

WFWP USA: HerStory Awards - Women Peacemakers Answering the Call

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February 10, 2024



On February 10, Global Women's Peace Network had the second HerStory Award of the year which Ms. Adia Lancaster, Director of the New Hope International Foundation and Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) Global Women's Peace Network Field Coordinator, gracefully emceed. She opened the event by sharing, "The HerStory Award is a truly prestigious award in its own right...not only do we with the HerStory acknowledge external achievements that these amazing women have impacted their communities and beyond, but we go a bit deeper. We care about the heart behind these women...we want to know the drive that drove them to overcome challenges and reach these insurmountable goals, what made them courageous, what made them become fearless and use those stories to inspire us in our own lives."

WFWP USA President Kaeleigh Moffitt then warmly welcomed everyone as she shared, "The woman's touch is needed in our society today and the more that we can uplift the role of true women in the family, in leadership and in society, the more we can see a change in peace." She quoted from WFWP Founder Dr. Hak Ja Han's memoir *The Mother of Peace Memoir*, "**Creating peace is like unraveling a ball of tangled yarn. It is difficult to find where to begin but nothing will be accomplished by sitting with arms crossed.**"

Each of the awardees was then introduced with their bios as well as a personal sharing from the WFWP member who nominated them. President Moffitt then virtually presented the award and each awardee shared her story with the participants.

The first awardee, **Jennifer Jordan, Award-winning author, filmmaker and screenwriter,**

She opened up by sharing her uncertainty regarding whether investigative journalists are born with an innate drive or if it's something acquired through training. However, she expressed a profound sense of being naturally inclined to challenge authority, question the status quo, and scrutinize narratives that lack coherence. Her awakening to this occurred when she read "Into Thin Air." Disturbed by the portrayal of women by the author, she embarked on her inaugural investigation, uncovering what she believed to be evidence of the author's misogyny and biased treatment of a particular individual on the expedition.

This experience marked the beginning of her journey into the realm of high-altitude exploration and investigative journalism. Her second investigation began when she read a biography of an explorer from 1939. At the time she and her husband were in the K2 mountain range. She realized that the biography

was biased and this she felt was not right and she needed to find out the truth. Through that, she was able to meet Greg Mortenson. Unfortunately as she watched his interview on 60 Minutes, she realized it didn't make sense for him to be treated the way he was and it was disappointing that the journalists were criticizing him without doing their due diligence. **"There is just something in me that balks, rears up when I am fed a story that does not make sense and I hope to continue that ...it is an ongoing battle that you and I can do on an individual basis to stop and say, wait a minute; what is the source, is there any agenda involved and is there a money trail to follow.** She shared that when there is a story in front of her that just doesn't make sense she says to follow the money and if there is money involved, where is the money.

She concluded, **"It is an ongoing battle and I am glad I am in the middle of it because I think that it is an honorable way to pursue a career in digging out and trying to ferret out the truth out of all the mishmash of power and money these days."**

The second awardee, **Cady Wassa Traore, Founder of Women for Peace in Africa,**

She began by fondly recalling her upbringing in a small town in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where she was raised in a household that embraced both Muslim and Christian faiths. Her father practiced Islam while her mother followed Christianity, and together they imparted upon her the fundamental values of love and sharing, which have remained deeply ingrained in her character. From a young age, she learned that despite differences in religious beliefs, we are all bound by a shared humanity and a duty to care for one another. Her childhood home was constantly bustling with visitors, and the family joyously observed the major holidays of both faiths.

In November of 2010, she faced a significant challenge: a massive scam that resulted in profound financial hardship, leaving her with virtually nothing. Despite the adversity, she shared, **"This scam taught me about resilience, perseverance, and the power of resistance."** She founded the Women for Peace in Africa in 2016 when she thought she didn't have anything. **"Deep within me, I knew I couldn't abandon the cause I strongly believed in...perseverance became my guarding principle, I learnt to embrace the setback and failure as an opportunity for growth and improvement."** She reached out to family and friends to ask them for support and they explored creative solutions for her to keep her mission alive. Through this she became more resourceful and resilient knowing that every penny saved would be put forward to support the organization and those in need. As a testament to never giving up, she created the beauty brand, CADY cosmetics to support the cause of the organization. She concluded by sharing, **"To anyone facing adversity, I urge you to persevere and trust in your ability to overcome and remember that it is in the darkest moment that the light of perseverance shines the brightest...it is not about how many times you fall but how many times you get up, brush the dust off and keep moving forward."**

The third awardee, **Elyssa Leininger, Owner of Elyssa Leininger Western and Wildlife Art,** She started by recounting her early affinity for art, which blossomed during childhood. However, a disheartening experience in high school, where a teacher defaced her artwork with angry faces, stifled her creative spirit entirely. It wasn't until she underwent heart surgery at 17 that her perspective on life shifted. **"After my surgery, I saw life as more sacred, more vibrant. I could see all the little details that I couldn't see before, the vibrant colors, the way the light hits the surface and reflects different colors...I didn't have a vision for that before. Once I could see that, I had these paintings in my head that I wanted to create."** As she was pursuing her medical degree in college, she received a scholarship to go to Italy to study art, she fell in love with art all over again. Upon her return, she was an artist with shows and commissions. She was balancing her love for art while still practicing medicine. During a medical mission to an orphanage in Ethiopia, she took that opportunity to teach the children how to draw and share her love for art with them, crossing the language barrier and connecting with them.

In 2020, she was commissioned to paint in her previous childhood neighborhood underpass. **" I believe that no matter what your income or where you live or how you find fine art... I believe that covering an ugly surface with bright colors makes all the difference in the world. There is something spiritual in creating a work of art for everyone. Public art transforms spaces, gives people a spokenness."**

We would like to congratulate all the awardees for sharing their inspiring stories with us and for reminding us that no matter our challenges, we can always choose to make a difference.