

The Board of Deputies of British Jews  
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6th May 2019

Open letter to Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

On the first anniversary of your becoming President it is worth considering your response to the several letters I have written to you about matters of concern to the Jewish community and which also have relevance to my own experiences and those of my family.

Racism continues to be a prominent tragic feature of so many human societies and creeds and recently we have seen the universality of hatred inflicted on innocent Muslims in New Zealand and on innocent Christians in Sri Lanka. Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain's initiative in response to the recent attacks is for him, the local vicar and imam to swap pulpits and preach at each other's places of worship. He hopes that the congregations will tolerate hearing from a different faith, and open up everyone's acceptance of one another. He said it will "demonstrate that we practise what we preach: loving our neighbour as ourselves, especially when they are different from us."

This is far removed from your late father's mind-set. When the first of Barry Kaye's unsolicited letters were received by me and my wife in April 2012, we were stunned. The disturbing contents were made known to you and your husband, my step-son Darrell, and I have repeatedly called on you to acknowledge and condemn his offensive racist letters.

Steve Taylor Ph.D, writing in Psychology Today (in 2018) on the Psychology of Racism, identified five different aspects of racism as psychological defence mechanisms. He describes the most dangerous and destructive extreme of racism in these terms:

*In other words, racism - and xenophobia of any kind - is a symptom of psychological ill-health. It is a sign of a lack of psychological integration, a lack of self-esteem and inner security. Psychologically healthy people with a stable sense of self and strong inner security are not racist, because they have no need to strengthen their sense of self through group identity. They have no need to define themselves in distinction to - and in conflict with - others.*

The statements made by your father were a classic racist trope. He defined himself as a member of a group - "the Orthodox community" - and made several references to me being "other", that is, non-Jewish and "not welcome". He made his intense hatred abundantly clear with the words: "Your alien culture and total lack of any Jewish orthodox learning, makes you unfit." This is pure and unequivocal racism and there can be no apology for it. He did not know me - and I definitely did not know him - so the only link between us would have been you and your husband, who I helped raise as a Jew. The question remains: why did Mr Kaye come to make such deeply offensive assertions, with the legacy of the Shoah echoing so loudly in our family's past?

His threat of violence with “blood on the floor etc” echoed the tone of Nazi thuggery which encouraged attacks against innocent people on the streets of 1930s Berlin where my Holocaust survivor wife had lived as a child.

Instead of denouncing his anti-gentile hatred as any true anti-racist should, you and your husband did not intervene and your father clearly felt that he could continue to send us his repulsive diatribes - which he did. Your silence gave endorsement

Deborah Lipstadt, the historian, said that we may never change the minds of people [of that frame of mind] “but we can stop them from influencing others.” Writing in November 2018 for an American publication, she said:

*This year, at Thanksgiving dinner, when your curmudgeon uncle or successful cousin (not all haters are old and ornery) begins to rant about Jews, blacks, Muslims and LGBTQs who are ruining our country, do not sit idly by. Challenge them. Do so not to change their minds but to reach others who are listening and learning. Silence is an imprimatur for hate and prejudice.*

She omitted ‘gentiles’ from her list, and of course the speaker could be a father or a ‘Zeida’ - but the message is clear: silence is not an option. In an email sent to my wife in 2016, after your father’s death, you said your daughter “was close to him”. Therein lay the danger of the corrosive influence of your father’s diseased mind. Was he ever challenged?

Professor Lipstadt also said: “Do not look for haters only on the other side of the political transom.” Equally, it would be naive to think that haters are not present “in their own midst” in all religious groups. Your father proved that.

In August last year speaking on talkRadio you said that Jeremy Corbyn is not “a credible anti-racist”. And in April this year, according to the Daily Mail, you said: “We stand united with all decent people in the fight against ugly racism.” As you embark on another year as President, how long can you claim to be a credible anti-racist, when you remain in denial about the ugly racist father who was an influence on you and your daughter(s)?

You relinquish the moral high ground and bring your own integrity into question by persisting with the big fib that you studied law at a university in Liverpool. Like Mr. Corbyn, your *alma mater* was a polytechnic - even though he did not complete his course.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker