

The Board of Deputies of British Jews
1 Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

28th January 2019

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

“I thought the Holocaust would mean no more of this hate. I was wrong.” This was the front-page headline in the JC (25 Jan 2019), summing up the views of TV presenter Rachel Riley. I share her incredulity that, given the lessons of history, hate should still be so widespread. By her own admission Riley was naive about the extent of hatred expressed as antisemitism, but the irrational hate which exposed itself within our family brought to the fore how hatred is not restricted by religious boundaries, but blights all society.

I have lived amongst various communities and, through my voluntary work with Victim Support over a period of years, came into contact with all sorts of minorities, ethnic groups, social classes and religious groups - including Jews. But I never encountered any hostility or abuse which would have prepared me for the personalized obnoxious hate letters I received from a member of the extended Jewish branch of my family. What possessed your father Barry Kaye to write with impunity in the offensive terms he did, attacking me for being non-Jewish and threatening violence against my person? What motivated him and emboldened him?

He claimed that he had “been given complete permission” to write to me. Aside from that, I informed you and your husband, my step-son Darrell, at the time the communications were received. But - contrary to all Jewish teachings, endorsed by contemporary rabbis - you did nothing to stop them. (It may be helpful if you refer to my letter to you dated May 2012.)

The basis of his hate mail was his claimed authority as “a senior member of the family” and “a member of the Orthodox community”. Did he, or any of his family know anything about the Holocaust and the trail of human tragedy it left in its wake which engulfed my wife’s relatives - your husband’s ancestors? Why didn’t Darrell, who would have been aware of his grandparent’s family history, challenge him and tell him the truth?

Rabbi Mark Goldsmith writing in the Jewish News (24 Jan 2019) says Jews have an obligation to help prevent Islamophobia and **all forms of religious and ethnic hatred**. [My emphasis]. What part of this do you not understand? Your current position as President of the Board of Deputies puts special expectations on you to speak up and acknowledge the wrongdoings by your father and show contrition.

If my being non-Jewish was such an impediment to any form of constructive communication, it shows contempt for the Talmud principle *mipnei darchei shalom* that Rabbi Goldsmith quotes. This, he explains, means pursuing caring relationships between

people of different faiths for the sake of peace for all. I have never held to any particular faith but was perfectly happy to ensure your husband, and his sister Kerry, were brought up in the Jewish faith, with the approval of their grandfather Rabbi Werner van der Zyl, who solemnized their bar/bat mitzvahs at West London Synagogue. This, together with their lineage, probably makes them more Jewish than Riley who jokes about her nebulous identity as a Jew; bacon sandwiches and all.

Not being in the public eye, unlike Rachel Riley, I have not received abuse to the extent that she has, but that does not lessen how it felt to be - like her - the victim of, as she expresses it, "untrue slights against my character". I agree with her that, to win the fight against falsehoods, knowledge and truth are the only weapons needed.

It is reported (JNews 25 Jan 2019) that you are sending a message to the current Hungarian government that the Jewish community care deeply that no form of racism, including antisemitism, should be propagated or tolerated. Your Jewish father propagated racism and it should not have been tolerated. For how long can you ignore my repeated raising of these concerns?

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian