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A mother's reflection on Remembrance Day

By FRIMET ROTH
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Like many other bereaved parents, I desperately want the memory of my angel to live on.

A decade after the start of the worst civilian war Israelis have known, the second intifada, the memory of its victims is endangered. With few soldiers, celebrities or heroes among them, they were always step-victims: anonymous men, women and especially children who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

My daughter Malki was 14 when the war started in 2000. She kept a private journal of her activities, which unknown to me, included her thoughts about the turbulent news.

- “Today the disturbances in the territories continued and the roads leading to the settlements were closed, including the Givat Ze’ev-Ramot road. A soldier was killed because he was trapped at Joseph’s Tomb and they couldn’t manage to rescue him. Just shocking and frightening...” Malki’s journal entry – October 1, 2000.

The details of the ordinary Israelis killed by the terrorists were doomed to fade away for other reasons too. Their fates highlighted the initial inability of the government to confront the terrorist onslaught. Until Operation Defensive Shield was launched on March 29, 2002, Palestinian terror groups were acting with essentially a free hand. The “omnipotent” IDF seemed unable to stop them. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that governments have been reluctant to highlight this sorry chapter in our nation’s history.

- “The shooting at Gilo continued and in response the IDF returned fire on Bethlehem...” – October 22, 2000.
- “Shooting at Psagot and Gilo continued...” – October 24, 2000.
- “There was an attack near Kfar Darom. A roadside bomb exploded near a school bus. Two dead, one of them a brother-in-law of Gilad Ludveiss. Three of the injured are siblings from the Cohen family and all are now leg amputees...” – November 20, 2000.
- “A car driving on the Beit Horon-Givat Ze’ev road was fired on. The driver, 28, was lightly injured. He’s from Ramot [where we live] and works as a security guard in the the industrial zone...” – December 31, 2000.

The second intifada also dealt a serious blow to tourism and to the local economy. In 2000, for instance, there were 3 million overnight stays in Jerusalem by foreign tourists. By 2003, that number had fallen to 46,000. Minimizing the damage was understandably deemed essential to the renewed flow of tourist dollars.

The abiding grief and fury of the families of civilian victims has been a thorn in the government’s side whenever its decisions have been perceived as threatening to reignite terrorism. Family voices have been heard opposing mass terrorist prisoner releases, the reopening of Route 443 to Palestinian traffic and other appeasement measures directed at Hamas and Fatah.

THEN THERE is the matter of official foot-dragging in relation to the construction of memorials. Jerusalem was by far the city hardest hit by terrorism. Between 2000 and 2003, hundreds of attacks, fully 60 percent of the national total, occurred in the capital. Nearly 200 people were murdered, more than 1,000 wounded. Yet, as these words are being written, the Jerusalem municipality has still not erected a memorial in the city

center to remind passersby of its civilian victims. Small, inconspicuous plaques bearing the names of victims have been posted at specific terror-attack sites but even some of those were placed thanks to pressure from the victims' families. Memorials, such as the hall proposed this week by Defense Minister Ehud Barak, are located at the military cemetery of Mount Herzl, a site visited exclusively by bereaved families and friends.

• “There was a suicide bombing in Kfar Saba today. Thank God there were no fatalities but there were many wounded, one very severely...” – April 22, 2001.

By neglecting the memory of the victims of the intifada, by failing to publicize their narratives, Israel has left a vacuum for our enemies to fill. The broadcasting of stories of Palestinian dead, whether true or fabricated, has helped their side to prevail in the media war. One example, the Muhammad al-Dura tale, has inspired many suicide bombers who detonated their explosives with his name on their lips. Despite overwhelming evidence against the authenticity of a video purporting to depict the shooting of the young Dura, it is still widely accepted as fact, not just in the Muslim world, but in the West as well.

MORE RECENTLY, the name of Rachel Corrie has become the terrorists' rallying cry. Her suicidal blocking of an IDF bulldozer attempting to demolish a house that sheltered terrorists has been portrayed throughout the global media as an act of heroism. Since her death in 2003, Corrie's parents have traveled the world, disseminating a distorted and hate-filled message. In March 2010, the government granted the Corries the right to sue the IDF in Israeli courts. Have our leaders gone mad?

• “Arye Hershkowitz, may God avenge his death, was killed one month ago in a shooting. Now his son was shot to death near Ofra!!! Only the younger son can say Kaddish...” – April 29, 2001.

This state of affairs has been a source of deep pain for the grieving families including mine. Like many other bereaved parents, I desperately want the memory of my angel to live on. Despite the fears she articulated in her diary, she managed to live a productive and exemplary life, devoting herself to children in the Ezra movement where she was a group leader, volunteering with disabled children, creating heavenly music with her flute and guitar.

If Malki's life were properly remembered, her indomitable spirit would surely be a source of inspiration for future Jewish generations. The same is undoubtedly true of many other victims of the intifadas. Please do not forget them.

“Today I went to Shaikong and bought Mommy a scarf. Daddy bought her a magnificent card and also a cake, and it actually turned out very nice. Mommy enjoyed it quite a bit. Then I studied for several hours for my exam.” – March 14, 2001.

The writer co-writes This Ongoing War, a blog with her husband. Their daughter Malki was 15 when she was murdered in the terrorist attack on Jerusalem's Sbarro restaurant in 2001.



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