

QUESTIONS FOR JEHAN SADAT

The War Widow

Interview by DEBORAH SOLOMON
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Your new book, "My Hope for Peace," comes at a sadly unpeaceful moment. So much has unraveled in the 30 years since Anwar el-Sadat signed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. He won a Nobel Prize for his heroic efforts. How do you feel when you read the headlines these days?

Sometimes it's very painful for me. I want to see what he did prevail. He paid his life for it, and every day there are either [Palestinians](#) sending rockets to [Israel](#) or Israelis invading [Gaza](#).

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Jason Larkin for The New York Times

You were with your husband when he was assassinated in 1981 by Islamic extremists. Did you actually see him gunned down?

No, my guard pushed me down.

What do you make of Hamas, the Islamic militant group that now controls the Gaza Strip?

I wish they would unite with [Fatah](#), the more moderate Palestinians, and face their problems together. They have to be one delegation to negotiate with Israel.

Earlier this year, I was surprised to read about violent clashes between the Egyptian border police and Palestinians who were trying to flee Gaza and buy food and supplies in your country.

That's right. When you want to cross into [Egypt](#), there are rules. But the Palestinians want to cross and come without anything, just like that. There were thousands and thousands and thousands who wanted to cross, which is not legal.

Why can't the Palestinians, your fellow Muslims, be part of your country?

Because they are not Egyptian. Gaza is their land, and they have the right to have their own state.

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I've heard the Palestinians characterized as being very smart and fond of argument, not unlike

Israelis.

Believe me, they are more like the Jews than us. By the way, most of the Palestinians are very well educated. Because they are a minority, they are like the Jews. They are intellectuals.

Any thoughts on [Hillary Clinton](#), who just completed her first mission to the Middle East as secretary of state?

I'm very proud of her, this lady. I know her, and she is very intelligent. When [her husband] became president, I paid a courtesy visit to her in the White House, and she was taking notes while I was talking. Very practical woman!

These days, you divide your time between Cairo and suburban Washington, and you serve on the board of the [University of Maryland](#).

From time to time, I teach a class about the status of women in the Middle East, mainly in Egypt.

Why is Islam so hard on gays, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where homosexuality remains illegal and punishable by flogging or prison?

Homosexuality is against Islam. Here in Egypt, there are not many homosexuals, not like the United States. There are some. We've had them since the Pharaohs.

You mean some of the Pharaohs were gay?

No, no, no. There were gays at that time. Now, it's more or less closet gay. I have a friend who is a lesbian. She doesn't say it, and I pretend as if I don't know it. But I know that she is. I respect her because she's very clever in her work and it's none of my business.

You were barely 16 when you married Sadat, who at the time was 29 and a national hero who had been imprisoned for fighting the British in Egypt.

I married on the 29th of May, two months exactly before I turned 16. You know, we were just two lovers devoted to each other.

What year was that?

1949. But why do you write that? People will say, "What an old, very old woman, this one." I'm 75. I swim every day, and I walk one hour in the morning.

Do you belong to a mosque in Washington?

No. Neither in Egypt.

Why is that? Is the mosque a men's club?

Some women go to the mosque. They have a certain place behind the men or a separate room. Myself, I prefer to pray at home. I pray in my room, and I believe God is everywhere.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, CONDENSED AND EDITED BY **DEBORAH SOLOMON**

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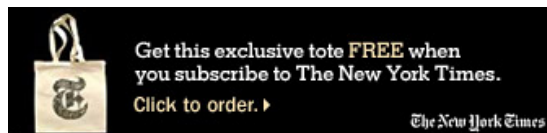
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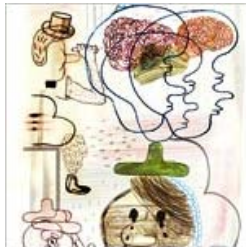


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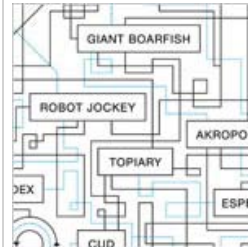
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