



RACHEL CORRIE:

DEFINITION OF A TRUE AMERICAN HERO

By Laura Dawn Lewis

Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend."

Col. John W. Mansur from "Missileer"



Occasionally an American takes his or her role as an American seriously and demonstrates the basic values we once lived by out of sheer generosity and compassion. One such American died in service to humanity on March 16, 2003, and it is this young woman, I'd like to remember today.

A beautiful, vivacious twenty-three year old Evergreen State college student out of Olympia, Washington, Rachel Corrie was murdered trying to save the property of a man, Rafahinian, Dr. Samir Nasrallah, who had done nothing wrong except be born in the wrong country, with the wrong color skin and the wrong faith. Rachel represented all that is good about America, what we once were: brave, compassionate, caring, humane, seekers of peace and people who do something about what is wrong with the world instead of complaining in complacency. She died trying to save a man's home, murdered in cold blood by a US made and funded Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer in the hands of a two vengeful soldiers. Two Israeli soldiers man each Caterpillar.

WHAT SHE WAS DEFENDING

United Nation's reports over the past three years Israel has destroyed nearly 900 houses in Rafah, (a total of near 15,000 in Palestine). For the families, there is no compensation, and this destruction of property falls under the Rome Statues definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed by Israel against an unarmed civilian population under their control. A form of collective punishment and surgical terror, this is like the US government showing up one day, telling you, you don't live in your home anymore, even if your family has owned that land for hundreds of years. Once confiscating your home the government then destroys it and everything in it as you and your family watch, now homeless, penniless, with only what you can carry.

Rachel was working to prevent actions of a holocaust in progress and the best way to explain this is through a movie most are familiar with. Watching *Schindler's List* last week knowing the reality in Palestine, the Nazis became Israelis and the Palestinians the Jews. Oskar Schindler reminded me of America, complicit and even supportive at first and slowly waking up to the horror unfolding. Perhaps in time Rachel will become our little girl in the red coat. Knowing the present situation, these similarities were impossible to shake during the first half of the movie, right up through the emptying of the ghetto. The victimized have become the victimizers and history is repeating itself at the hands of the very people who should know better.

THE LAST MINUTES OF RACHEL CORRIE



Rachel Corrie confronts the bulldozer driver.
(ISM Handout)



A clearly marked Rachel Corrie, holding a megaphone, confronts an Israeli bulldozer driver attempting to demolish a Palestinian home, Rafah, Occupied Gaza, 16 March 2003. (ISM Handout)



Other peace activists tend to Rachel after being injured by the Israeli bulldozer driver, Rafah, Occupied Gaza, 16 March 2003. (ISM Handout)



Rachel Corrie lies on the ground fatally injured by the Israeli bulldozer, Rafah, Occupied Gaza, 16 March 2003. (ISM Handout)

The scene in the Judenrat where complaints are registered and the woman says, "*They come into our house and tell us we don't live there anymore*", so many times I've heard the same stunned frustration from Palestinians. The lines of people standing, the humiliation, the restriction to freedom, racial laws, forced starvation, the desecration of religious sites and symbols, the targeting of people for their faith, (in this case Gentiles instead of Jews) the shootings in the streets, the roads closed off to Jews in the movie are the same roads closed off to Arabs today. The theft of property even the taunts "Good bye Jews" by the little girl on the day of the Krakow Ghetto immigration. Today Israeli settlers scream at Palestinians, "We will kill you all!" The guerrilla warfare the Jews fought from the ghettos against the Nazi military might is the same guerrilla warfare fought by the Palestinians against the Israeli military might. Up through the emptying of the Krakow Ghetto in the movie, this is *exactly* what Palestine is like today. The next step is concentration camps and forced deportation. The Israeli government already speaks publicly of forced deportation and worse.

Gaza exists today as a walled ghetto. Rather than simply force people out of their homes and acquire them, in the Occupied Territories the homes and everything in them are destroyed. If the resident doesn't hear the bulldozer or is too slow to move, he/she is crushed to death. The excuse of late is these homes must be destroyed in order to create a one hundred meter "buffer zone" between Palestinian homes and the wall. Daily shelling and armed raids over the past three years have killed nearly 300 Palestinians and have left more than 8,600 people homeless. This is what Rachel was fighting and trying to prevent. Any American with conscience, Jewish or Gentile witnessing this would have done the same.

