations of orphans to go before Rwanda is rid of this problem. But hopefully, we are able to model a solution that others will pick up on.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: So these children have been living as orphans on their own or in impromptu centers?

ANNE HEYMAN: Right. One of the phenomenon of Rwanda are what they call child headed households. You know, and they literally have hundreds and thousands of them. And so some of the orphans are children who were cared for by older siblings. Which meant that those

siblings never had a chance to go get educated, because they were always worrying about where the next meal is coming from for their younger siblings.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Yeah, or to be children, at all.

ANNE HEYMAN: To be children at all, or to be trained, or to be anything. Many of these kids were left on their own after the genocide. They were taken in by neighbors or extended family members. The vast majority of the ones who are coming to us are kids who, even when they were taken in, were abused. Or taken in because whoever took them in wanted to exploit their land, took away their family land. None of them are in any kind of good situation. The best situation that our kids are in, there may be a couple who are with relatives who actually care for them, but can't afford to educate them. So there are so many that there's no issue with finding kids. What we did was we worked with our Rwandan advisors to come up with criteria. Then, we had our Head of Informal Education, who is himself a genocide survivor and who wound up taking care of his three younger siblings. He put himself through college and then devoted his life to caring for the orphans of the genocide after that. And so he has spent the last ten years working in the orphan community, and he knows a lot of people. So armed with these criteria, one of which is geographic. Rwanda has 30 districts. And so we wanted to get four kids from each district. Because part of what we want to do is when our kids graduate and return to their communities, we want them to be able to split out throughout the whole country. And to take the innovative education that they've received. So I'll talk a minute about what that innovative education is. But to really share it with the whole countryside and not just have it be concentrated in one particular area.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Yeah, if you can just say, briefly, about the education. And then, I'd also like to ask if you can tell people what your website address is. So I know there are photographs, there are updates, and people can learn more about the work you're doing.

ANNE HEYMAN: Absolutely. So in terms of the education, the formal education, the high school education, is a Rwandan curriculum, which is enhanced a little bit. But it is more than methodology, which is revolutionary in Rwanda and, I think, in Africa. And the methodology is based on an institution in Jerusalem, actually, called the Feuerstein Institute. Its formal name is the International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential. There is a Professor Feuerstein, who is now 94 years old, who is a wonderful, wonderful man, who got his start in life working with Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. He has developed a whole methodology for dealing with children with trauma, which is, in fact, a lot of his work is what the Yemin Orde model is based on.

But in the formal education sphere, they have developed something that they call instrumental enrichment. It's a way of identifying cognitive skills that are missing. So for kids who have suffered trauma, and who have had to miss certain years of their education, rather than have to go back and catch up on all those years, they are able to identify the cognitive skills that are missing. And teach those and incorporate the learning for those in their regular classes. So that these kids can continue in an age appropriate manner and not be forced to go back to first grade at the age of 18. So our teachers are, actually, in Israel at the moment for six weeks of training at the Feuerstein Institute. And then, we're going to have a resident specialist from Feuerstein living in the village for the first year, helping set up this whole system. So that's the formal education.

In addition to that I just want to mention on quick thing about the partnerships that we have. We are partnering with Keren Kaymet Israel, which is a Jewish National Fund, to start a forestation program. Rwanda, like much of that part of Africa, is completely deneutered and in desperate need of reforestation. This will be a tremendous skill for our kids and, also, something that we can offer to the country and offer neighboring countries to come and see.

Another area where we are partnering with the Cisco Systems, which is the computer company, to really build an IT center at the village. And part of that has to do with President Kagame's vision for Rwanda. He really wants it to become the IT center of Africa. And so our village will be wireless, and our kids will be computer literate and, also, trained in actually managing, you know, the mechanics of computers. So the goal is to really have kids that, when they leave us, are prepared for college, if that's what they want. But if not, the one other thing that we're doing is we're having an organic farm where, within a few years, we hope to be completely self-sustaining. And have cows and chickens and really feed ourselves. So again, the idea being that when the kids leave the village, if they want to go back to their family farm, they will know modern farming methods that they can not only use, but share with their neighbors. If they want to go into forestation, which is desperately needed, they will have the skills. Same with computers. It's really about, it's become a development project. But a development project through really repairing the lives of these kids.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: And developing human capacity first.

ANNE HEYMAN: Exactly. Exactly.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: It makes an incredible amount of sense. Anne, thank you. Oh, and please do let...

ANNE HEYMAN: Let me give you the website.

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: Yeah, exactly.

ANNE HEYMAN: The website is www.agahozo-shalom.org, and just so that you know, agahozo means, “a place where tears are dried.”

BRIDGET CONLEY-ZILKIC: I think it’s an appropriate name. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me.

ANNE HEYMAN: Really my pleasure. Thank you.

NARRATOR: You have been listening to *Voices on Genocide Prevention*, from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. To learn more about preventing genocide, join us online at www.ushmm.org/conscience. There you'll also find the *Voices on Genocide Prevention* weblog.