

The night Yitzhak Rabin came for tea

• STEPHEN M. FLATOW

I met Yitzhak Rabin once and for only a short time but the impression the man had on me is still with me 25 years after his assassination. That encounter took place in May 1995, about one month after my daughter Alisa had been murdered in a Palestine Islamic Jihad terror bombing near the Jewish community of Kfar Darom. She was on a bus heading to a hotel in Gush Katif so she could, as she told me, “get a few days in the sun before *Pesach*.”

On a Sunday night in late April I received a phone call from Itamar Rabinovich, Israel’s ambassador to the United States. He told me that Rabin wanted to meet with my wife and me and our family to thank us for donating Alisa’s organs for transplant. I asked him where I had to go to meet Rabin, and his answer floored me: “No, he’ll come to you.”

I was stunned, but recovered quickly and checked with Rosalyn, my wife. We agreed on Monday evening, May 8.

“Keep it secret,” I was told, and more information would be forthcoming. It was a few days later, the US Secret Service visited our home and checked out the neighborhood. The big debate in our home was about what you serve a prime minister? We decided on coffee, tea and cake. Roz and I knew Rabin was a chain-smoker, and through the Israel Consulate in New York we politely asked ahead that he not smoke in our house. We then drew up a list of about 20 people, relatives and friends, to be with us at the meeting.

Waking early on Monday morning, we saw the news on TV that Rabin publicly announced his scheduled visit to our home on Sunday night as he addressed the annual meeting of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington DC. He told the AIPAC members he was coming to see us to thank us for donating Alisa’s organs saying, “Alisa’s heart beats in Jerusalem.” (Point of fact – it was beating in the chest of a 54-year-old man who lived in Kfar Saba, but Jerusalem was far more poetic.)

The Monday of the visit, I had to leave work at midday because Rosalyn had gotten a couple of crank calls and was being yelled at for letting Rabin into our home. I was told by one caller that I should “push him down the steps” when he got there.

It was getting dark when Rabin arrived in a motorcade with police lights flashing. This drew the attention of everybody in the neighborhood. Roz and I went out to greet him, then led the prime minister into our living room and asked for several minutes of privacy with the prime minister before we introduced him to our family and guests.

Sitting on the couch next to Rabin, I



asked him straight out, “How could you negotiate with Yasser Arafat and sign an agreement with him?”

He replied in his deep voice, “Make no mistake about it. Yasser Arafat is a terrorist, was a terrorist, will always be a terrorist and is surrounded by terrorists. But he’s the leader of the Palestinian people, so I have to speak with him.” He then apologized for not being able to find a way to stop a “lunatic” from becoming a human bomb and killing innocent people.

There Rabin was wrong. The young men who became bombers were not lunatics. They may have been foolish to fall under the sway of very evil people in Hamas and Islamic Jihad, yes, but they were not crazy.

But he was right about the nature of Arafat and his henchmen, including current Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, being terrorists. The Second Intifada of 20 years ago and the ongoing glorification of terrorists and incitement is proof of that. The only difference between Arafat and Abbas is that Abbas wears a suit.

The rest of the meeting with family and friends was cordial and he had his cup of tea. Our daughters got a kick watching their brother Etan calmly explain to the prime minister how to open the handles on the paper coffee cup as he handed it to the leader of the Jewish people’s only state, Israel.

But the only time Rabin became animated in conversation was when he spoke about the Western Wall tunnel that had been recently completed. He bubbled in amazement at the engineering feat the creation of the Western Wall required. But I felt that something was missing in his enthusiasm.

It dawned on me that he was looking at the Western Wall from a purely archaeological point of view—the size of the stones at its base—and not as something being part of Israel’s holiest site, the Temple Mount and its importance to Jewry.



(Left) RABIN VISITS with the writer. (Courtesy Stephen Flatow)

PALESTINIAN WOMEN display pictures of PA President Mahmoud Abbas and PLO leader Yasser Arafat during a rally marking the 55th anniversary of Fatah’s founding, in Gaza City on January 1. (Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Reuters)

I wasn’t aware of it then, but Rabin’s visit to us created a storm for him when he returned home to Israel. He almost never visited families of terror victims there. I concluded that two things had led him to visit us: first, the organ donations; and second, his advisers knew that I wasn’t vitriolic either to him or to the Israeli government.

Six months later, on November 4, 1995, Rabin was dead.

Now, 25 years later I understand and appreciate that Rabin was a complicated person. I have no illusions that Rabin held any love for the settlement movement. And we know what he did to fellow Jews when he fired on the Irgun’s ship *Altalena* in the early days of Israel’s independence.

On the other hand, he took some very bold steps to effectively end Israel’s “occupation” of the Palestinians by agreeing to turn over control of 98% of the Arab population to the Palestinian Authority.

Thus, despite what we hear from the Israeli and American Left and pro-Palestinian supporters around the globe, Rabin ended Israeli control over the lives of millions of Palestinians and set them on the road to nation building; an opportunity they have squandered. He had a vision of what a Palestinian state would look like and how Israel would secure itself, but that vision was tossed aside by the true architect of Oslo and its ultimate failure, Shimon Peres, and former prime ministers Barak and Olmert.

We could play the “what if” game and wonder what Israel would be like today if Rabin had not been murdered. We’ll never know. And maybe that’s where we should leave it. ■

The writer, an attorney, is the father of Alisa Flatow – who was murdered in the April 9, 1995 terror attack near Kfar Darom. He successfully sued the Islamic Republic of Iran for its role as the sponsor of that attack. He is the author of A Father’s Story: My Fight for Justice Against Iranian Terror and an oleh chadash.

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