Currently, Rabbi Arik Ascherman originally from the United States, and the *Executive Director of Rabbis for Human Rights* is awaiting trial in Israel for trying to prevent the demolition of two Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, the same non-violent protesting as Rachel Corrie. March 17, 2004, over 400 Rabbis from around the world signed a letter sent to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon protesting Israel's home demolition policy and the trial. The letter noted that: "The homes that were demolished were not connected with terrorism. None of



the people in these homes or their relatives engaged in violence or harboring terrorists. The homes were demolished because of a violation of zoning regulations. The inhabitants had failed to secure a building permit for an extension in the context where it is almost impossible for Palestinian families in those parts of the West Bank under Israeli civilian control or in Jerusalem to legally obtain them.”

Taken by force, East Jerusalem is part of the Occupied Territory and does not legally belong to Israel.

Standing with the Rabbis are hundreds of non-Zionist Christian and Muslim clergy and clerics. This issue, what Rachel attempted to prevent, is not about anti-Semitism or anti-Americanism. It is about humanity, ending apartheid and removing the situations that cause terrorism.

MARCH 16, 2003

This day six activists were attempting to prevent the destruction of more homes. On several occasions, the bulldozers stopped several times directly at the feet of the demonstrators, before pulling back, indicating they could see the protestors even at the base of the blade. The protesting the ISM volunteers conduct is similar to the protesting in the United States you see where environmentalists or human rights activists will place themselves in the path of trucks and equipment to prevent destruction. For whatever reason, this time the driver and his lookout decided not to stop.

Rachel slipped below the blade wailing in pain, the massive machine crushing her; not satisfied, the driver moved over her and then reversed course while several horrified people screamed and attempted to stop him. Military personnel nearby allowed it to happen. Her death is tragic, but not nearly as tragic as America's response. Our response, none but ridicule shows how sick, morally sick as a nation we have become.

Rachel was an American citizen killed exemplifying all that Americans consider righteous. As a student activist she devoted her life through civil disobedience to ending one of the longest, cruelest and inhumane occupations in the history of man. An occupation defined illegal by *UN Resolution 242*, (a total of 84 sanctions) and wholeheartedly funded by the United States. An occupation that targets children with bombs shaped like toys, which then explode, gutting the children and killing or maiming playmates near.

Rachel was doing exactly what the majority of Americans wish they could have done, had they been alive, during the most widely publicized of seven holocausts¹ of the twentieth century. Miss Corrie didn't sit around and wish she could help. She did.

¹Holocaust is defined as a concentrated and orchestrated effort of ethnic cleansing and genocide targeted at a civilian population by the state or forces in power, generally based upon their faith, race or social/political standing. During the 20th Century, the world saw seven separate holocausts: The Armenian Holocaust (aka the Armenian Genocide) of 1915-1923 (500,000 killed); The Russian Holocaust under Stalin beginning in 1928 (The largest holocaust of the 20th Century with 5 million dead from forced starvation between 1932 and 1933 in the Ukraine, (aka The Terror Famine and Kulak



She fought peacefully and unarmed against tanks and an armed military that has crushed alive the elderly, handicap and ill in their homes with bulldozers. She fought an oppression that at times places numbers on the arms of those trapped in its ghettos. She protested against an occupational force that tosses poison nerve gas into the courtyards of homes where women and children are playing.

THE US MEDIA'S TRIBUTE TO RACHEL

As a nation did we express outrage that one of our unarmed citizens, barely an adult was murdered in a selfless act assisting others? Did we insist upon an investigation? Did we do anything? Yes. Rachel became the butt of jokes on comedy shows. She was ridiculed by our newscasters and vilified by our pundits, some even saying she "Deserved it". Who deserves to be squashed to death under a giant bulldozer? Prostrate with grief, her parents began touring America in an effort to educate people to the real issues in Palestine. Many times they were prevented from speaking. Why? Their daughter did nothing wrong and everything right. Rachel Corrie is hero in the truest sense of the word. She represents everything good about America. Unfortunately she was murdered by the only group of people with full immunity from accountability and prosecution. Two Israelis murdered her.

