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Pope Francis leads the World Youth Day prayer vigil at St. John Paul II Field in Panama City Jan. 26, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Whenever I sing the words, "Make me a channel of your peace," knitting is the last thing I think about.

But on a visit one afternoon to a grandmother in Ramallah, on the West Bank, I found I had a lot to learn about peace — and knitting.

On the West Bank, peace is all or nothing. Everyone suffers. Whether you are Muslim or Christian, all observe lock downs and closures routinely. All observe deprivation. If peace ever comes to them, it will have to be big and bold and forgiving.

But peace was not what I went there looking for. I was looking for justification of my anger. How could this be? How could anyone live in such a place? How could any child thrive? My questioning would amount to an inquisition. I wanted answers.

So knitting was the last thing on my mind when I sat down on a sofa opposite this tiny woman surrounded by pictures of her smiling family.

She began by telling me about how she met her now-deceased husband.

He was handsome, of course, but she chose him from among others seeking her hand because he had a car. It was not only a marker of his wealth, but of his intellect and insight.

They built a beautiful house in Jerusalem. He was an architect. They had two children. Inside their home they had a library of books so massive the shelves went floor to ceiling.

One night, they fled that beautiful home in Jerusalem as gunfire rained over their heads. As the woman fled, she grabbed the one item she knew would be needed most for her future — a set of five No. 1 steel knitting needles. They would be necessary to make socks for her two sons in their future life, wherever that would be.

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With a car full of bullet holes, she and her family made their way to Amman, Jordan, to stay with relatives. Eventually, they settled in Ramallah. There they built a new life. On trips into Jerusalem, roughly 10 miles away, they would drive by and gaze at

their former home. They would not confront the young Israeli family who had moved in. They would just look at the flowers or changes to what they had built.

"How could you ever get over that kind of loss?" I asked. "Didn't you get angry?"

Perceiving my anger, the grandmother smiled and reached into a drawer next to the sofa. She pulled out the five No. 1 knitting needles, tied together with a string that she had fled with. "These were for long ago. I needed them then. I want you to have them now," she said.

Since that day of blessing and initiation, it is knitting that has taught me about peace, the kind of peace that is intangible, but more real than a 20-foot-high concrete wall in Palestine, covered in the graffiti of despair and rage. It is a peace that is chosen, living, flexible with the times, but always there to be obtained through the hard work it asks of you.

Not even a separation wall could contain or hold back the arrival of peace in the life of this one elderly woman. She came to me armed with peace and a set of knitting needles, just waiting to pass both of them on.

As I knitter, I can't help but think of her fingers working over the same equipment I hold onto. The needles must be at least 100 years old. Like an inheritance, hundreds of women may have worked over these needles, stitching the same stitches I do now. Only the pattern is different.

I do nothing but make socks. My socks are of two kinds — matched ones that look great on first glance, but with hidden flaws, and unmatched socks obviously imperfect but wearable. I find these are the ones people seem to like the most. For me, wearing unmatched socks are the first step on the road to forgiveness and my own peace.

I often think of all the hands out there in the world knitting, as if we are all meant to be stitching something wonderful together. I hope in some way we are.

I sit and wait for the person who will arrive at my door seeking peace. It's not a peace that is easy, or perfect or lasting. Everything in this life is fleeting. Still, knitting shows us one way to persevere. There is a peace in the quiet act of perseverance. The widow's gift was both symbol and truth.

Now whenever I sing the words, "Make me a channel of your peace," knitting is the first thing I think of.

When a person arrives at my door, looking for peace, I'll do as I have been instructed.

I'll hand over those five steel No. 1 needles and wish them well.

[Sue Stanton is a journalist and author of *Great Women of Faith: Inspiration for Action*. She writes from Ames, Iowa. All of the Soul Seeing columns can be read at NCRonline.org/blogs/soul-seeing.]

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