

A Unique and Beautiful Tribute to 13 Lives

The Dizengoff Memorial Quilt

ESRA Magazine Article-March 2005

Attending the annual memorial ceremony for the Purim 1996 Dizengoff Street suicide bombing, Marlyn Butchins – whose mother Sylvia Bernstein (75) and sister Gail Belkin (47) were among the 13 victims – felt that for all its dignity, it lacked a real focus, something warm and tangible, to celebrate the lives of the victims.

She felt that the cold steel memorial plaque erected at the corner of Dizengoff and King George Streets was just a recognition of their names. But she believed that the ceremony - and the families - needed something more profound.

The answer lay in Marlyn's new-found passion of quilting and expressed through the genre of memorial quilts. These have been used effectively in other parts of the world, for example in the United States for the commemoration of victims of 9/11 and AIDS.

Marlyn decided to create the Dizengoff Memorial Quilt, as a unique and beautiful tribute to the victims of Dizengoff, Purim 1996. It portrays them as real people, not just statistics. In this way, as a living, vibrant work of fabric art, the quilt also speaks out for other Victims of Terror in Israel and around the world.

"Initially, I just wanted to make a quilt each for my mother and sister," Marlyn said. "But then it became clear to me that every victim of Dizengoff should be remembered in the same way."

She immediately set about recruiting some of Israel's top quilters to help her in the task of designing and creating the quilts.

"I departed from standard quilt design, which generally calls for a series of patches and different colored and textured fabric to be combined into a design as a single unit," she explained.

"Because of the nature of the tragedy, I decided that 13 individual quilts would be made, each representing the victim in the most personal and meaningful way."

Each of the quilters involved interviewed family members to gather personal information about the victims; their life, loves, hobbies, interests and ambitions. They gathered pictures, personal items, meaningful objects, even clothing, and creatively combined them to produce 13 unique quilts, each one telling the story of an individual victim and highlighting the most significant aspects of his or her life, loves and dreams.

Every quilt is linked to another to depict the fact that although each person was an individual in his or her own right, they were nonetheless bound together forever by this tragedy. As many of the victims died together with friends or family members, individual quilts have been hung in groupings to portray these relationships. The spaces between each quilt represent the gaps left in the lives of families and friends.

The Purim mask with its single tear of blood is used as a graphic statement about the timing of the attack.

The quilt is suspended on four sides in a free-standing light-weight aluminum frame to enable it to be easily seen both front and back as many of the individual quilts carry a narrative on the reverse side as well. Storyboards carrying descriptions of each quilt and the quilter's notes, in English and Hebrew, accompany the frame.

"The making of this quilt has been an incredibly emotional experience; not only for me with my very deep personal involvement, but also for the other quilters who volunteered for this project," Marlyn added.

"Although none of them had any direct connection with any victim, their meetings with the families and learning of their stories moved them in many ways. At the same time, despite initial misgivings on the part of some of the quilters, we found that the families opened up and were only too happy to have an outlet again...to speak of their loved ones and share some beautiful memories."

The volunteer quilters who participated as individuals in this project are all members of the Accent Quilters' Guild of Herzliya, Israel, established for Israel's English-speaking quilters. They are:

Zvia Strahilevitz-Klein, who made the quilts for Inbar Atia, Yovav Levi and Rachel Sela.

Shulamit Ron made the quilts for Hadas Dror, Bat-Chen Shahak and Dana Gutterman, the three friends from Tel Mond who went to Dizengoff dressed in Purim outfits.

Ramona Bachmann made the quilt in memory of Leah Mizrahi.

Terry Mowszowski created the quilts for Sylvia Bernstein and her daughter Gail Belkin, and Tali Gordon (who was at Dizengoff with her friend Inbar Atia).

Tamaris Pardo made the quilts for Asaf Waks and Dani Tversky.

Marlyn made the quilt for Kobi Zaharon, who went to Dizengoff with his close friend Yovav Levi.

Marlyn is hoping to take the quilt abroad to Jewish communities in the US, UK, South Africa and Australia, to talk to them about victims of terror and what terrorism has done to families. At the same time, she wants to demonstrate the power of the human spirit and the determination to keep alive the memories of terror victims in meaningful and creative ways. She also intends showing the quilt at international quilting exhibitions.

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