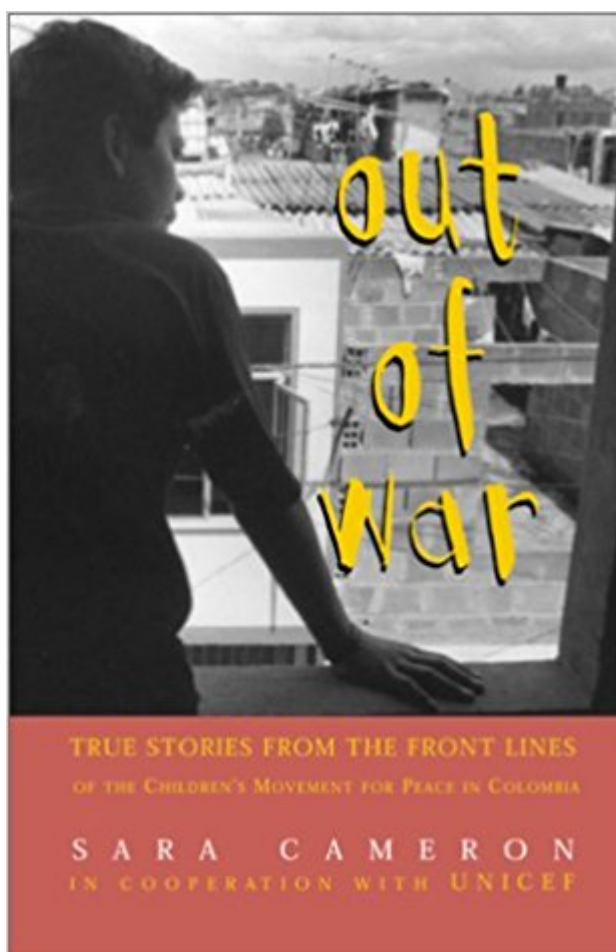


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# Out Of War: True Stories From The Frontlines Of The Children's Movement For Peace In Colombia



## Synopsis

Through nine intimate first-person narratives, *Out of War* tells the story of the Children's Movement for Peace, a network of organizations struggling against the forty-year civil war in Colombia. Readers will meet young people like Juan Elias, who decided he could best avenge his father's murder by fighting to end the war; Maritza, who found refuge in the peace movement after her family and friends abandoned her in the comunas of Medellin; and Beto, who works for the peace he never had in his abusive home. The voices of these children are raw and real, and their stories are nothing short of inspirational. In 1996, the Children's Movement for Peace helped organize the Children's Mandate, a referendum on children's rights in Colombia. Two million children turned out to vote for their right to peace, sending the Colombian government a powerful message about its inability to control the violence within its borders. Since then, the Movement has worked to help children cope with loss, displacement, poverty, and other effects of the war. It has also taught children how to resolve conflict without fighting. The movement's work is impressive, yet *Out of War* is really about the individual children who lead the group. Through them, readers will learn not only about the tenuous life of children in Colombia, but about what it means to give back to your community and face adversity with true courage and hope.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When writer Sara Cameron went on assignment to Colombia to write a UNICEF report about the Children's Movement for Peace to submit to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, she was skeptical: "I didn't believe that children could do anything substantial to help peace." But she was soon convinced by the sincere teen leaders of the movement who had been through hell and lived to tell about it. Colombia is a country that has been torn apart by guerilla warfare, illegal drug trade, and gang violence for more than 40 years. In the late 1990s, guided by civic and religious leaders, the children and teens of Colombia decided to try and do what the adults of their country could not: make peace. Besides writing her report for UNICEF, Cameron collected these first-person accounts of nine young leaders of the movement, all of whose lives have been tainted by violence. Heartbreaking examples include 18-year-old Juan Elias, whose father was murdered right in his own office, and 16-year-old Mayerly, whose best friend was stabbed to death in a gang war. Still, these young leaders--despite threats by armed gangs and extreme poverty--organize peace rallies, speak publicly at schools, and lead workshops for other displaced or abused children. Sad, but ultimately triumphant, these stories will both inspire and shame the teens of First World nations who read them--shame them by showing how much of their lives they take for granted, and inspire them to do more with the resources and relationships they have been blessed with. The book includes an author's note and a list of resources to learn more about the Children's Movement for Peace. (Ages 12 and older) --Jennifer Hubert

