

Teens who lost kin to terror unite at Mass. camp

By Bridget Murphy Associated Press July 19, 2012



NEWBURY, Mass. (AP) — On a windowsill at a Massachusetts boarding school, a white candle burned in memory of a man who died half a world away in Argentina.

The man's daughter, Astrid Malamud, was a toddler when it happened.

On Wednesday, 18 years later, Malamud, who barely remembers her father's face, was far from home as she marked the anniversary of his death in their homeland's bloodiest-ever terrorist attack. But the 20-year-old Argentine university student was still close to people who understood her loss. Beside Malamud's candle, a second wick burned to commemorate another of the 85 victims of the July 18, 1994, bombing at the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association in Buenos Aires. That man's daughter also was nearby, as were more than 70 other teenagers and young adults who lost family members to terrorism. They came from the United States and 15 other countries, gathering at Governor's Academy, about 30 miles north of Boston, for a summer camp known as Project Common Bond. The program, now in its fifth year, is part of the New York-based nonprofit Tuesday's Children, which helps families of victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The nonprofit's executive director, Terry Sears, said Wednesday that the camp is a way for the children of Sept. 11 victims to reach out to children around the world who've suffered similar losses. She and other organizers said it's a chance for participants to heal and to work on becoming the world's next generation of peacemakers.

The curriculum design comes in part from a mediation and negotiation program at Harvard Law School. It's meant to teach conflict resolution and leadership skills that campers can take home to do projects that make a difference in their communities. Campers, ranging from 15 to 20 years old and some attending with the help of scholarship money, said it's also a chance to be around others their age who understand them. As they sat talking Wednesday below the flags of their countries, each had a story of a childhood that changed because of a loved one who was lost.

"I think you get independent sooner and you grow up faster because you need to understand things little kids don't understand," Malamud said later. "... I wish we all weren't here. If I could take my flag off of there, I would. Or any flag."

For 19-year-old camper Farah Sarrawi, a Palestinian, the program is a chance to make friends with Israelis. That was something she never expected could happen, she said, after she saw her father die in 2001 when Israeli soldiers shot him on the balcony of the family's home. "At first, it was hard," Sarrawi said. "But I look at them now as humans ... and I believe that in every country we've got some crazy people that make that conflict."

Sarrawi said she grew up wishing that her father, who used to spin her on the dance floor, was still with her. She said she can't imagine that someday she will get married and not have him there to see it. But Sarrawi said that her father's death also made her strong and that camp is a way to stoke the belief inside her that there is hope for peace.

Previous camps were held in Washington, D.C., in Philadelphia twice and in Northern Ireland.

Camper Joanne Murphy, a 20-year-old law student from Northern Ireland, said the program has been like going to 15 countries and having a cup of coffee with someone. The Derry resident lost her grandmother to terrorism before she got a chance to meet her. Murphy said British soldiers shot her Catholic grandmother to death in a 1971 raid during the Northern Ireland civil unrest known as the Troubles and there never has been justice.

She said it's difficult to explain the barrage of what-ifs that follow her through life to people who haven't experienced the same thing. But at camp, she said, she doesn't have to explain.

Malamud, the Argentine student, shared that sentiment.

"Even if you don't talk about it with these people, there's a strong bond," Malamud said. "You can feel it."