The British press and even some in the Israeli press wrote some beautiful eulogies to Miss Corrie. Her country however, the United States turned a blind eye and degraded her. In the rest of the world she is a hero. In America, her home, she is ridiculed. Case in Point:

On Today, the anniversary of her death, [THE WALL STREET JOURNAL](#), one of the largest newspapers in the United States posted the following:

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Rachel Corrie

Thanks for showing us what "peace" really means.

BY RUHAMA SHATTAN

Tuesday, March 16, 2004 12:01 a.m. EST

Today is the first anniversary of Rachel Corrie's death. I want to thank Corrie for the explosives that flow freely from Egypt to Gaza, via the smuggling tunnels under the Gaza homes that she died defending.

Killings) later claiming a total of 30-million souls under Stalin during his reign); The German Holocaust of 1930's and 1940's (aka The Jewish Holocaust) consisted of 12 million dead: 2.5-million Catholics, 25% of the Gypsy population, 6-million Jews and an additional 3.5-million consisting of Poles, handicap, mentally ill, Communists and homosexuals, all of whom were systematically targeted and exterminated; The Cambodian Holocaust (aka The Killing Fields) of the late 1960's to mid-1970's (1.7 million dead); The Bosnian Holocaust of the 1990's, (official state records show 2,265 civilians killed. Unofficial estimates place this around 30,000. We have been unable to locate a consistent authoritative accounting of the death toll in Bosnia); The Palestinian/Arab Holocaust (aka the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict) from 1948-1956 and 1967-present (The longest running holocaust, exact numbers are unavailable as this is ongoing; estimates run from as few as 300,000 to over one million killed during the past 58 years); the Somalian Holocaust of the 1990's, (est. 300,000); Idi Amin's Rwanda Holocaust (800,000) of the 1990's. Some historians also include Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the cities the United States dropped the nuclear bombs on as a holocaust in that the targets were civilians. Since these were single day events, they are generally not included in the reference to the 7, all of which occurred over an extended period of time.



Perhaps it was these explosives that in the year since her martyrdom--oops, death--have been strapped around suicide bombers to blow up city buses and restaurants in Israeli cities, particularly in Jerusalem, killing men, women and schoolchildren (two of them classmates of my daughter and her friend in the February 22, 2004 bombing) and leaving hundreds more widows, orphans and bereaved parents.

Perhaps her help in fanning the flames of violent anti-American sentiment led to the October 2003 bombing of the Fulbright delegation to Gaza to interview scholarship candidates, killing three. There will be no new crop of Palestinian Fulbright scholars this fall. <End excerpt>

The last name, "Shattan" is Arabic for "The Devil". Devote Muslims are forbidden from speaking this name, making this a cruel, sadistic joke toward them. To protest the letter, they must read it and cite it. Psychological warfare, the story purposely instigates. This first appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, considered by the majority of international journalists as the most racist paper on the planet. Its nickname, "*The Hate Sheet*" as this example shows, is well earned.

What possessed the *Wall Street Journal* to pick up such an opinion defies words. Blatant hate, this racism and errant propaganda vilifies an American citizen, ties her to ideas, organizations and actions she and the groups she worked with have no ties to. Though the US embassy failed to protect her death and insist on an investigation, it did voice its disapproval in a letter to the editor of the originating paper, the *Jerusalem Post*:

US EMBASSY ACCUSES J'POST OF PUBLISHING "HATEFUL INCITEMENT"

March 16, 2004, By Warrick Page for IMEMC

The US Embassy condemned the *Jerusalem Post* in a letter to the editor on Wednesday, saying an editorial written about the first anniversary of Rachel Corrie's death, was "nothing less than a hateful incitement".

The editorial, written by Ruhama Shattan, "thanks" Ms Corrie - a US peace activist killed in Rafah on March 16 last year -for "defending" the arms-smuggling tunnels in Gaza and "for showing Palestinian children how to despise America".

