

Jewish News Weekly

Issue date of Friday October 27, 2006 - Thursday

November 2, 2006

http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaysection/edition_id/576/format/html/displaysection.html

"Daniel Pearl's parents fighting 'Zionophobia' one journalist at a time"

**by joe eskenazi
staff writer**

You know what Judea Pearl could do without? Sentences that begin: "It's a shame your son was kidnapped and murdered, but ... "

He's getting really tired of the "but."

"I am not happy with the typical response we get from the Muslim world, which is that so many Muslims are being slaughtered in Iraq and Kashmir and Palestine and Chechnya, so what's all this fuss about an American Jewish journalist?" recalls Pearl, the father of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter killed by terrorists four years ago in Pakistan.

"This is a technique of blurring the definition of terrorism," he said in a phone interview. "The argument is based on counting bodies regardless of intention. It's an attempt to say that everybody is a terrorist."

Pearl has fighting words for many in both the Muslim and Jewish communities, but he isn't fighting with fists or missiles. Through the Daniel Pearl Foundation — he's the president and his wife, Ruth, is the CFO — he's working to combat hatred and intolerance through the mediums his son excelled in: journalism, music and dialogue.

"We are trying to change the world. We are trying to bring some sanity into this world," says Ruth Pearl.

The couple, both 70 and both American-Israeli dual citizens, were at Stanford on Tuesday, Oct. 17 for the

inaugural Daniel Pearl Memorial Lecture; CNN's Christiane Amanpour spoke to a capacity crowd of roughly 800.

The lecture series is just one of many projects that have become full-time jobs for the Pearls. Ruth is running the foundation, and Judea, a computer science professor at UCLA, is burning the midnight oil as well.

Most readers know of Daniel Pearl only in the context of his death and the hostage crisis which led up to it, so it may come as a surprise that Pearl was a funny guy who played the violin and mandolin in a number of bands. The Pearl foundation has helped to organize roughly 360 concerts in 36 countries to spread the message of tolerance and cooperation through music and dialogue, just as Daniel Pearl did in life.

The foundation has also started a program in which journalists from Muslim nations are given the chance to work at American newspapers, either as working writers or as observers.

So far, writers and editors from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Yemen and Nepal have gotten the chance to contribute at the Los Angeles Times and, intriguingly, the L.A. Jewish Journal.

"We met the editor of the Saudi Gazette at the airport and spent time with him, and he turned to me and said, 'You two are the first Jewish people I have ever met,'" recalled Ruth Pearl.

Another journalist "went back to Yemen and organized training seminars. He also publicly responded to the Arab journalist organization that suggested no Arab journalist should be trained in the West. We have strong connections with these people. A journalist has an impact that is far greater than one person's. An editor has even more."

Daniel Pearl's murder at age 39 changed his parents' world forever, as it would for anyone who outlived their child. But the Pearls decided to do more than just grieve.

"Everything we do now, we have never done before. I was dealing with equations, and Ruth was dealing with computer software," said Judea Pearl. "Now we are engaged with social activism."

Pearl blames "classical anti-Semitism" for fueling the men who killed his son, but also sees "Zionophobia," a term he coined. Zionophobia is different from anti-Semitism, and he feels the organized Jewish community has been slow and incompetent in fighting it.

"Denying Jewish people the right for nationhood is straight racism, not anti-Semitism. Jews fight Zionophobia by labeling it anti-Semitism, which is a mistake. It is so easily deflected by saying 'My best friends are Jewish' or 'I'll go to prison to defend a Jew's right to wear a yarmulke or eat kosher food' but still want Israel to be abolished," argues Pearl.

Banding about the term anti-Semitism "makes us look paranoid. It makes the whole fight against anti-Semitism lose its edge."