



TELLING THEIR STORIES: Journalist filmmaker Mehria Azizi risked her life to make the documentary *Afghanistan Unveiled*, revealing the lives of women outside Kabul. She is featured in Wilson's book, *One Peace*, for her work teaching other girls how to read and write despite the threat of death under Taliban rule. - Submitted Photo

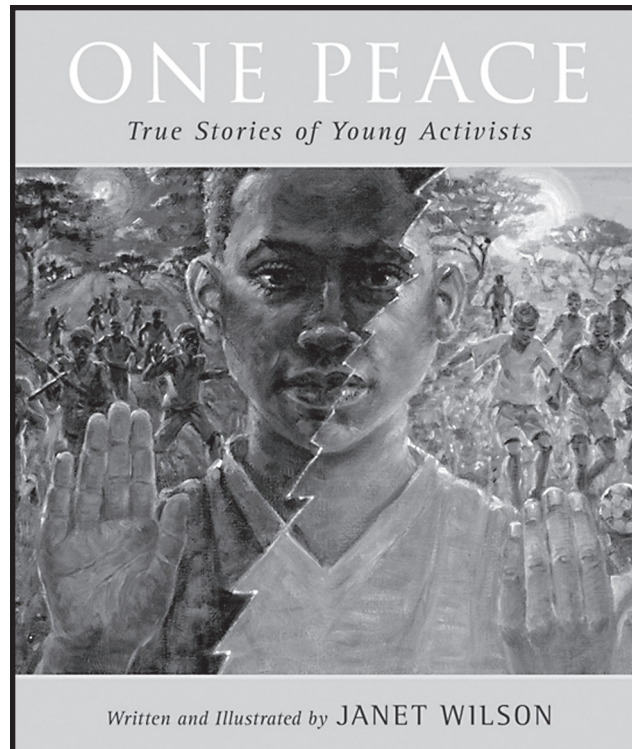
Eden Mills author releases new book on global children

By Rebecca Ring

Janet Wilson recently released her new book, *One Peace: True Stories of Young Activists* (Orca Book Publishers), recommended for ages eight and up. The Eden Mills artist wrote and illustrated this inspiring volume of stories, poetry, photographs and paintings of children from all over the world who have worked to promote peace. Each story demonstrates the "Power of One"; how the actions of one person, even a child, can have a profound effect.

The profiles of young peacemakers include Canadian Craig Kielburger who, at age 12, founded Free the Children to help victims of child labour. He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times.

Wilson tells the story of Song Kosal, who lost her leg in a land mine explosion at the age of five, while working in a rice paddy with her mother in Cambodia. Her experience led her to spread a message of



Written and Illustrated by JANET WILSON

peace around the world and she founded Youth Against War. The Canadian Government invited her to witness the signing of the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997.

Many stories

Other stories tell of brave, remarkable and determined children from Bosnia, Liberia, Japan, the UK, Columbia, and the USA. One story has become personal for Wilson – the story of Mehria Azizi, an Afghan girl who believed in education for peace.

When Azizi was eight, she saw her mother killed by a stray bullet while she was praying. For the next five years, she risked her life to teach neighbourhood girls to read and write, an action punishable by death under Taliban rule. She continued because she knew that education is crucial to break the cycle of poverty and ignorance that led to the fighting that killed her mother and the tyranny that stole her basic human rights.

Azizi went on to educate the world about the plight of women in Afghanistan. After the fall of the Tali-

ban, she was trained as one of Afghanistan's first female camera operators. She worked on the Emmy nominated documentary *Afghanistan Unveiled*, which portrays life for women outside of Kabul. She travelled through dangerous territory in the process and has since received countless death threats. Her family was also threatened and her brother was kidnapped. Azizi was forced to flee her homeland. Wilson has been instrumental in helping her do so.

Wilson contacted Azizi to ask permission to tell her story. She agreed but begged that the book not be published in Afghanistan, as it was too dangerous. Wilson offered to change her name but Azizi wanted her real name used. Wilson contacted her just prior to publishing to offer once again to protect her identity. Azizi stuck by her decision. It was during this conversation that she first asked for Wilson's help to get her out of the country.

Wilson was overwhelmed as she had no experience in such matters, but fate led

her to the right people and the right contacts. "It has been very interesting, enriching and stressful," says Wilson. She raised enough money to get Azizi, her husband and infant son a visa to stay in India, where they can apply to the UN for refugee status, allowing them to move to Canada or the USA. Azizi has an appointment with the UN High Commission in May. Wilson says she has contacted MP Mike Chong's office for help in the matter but has so far received no response.

No funds

The Azizi family has no funds of their own and must continue to raise funds in order to live in India until their meeting with the UN. Wilson began raising funds by talking to other authors at the Eden Mills Writers Festival. She continued at exhibitions of her artwork, and has managed to help keep Azizi and her family going. She says she has tapped out her personal contacts and now needs help from the larger community. She is in the early stages of organizing a benefit. For more information or to help, contact her at jan-chris@hsfx.ca.

In the meantime, Wilson spreads her message of peace and the power of one. She makes presentations at schools in Canada and the USA. "In 20 years of making presentations to kids, I have never seen this level of fascination and engagement," she says, "You can hear a pin drop." She says they are impressed by the fact that it is not adults but children who are making such a huge impact in these stories.

She noted that younger children define peace in terms of love, family and happiness, whereas older kids define it as the absence of war. Many of them do not see world peace as possible. Before hearing the real-life stories, many glamourize war as it is portrayed in video games and the media. The glamour fades as they listen to stories of real children affected by "weapons of mass destruction," like the atom bomb. "It brings the reality to light," says Wilson.

When the kids learn about landmines, the consistent reaction is that they see them as "so unfair" because they are hidden and any child running in a field can be killed or injured.

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