

*We wish to express our deepest gratitude
to His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

Unsung Heroes of Compassion is a family reunion of sisters and brothers related not by blood, but by passion and purpose.

Scattered across the globe, members of this family work tirelessly to ease the suffering of others, create opportunities for those less fortunate, and bring life-saving care to war-torn regions of the world. Some work alone, others in collaboration with expert teams, all with humility and no expectation of reward. They are the first to acknowledge that although the problems of humanity are too great to be solved quickly or easily, there is not a moment to lose, and so they act wholeheartedly, trusting that if you save one life it is as if you have saved the whole world.

The patriarch of this far-flung tribe is Dick Grace. In 1999, Dick first gave voice to a dream of bringing together compassionate individuals from all corners of the world—those who have dedicated the course of their lives toward helping others. He asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama to join him in this endeavor, enthusiastically asserting that these “unsung heroes” could inspire others to act with greater kindness and generosity.

The Dalai Lama agreed, pointing out that the last words of the Buddha were “Make of yourself a lamp.” In other words, let your own life be a shining example of goodness.

The individuals we recognize today have done just this, lighting the way for us in places where hope must overcome hopelessness and generosity illuminates the only path to safety. Though there are just 51, today’s honorees represent a broad spectrum of humanity. Among them are young and old, female and male, spiritual, religious, and agnostic individuals. Gathered from the far corners of the earth, each demonstrates the universal goodness that is our human birthright and



is celebrated by every culture. Together, they help us to recall that we are all one family regardless of where we reside or the circumstances in which we live.

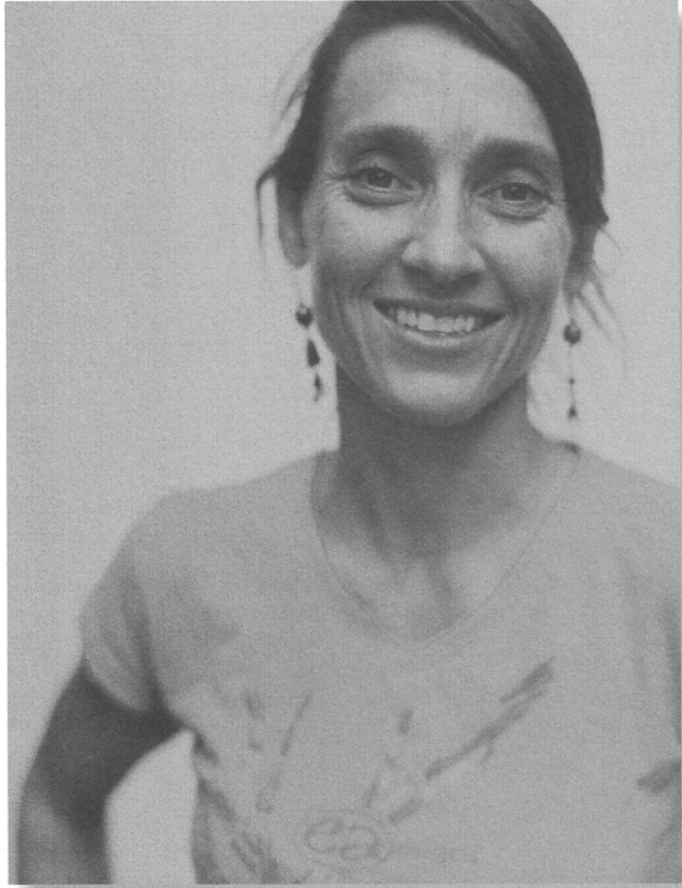
Traditional societies express this connection of family by calling everyone Auntie or Uncle, Grandfather or Sister. Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains further: "In Africa when you ask someone 'How are you?' the reply you get is always in the plural, even when you are speaking to one person. A man would say 'We are well' or 'We are not well.' He himself might be quite well but his grandmother is not well and so he is not well either. The solitary, isolated human is really a contradiction in terms."

In fact, the impulse to connect with and to care for others blossoms daily, even when circumstances are most dire. For every global injustice and act of violence, there are a thousand corresponding acts of caring. This is why we see children on the verge of starvation feeding stray animals, comforting them against their scrawny chests. No matter the difficulty or odds against success, the force of caring can never be quenched. Pablo Neruda explains, "You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring."

The Dalai Lama prepares his day with these words every morning: "May I be a guide for those on the path, a guard for those who need protection, a boat, a raft, a bridge to cross the flood. May I be a lamp in the darkness, a resting place for the weary, a healing medicine for all who are sick."

We, too, can help heal our tender and magnificent world. The stories in this book show us how. We hope you will savor them and let them touch you. Then find a way to speak out, act up, and shine.

—*Elizabeth Share and Jack Kornfield*



Nicole Swedlow

Mexico



Jace and Ali have grown up in Nayarit, Mexico, sharing their mom, Nicole Swedlow, with an entire community. “It isn’t always fair or easy,” says Nicole, “but I hope that they have learned that life and family and work are all inspired by the same seeds of passion and love.”

Nicole learned this lesson from her parents at an early age. “My very first job was picking up nails on my father’s job sites,” she says. “At some point I graduated from picking up nails to pounding them, then to painting and to helping in the construction of homes with my dad. I helped build my family home when I was 14. Three years later, after it burned down, I helped build it again.” Nicole says these skills, along with those she learned in the Girl Scouts—“a little art, a little sewing, a little resourcefulness”—have been key to the success of Entreamigos, the nonprofit organization she founded in 2006.

More than 12 years ago, after completing college in the U.S., Nicole spent time traveling in Mexico. She eventually fell in love with the sleepy coastal town of San Francisco in the state of Nayarit. She says, “I didn’t come to Mexico to start a nonprofit. But I was living in this tiny town that needed and really wanted the opportunities of tourism, but didn’t seem quite prepared to make the most of it. There were serious economic and educational needs in the village, and people arriving in the community who had skills and resources to offer, yet the connection between the two wasn’t happening. It seemed like with just a little impulse or a little bridging, everyone’s best intentions could help San Francisco grow in a healthy, community-centered way.”

Nicole wrote what she refers to as a “mini-manifesto,” an idealistic plan for what San Francisco could be if everyone worked together. She explains what happened next: “A friend who is a former teacher offered to support me for a year so I could try to make my vision a reality. He told me, ‘If you don’t do it now, you will always wonder.’ That is how Entreamigos was born.”

The nonprofit began small—offering community art classes and establishing a store to sell locally made crafts. Other classes quickly followed because, Nicole says, “at Entreamigos we believe that everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn.”

In 2009, the Nayarit state government gave Entreamigos the rights to remodel an abandoned milk processing facility on the town’s main street. “The community came together to remodel the facility using a ‘green’ design, and it now serves many purposes,” Nicole says. “Approximately 150 kids use the facility each day for classes in technology, sports, circus, art, or just to read a book in the library or get help with homework. Adults come as well for classes, workshops, and conferences. In 2013, we offered more than 700 classes to the community. One of the hardest things for us to do now is to keep track of it all and to let people know about everything that is happening.”

Nicole explains that she learned a valuable lesson about scale and impact through the experience of Entreamigos’ scholarship program. “At one time in the early years we had 150 kids on scholarship,” she says, “but we really couldn’t keep track of them all. Today we have about 70 kids but we know everything about them, their families, and their challenges. We also know that every single one will be able to go to college if they choose to. That is a generational change that will be of true long-term value in our small community.”

Nicole’s decision to create her family’s life in Mexico was not an easy one. But, in her words, “If you believe in something with the whole of your heart then you have to jump in with two feet and go all the way to the deep end.”

