

Article on Crossing Borders in the Jewish Telegraph - the British Jewish newspaper  
By LYDIA AISENBERG  
Hope for our kids - thanks to folks like Liat and John

JOHN Bartholomew is a British-born educator and present-day resident of Jerusalem. He is also Jewish, black and the principal of an Arab high-school in East Jerusalem.

Bartholomew's mother, an Ethiopian Jewess, met his Caribbean Christian father in London where he was born. A remarkable and charismatic character, John Bartholomew smiles a great deal although one wonders how he has so much to smile about.

He faces and fights discrimination on an almost daily basis. When he leaves his house on the western side of Jerusalem he never knows whether he is going to be late for school - or even get there at all, much the same as many Palestinian pupils.

On top of the many complications and difficult roles Bartholomew faces in daily life, he is also the stepfather of a French-born Israeli soldier and heavily involved in a project called Crossing Borders (CB) involving Jewish and Arab youth in the Middle East. And he is still smiling, although he admits that he has had to make some concessions along the way.

"I have been both a teacher and principal for nine years, and have been a keen observer of the triumphs and struggles of the students under my care," Bartholomew said last week. He was speaking at the sixth anniversary gathering of Crossing Borders, a not-for-profit organisation that publishes an English language magazine written by Israeli Arab and Jewish, Palestinian and Jordanian youth and funded by the European Union and Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"Being Jewish while teaching Arab students in an Arab part of Jerusalem has caused me to have a unique perspective on the daily life of both Arabs and Jews," he said. "I have been 'crossing borders' for quite some time and this experience has been bitter-sweet for the most part."

The pressure on Bartholomew to switch jobs and work for the "other side" has been great, but he says he has always loved his job and loves the children with whom he interacts and educates on a daily basis.

Bartholomew was also instrumental in the writing of the recently-published Crossing Borders teachers' manual for peace education.

Since the Crossing Borders regional magazine first got up and running on a printers' press hundreds of English teachers in Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian schools have introduced the magazine to their classes.

The September 2000 intifada was thought to be a death notice for the-then fledgling project, but against all odds it not only continued but developed to include teachers.

The prohibitive travel restrictions enforced after the intifada was another major hurdle conquered - by having participants meet for long weekends in Turkey after which a new issue of the bi-monthly magazine saw fruition.

In an emotional speech at the sixth anniversary in Jerusalem, 21-year-old Jerusalem-born Liat Margalit said being part of CB was an important component in her life and had maintained her CB ties project during her military service.

Just before donning an IDF uniform, Liat had penned an article for the magazine entitled Soldier of Peace. She said she was often quizzed about belonging to a joint Jewish-Arab project.

"They don't understand how we can create a dialogue with those who are portrayed as 'the enemy' or 'the other side'," she said. But she didn't feel she owed anyone an explanation.

"I believe that those who spend their lives hating for no reason are the ones that need to give the explanation," said Liat. "I have committed to making CB a way of life, a part of who I am, so that the next generation will not grow up in hatred."

She went on, gesturing with both hands to all those sitting in front of her: "I am asking you to look around you. What you see is the future. My hope is that my kids will grow up side by side realising that every person is an entire world."

With people like Liat Margalit and John Bartholomew, maybe there is a chance after all.

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