

Finding COMMON GROUND



Coming together through tragedy

BY WENDY KAHN

I HAVE BEEN AN ARDENT ADMIRER OF RACHELLE Fraenkel since I first got to know this remarkable woman through the eyes of the media. Together with world Jewry, I prayed for the safe return of Eyal, Naphtali, and Gilad, and grieved when we learned the heart-breaking news that they had been murdered. I watched in awe as she and the other five parents who, caught up in the most horrific situation with which a parent can be faced, exhibited nothing but strength, dignity, and yirat shamayim.

Rachelle delivered her courageous messages to the media, providing us all with strength at this tragic time. She stood at the United Nations, delivering a powerful message with dignity and eloquence and providing a pivotal voice that needed to be heard. Drawing on the unity that had resulted at the time of the disappearance of the boys, she created campaigns and an organisation to perpetuate this unity and to build on it in Israel and throughout the Jewish World. This was a true inspiration. What an honour to have this woman come to our community in South Africa, sharing her wisdom and powerful messages with us.

But perhaps her messages resonated more broadly than we thought. Perhaps her courage could be shared further than SA Jewry. Earlier this year, a colleague and I had visited the community of Boipatong near Vanderbijlpark at the invitation of Faith Mazibuko, the MEC of Sports, Arts, Recreation, and Culture, to lay a wreath at

the graves of the 46 victims of the massacre that took place there in 1992. This is a community that had experienced horrific loss, yet very little support has been extended to remembering their tragedy in the way that other tragedies in our country are commemorated. Both the MEC and Mayor thanked us for being there and spoke about the suffering that our own community experienced in the form of the Shoah. We met that day with victim support groups that had been established in Boipatong to support the survivors and families of those killed.

We decided to arrange a visit to Boipatong so that Rachelle could engage with other support groups. A delegation of 45 women (and one man) including female prefects from the King David Schools, the SAJBD, the SAZF, the UJW, Emunah, and the JNF headed off to Sedibeng with our special guest.

As we entered the Boipatong Museum we were greeted with singing and dancing, enveloping us immediately into their community. MEC Mazibuko welcomed us warmly and introduced us to the two survivor groups, providing a representative of each with an opportunity to share their painful stories. We felt the pain as a woman from Bana ba Modimo shared how she

had hidden under the bed while the attackers had thrust spears through the mattress. She spoke of the carnage around her after that devastating night.

And then Rachelle stood up. She empathised with the suffering and pain, commenting about how much comfort she got from the support of her community and how that same communal support was so evident there in Boipatong. She spoke of the value of victim support groups that she had experienced at the time of her tragedy and that she was seeing in front of her. While she acknowledged the on-going pain and heartbreak that she experienced with the brutal killing of her son, she had never allowed the pain to define her.

"There is part of our lives that is pain and loss and there is the part of our lives that has a lot of joy and blessing. I can feel the pain, but don't have to become my pain; feel sorrow and loss, but don't have to become my sorrow and loss. With the help of family and community, and survivor support organisations, we can experience a full life that, along with the pain, has blessing and joy, and allows us to speak out and tell our story," she said.

As the survivors of Boipatong embraced her, I was deeply moved by this moment in time when this connection between a woman from Nof Ayalon, Israel and a woman in Boipatong, South Africa found a commonality. **■**

“THERE IS PART OF OUR LIVES THAT IS PAIN AND LOSS AND THERE IS THE PART OF OUR LIVES THAT HAS A LOT OF JOY AND BLESSING.”