

John Calvin Visits Ottawa

Richard Young

[The previous article is an excellent summary of John Calvin's situation up until January of this year. It is August now, and John has all but run out of options.]

I first heard about John Calvin in an online CNN video-story (<http://goo.gl/BvugjY>) in late June. The grim absurdity of his situation struck me. Here's a 24-year-old wisp of a man, soft-spoken, sincere and gentle, who has turned his back on his extremist Hamas family in the West Bank at great peril to himself, and has spent the last 5 years in Canada hoping to be allowed to stay. In 2012, his application for refugee status was approved but later rejected on appeal by the Canadian Border Services Agency because of his past membership in Hamas. According to Section 34 of the Immigration Act, membership in a terrorist organization is unforgivable, no matter the person's age, or whether they chose that life or were born into it, or how forcefully they denounce it today.

(NB: It appears that the only Hamas-related evidence against him is that which he himself has freely recounted: at 14 he was given a pistol by his grandfather for having successfully memorized the Koran, and as a teen he carried messages from uncle to uncle. That's it.)

So it is likely he will soon be deported – back to a lethally hostile family and jurisdiction. That might sound a bit over the top, but from the perspective of the radical Islam that permeates John's homeland it is not, as there are three major strikes against him:

1. He is openly gay.
2. He has committed apostasy in rejecting Islam (and Hamas) by converting to Christianity.
3. He has committed treason by openly discussing both his admiration for Israel and his feelings of revulsion for Hamas.

This would make life difficult, if not impossible, for anyone in the West Bank, let alone the first-born son of a proud Hamas family. In March



Richard Young, John Calvin and Madeline Weld.

[Photo: Kind stranger at the restaurant at the Delta hotel, Ottawa.]

of 2010, his father tried to kill him with a knife. Earlier this year his mother cut all ties with him.

It seems mad: from our government's perspective, John is guilty of being "too Hamas," and so he must be deported back to the West Bank, yet from the perspective of Hamas John is guilty of being "too un-Hamas" and should be put to death. It reads like a Kafka-Heller-Beckett co-production.

Here's a brief account of our meeting with John. Thanks to Josh Bowie (our book review editor) I was able to arrange for a telephone interview in July with John Calvin as well as with tireless supporter Dr. Leo Mos of the University of Alberta. The interviews led to *HP*'s meetings with John in person. Josh joined us for our first meeting, and Madeline Weld (co-editor) joined us for the second. John described growing up during the Intifadas, his grandfather's role in the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, his own involvement with Hamas, and then we found ourselves in a friendly debate about Christian theology. We covered dozens of topics, not all so dour. (At one point we discussed the musical *Grease*.)

I believe I can confirm the observations that Dr. Mos, a clinical psychologist, shared with me: John does not have a violent bone in his body. He didn't even raise his voice when I questioned the historicity of Jesus. He's an intelligent, compassionate, articulate young man who, under less dire circumstances, would have a bright future.

I know that Josh and Madeline – and every other person who has had the pleasure of getting to know John – join me in my hope that there will be a happy ending to this story. I also hope that one day soon John, as a permanent Canadian resident, will be able to share with us his unique perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict. •