



The Compassionate Listening Project

Mill Valley Woman Documents Mission of Peace

Ê Ê

By Karen Forni, Editor, Mill Valley Herald, May 1-7, 2001

The images are striking: A woman leaning close to press a kiss to the Wailing Wall. An elderly married couple laughing together. The photograph of a blissful baby-and the bullet hole in the wall above it.

"That happened earlier in the day," Mill Valley resident Beverly Boos says of the bullet hole, a momento of one morning's conflict. When Boos shot the picture the family wasn't quaking in fear, because that day had pretty much been like any other. During the visit another skirmish broke out and the windshield of the delegation's car was shattered by gunfire.

Boos, a commercial photographer, is fresh off three weeks in the Middle East, where she documented the efforts of a Compassionate Listening delegation as they attempted to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to share their stories and recognize each other as people instead of adversaries.

The Compassionate Listening Project (www.compassionatelistening.org) has traveled to the troubled area 16 times over the last 11 years in an effort to develop a sense of empathy between the two cultures. "They try to move beyond stereotypes, to humanize Israelis and Palestinians," explains Boos.

The mission is one of a series of socially and spiritually centered work Boos has done recently. Accustomed to doing fashion and architectural photography, Boos was invited to photograph the Pope a few years ago; later projects involved sleeping in homeless shelters while documenting the plight of street children.

Interested in exploring both sides of the conflict, Boos decided to join TCLP's March effort after being impressed by the group's Compassionate Listening Project. "They use innovative solutions to conflict resolution," says Boos. "The Mid-East situation between the Jewish population and the Palestinians is the ideal model of Compassionate Listening. In Compassionate Listening, we re-humanize the perceived enemy-whoever that is-by listening to their stories." When the stories are heard, a sense of empathy sets in-the enemy is no longer a faceless mass.

Compassionate listening fills a big need, says Boos. "The interesting thing is, the Israelis don't travel to the West Bank. And the Palestinians aren't allowed to travel to Israel. I saw how each side was blind to the narrative of the other; each does not allow the reality of the other. The Palestinians don't see the fear of the Israelis-they only see the tanks, the soldiers. They're under occupation." On the other hand, "The Jews have never felt safe because of years of persecution, and now they're in the middle of these Arab nations. The Palestinians only see the difficulties of their daily lives: They experience confiscation of their land. Some have been in refugee camps since 1948; some people can't get to work-they have roads blocked off. Children can't get to school. The Israelis, because they don't live in the

- ▶ [Home](#)
- ▶ [About](#)
- ▶ [History](#)
- ▶ [Trips & Projects](#)
- ▶ [Workshops](#)
- ▶ [Events](#)
- ▶ [Newsletters](#)
- ▶ [July 2001](#)
- ▶ [Articles](#)
- ▶ [Compassionate Listening Shop](#)
- ▶ [Photo Gallery](#)
- ▶ [Links](#)
- ▶ [Support](#)
- ▶ [Contact](#)



West Bank, don't know about the daily lives of the Palestinians. They only know their fear-the fear of the bombs."

The Compassionate Listening dialogues delved into the experiences of the participants, giving Boos insight into their lives. "A Palestinian might say, for example, I'm only throwing a rock. But the Israeli is afraid of the rock. But the Palestinian is living with tanks-neither sees the beauty in each other's lives. In compassionate listening people may relate their lives. We drop our ego view-that's when transformative healing occurs."

Despite the differences in their daily lives, their existences are entwined, says Boos: "Almost every Jew has a friend who's an Arab, and every Arab has a friend who's a Jew. These people don't really hate each other-I haven't met a Palestinian who hated a Jew. But something happens, and everybody jumps backward and the stereotypes are reinforced."

In the end, Boos was so entranced by the Middle East that she elected to stay another week after the two-week mission ended. "It was a beautiful opportunity to photograph two beautiful people who can't see each other's beauty. We met with all different types of people, including peace activists on the Israeli side. We would listen to people's stories and at the end of that-in situations where we had an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian together-each were able to see something of the beauty of the other, and they were able to move forward in a trusting and just way."

The photographs Boos took to document the journey are being put together in an exhibit, but the trip and the exhibit are an expensive proposition. Among those who helped with the trip were Whole Foods Market, Mirror Mirror, Margaret O'Leary's, Sloat Garden Center, and Famous For Our Look, which all sent supplies for those in need.

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Trips](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [Articles](#) | [Compassionate Listening Shop](#)
| [Photo Gallery](#) | [Links](#) | [Support](#) | [Contact](#)