

PROFILES of COURAGE

AFTER THE TEARS ...

Her Chessed Lives On

Arnold Roth is regaining his connection to his daughter Malki, killed in the Sbarro attack, through a foundation he and his wife established to continue what she started

By Joel Rebibo

Arnold Roth has spent a lot of time on the road trying to make Europeans care about the murder of his daughter at the Sbarro restaurant three years ago. Despite his fluent, Australian-accented English, his sharp legal mind and his unflappable demeanor, he's had only limited success.

"It's difficult to talk to people who display a clinical coldness to Israelis' pain," he says. "They are convinced that the Palestinians are the victims, and nothing will change that."

A year and a half ago, for instance, he and seven other terror victims met in Brussels with Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michele. "He sat impassively as the eight of us spoke about our losses," recalls Mr. Roth. "The most striking impression I have is of him sitting there, looking at his fingernails while we spoke. Then he gave an almost theatrical talk about how sitting with us had changed his life."

To make matters worse, the next day his office released a statement saying that he had met with Israeli victims of terror and urged them to press their government to end the oppression of Palestinians.

"This is one of the truths in life," notes Mr. Roth. "There is an 'us' and a 'them.'"

Before leaving Brussels, Mr. Roth gained an insight into why Europe is so firmly in the camp of the "them."

"We were meeting with a very senior politician and a member of our group bluntly asked, 'What is it about you Belgians that turns you into such disgusting anti-Semites?' He answered, 'You won't understand anything about what you call anti-Semitism unless you understand the massive political change that has occurred here. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims have moved here in the last 20 years, and every second birth in Brussels is a Muslim. This is a one-way process.'"

Though Mr. Roth harbors no illusions that he can reverse this trend, he pushes himself to travel — to Strasbourg, Luxembourg, Athens, the Hague — to meet dispassionate politicians, be interviewed by a hostile press and clash with pro-Palestinian demonstrators, because he believes he can sway the middle ground. "As long as you can, you must," he says. "You don't know who you're reaching."

Mr. Roth may also be driven to try and set the record straight about who is the victim in Israeli-Palestinian "conflict" by a sense of obligation to the memory of his daughter Malki, whom he describes as "an extraordinary *baalat chessed*."

Malki, who was only 15 when she was murdered, had a special gift for helping severely disabled children. When she was 11, her year-old sister, Chaya Elisheva, developed epilepsy and had what was essentially a six-week-long seizure that left her blind and severely neurologically impaired. She can't speak and is unaware of her surroundings, even of her own limbs. Mr. Roth describes her as "the most disabled child you'll ever meet."

"My wife was in the hospital with her for those six weeks and Malki, more than anyone else, was there to help her," recalls Mr. Roth. "Malki and Chayale became very attached. She would hold her so she'd feel contact with another person."

Instead of "resenting" being saddled with a disabled sibling, Malki sought out other such children to help. "From the time Chayale became ill, Malki began doing secret, serious acts of *chessed*," her father recalls. "She was the kind of person who radiated from the feeling of doing good."

"She found a woman in the neighborhood who was raising on her own a son with a fatal genetic disease. Malkie volunteered and became her helper."

"The woman came to us at the shiva and said, 'No one will ever know the things this girl did.'"

One summer, she and a classmate from the Chorev girl's high school showed up at a camp for children with mental disabilities, located near the Kinneret. "They presented themselves at the gate and said they were there to volunteer," Mr. Roth says. "Until then, the camp had never accepted volunteers. But they were so impressed by them that they changed their policy, and the next summer dozens of girls came to volunteer. That's real *chessed* — when you make waves that are larger than you."

On Aug. 9, 2001, Malki and her best friend Michal Raziel spent the morning decorating the room of a neighbor in Ramot, who was returning from the United States. That afternoon they had to be in Talpiot to attend a planning meeting for the summer camp of their youth group, and they stopped off for lunch at Sbarro's, in the center of Jerusalem.

Mr. Roth was busy at work when his wife, Frimet, called in a state of hysteria. "She was shrieking, 'I can't find them,'" he recalls. "My job was to calm her down."

By 3:30 p.m., she decided that she had to go to the hospital, so Mr. Roth left his office at the Har Chotzvim high-tech park and came home to take care of Chayale. As his wife made her way up the street, she saw Aviva Raziel, the mother of Malki's friend Michal, who had also decided that she could no longer sit at home.

The next 12 hours were a nightmare. The carnage at Sbarro — 15 killed, more than 130 wounded — translated into chaos at the hospitals. People crowded into waiting areas outside of emergency rooms and operating rooms, desperate for any news of their loved ones.

"Patients were being wheeled in and out of surgery with nails in them or limbs blown off or unconscious. You didn't know where you're child was ..."

Throughout the ordeal Mr. Roth, who began his search for his daughter in Shaare Zedek and then moved on to Hadassah Ein Kerem, was "doing deals with the *Ribono shel Olam*."

"I would say, 'Let her be unconscious, let her be brain-damaged, let there be a reason why she hasn't contacted us ...' I was begging: 'If You do this, I'll do that ...'"

The Roths' hopes were raised when they heard that a 15-year-old girl was in surgery.

A neighbor, who had just retired as a senior physician at Hadassah, went into the operating room, but came out with the news that it wasn't Malki, after all.

Someone who had overheard, not realizing what was going on, responded, "Oh, you're looking for a girl 15? She just died."

By midnight, with no information on their daughter (she was the last of the victims to be identified), a social worker approached them and said they had to go to the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute.

"I couldn't face it, so I sent my two oldest boys, who were 24 and 21. We came home at 12:30 a.m. and as we drove by the Ezra youth-group building, we saw hundreds and hundreds of kids who had spilled out on the street, saying *Tehillim*. That's what I saw as I drove past."

At 2 a.m., 12 hours after the attack, they got the call.

"Losing a child in this way is not a neat process," he says. "There is a lot of shrieking and crying. It's nightmarish."

The next day, Malki was buried at Har Hamenuchos next to her friend Michal in a funeral that drew thousands. Mr. Roth asked the press to leave, government ministers not to speak, and said a few words himself, as did his Rav, Rabbi Aharon Adler, and a teenager from Malki's youth group. Then "we went home and began the rest of our lives."

The rest of their lives has been profoundly different from their years in Australia, where Mr. Roth was a successful lawyer and entrepreneur, and also from their first 13 years in Israel.

"There are pressures at home that never were before, discussions that cause silence, and a tremendous amount of sadness, especially around the *chagim*."

"It's very hard to come to terms with other people's *simchas*. I try to participate, but my wife hasn't been able to."

"Our relations with friends have gone through change ... a lot of friendships have ended. Quite a lot of people seem not able to deal with the complexity of a relationship with us."

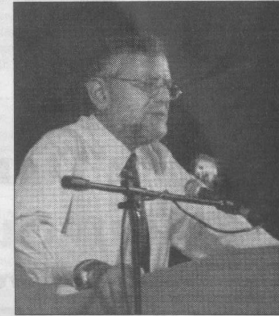
"At the same time we've developed close ties with others who have lost children. This is the biggest change. People today will cross the street when they see me. Shiva provides a protocol; you don't have to say anything. But people are afraid when they are on their own. Many can't find the way."

Life is also different for their other six children. Their younger daughters Rivka, now 15, and Pessy, 12, aren't permitted to ride on buses or go to the center of town.

A year ago, when Rivka celebrated her 14th birthday, she prevailed upon her mother to take her downtown for lunch. Afterward, when Mrs. Roth had to get back home to take care of Chayale, Rivka asked for another 45 minutes to shop and Mrs. Roth gave in. After all, it was her daughter's birthday.

Rivka was on the bus that was directly behind the No. 14, which blew up in front of the Clal Building. She was hysterical and couldn't talk for hours.

"Our girls know there really is evil in



Arnold Roth addresses 200 European parliamentarians and politicians in Jerusalem last year. "As long as you can, you must" try to change their perception that the Palestinians are the victims.

the world," says Mr. Roth.

And Mr. Roth knows that he is powerless to protect them against such evil.

"Rivka once said that everything

"Rivka once said that everything changed for her when she saw her father cry," Mr. Roth says. "She has seen every-one's defenses completely down. She's not the same person."