The response from the US Embassy, written by Paul Patin, said, "The author's disgusting abuse of the anniversary of the death of this American citizen is inexcusable".

Such treatment of an American citizen is shameful and the *Wall Street Journal* should be held accountable for posting hate speech, a horrendous breach of ethics. The publication took a selfless act and made it evil, an unconscionable leap. The person who approved this propaganda demonstrates his/her judgment severely lacks the critical thinking skills and morality required of a professional journalist. Research disproves its allegations and the person posting did not check the facts. Posting such constitutes extraordinarily sloppy journalism. The only motivation for such libel is pure hate.



More revealing is how Americans RESPONDED to this opinion. The Journal chooses which to post and many of us sent in objections to the article. These were not posted. Rather, the Journal posted a majority demonstrating a crass disregard for Americans and the life of one of our own. Any doubts that the posting was unintentional or "slipped through the cracks" evaporates. The responses posted show it to be intended, purposeful and with malice.

THE INVESTIGATION INTO RACHEL'S DEATH

In Israel, even though photos show the action and many witnesses were present, no one was charged or reprimanded for the murder of Rachel Corrie. In a characteristic stroke of cruelty, the Israeli government even celebrated her death, taunting her grieving family in correspondences to her parents. Of late the story shifted from denying that Rachel was run over by the bulldozer, to maintaining that Rachel was not actually touched by the bulldozer, (despite the fact its imprints are visible on her) but killed by falling on a concrete block. This is refuted by the Israeli autopsy report the Corrie family obtained, and as is clear in the pictures above, there are no concrete blocks in existence.

The US never investigated Rachel's death and the Israeli government refuses to release its June 2003 military police investigation final report to the United States, only allowing an American embassy official to read and take notes from selected parts, (kind of like us removing 800 pages from the report on WMD's before allowing others to see it.) The Israeli's refuse to allow a memorial to her the Palestinians would very much like to build. She is a hero to the Palestinian people. She should also be a hero to the American people. Israel's reaction to her death was to change its laws so that all aid workers have to sign a release allowing them to be killed without repercussions. Summary executions of Palestinians are common and peace activists are often targeted along with children in the West Bank and Gaza. After Rachel was killed, Brian Avery of New Mexico was shot in the face on April 5; Tom Hurndall, (22) a British citizen, was shot in the head on April 11 attempting to protect some children playing and died Jan. 13, 2004 and James Miller, another British citizen, was also shot and killed in April 2003.

To date, only the Hurndall case goes to trial, and this is because the British government, after several months, finally responded to the overwhelming evidence presented by the Hurndall family. Overwhelming evidence exists in Rachel's case that shows the act to be deliberate murder and our government has done nothing.

DUAL LOYALTIES IN THE US GOVERNMENT

[US Consulate Refuses to Protect Rachel Corrie](#)

[\(by Dr. Lim Ibn Kateb\)](#)

Our government stays quiet leaving one to wonder, where do our government's loyalties lie? Obviously, not with the American people whom they are sworn to serve and protect. Rachel and Brian are evidence of this. How is the US government serving their families by ignoring the event and not investigating it? Without understanding what has happened and why, how can they protect other Americans from suffering the same fate? And why



are they protecting a citizen from a foreign country before protecting their own? Why do the freedom and vanity of and Israeli soldier supercede the life of American citizens? [TOP](#)

Certainly our government is not protecting and defending US Constitution. Rachel was doing her duty as an American to see she exemplified our values thus encapsulated. That these principles are without borders: values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Constitutional guarantees like not allowing unlawful search, seizure or the confiscation and destruction of property without due process. In accordance US law, she was preventing US equipment from being used to persecute and attack civilians. Our government certainly isn't. They have been looking the other way, an immoral act showing a lack of ethics and patriotism for 30 years. Rachel was upholding international laws that forbid collective punishment, ethnic cleansing and the destruction of family, livelihood and the property of civilians. These policies are known as *Crimes Against Humanity* and their practitioners face the gallows. Our government continues to fund them and provide the tools at taxpayer and the deprivation of social services expense. Israel acts in its best interests, as they should. The question is, why does the US Government continue to act in Israel's best interests at the expense of its, or better stated, our own? [TOP](#)

DOUBLE STANDARDS

On Oct. 15, 2003, three Americans died as they traveled through Gaza, presumably in an explosion allegedly set by Palestinians. Within 24-hours the FBI arrived to investigate the deaths. It's been a year since Rachel was murdered and still no police agency of the US has bothered to investigate. [Neither the FBI nor any other U.S.-led team](#) has done anything to investigate the death of *any* American killed by an Israeli, including those of our own military, such is the case with the [USS Liberty](#). They've been waiting 38-years for an investigation. Our government chooses to protect Israeli citizens from prosecution rather than to protect the lives and needs of American citizens. Is this a policy in America's best interest? Can you imagine any other country in the world getting away with murder when an American citizen is involved?

This past week, two American civilians found themselves the target of assassins at a security checkpoint, this time in Iraq. Fern Holland, 33 of Oklahoma an attorney setting up women's rights conferences and assisting with the new constitution, and Robert J. Zangas, 44 of Pittsburgh, a former Marine and father of three working to set up the free press in Iraq. The civilians who were both assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority, based in Arlington, Va., died March 9 in Al-Hillah, Iraq. With them also, an Iraqi national serving as a translator was killed. Within twenty-four hours the news was full of wonderful tributes to these two selfless individuals and the Department of Defense and FBI both committed to investigations. They were not mocked for giving their lives to help others. They were not vilified, ignored or swept under the rug. Fern and Robert received the recognition, honor and admiration of the American people they deserved for giving their lives, honorably in service to others.



Watching the tributes and interviews, I couldn't help but notice with great sadness the blinding disparity between our treatment of Fern and Robert, and our treatment of Rachel and Brian. [TOP](#)

A FITTING TRIBUTE

Rachel Corrie died supporting American values. As a nation, there are three ways we can acknowledge her sacrifice. First, insist on an investigation into her death by the US Government. As a citizen, we owe her and her family this. Secondly, Americans must relinquish their fear of discussing and debating our relationship with Israel. Being called anti-Semitic for questioning Israeli policies, actions and agendas is unconscionable. We need to start publicly confronting people who use this term to circumvent public debate about our foreign policy. Those whom slander and libel persons as anti-Semitic for opposing US involvement in Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity, these are the villains, the true enemies of American democracy. They wield this characterization with impunity preventing Americans from debating issues critical to our security and health as nation. Opposing ethnic cleansing, apartheid and genocide is not anti-Semitic. Supporting it is, however, anti-American.

Finally, as a nation we must make serious inquiries into the suspicious dual loyalties our congress, senate and executive branches illustrate each time they forego the welfare of Americans in favor of their passionate attachment to a foreign government. Today it is very difficult for a politician to get elected or stay in office if he or she does not proclaim solidarity and show unwavering support, first to Israel and second to the United States. There is something seriously wrong when a politician for our country must support a foreign country to get elected or stay in office. As a nation we wonder why we cannot get good politicians. Perhaps voting out people who show their loyalty and solidarity with foreign nations before their own is a good place to start. Spain accomplished this. The American people should as well. [TOP](#)

The American people continue to suffer financially, diplomatically and morally for this unhealthy alliance, a relationship that has cost us \$1.8 Trillion dollars since 1973, (There's your national healthcare system and free college education for every American, America. Or enough of a reduction in taxes that women could stay home with children if they wanted to. A two-income family would no longer be a requirement; it would return to a choice.). Economists estimate the United States loses 200,000 jobs a year due to our continued support and underwriting of apartheid and through trade agreements. Investigations into Israel's misappropriating of our funds, illegal use of our weapons and multiple crimes against humanity are warranted. Under no circumstance should any American money, property or aid go to support countries that do not uphold International law or the principles of our Constitution. Israel fails on all accounts and no country should be an exception to the rule. Why this continues, and why our government relinquishes American needs for a foreign government must be investigated. Our future depends on it.



