

# Christians, Muslims & Jews Igniting Peace in Jordan

Saturday, August 13, 2011 at 6:00PM

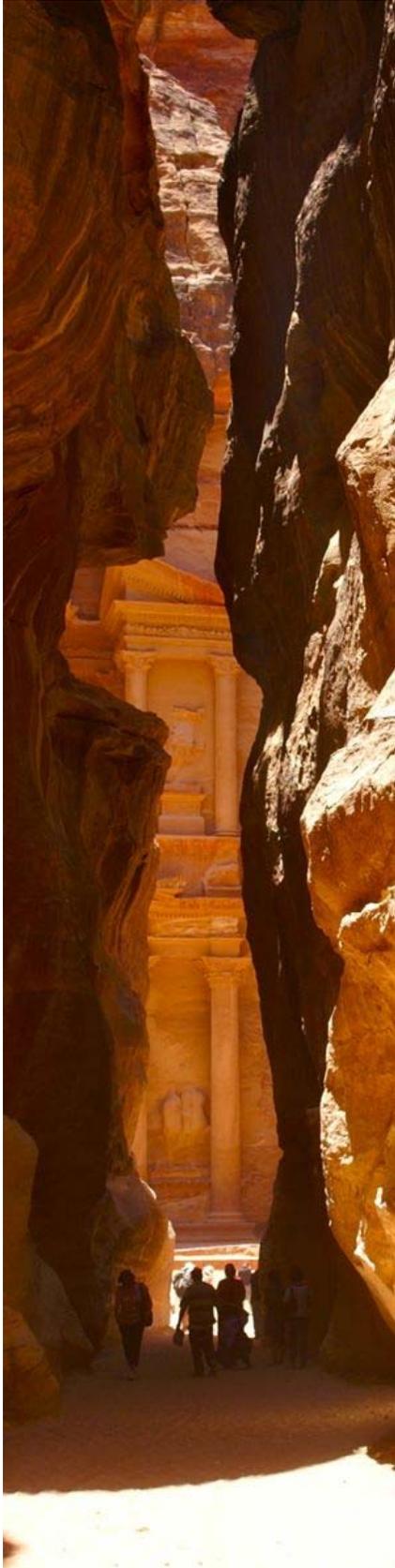
David Crumm in Expand Your Horizon, Jewish, Muslim, Peacemakers, Ramadan, Travel



**JORDAN CONFERENCE:** From left, Adnan Badran, an American-educated scientist who was prime minister of Jordan during 2005 and currently is president of Petra University in Jordan, peace activist and writer Brenda Rosenberg and is a former Jordanian Prime Minister, Brenda Rosenberg, Father Nabil Haddad, founder of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center.

**W**elcome peace activist Brenda Naomi Rosenberg, who was the creative spark in launching [the Friendship and Faith project](#) that now is circling the globe. In this report, Brenda writes about a recent worldwide peace conference held in Jordan. As you will read, the conference was marred by eruptions of emotion—and lit by an unquenchable yearning for peace.

**Care to read more?** [Sarah Jaward, who plays a key role in Brenda's report, writes her own personal reflection for the Friendship and Faith website.](#)



# Igniting Peace in Jordan

**BY BRENDA NAOMI ROSENBERG**

*Sometimes sparks ignite bombs, sometimes they light candles.*

**PETRA STONE ENTRYWAY:** Located south of Amman, Jordan, the city of Petra is more than 2,500 years old. Now a World Heritage Site, Petra is a national symbol of Jordan and its most-visited tourist attraction.

**AMMAN, JORDAN**—Thermometers pushed past 100 degrees. Smog and sand thickened the air. Even the pavement seemed to be on fire as Sarah Jaward and I arrived in Amman Jordan in July for an international Conference on Conflict Transformation. Sarah and I are an unlikely pair anywhere, but particularly in Jordan: I'm a former global fashion executive and American-Jewish-Zionist-peace activist; Sarah Jaward is an American-Muslim-Lebanese-recent graduate from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

Together, we were attending the conference to talk about the concept of Tectonic Leadership, in this case focusing on Middle East Conflict Transformation. This may be the first time you've read about our new and growing array of training options, [which you can learn about via our new website](#). This is a ground-breaking

approach to grassroots peacemaking. We focus on training existing and potential leaders from opposite sides of a conflict to take joint ownership in transforming that conflict. These newly trained pairs of leaders face challenges together and find solutions together. [The story of how we developed Tectonic Leadership also is part of our new website.](#)

In our journey to Jordan, Sarah was experiencing everything for the first time. I was a veteran. Three years ago, I was the guest of the royal family and participated in an Abrahamic Dialogue with 80 participants from around the world. It was a wonderful experience, so I arrived optimistic, confident and without jet lag. We couldn't wait to present Tectonic Leadership to this new gathering of men and women.

### **‘I’M GADY FROM TEL AVIV.’ THEN, A SCREAM IN ARABIC.**

I was looking forward to working again with my friend Father Nabil Haddad, who heads the [Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center](#), and to meet new friends from Israel, Palestinian territories, Jordan and Lebanon who would be sharing their successful models for transforming conflict and creating cross-cultural understanding. I was starry eyed and exuberant at the opening ceremonies, where we made our introductions.

Then the microphone was handed to a man who said: “Hi I’m Gady from Tel Aviv.”

Next, there was a scream in Arabic as a young man ran out of the room ranting. He was followed by 20 young men and women—even as two other young women physically were tugging on his jacket trying to pull him back into the room.

