



The Road to Healing

By Soraya Zaki Hafez

In 1967, I was living in Toronto, Ontario. I joined an international women's group and I was invited to their first meeting. Everyone had to bring a dish from their native land. I was so proud of myself for making baklava; I thought it was the best. When I got there, I put my baklava on the table and looked at the other food and to my surprise I saw a dish of falafel. The falafel looked perfectly round and golden brown. They looked absolutely delicious. I asked who brought them and I was introduced to Rachel from Israel. I tried to hide my disappointment but I couldn't. She was apprehensive when she knew that I came from Egypt. She asked about the weather and my education and in return I asked her how she made the falafel. We started talking about Toronto and Canada, in general. We complimented each other on the dish we brought and left.

I found out that Rachel lived close to where I lived. We met several times on our way out shopping or catching the bus. We started to feel comfortable talking to each other. We went for coffee several times.

Then it was June, 1967 and it was tense between Egypt and Israel. Rachel was scared of what might happen. I had a brother in the army and I was terrified of the prospect of war. I cried a lot and my relationship with Rachel at this time was very difficult to maintain. On June 5th the war started and ended in six days with a defeated Egypt. I didn't know what happened to my brother. Rachel came every day to ask me if I heard any news about my brother until the day I received a message saying that he was safe. Rachel came and hugged me and we both cried. I moved away to Edmonton, Alberta and Rachel and I kept in touch with each other.

In 1971, my brother was killed during an Israeli raid on Egypt. This news was devastating to me. I cried and cried until I couldn't cry anymore. I didn't want to have anything to do with Rachel or any other person with the same background.

However, one weekend I was in Toronto attending a conference and as I was sitting reading the program. I looked up and there was Rachel standing right there wearing a black dress and looking very sad. Her father had been killed in a bombing.

We talked about both of our situations. We talked about the anger that leads to violence against innocent people. We both agreed that there must be a solution. Peace is the answer to all that. We promised each other that we should work for peace so no one would have to go through what we went through losing loved ones.

The anger inside me turned into a feeling of accepting my brother's death as my start toward a journey of healing, and I was determined to do all I could to help bring peace between the Palestinians and the Jewish State of Israel.

A story told to Soraya Zaki Hafez by Mona Ahmad Zaki, a Muslim by birth.