

Remembering and Replicating Kristine Luken's Love

I never knew Kristine Luken, but I feel as though I did. I feel that we were old friends, that I knew her well.

It's strange because, on one hand, I know very little about her, but on the other hand, I feel as though I know most everything that was important. I feel as if I know this because everything about her last day on this earth in so many ways personified her life.

At the same time that I feel as though I knew her well, I am sad, and I feel a deep sense of loss at not actually having known her, and more so that she was taken in such a cruel way.

Six years ago, Dec. 18, 2010, Kristine was on a hike with my friend, Kay Wilson. Kay is Jewish, an Israeli tour guide who met Kristine on a trip in Poland to bear witness to the unspeakable suffering and cruelty that was the root of the mass slaughtering of six million Jews. Many go to Poland and other parts of the vast European killing field to learn, to bear witness, mourn, pray, look for answers, etc.

It's common for Israelis to do that; in fact, we send our teens as part of their education. It's common for Jews around the world to attempt to understand the horrors as best as a human being can understand them as a recent part of the persecution we have suffered over the millennia.

But Kristine was neither a Jew nor an Israeli. She was a Christian. What drove her to visit Poland with Kay was her unconditional love for Israel and the Jewish people. She went to Poland in solidarity, to express love for the people she loved and grieve at the loss of the people who as God's chosen people were shot, gassed and burned to death.

And so Kay and Kristine became fast friends. Kay invited Kristine to visit her in Israel and on that magnificently clear, sunny, crisp Saturday afternoon, they went to hike in the Judean Mountains to absorb and appreciate the beauty of the land together.

Despite the pristine beauty of the sunny sky, something lurked in the shadows that was a vivid contrast to the magnificence of the day. Literally lying in wait, two Palestinian Arabs had camped out along the Israel Trail, waiting to set upon whomever they could find. Later in court, they not only confessed but also bragged about their premeditated plan to be waiting simply to kill Jews. Kay and Kristine had the misfortune to be the ones who found this out personally.

After being bound and gagged and held at knifepoint for 30 minutes that seemed like eternity, the terrorists tried to make Kay and Kristine think they had no ill intent. As they made repeated calls in Arabic to members of their terror cell, Kay noticed, out of the blue, the sun glaring on a large machete moments before one of the terrorists plunged it into her.

As Kay was being stabbed (a total of 13 times) Kristine was being attacked and butchered as well. All Kay could do as she was being hacked by his terrorist was look at and listen to the screams of her friend, who lay there helpless as well. Before leaving them for dead, one terrorist plunged his weapon into Kay's chest one more time, missing her heart by millimeters.

Kay remained bound, bleeding profusely, bones crushed and sure that she was going to die. She had no way to help Kristine, so she resolved that with all her strength she would find a way to get up and walk back to the main trail, certain each step was to be her last. She had one mission: to die in a place where she would be found so she and Kristine would not die anonymously, and perhaps the terrorists would be caught.

Miraculously, Kay stumbled through the forest, barefoot, for over a mile. She came upon others enjoying the beauty of the spectacular day. They called for help and saved her life. The next day, Kristine's lifeless body was found. She gasped her last breath overlooking the beauty of the land she so deeply loved.

Over the years, I have gotten to know Kristine's family. It's one of the reasons I feel as though I know her. They are sweet, thoughtful, caring people, but they bear huge invisible scars at the brutal murder and loss of Kristine.

Although Israelis are far too familiar with the evils of terror, with tens of thousands murdered and injured and many more tens of thousands of bereaved left behind, for Americans even after 9/11, the notion of terror that up close and personal is jarring and hard to comprehend. And although there are many resources in Israel to help victims and families of victims, in America, victims and their families are largely anonymous. There are few if any services and no network of or connection to others like them who have suffered such loss.

Kay and I have teamed up to create a living memorial so that not only will Kristine always be remembered in Israel, but because of her love for Israel, it will be in a way that provides comfort to bereaved Israeli children who have suffered the kind of loss her family has.

Through The Koby Mandell Foundation, Israel's preeminent organization that provides therapeutic healing for families of terror victims and those who have suffered other loss, we are establishing a scholarship for Camp Koby to enable bereaved Israeli children to benefit from the healing environment they need.

In the same way that it's rare for Christians to go to Poland to bear witness to the horrors that Jews suffered in the Holocaust, so too is it rare, maybe unprecedented, for Israeli

Jews to care to remember non-Jewish non-Israeli terror victims. We're not looking for notoriety, just to do what's right.

Kristine's last day embodied who she was—a Christian who loved Israel and the Jewish people. We'd prefer the story had a happier ending. But it's an honor and a responsibility to be sure her life is not forgotten, especially among the people she loved in the land she loved. The Kristine Luken Camp Koby Scholarship will perpetuate her memory, embody her love and be like a big hug to comfort children who suffered loss in a way she would do herself if she were still alive.

Please join us to remember Kristine, her life and her love by making this living memorial possible. {eoa}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for 's Standing With Israel. He can be reached at firstpersonisrael@.