I froze. My optimism vanished. All I could hear were echoes of my well-meaning friends and family: “Brenda don’t go!” “Jordan isn’t safe!” One of the organizers of the conference was telling me: “Brenda, protesters are out front. We have a bus at the side of the building for the Israelis. Please, go now.” Her words reinforced my fears. I took Sarah’s hand and walked to the bus, my heart pounding. Who were these angry people? Why were they so furious?

By the time we arrived back at the hotel we had learned they were university students. When their group leader heard the words “from Tel Aviv,” he was outraged. No one had told him that Israelis would be attending.

The next morning, Sarah and I approached that young group leader in the hotel lobby. We were trying to put a central principle of Tectonic Leadership into action: Tension can never be eradicated, but we can utilize tension to transform conflict.

For more than two hours, we listened. Sarah translated back and forth. This young man began by arguing that he had no problem being around Israelis in general—but no one had alerted him that this conference would include active participation by Israelis. That shocked him. As we listened, he went on to explain that he had never actually met an Israeli. He needed to prepare himself and prepare his group for this unexpected situation they were facing. Eventually, we gained his trust enough that he was willing to meet Gady, shake his hand—and present a collaborative exercise with him at our presentation the next day.

Our hearts were lighter as we went to the next session. Then, yet another student leader announced that he was leaving with some of his friends. This young man asked to speak to the entire group and explain himself. He just wanted two minutes! But those minutes

turned into two hours. Soon, conference sessions were being cancelled to accommodate this unexpected change in schedule.

The conference slowed into a long listening session. Why was this student leader pulling out? He explained that a local newspaper described this conference as encouraging “normalizing,” so his parent organization had told him to leave the conference. I was not familiar with the report or the claims of the newspaper, but this young leader told us: “We believe in peace, but we will not normalize relations with Israelis until all Palestinian land is returned.”

A talented mediator who had traveled from Canada for the conference tried to intervene. But angry exchanges soon erupted among the Jordanians themselves—disputing whether anyone needed to pull out of the conference. In the end, about 10 young Jordanians left. One Palestinian girl waived but decided to stay. She and Sarah began to talk about our ideas in Tectonic Leadership—and the two of them have been texting ever since.

The conference was full of such surprises and strong emotions. One of the most wrenching was a presentation by Wounded Crossing Borders: 6 Israelis and 5 Palestinians. These eleven brave people came to Jordan to share their personal stories of being displaced from their homes in Iraq and Lebanon as Jews and being displaced from their homes as Palestinians. These are courageous individuals whose stories include serious wounds, the loss of loved ones, arrest and imprisonment—yet they came together and now work for peace together.

Despite the outbursts early in the conference, most responses were encouraging. I presented my documentary film on Reuniting the Children of Abraham with Arabic subtitles to a packed and

enthusiastic room. Many people asked for copies and said they hoped to work with our programs in the future.

## **STINGING WORDS SHOT AFTER CANDLES AND WINE**

I was exhausted by that Friday evening, but I was thrilled when Israelis asked me to light Shabbat candles—and we joined with the



Israelis and Palestinians from Wounded Crossing Borders in a mini Shabbat that was held in the hotel dining room. Sarah and others in the dining room joined us. Sarah and I read a few lines about why we light Shabbat candles. Wine is not served in the hotel, but one of the Jordanian organizers allowed us to pour ceremonial wine brought from Israel. I went to sleep with a smile on my face.

I arrived at breakfast refreshed and hopeful. But, before I finished my coffee, I faced the chastising of a Jewish woman from America who said, “I heard you lit candles last night. Why did you let the Israelis use you?”

I replied, “It was an honor to be asked.”

She retorted, “If you wanted to light candles and have wine you should have done it in one of your rooms—not in the dining room.”

I replied, “This is a conference on cross cultural communication and we saw Shabbat as a wonderful opportunity to share the sweetness and beauty of Judaism.”

Over her morning coffee, Sarah heard from several of the Jordanians: “Why would you stand there with Jews when they lit candles? How could you read with Brenda?”

Sarah and I connected on a deeper level that morning. Harsh words from our own sting the most.

## **ONE MORE SESSION DISRUPTED BY A SURPRISING DEPARTURE**

Finally, it was our turn to present Tectonic Leadership. [You can learn more about our programs at our website.](#) However, before our session was over, a Palestinian man from Wounded Crossing Borders left the room. Sarah and I looked at each other, but we forged ahead with the presentation. Despite an array of problems that had confronted this conference, our session was a hit. We fielded lots of questions, received hugs and sincere invitations from across the region.

At lunch, the Palestinian man who had bolted from our room asked if we could talk—and we agreed. He explained that he left our session because he was overcome with emotion and didn’t want anyone to see him shed a tear. He wanted to learn more about our programs. He was touched he to see an Arab and Jew from America care so deeply about both Israelis and Palestinians. Sarah and I had assumed this young man had left our session in a show of anger—yet here we were hugging and snapping photos and promising to stay in touch.

The week was so challenging—yet so rewarding. Ever since that journey, I've been Skyping, emailing and texting young leaders from the region who want to learn more. I continue to believe peace is possible but our efforts need support from all communities. We need to create viable career paths for a new generation of professionals trained in peacemaking, cross-cultural communication, genocide prevention, conflict transformation and activism for social justice. All of us can play a role in empowering these young leaders and making our world a better place.

**Care to read more?** [Sarah Jaward, who plays a key role in Brenda's report, writes her own personal reflection for the Friendship and Faith website.](#)

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