

## 9.11 Voices

September 11, 2002

San Francisco Chronicle

### A New Life as The Enemy Within

by Sawson Nadim Zarour



In Sept. 10, 2000, Mother and I sat at Grace Cathedral watching Father speak on a panel with a rabbi about the future of Jerusalem. In the midst of the introduction, my father spoke his very last words, suffered a massive heart attack and closed his eyes forever.



When I left the cathedral after an ambulance had carried Father's body away, I found that San Francisco -- the city of my birth -- felt foreign to me. Though both my parents had been born in Palestine, I had until that day rarely felt like an outsider in the United States.

When the terrorist attacks occurred in the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, I again had feelings of not belonging. I was told by family and friends to think twice before telling people that I am a Palestinian. I was afraid of living in my own skin because to many Americans, I was the terrorist. My Ramallah community, in fear, canceled all of its events and festivities. Friends called and asked me if I was OK because they knew that the blood running through my veins was simply the enemy. The only thing that made sense to me was to speak out like my father had done his whole life. Through the Jewish Palestinian Living Room Dialogue group that my father co-founded over 10 years ago, I knew I had a place where I felt safe to speak.



Shortly thereafter, I found myself sitting in the back of a packed temple filled with Jews, listening to most of them speak point by point about how Palestinians teach their children hate and terrorism. This made my heart pound out of my chest, and I was compelled to speak and did so. People had to know the truth. We Palestinians are human beings and not animals, we love and fear and hope, like every American, like every Jew. Many of my Palestinian brothers and sisters have so very little hope amid the unbearable conditions in which they live that they feel compelled to take their own lives. I wanted more people to understand this.

I followed more opportunities to speak and found myself one day in a mainstream Jewish camp for young children in the middle of heaven: Yosemite. I sat there in the middle of trees that reached the sky.



How ironic that at such a place I would try to make people understand that somewhere in the middle of the world my Palestinian family can't leave their homes, have no water, no means of food, no education, no voice, no life. Was it possible that anyone could understand that living in a nightmare would make you want to die? At this camp I spoke with young American Jews and Israelis my age -- some who had served in Israel's military -- and I learned that they too felt a kind of despair and fear of what their lives had in store. I spoke about promoting dialogue as the only way toward peace. How else can there be peace if we can't listen and understand one another's deeply rooted anger and fear?

Now two years after my father's death and one year after the tragedy of Sept. 11, I find myself a survivor. A survivor living through the loss of my father whom I adored so much and a survivor living in a country that calls me the enemy.

*Sawson Nadim Zarour is an elementary school teacher in San Francisco.*

The original publication by the San Francisco Chronicle is at [http://articles.sfgate.com/2002-09-11/other-article/17559891\\_1\\_palestinian-american-jews-and-israelis-father](http://articles.sfgate.com/2002-09-11/other-article/17559891_1_palestinian-american-jews-and-israelis-father)