

**When I Was a Dot,** I was five years old: a single point of consciousness, believing my nation was the entire universe. But, even then, I was a dot in motion, yearning to connect with other points, to draw the first lines of my one-dimensional world.

**When My Lines Became Shapes,** My world expanded to two dimensions. My father brought home a map, transforming my simple lines into complex shapes. Suddenly, my country was just one sliver of land in the east. I dreamt of this 2D world, of the beautiful, intricate patterns humanity could form.

By ten, I learned this two-dimensional world held cruelty. The lines were no longer just connections; they were headlines, frontlines, and borders. Conflict, injustice, famine, and hatred became abstract shapes on a flat plane. "They" – those on the other side of the line – were not people. They were distant, untouchable concepts.

**When I Became a Block,** At seventeen, I left my homeland and plunged into that 2D chaos, undeterred. My desire to connect had become stronger than the polarization pulling the world apart.

I arrived at Younited, and the two-dimensional map shattered. My 150 schoolmates from more than 30 countries, the countries I knew only as colorful shapes on a map turned into real people - with laughter, dreams, with a shared desire to unite the world. We danced to each other's traditions and carried the weight of each other's histories. The "small village" I once dreamed of felt real. That moment reminds me of something I used to believe when I was a kid: that the world was becoming a small village.

Then, reality pierced our three-dimensional block.

News broke of the ceasefire and the return of hostages. On the two-dimensional map of the news, it was a cold political negotiation, two opposing shapes. A tragedy, but one that was still *out there*.

And then, my 3D block – my Younited – held a memorial for the hostages.

When I entered, I saw no two-dimensional factions. I saw the three-dimensional mass of my community. I saw my friends, people I eat lunch with, gathered in a heavy, collective silence.

My 2D map had prepared me for shapes of sadness. It did not prepare me for *this* sound. It was not the dramatized grief of television. It was a raw, guttural sob.

I stood there, a dot, an alien to this context. I was suspended between two 3D blocks of authentic pain, coexisting in the same space. I realized peacebuilding is the messy, agonizing work of dismantling the barriers between us.

Younited taught me that peace is a verb. It transcends a *state* of being; it becomes the very *act* of being. It is the choice to sit with discomfort, to listen deeply, to stay soft in hard times.

Suddenly, *Global challenges suddenly become personal.*

If there's a girl anywhere in the world who can't afford her meals, it makes me poorer. If a boy dies in a war he never understood, part of me dies with him.

I am still just a dot in a vast, dimensional world. But I have learned I do not need to be a great leader to build peace. I can be an *active* dot. I can be the dot that initiates a line, the dot that helps create a safe space for others, just as Younited gave to me.

If we still believe in a shared future, let us not forget: those we label as "They" are human. In seeing their humanity, we find our own. Refusing to let one another go is the only way forward. Someday when we leave Younited, we carry everyone we have met – bound by something deeper than belief: our shared humanity.