From Bullets to Bangles
by Sr. Marilyn Lacey

I am happier now, after the angst of my earlier years.

Those years were rough. I started life in a factory as a coiled mix of copper and zinc being pressed into a small, cup-like shape. Then I was pulled mechanically into a cylinder and stretched to form a tight tube. Even the memory is painful: in order to be stretched without breaking, I had to be heated, annealed, pickled, rinsed, and measured, over and over.

After that, machining tools pinched off the top of me, stamped my bottom, and jammed me into a permanent tubular shape. I won’t even share the details of what followed: the whirring lathe, the cutting, the punching of the “flash hole”, the final sealing that led to my birth as a shiny new brass bullet casing.

Then a conveyor belt shoved me into a dizzying pile of cylinders just like me. I was sorted. Boxed. Loaded into a crate. Sent to ammunition makers. Purchased by armies that didn’t care a bit what I looked like; they cared only for what I would eventually hold.

I became an unwilling accessory to death: the metal casing for an AK-47 bullet.

Photo by Mykola Makhlai on Unsplash

International trade brought me to South Sudan and eventually into the ammo cartridge of a young man. He loaded the cartridge into his AK-47. It was dark in there, and scary. I cringed whenever he marched, ran, or flung himself to the ground. On the terrible day he pulled the trigger, I provided the ignition that propelled the bullet forward.

I couldn’t see whether the bullet reached its target or who/what he aimed at. I remember only that the noise was deafening and I was simultaneously ejected, landing with a soft thump on the parched clay of an unnamed place. I lay there, inert and exhausted, worrying whether someone had suffered on my account.

But here’s where my life trajectory took an unexpected turn. Some days later a woman picked me up, dusted me off, and brought me to her mud hut. There she added me to dozens of similar empty casings. On a rainy day when she could not pursue her other tasks, she scooped me up with the others and melted us on a flat piece of iron over an open fire.

Gradually, we shells softened and lost our individuality. That hurt, sure; but there was a tenderness about her that I trusted. She let us cool a bit, then rolled us by hand into long,
rope-like shapes. And then, wonder of wonders, she bent us into anklets and arm bracelets.

Can you sense our relief? We are no longer instruments of brutality. We are things of beauty! Who could have imagined such a transformation? Who could put our joy into words?

Now when my owner moves about, we dance with her and we sparkle in the sun and we feel good about who we are. Life after death. What could be better?

An Objective Lens—South Sudan