Undoubtedly, the one who has been most effected by Malki's killing is Mrs. Roth, who understandably doesn't want to be interviewed. She remembers Malki every time she has to deal with Chayale on her own.

"They were closer than mother and daughter," says Mr. Roth. "The loss of Malki has left her permanently changed."

As for Mr. Roth, he feels that all the things that keep men busy — his job and other responsibilities — are "part of a solution for me."

What troubles him though, despite all the things that keep him busy, is that he can't "find" her. "There is a path outside our home, where I used to meet Malki and enter the house. I often feel her presence there; but other than that, I can't find her."

"At the funeral, when I saw the body bag, I had no difficulty making the disconnect between Malki and the body. She went off to *Gan Eden*. But I can't communicate with her. I've lost that connection."

"I wasn't ready to bury a child or for the guilt that comes with it."

Mr. Roth notes that there is a lot of literature available on grief, even on grieving for children. "But there is no book that helps you deal with people dancing in joy that your child has been murdered."

"We're not unhappy," he stresses. "We're sad. We have nothing to complain about except that we've suffered a tremendous sadness. Everything else is trivial, even a handicapped child."

As far as Chayale, no one knows how she feels about her sister's death or how it

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has affected her. The family, says Mr. Roth, "will keep her always, as long as we can." What's more, they have established the Malki Foundation, or Keren Malki, to help others "exercise their freedom of choice as well."

The foundation, planned during Malki's shiva and officially recognized as a non-profit organization by the government, aims to help parents of disabled children keep them home by purchasing equipment like special-purpose beds and mobility equipment and providing the kind of therapy that the government should but doesn't provide.

"We can either waste our time fighting the system or build a bypass road that is effective in keeping children home," he says.

"We've identified five key categories of treatment — occupa-

tional therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, hydrotherapy and horse-riding therapy."

In January of last year, Keren Malki and Yad Sarah, the organization that loans out medical equipment, formed a partnership, whereby Keren Malki purchases specialized therapy equipment and Yad Sarah maintains it.

It gives Mr. Roth enormous satisfaction to be able to sign a check that keeps a disabled child out of an institution. "With the flick of a pen, a family in Yerushalayim can keep their child home. We are empowering families to something that the lack of money had prevented. They can now have as much therapy as they need.

"That's what Malki has left behind."

Even at work, Mr. Roth has tried to harness high-tech to help the disabled. His company, Vir-Touch, helps the blind and visually impaired "see" via a specially

built mouse with an embedded tactile display that lets them feel what is on the screen.

"It's a world-class, breakthrough technology," he says.

The problem is that now that the technology has been developed and Mr. Roth has made some marketing breakthroughs, the investors have pulled out and the company is in liquidation.

Mr. Roth hasn't been paid in two months, the office in which our interview is taking place is being packed up and there is just one staffer sitting down the hall at a computer. He has spent the last few months trying to find investors to save the company, and now there is only the slimmest chance that it can be done.

What is striking about Mr. Roth is his positive attitude. He is upbeat and calm despite the loss of his daughter in a terror attack, a severely handicapped child and a business that has collapsed. Some people fall apart, or at least indulge

in depression, over much less.

Mr. Roth dismisses any notion that his positive attitude is worthy of praise.

"We're blessed with wonderful children; we are a happy family, thank G-d. We can stand back and look at what we have and say, 'Baruch Hashem.'

"There is no alternative."

Tax deductible donations can be made to UJC/IEF and sent to American Friends of Keren Malki, 736 Grange Road, Teaneck, NJ, 07666.

In Israel, contributions can be sent to P.O. Box 23637, Jerusalem 91236. Donations over NIS 600 are tax deductible if made out to Haruch Hayisraeli. All other donations can be made out to Keren Malki.

In Australia, tax deductible contributions can be made out to UJA RRF Keren Malki and sent to Australian Friends of KM, Box 16, 393 Wattleree Rd., Malvern East 3145, Victoria.



Arnold Roth with the European Union's Dr. Javier Solana in Brussels, as part of a delegation of eight Israelis whose families had been victimized by Arab terror. During that trip, Mr. Roth learned what is behind Europe's anti-Israel bias.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

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