Rachel Corrie died trying to reverse some of the damage the United States' unquestioning support and passionate attachment to a foreign country has caused to an entire race of people. She did what our politicians are too afraid to do. She stood up for American values, tried to make a difference and gave her life for the principles this country once stood for. And that is, what Rachel Corrie at the young age of twenty-three was, the definition of a true American Hero. [TOP](#)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Some of the incidents and attacks I mentioned in this article can be seen first hand in the documentary [Gaza Strip](#) including the gassing of women and children, the destruction of homes by bulldozers and the toy bombs for children. This film is brutal in its reality and not recommend for children under the age of 17 without an adult present. If you are interested in learning more about the Israeli/Palestinian issue, [THESE ADDITIONAL SOURCES](#) will help you bypass the BS and get to the real issues.

RACHEL'S E-MAILS

February 7 2003

Hi friends and family, and others,

I have been in Palestine for two weeks and one hour now, and I still have very few words to describe what I see. It is most difficult for me to think about what's going on here when I sit down to write back to the United States. Something about the virtual portal into luxury. I don't know if many of the children here have ever existed without tank-shell holes in their walls and the towers of an occupying army surveying them constantly from the near horizons. I think, although I'm not entirely sure, that even the smallest of these children understand that life is not like this everywhere. An eight-year-old was shot and killed by an Israeli tank two days before I got here, and many of the children murmur his name to me - Ali - or point at the posters of him on the walls. The children also love to get me to practice my limited Arabic by asking me, "Kaif Sharon?" "Kaif Bush?" and they laugh when I say, "Bush Majnoon", "Sharon Majnoon" back in my limited arabic. (How is Sharon? How is Bush? Bush is crazy. Sharon is crazy.) Of course this isn't quite what I believe, and some of the adults who have the English correct me: "Bush mish Majnoon" ... Bush is a businessman. Today I tried to learn to say, "Bush is a tool", but I don't think it translated quite right. But anyway, there are eight-year-olds here much more aware of the workings of the global power structure than I was just a few years ago.

Nevertheless, no amount of reading, attendance at conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just can't imagine it unless you see it - and even then you are always well aware that your experience of it is not at all the reality: what with the difficulties the Israeli army would face if they shot an unarmed US citizen, and with the fact that I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and the fact, of course, that I have the option of leaving. Nobody in my family has been shot, driving in their car, by a rocket launcher from a tower at the end of a major street in my hometown. I have a home. I am allowed to go see the ocean. When I leave for school or work I can be relatively certain that there will not be a heavily armed soldier waiting halfway between Mud Bay and downtown Olympia at a checkpoint with the power to decide whether I can go about my business, and whether I can get home again when I'm done. As an afterthought to all this rambling, I am in Rafah: a city of about 140,000 people, approximately 60% of whom are refugees - many of whom are twice or three times refugees. Today, as I walked on top of the rubble where homes once stood, Egyptian soldiers called to me from the other side of the border, "Go! Go!" because a tank was coming. And then waving and "What's your name?". Something disturbing about this friendly curiosity. It reminded me of how much, to some degree, we are all kids curious about other kids. Egyptian kids shouting at strange women wandering into the path of tanks. Palestinian kids shot from the tanks when they peak out from behind walls to see what's going on. International kids



standing in front of tanks with banners. Israeli kids in the tanks anonymously - occasionally shouting and also occasionally waving - many forced to be here, many just aggressive - shooting into the houses as we wander away.

I've been having trouble accessing news about the outside world here, but I hear an escalation of war on Iraq is inevitable. There is a great deal of concern here about the "reoccupation of Gaza". Gaza is reoccupied every day to various extents but I think the fear is that the tanks will enter all the streets and remain here instead of entering some of the streets and then withdrawing after some hours or days to observe and shoot from the edges of the communities. If people aren't already thinking about the consequences of this war for the people of the entire region then I hope you will start.

My love to everyone. My love to my mom. My love to smooch. My love to fg and barnhair and sesamees and Lincoln School. My love to Olympia.

Rachel

[MORE e-mails](#)