



# The Compassionate Listening Project

## A PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY; INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLY DUPERLY BOOS

By Anne Flatte

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When photographer Beverly Duperly Boos accompanied the March 2001 delegation to Israel and Palestine, she not only captured on film what is often hidden in the conflict, but also experienced a spiritual unfolding that opened her own heart.

It was Boos' first trip to the Middle East and her professional mission was to photograph the intimate process of Compassionate Listening with Israelis and Palestinians for a traveling photographic exhibition sponsored by The Compassionate Listening Project.

Boos, an experienced commercial photographer, relocated to California from Jamaica four years ago. After hearing about the work of TCLP, she contacted Leah Green, intrigued by the opportunity to photograph people in the process of Compassionate Listening.

"My interest has been trying to capture deeper intimacy on film, where people allow what's hidden to be revealed," says Boos. This urge has led her to photograph the poverty-stricken population of Riverton City, Jamaica (built on the Kingston dump), homeless citizens in northern California, and most recently the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

Both Boos and Green agreed there was great potential in documenting a Compassionate Listening delegation. During the two-week journey, Boos worked unceasingly to capture the humanity of the people she encountered, deeply moved by the many Palestinians and Israelis she photographed, as well as the members of the delegation.

"What Compassionate Listening does is bring us past the place of judgment, where we allow ourselves to recognize ourselves in the other," says Boos. "Inevitably when you examine two sides of a conflict in this way, the photography reveals that we're all the same."

As examples, she points to two photographs, one of Palestinian farmer Atta Jaber with his three-year-old son, and then another of Israeli Rabbi David Maimoni with his son, also three years old. Another set is of two six-year old girls, one Jewish, in her Shabbat clothes, the other Palestinian, on a hike with her family. Side by side, says Boos, "they could be sisters."

Boos says she came on the delegation as a photographer first, but experienced the journey at an intensely personal level when she became aware of her own stereotypes of others. She confronted these notions early in the trip during her stay in Hebron at the home of Salah and Tahani al-Zarro. While conversing with her Palestinian hosts, occasionally snapping pictures from the floor with her monopod camera, she suddenly burst into tears. "We were talking about stereotypes, and out came all this stuff, which is how I realized it was in me," remembers Boos. "I recognized that I had viewed them in a one-dimensional way. When I realized that they were teaching me about missing parts of myself, I had to allow in what I was



seeing-all this beauty and depth-and I recognized that in myself there was already a conditioned idea of what I should be receiving. My view of Arabs had pretty much been limited to the suicide bomber image, the fanatic Muslim." Letting go of these stereotypes, says Boos, "made more room in my heart." Afterwards, she says, Salah thanked her for her tears, deeply moved. "He and I inspired each other to a new place."

Boos also discovered for herself how difficult it is to maintain these new ideas. The day after her experience with Salah, she became separated from the group while photographing in the Palestinian market in Hebron. Suddenly "alone" in the market, Boos began to feel afraid of the Palestinians and comforted by the nearby presence of Israeli soldiers. "It was a terrible moment," recalls Boos, "my mind jumped back to stereotypes in a moment where I felt threatened." A few minutes later, a Palestinian man reunited her with the group.

Other moments stand out as well, including a day with Orthodox Rabbi Menachem Froman and his wife, Hadassah, who live in the West Bank Jewish settlement of Tekoa. Boos photographed the pair in the pedestrian-only Jerusalem neighborhood of Nachlaot, filled with stone corridors and stairways. "When I asked him to turn toward the sun, he turned toward his wife," says Boos, laughing. "It was a really great moment." Or the many times TCLP delegates were moved to tears by their own experience of the powerful listening process.

"That kind of emotional, physical gesture or expression means a lot to me," says Boos. "To me, that's what Compassionate Listening is all about-the opportunity for spiritual growth, and there was inevitably a moment where what they were perceiving was challenging what they already knew, and their intention was pushing them toward the truth to allow more in, and that usually means that people start crying."

This summer Boos will work with TCLP director Leah Green on the painstaking task of selecting 60 photographs out of the approximately four thousand she took on the trip. Each photograph will be accompanied by a personal description of and a direct quote from those pictured. The guiding principle is to create a peace education exhibit about Compassionate Listening for people to learn about the opportunity that the process represents as a tool for conflict resolution.

The exhibit will open in the fall, and "will allow viewers to have a Compassionate Listening experience by having the opportunity to view both sides, equally, beautifully, and intimately," says Boos. "My hope is that people will allow in what they normally block out."

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