

## Recruited To Die Movies

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In 2004, 24-year-old Brooke Goldstein spent her summer in the West Bank filming more than five hours of in-person interviews with terrorists -- all of which she conducted without a bodyguard and without a weapon. A Cardozo Law student with a fashion model's high cheekbones and long blond hair, Ms. Goldstein came face-to-face with Zacaria Zubeidah, a notorious recruiter of child suicide bombers. She interviewed suicide bombers' families and children, who aspire to "martyrdom." The resulting film, "*The Making of a Martyr*," will screen as part of the **Brooklyn International Film Festival** on Saturday and Tuesday.

Ms. Goldstein only appears in the film from the back; the focus is on Palestinian Arabs. Shots of refugee camps in Nablus, Jenin, and other towns show children playing, sometimes amid remains of buildings and the detritus of gunfights.

In the interviews, parents of suicide bombers sit in living rooms adorned with posters of their dead, and teenage terrorists sit with their hands tensely gripping machine guns that rest against their knees as they answer Ms. Goldstein's questions.

Ms. Goldstein was inspired to do the project after reading a news story in 2004 about Hussam Abdu, a 16-year-old would-be suicide bomber who had a sudden change of heart and surrendered at an Israeli checkpoint. The image of the boy, with his hands above his head as frightened Israeli soldiers shouted orders, haunted her. She approached the problem like the aspiring lawyer she was.

"I was thinking, 'You know, there's a legal argument here that no one is making, which is that the suicide bomber himself -- 18 and under -- is as much a victim as the Israeli civilians being killed,'" she said. "These kids are not doing this of their own accord."

After resolving to gather evidence to prosecute those who recruit child terrorists, Ms. Goldstein traveled to Israel to interview experts on brainwashing and recruitment. She teamed up with her college pal Alistair Leyland, who taped the interviews and served as co-producer. But that summer, while interviewing a prominent Israeli psychiatrist, she decided she needed to delve deeper.

"When I asked [the psychiatrist], 'When was the last time you've been to the West Bank?' she said, 'Oh, I've never been to the West Bank.' 'When was the last time you sat with Palestinian children to analyze their behavior?' 'Oh, I've never done that.' I think that interview made me aware that I couldn't release anything publicly about people I had never met."

Because reporters typically don't go to the Palestinian Arab territories alone, Ms. Goldstein and Mr. Leyland employed a "fixer" who introduced them to sources, translated, and served as a guide. After working on previous projects with the BBC and CNN, he took on the job eagerly but wishes to remain anonymous.

"He liked that we were young," Ms. Goldstein said. "He liked that our motive was to expose the crimes being committed against these children."

The night before her first foray into the West Bank, she was terrified. "I called my sister and said, 'You should



Like many people, Brooke Goldstein couldn't understand why Palestinian Arab terrorists recruited children to become murderers, so she went to the West Bank and asked them, Heather Robinson writes.

know where I'll be in case I don't come back in 24 hours.' I thought of the lynching of those Israeli reservists. A million horrible things were going through my mind."

Her arrival didn't allay her fears. "There are gallows in Ramallah -- they practice public hanging. There are pictures of dead children brandishing weapons -- 'martyr posters' -- everywhere you look ... with captions like 'Our hero.'"

As the group walked through the town, they spoke to Palestinian Arab children in schools and on the street. "Our fixer was encouraging us to speak with the children. I think I'd always, deep down, had a hard time thinking the problem was really that bad. I thought maybe it was a lunatic fringe," she said.

In fact, the fanaticism was worse than she ever imagined. "The most shocking thing was reconciling the normal appearance of these kids and what was coming out of their mouths," she said. "I was holding these beautiful children in my lap, and my translator was translating words of hate."

The story was always the same. "No child ever said, 'I don't want to be a martyr.' They talked about fame, paradise, virgins, and Ferris wheels [after death]. They were happy to tell me they hated Jews," she said.

The children were more fanatical than their parents. "When we interviewed Hussam's family for the film, his parents were distraught. They don't believe in this whole child suicide bomber concept," Ms. Goldstein said. "Then I interviewed his sister, who was like, 'I'm so proud of my brother. Hamas says he's a hero.' At one point she had a loser, dwarf, mentally handicapped brother. Now she's the coolest girl in class, and very proud."

In addition to the children, Ms. Goldstein interviewed Mr. Zubeidah, commander of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Jenin. At the time, the Israel Defense Forces had made five attempts to assassinate him. In person, Mr. Zubeidah was not the harsh figure she had expected. "It was like talking to any other kid, about 27 years old," she said. "He was smiling. My translator told me, 'He's talking about killing Jews.'"

Ms. Goldstein didn't say she was Jewish, but she asked if she were on the streets of Tel Aviv, could she be murdered in a suicide attack? His response was chilling: "He said, 'Indeed you could. Right here you are my friend. I'm protecting you. But when you are in Israeli territory, I'm no longer protecting you.'"

Now 26, Ms. Goldstein, who finished law school in 2005, is setting up an international think tank of attorneys, psychiatrists, and policy makers to address the problem of recruiting children for terror. "It's a problem everyone should be concerned about," she said. "There are child suicide bombers now in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it's being orchestrated by adults."

It is a point her film makes with honesty and compassion in presenting Hussam and other impressionable children at the mercy of a predatory society, as well as in presenting the adults, some of whom seem to participate in these children's exploitation more due to intimidation than venality.

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