

## **A Unifying Tool for Peace: Confronting Tragedy with a Football**

(Original)

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*Walking down the street, initially looking at me, no one would know my family's legacy of survival of the fittest and leaves minor invisible scratches on my body that no one can see but me.*

Every day, we hear the chitter-chatter in the medical community about gene inheritance and how they shape cancer, diabetes, and even physical deformations such as a cleft lip palate. When these conversations arise, I quietly think about my inheritance that leaves tiny marks of hardship and violence on my heart and soul.

*If modern science were to examine my DNA, they would see that my trauma lineage is self-explanatory, and each DNA polynucleotide carries transgenerational trauma passed to me.*

From my father's side of the family, I am a Sefardi Jew; my Iberian roots struggle to keep a dying language and culture alive with each passing year. Fleeing Spain and setting up a new life in a strange land was hard work to prove they were worthy members of society. Each time an elder dies, there is a collective loss as a piece of our complex survival puzzle is lost.

*I vow to share their stories with others who lend their ear...*

My mother has roots from the Land of Milk and Honey, present-day Bosnia. Her family fled systemic ethnic genocide whose focus claimed the lives of men and physically and sexually abused women to harm them beyond repair as a part of the ethnic cleansing campaign. The women in my mother's family have a post-conflict existence that roots itself in feminine solidarity.

*I promote women's rights as human rights that are vital to the survival of humanity...*

My mother's father was a valiant Kurd who was imprisoned for being an activist who

challenged the nation of marginalized ethnic groups in Turkey. His spirit lives in millions of minorities in Turkey whose muffled voices are dying to be heard.

*I engage in my community and online to achieve equality for all who face systemic and implicit oppression.*

Wanting to “beat oppression,” in 2016, my brother started the Football Unifies Project in Istanbul, Turkey. Confronting the weight of trauma, he inherited from our lineage, instead of wallowing in tragedy, he faced contemporary concern- the mistreatment of Syrian refugees. Thus, he organized training, matches, and, of course, the feeling of camaraderie that the football field gives as a place where everyone forgets their problems and enjoys holistic wins and defeats. Since my brother graduated from high school, he “passed the ball” to me to uphold and carry his mission on the football field where pressing concerns are articulated, and passing the ball collaboratively generates solutions. While each match isn’t won, we are winners because we work together and score goals to create peace and halt oppression, poverty, and civil discord. Even though different languages are spoken on the field, the players share the same anthem of peace and moving forward despite the circumstances.

*As a forward player and the founder of the Football Unifies Project, in 2021, he made me captain of his team to continue to teach, play and win with peace.*

Wanting to address violence perpetrated against women in Turkey, currently, as a young woman, I am leading a Football Unifies Project team of young girls giving them the tools to be bold, strong, and ready to confront a world that seeks to hold us back. The girls I coach learn that football and sports aren’t solely reserved for males but for all genders as an empowering tool to promote peace, tolerance, and understanding where no gender, ethnicity, or religion matters.

*“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire; it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.” Nelson Mandela*

Our worldwide communities don’t need another foundation or huge grant to bring about peace; we need a hands-on approach where we work hard, play hard, and get sweaty and shed tears. Such experiences will help us win peace in the least expected place, like a football field. A simple object like a ball and well-intentioned individuals with energy and a competitive spirit can bring peace on the field that transfers to our daily lives.