



Roth

October 29, 2002

One of those killed in the Sbarro Pizzeria bombing was Malkie Roth. Her parents, Arnold and Frimet, sat down with Ron Claiborne to talk about the effects of suicide bombings. This is a partial transcript of that conversation:

Ron Claiborne: Mr. Roth, tell me about your daughter. What was she like?

Arnold Roth: Well Malkie was a girl full of energy and full of love. She was very involved in helping other people particularly involved in working with children with special disabilities. She loved people, people responded well to her. She was very popular. Not the greatest student on earth because there was never enough time for her to go and do her schoolwork because she was doing so many other things: Wonderful musician- classical flutist. Special girl, lovely personality.

Ron Claiborne: This latest wave of suicide bombings has been going on for awhile now, was this something that you and the family talked about?

Arnold Roth: I think like all Israeli families, the idea that terrorism might strike us was really unthinkable. We tell the kids to always pick the safer route, but there is a big difference between that and confronting the reality of something that your mind simply can't embrace. It's impossible to think about what actually happened to us.

Ron Claiborne: You remember that day I assume very clearly. Malkie was where that morning?

Arnold Roth: I can tell you exactly because it is engraved in my memory. At about two o'clock my wife called me in the office and said that, "CNN was on television and that there was a report of an explosion in downtown Jerusalem." She immediately called each of the kids using cell phones- couldn't reach three of them. Called me in a very bad state, told me what had happened. Some time went by and the other kids checked in, Malkie didn't. We then were involved each of us separately in searching everywhere: going to the hospitals. But it wasn't until twelve hours later at two in the morning that we found Malkie. Our sons went down to Tel Aviv and identified her body.

Ron Claiborne: Do you remember what you were thinking when you heard your daughter had been killed in the attack?

Arnold Roth: We couldn't come to terms with the idea that she was missing. We were hoping all of us that she was unconscious in a desperately sick situation because that would explain why we didn't know where she was. So that when in the end the report came from our son, it was as if somebody had switched off the lights. I had a feeling that somehow the first part of my life had just ended and that everything afterwards was going to be quite different- and it has been.

Ron Claiborne: Were you angry?

Arnold Roth: I've tried to summon up anger but it's difficult. I'm angry at a lot of people but it isn't the kind of profound anger that gets you in its grip- focused on the murderer. For two reasons: Even though we know who the murderer was he killed himself as well as many other people but he was only one small cog in a system that involved many other people. We know who many of those other people are: some are in jail, some are free and some are dead. It's difficult to focus your anger on so many people. I think the overwhelming feeling is not so much anger as a tremendous sense that this is wrong, this is so unjust, this is incomprehensible.

Ron Claiborne: I'm sure you've heard about the logic, the rationale, the explanations behind the bombings. How do you feel about that?

Arnold Roth: It's pretty clear to us sitting here and going through the experiences that we've had, that hatred is the focus of this. And the tragedy of our time is that an entire generation and even two generations of children on the other side of the fence, have been raised with this incredibly deep hatred. A hatred so deep that they can blow themselves up and that they can throw themselves into a place where they know they can destroy women and children's lives. This is a hatred that explains everything and explains nothing.

Ron Claiborne: Have you paused and tried to imagine what must be in the mind of someone who would do something like this?

Arnold Roth: I don't think a great deal about the person who blew himself up either in the case of my daughter or in the other suicide murders that have taken place here. I do think a lot about the people who send them, it's striking to me that the leadership, the spokespeople, the upper levels of the society that sends these wretched creatures, never sends their own children. Never sends anyone who they're close to. No child ever came out of their mother's womb hating like these children hate. This hatred is something that is straight out of hell and a lot of people have to answer for that.

Ron Claiborne: Mrs. Roth?

Frimet Roth: It's a very complex situation that we have here and to just paint it as the oppressors and the oppressed, and the desperate oppressed have responded and reacted to their desperate situation by doing this- this is not what's going. This is a handy, simplistic portrayal of a very complex situation.

Ron Claiborne: Is their hatred in your heart?

Frimet Roth: Hatred no. I'm not a hateful person. No, I'm in pain, I'm suffering. I don't think anyone would describe me as hateful. I'm just aching -that's what there is in my heart.

Ron Claiborne: Mr. Roth, have you tried to understand on some level why someone, or how someone could do what they did in that instance?

Arnold Roth: Look that's the question of questions. All of us here in Israeli society are asking ourselves, "What could possibly bring people to do this kind of thing?" even more than that, "How could you send your own child to do this kind of thing?"

There's no point in trying to understand it. You have to be prepared to say, "This is evil, this is sickness." This is the result of whole process that we have to be able to identify when we see it, and if we don't recognize it and call it what it is, I'm afraid that we are doomed to be living with it again and again.

We are seeing that already, we are seeing it in places like Bali. How many people have to be killed by this insanity before people say, "no, this is insanity." We don't need to understand this, we need to stop this.

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