Reflection on IPRA General Conference, August 2014
By Ellen Frank

1.
If I watch, can I know?
If I work, can I watch?

2.
If words cannot match what eyes can see
Can eyes see what is?

3.
It is far away that planes bomb
Yet yesterday it was all we spoke of.
And Nazism and Fascism and
Stalinism and internment and showers of
poisonous gas and ovens
and ISIS and Aleppo,
Damascus and the Ukraine, Gaza and Israel
Are far away in time and place
just now.

Are they farther away than
hand and pencil?

And could I sit in a cave?

Ellen Frank
What I gained from the UPRA conference as a whole:

*Gems, as fire from ashes: reversal*

I am not alone in my devotion to peacebuilding. There is a world of people so devoted.

The so-dedicated gathered in the auditorium of the first day to hear the Plenary speakers. Nesrin affirmed numbers! 500 IPRA members! She named the elephant in our room: this conference was being held at a “perfect” time, during the escalation of wars in Gaza, Ukraine, Syria, Baghdad. And in a perfect place: Turkey, as a link between 3 continents and armed conflict. We are necessary. We have more work on our hands, non-violent action.

I was glad that Nesrin did not mince words, that she addressed the ominous world that had further darkened since I left the States at the end of June. The imperative, to “work more,” made me think there is hope, peopled in different colored skin, language, country-of-origin, religion.

I learned that there is visible and invisible violence, direct and indirect inseparable problems. How can we change world focus on war? The direct impact of violence ignores underlying structures, violations of the UN Charter on Human Rights. Degradation transmutes into, erupts as violence. Peace is the presence of social justice: everyone has the right to build a shared future. We *must* use everyone’s talents and abilities to inspire leaders of today and tomorrow.

The ringing of the Peace Bell tolled for us all, for the human family. Conflict is not inevitable. In the face of fire, we stood, united for sustainable values and peace, a nexus.

There was far more that I learned and am able to include here. I do want to mention, however, a phrase that lingers: “remote empathy.” Such were my tears in a safe American studio, international interns by my side, applying crimson leaf – the color of
our blood – to the painting “Baghdad: City of Peace, Truly”. In our Arts and Peacebuilding Commission, it was remote empathy that coursed through our veins as we watched, listened, learned how fellow peacebuilders worked toward awakenings of heart and mind, cessation of violence, human-hood, neighbor among neighbor thousands of miles apart, in space, now in time.

The Arts & Peacebuilding Commission
Showing, Displaying, Discussing

Resilience, dynamic systems, self-value, creativity, play, freedom, ritual, resolution, language, courage, perseverance, justice, dramatic, song, tradition

There are those who say
an array of horsemen,
and others of marching me.
and others of ships, is
the most beautiful thing on the dark earth.

But I say it is whatever one loves.
Sappho

I am humbled and honored to have taken part.