



Fear of Getting Involved in Coexistence Groups

An Israeli businessman founded Parents' Circle (PC) after the murder of his son at the hands of Hamas in 1994. He hoped that this organization would serve as a support group for all the parents that lost beloved family members due to the conflict. He also wanted PC to function as a voice of hope, proving that the cycle of hate and revenge can be ended and that peace is possible. Today, Parents' Circle is a large Arab-Jewish peace activist organization that consists of Israeli and Palestinian parents that have lost family members as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The message of these bereaved parents is to seek reconciliation, not revenge.

Project goals:

- Parents' Circle receives support from many American synagogues and liberal Protestant churches. However, before my internship, it had little contact with the Arab-American communities. My job was to identify sympathetic Arab-American communities and garner their support.
- Visit Arab-American institutions such as churches, mosques, organizations, and activist groups in order to raise awareness about PC
- Build support for PC from the Arab-American communities
- Begin to develop a relationship between Arab-American community leaders and PC
- Bring Yitzhack Frankenthal, PC founder, and a Palestinian parent from PC to speak to Arab-American audience for the first time
- Encourage partnership and future collaborative work between PC and Arab-American communities

Personal Goals:

- Encourage Arab-American communities to play an active and influential role in peace activist groups such as PC. I, as an Arab-American, fear that lack of action could prove to be very costly for Arabs, as they might get completely left behind during the peace process if inactivity and indifference persist.
- Understand the fears, concerns, and other reasons for an Arab-American community's hesitation to work with PC
- Help PC to become more appealing to an Arab audience

Activities:

- Prepared an extensive and elaborate presentation about PC
- Contacted and visited many Arab-American communities and organizations in New England, in order to give my presentation about PC
- Organized PC's and Frankenthal's first visit to a mosque in the USA

Key Dilemmas:

- What reactions will I, an Arab-American, receive from other Arabs for volunteering for an Israeli organization?
- How can I get Arab-American community leaders to trust the intentions of Frankenthal, an Israeli, and founder of PC?
- Are the principle and message of PC well conveyed to an Arab audience?
Are the brochures, website, and videos of PC appropriately suited for an Arab-American audience?

Important Learnings

- It is crucial for an Arab-Jewish peace organization to reflect equality in the power structure of the organization. Arab and Jewish members need to divide the responsibilities and the authority equally in order for the peace organization to thrive and to have the ability to gain support from both communities.
- Immense courage is required for both Arab and Jewish members to volunteer for this organization. Many members hesitate to tell friends and families that they work for PC.

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(Below) A banner outside of the ISB Mosque

Here is one of the communities I visited to raise awareness about Parents' Circle—The Islamic Society of Boston (ISB).



Yitzhack Frankenthal describes the mission and activities of Parents' Circle to Dr. Krayyem, a leader in Worcester's Muslim community.



עדיפה דרך השלום מאשר דרך המלחמה
The Road To Peace Is Preferable Over The Path To War
طريق السلام افضل من طريق الحرب

Above is the logo for the Parents' Circle—the Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Parents' Forum, the organization where I worked.

It was 7:30 and the synagogue was packed. The crowd consisted mainly of senior citizens and members of the Jewish community in Great Barrington. I sensed the crowd's eagerness to hear from Yitzhak. I even witnessed a small brawl between two parties of senior citizens for the limited front row seats. All chairs were eventually filled. Many had to stand during the lecture. I was excited for the event to begin and drove two hours so that I could see a Palestinian member of Bereaved Parents' Forum. I wanted to observe how Ghazi would interact with Yitzhak. Is Ghazi just there to serve as a Palestinian token? Or is he just as intelligent, devoted, and as eloquent of a speaker as Yitzhak?

Eventually the head of the congregation introduced Betsy and she revealed the bad news. Yitzhak and Ghazi were stuck in a Buffalo airport. Their flight was cancelled because of storms. The crowd was sad, yet certainly not disappointed because Betsy's presentation was awesome. People remained in their seats and listened attentively to her moving presentation. She showed poise, was informative, and very articulate.

She discussed the profound emotions attached to this conflict. Everyone is passionate about his or her views. Regardless where one stands on the political spectrum, most refuse to modify their views. She revealed that when Yitzhak raised an opposing perspective to a crowd as large as the one I saw at the temple in Great Barrington, it significantly jeopardized his security. In some Jewish communities in Israel, Yitzhak needs bodyguards because the atmosphere can become antagonistic.

Learning that Yitzhak needs bodyguards when he speaks almost belittles my fears of describing Parents' Circle to an Arab audience. My insecurities to deliver a presentation are petty compared to the real dangers that he faces. He admirably does not allow a hostile crowd to discourage him from spreading his views on peace and coexistence. My gravest fear is social denunciation. Not only does he encounter social rejection from his own people, but he also has to worry about his physical safety. I know that in America, regardless of how different my views may be, I won't suffer physically for it. I may be labeled as a traitor, or not be welcomed, but at least I have the security of not being physically harmed.

Even Betsy was prepared to endure backlash at the temple. Fortunately, the crowd responded positively, but Betsy told me that she was prepared to hear it all, both compliments and scolding. Betsy and Yitzhak have encountered hostile audience after expressing their views. However, inhospitable audiences do not intimidate them. Yitzhak isn't discouraged from an unsympathetic audience. He keeps spreading his word, which is an inspiration to me. I admire their resiliency. It encourages me to speak courageously, no matter how the crowd might react.