Cameron here collects the poignant stories of nine articulate teenagers who describe the long and diffuse internal war raging in Columbia for over 40 years, in which various armed groups vie for control of land and power. The genesis of the Children's Movement of Peace, created in response to the war, is framed with their personal and agonizing accounts of loss, hope and the understanding that endemic violence must be fought through personal forgiveness as well as through organized efforts against poverty and racism. Juan Elias, one leader of the movement, realizes after his own father's and cousin's murder, "No matter how much you want peace, you take a step toward violence when the war hits you personally." Johemir, whose mother left him to live alone when he was only 10, helps to create art programs so other children can express their sorrow and wishes for peace. The stories display a depth of insight about the limits and possibilities for creating a more peaceful country as well as the fragility of commitment in the face of the ongoing violence and despair. Yet they continue to work against violence because, as Maritza (who lives in violence at home as well as on the streets) put it, "I know that making peace is our only hope." Young adults will find this an inspiring book about the courage of people their own age who have

devoted themselves to the cause of ending violence. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This nonfiction book is a collection of personal accounts of nine children who took one look at their beloved war-torn Columbia, saw how it was affecting the people around them and their families, and walked down the path to the right to live in a peaceful environment. From each body comes a different voice, a different problem. Even though these nine children live in Columbia, each of them is affected, and how each child chooses to go about solving their problem is different. Some of these children face abuse by their parents or siblings, other face the travesties of watching a loved one being tortured to death by the local gangs. Through thick and thin these children fight for peace in their country. That's one of the things that make this book a good one. I think that it's really cool how all the children who were involved in the Children's Movement stood up for what they believed in, even though that they knew the dangers of trying to stand up to the dangerous rebels. That takes true courage for kids to take on a cause that involves a whole country. One of the things that I gained from this book is that I think that American news is drummed up a little too much. All channels like NBC 5 report about what is bad in America because it will sell, and when they report on something good like medicinal breakthroughs, the medicine has all the weird side effects that might possibly kill you. I thought that watching this at 10' o clock was depressing, but then in one child's section I read a description of the news. Basically it showed me how many people had been captured by the rebel gangs, the truly sad part was when the rebels allowed their prisoner's of war to speak on television. I would hate to see one of my loved ones on T.V talking about how he or she was safe, when I could sense that something was really wrong. I believe that is slightly worse then seeing a dead person's fuzzy picture on the news. Another thing that I gained from Out of War was that we should be grateful that we have a justice system, a constitution, and a police force to protect our government from being ruled by rebel gangs or power hungry dictators. We are also fortunate that our country's government isn't in such disarray like Columbia's. Do you know what barrio means? It means a district. At the beginning of the book when Juan was talking, I didn't know what that means. So I kept on reading it in context and finally looked it up. Barrio means district. Even though while I was reading the book I may have not know what the word meant, but when I looked it up in a Spanish dictionary, I felt as if Juan was trying to share his culture with me, not just writing to tell a story, but enrich people on their daily use of common words. When Maverly was using Spanish words, I felt I was walking right along side her as she told the story, actually looking through her eyes. Another thing interesting thing about the format was the aftermath written by Sara

Cameron, who had taken her time to follow up on these children's lives. It was interesting to me to see how each kid had grown up and how they were still helping the movement in different ways. If you want to be informed about what is going on in Columbia, and how these nine children walked down the path to peace, then *Out of War* is the right book for you. Maybe it'll give you the idea to help out a war torn country in the future, or maybe give you the courage to fight against something you think is wrong and have a better solution.

This book confirms Colombia's intimate relationship with war. However, "*Out of War; True Stories From the Front Lines*," offers a frightening new dimension of the conflict. Author Sara Cameron documents the tragic lives of young poor Colombians who are disgusted with the violence and seek to reduce the warfare by fostering a better understanding of peace. On the one hand, this book is uplifting. It is a sparkling display of courage. However, sprinkled throughout nearly each narrative is the reality that death is always present and that the violent actors still continue the pattern of killing unarmed civilians. The reality is so great that not one of the young poor adults that writes a testimony of how the conflict has impacted them dares to point a finger to whom is responsible for the murder and intimidation. All are careful to remain neutral and not trigger the anger of those responsible for the ruthless violence in Colombia. Hats off to Redepaz (Colombia's Peace Network), UNICEF, The Red Cross and the Catholic Church for nurturing peace among the young. This book also provides useful web sites to learn more about the children's movement for peace in Colombia. Upon completing this book one is filled with pride for the bravery of the young in Colombia. But one is also saddened by the stark reality that the young suffer a great deal. Finally, this book promotes a greater awareness of the children's movement for peace but also drives home the fact that the young are defenseless to the harm of poverty and violence in Colombia.

"*Out of War*" has some amazing stories of Colombian teenagers who have survived the terrible violence that is tearing their country apart. Juan Elias has to cope with the murder of his father and cousin and the persecution of his family. Wilfrido lives in a town where assassins ride by killing people and armed groups recruit children as soldiers. The gangs that dominate Maritza's community sometimes attract her, but then she tries to make peace between them. This is true of all the young people in the book. They suffer from the violence but then they try to do something about it. Alberto's brother was kidnapped by one of the armed groups but still Alberto, who is only 15 years old, runs peace workshops for kids. He says he is working for forgiveness. He says that it is especially important for people like him who have suffered in the war to forgive because without

forgiveness there cannot be peace. There still isn't peace in Colombia but Mayerly (who is 16 and whose best friend was murdered) says that we should never give up on peace, no matter how hard it is or how long it takes, because if you give up how will you ever achieve it. The book is not long. I read it in one go. Once I started reading I couldn't stop. I thought it was one of the most important books I have read, especially now! I recommend it to everyone, whether you are young or old because it can give hope to everyone.

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