

Questions for Dr. Frank Romano, author of...

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1. Please provide us with a brief biographical sketch about yourself and your career.

I earned a PhD at University of Paris I, Panthéon Sorbonne, and a JD at Golden Gate University, Faculty of Law, San Francisco. I'm Maître de conférences (assistant tenured professor) at the University of Paris X in the Anglo-American Literature and Civilization Department and a member of the California and Marseille Bars. At present, I teach law, literature, history and philosophy at the University of Paris and practice law in France and in the United States. I actively organize and participate in interfaith events involving Jews, Moslems, Christians and others in Israel and Palestine. I've authored a book entitled *Storm Over Morocco*, published by World Audience, Inc., *Globalization of Antitrust Policies* (Mondialisation des politiques de concurrence), published by L'Harmattan in French, a book of poems entitled *Crossing Over* (also published by World Audience, Inc) and have published many articles in Europe and in the United States where I'm often invited to speak at conferences.

2. How did *Storm Over Morocco* come to be written? Please tell us the story behind the book's origins. And please describe the full editing process for this book.

This autobiographical narrative was inspired by a spiritual voyage to the Middle East that I took searching for meaning, for truth. I was invited to study Islam in Casablanca with a militant Islamic sect led by an Imam who accused me of being a Zionist spy and imprisoned me. The curious part of the book is that my accusers were particularly incensed at my questioning the treatment and position of women in a fundamentalist Islamic community.

For the 2nd and 3rd editions, my regular editor was assisted by students of Martha Witt, professor at William Patterson University, New Jersey. After those editions were published, I was invited to do a reading at William Patterson University.

Finally, all editions of the book were carefully filtered and edited by the CEO of World Audience, Mike Strozier, who also helped to improve the quality of the manuscript.

3. What peace-related activities are you taking part of now and how did *Storm Over Morocco* to get involved in this way?

I have been inspired by my vision in 1978 and my subsequent experiences in Morocco as a means of organizing interfaith events with members of various religions that notably include liberal, orthodox and extremist Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Israel and Palestine. Never losing sight of my spiritual path, I continue to nurture the dream of helping to find a peaceful solution to religious conflicts, notably in the Middle East.

For years ago, about 25 years after my escape from the Islamist sect in Morocco, I finally arrived in the Holy Land. During my first visit, I was able to contact several Israeli groups that were already working to bring members of all faiths together for dialogue and understanding.

I began carrying out my vision by helping to organize and participate in various interfaith “happenings” in a kibbutz in the Galilee in Northern Israel. However, I noticed that the many Palestinians invited from the West Bank were not able to attend due to the checkpoints and walls separating the West Bank from Israel.

I delegated myself as the emissary from the group and traveled to the West Bank to inform people there face-to-face of our interfaith peace initiatives and to create a bridge between nonviolent peaceful projects taking places on both sides of the walls. I’ve been traveling back and forth from Israel to the West Bank for the last few years and I’m making strides in the peace process, in spite warnings from my Israeli friends that I will meet only hostile, dangerous people in the West Bank. On the contrary, I’ve met peace hungry people on both sides and I’m still alive and well! Anyway, nothing is going to happen unless I take necessary risks.

The objective is to break the ice between conflicting groups through education in view of tempering hate exacerbated by some religious leaders and politicians using misinterpretations of religious ideas to polarize the people, their motivation fanned by greed and a classical pursuit of power and money as opposed to a sincere desire to help people. Another worthy goal hence is to take religion out of the conflict!

In furtherance of that objective, I organize and participate in interfaith peace/freedom marches in the West Bank and Israel. Once I have mobilized more and more people to participate, the goal is to, with their help, to develop and nurture projects to help bring peace, such as build secular schools to replace schools that have been destroyed, etc. Working together on worthy projects is necessary to complete the bonding process, a precursor for durable peace in the area.

Another objective is to create groups that work together to pressure the Israeli government to remove some of the walls and withdraw from some of the settlements in the West Bank so that Israelis and Palestinians can freely circulate in order to work together to enhance the already economic as well as cultural interdependence experienced in the area, not to mention to allow both Palestinians and Israelis to visit the holy sites both in Israel and the West Bank without being held back by check points, walls, etc. At the same time, the Palestinian authorities must be pressured to maintain peace and order

in the occupied territories, while allowing Palestinians to exercise fundamental rights. Finally, a lasting peace will only be achieved if first the security of both areas is assured.

I have just returned from the West Bank where I organized and participated in two Interfaith Peace Marches, one in Hebron the other in Jenin, both highly contested areas. (See blog: frankromano363.blogspot.com--which includes a description and photos) I intend to organize more interfaith events in the Middle East in February or April, 2010.

The 2nd and 3rd Editions of *Storm Over Morocco* were published in 2009 and they include two new chapters, including one that discusses a recent intense meeting with Militant Palestinians in a West Bank refugee camp. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit their help in organizing upcoming interfaith peace marches in the West Bank. My view is that unless the Palestinian activists/militants are a part of the movement for peace between the West Bank and Israel, no durable peace will ever take place in the Middle East. Many people have expressed interest in my present interfaith activities during author events and media interviews, which inspired the writing of the last two editions of *Storm Over Morocco*.

4. Can you briefly list how many book tours you have done now for your books and describe how successful they were and how people have reacted to your books when you gave readings?

I've engaged in about 90 book events and at least 6 book tours for *Storm Over Morocco*, including a myriad of TV and radio interviews, commencing in February, 2007, and ending in January 2010, in the United States, France, England, Israel and Palestine, covering over 50 cities and 12 (US) states.

The books were often sold out during those extremely successful events; bookstore events managers frequently requested me to schedule a follow-up event at the same locations. In addition, the readings often gave rise to comments about my experiences in Morocco and sometimes heated discussions about the interfaith events I organize in the Middle East.

5. Please describe the story behind *Storm Over Morocco*.

This is a true story about me, the author; I was wrongly accused of being a Zionist spy in 1978 and tried for sabotage, a capital crime, by an extremist Islamic group in Morocco.

While traveling across Africa searching for a universal religion, I was invited to study Islam in a mosque in Casablanca, Morocco; it turned out to be controlled by a militant Moslem group which promptly imprisoned me.

My questions as to the treatment of women served as a catalyst for one of the Islamic gurus to unjustly charge me with being a Zionist spy and sabotage of the "back to Islam" movement. I was eventually acquitted by an internal inquisitorial tribunal, but remained a prisoner behind the towering walls of the mosque located in the outskirts of Casablanca.

This harrowing ordeal was followed by excruciating suspense built up during attempts to escape the 10-foot high compound.

The book is an autobiographical narrative about my spiritual path and about fundamentalist religions and brainwashing techniques. It also discusses the status of women in orthodox/fundamentalist Islamic communities.

"Storm Over Morocco", however, does not criticize Islam and often portrays me as a student who learned a great deal from that religion.

6. Please describe your poetry collection.

My book of poems, "Crossing Over" relates my tumultuous, yet powerful, gut experiences, as well as my spiritual awakening, from the halls of a Northern California high school to the streets of an African American ghetto. . .from Parisian midnight streets to enflamed shores of Africa. .

Since the book includes poems that I've written since high school to the present, it has been described by several people, including one radio journalist, Robert Reid of Blog Talk Radio, as a companion piece to "Storm Over Morocco". He stated that since I discuss mainly my spiritual path and experiences in an African American ghetto in "Storm Over Morocco", the poems further recount parts of my personal sometimes intimate life and thus focus more on "who I am".

7. What writers have inspired you throughout your writing career? How would you describe your writing style?

I've been inspired mainly by writers D.H. Lawrence, John Steinbeck, Emily, Charlotte and Anne Bronte and Jane Austen. I was also very much inspired by my high school English teacher, Mr. Hansen who, after sensing I was succumbing to writer's block, advised me to "let my heart speak". That helped turn on the faucet of emotions which have been flowing ever since. . .

It's difficult to objectively describe my writing style. Suffice it to say that I work hard to bring readers into the story, appealing to all the senses as I interweave images and metaphor throughout the writing. In order to successfully do that, it sometimes takes 20 to 30 rewritings of the same paragraph. . . .In addition, I try to make Storm Over Morocco, an autobiographical narrative, read more like a novel in order to retain the attention of readers as opposed to many biographies and autobiographies. The latter have a tendency of lulling readers to sleep by a linear recounting of someone's life or parts of a life story without seriously attempting to link its stages into a flowing portrayal of a dynamic experience.

8. Are you working on any books now?

Because many people have expressed interest in my present interfaith activities in Israel and the West Bank during author events and media interviews, I've started to write about those activities. When the book is published in another two years, after reading "Storm Over Morocco" readers of my new book will be convinced again by Mark Twain's famous words: "Truth is [indeed] stranger than fiction."