

Peace studies pioneer gets Fulbright Fellowship

JAY ROTHMAN '80 TO STUDY ARAB-ISRAELI STRUGGLE

Published in Autumn 2006 Antiochan, the alumni publication for Antioch College

By Dana Clark Felty '98

The problem with conflict for many people is they've had too many bad experiences with it. Not Jay Rothman '80. The Yellow Springs native and son of Phillip Rothman, professor of education emeritus, discovered as a student in the late 1970s that getting into an argument doesn't have to be all that bad. In fact, it can often be a source of creativity and deeper cooperation. "Too often, we flee from conflict," said Rothman. "Fight or flight."

Through his academic career at four universities and his practice as president of his own Yellow Springs-based conflict resolution firm, Rothman has forged into the muddiest struggles between neighbors, co-workers, communities, and nations. Now he punctuates 25 years with an international fellowship that has sent him to the Middle East to study the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This year, he will straddle the fence of theory and practice. Armed with a Fulbright Fellowship, Rothman will spend a year as Distinguished College Professor at Jezreel Valley College in Northern Israel. In addition to teaching, he will assist in the development of the college's Action Research Center as it builds a "learning partnership" between the community and the college to engage in social issues and implement mutual knowledge. "This college, just over a decade old, has the explicit mission of bridging the divide between university and community, between Arab and Jew, between theory and practice," Rothman said. More than two decades ago, when his professional journey began at Antioch College, Rothman wanted to work in the field of intergroup relations and peacemaking. An escalating conflict between students, the staff union and the administration helped fine-tune his passion. "I got myself into sort of a mediation role between the two sides," he said. "A strike was averted and problem solving began." Former Antioch Professor Jewel Graham suggested Rothman should consider a career in mediation. Rothman had never heard of that line of work but he soon looked into it. After completing his master's degree in international relations at the University of Maryland in 1985, Rothman moved to Jerusalem and began his doctoral research exploring methodologies for teaching and evaluating international conflict resolution with a focus on intergroup relations. From 1990 to 1994, Rothman alternated between Israel and the U.S., serving simultaneously as director of peace and conflict studies programs at Haverford and Bryn Mawr colleges and as director of numerous mediation initiatives at The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Rothman has lectured and taught globally. He has been a presenter at conflict resolution conferences and workshops, and has written numerous articles and books, including *Resolving Identity-Based Conflict in Nations, Organizations and Communities* (Jossey-Bass, 1997). In 1998, Rothman brought his wife, Randi, and three children back to his hometown where he launched his consulting firm, The Aria Group, and taught conflict resolution at Antioch University, McGregor. The Aria Group specializes in his trademarked mediation strategy called the "Aria Method." The system guides opposing factions through identifying and airing frustrations, hearing out conflicting viewpoints, exploring options and acting on solutions. It was the Aria Method that Rothman employed in 2001 when a federal judge appointed him head mediator between police and angry residents following the Cincinnati race riots. "Identity-based conflict is the deepest type, when people's sense of self is threatened and frustrated," he said.



Other clients have included The Andrus Family Fund, Greene County Children's Services, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the Ohio Department of Health-Ohio Sexual Assault Task Force. Rothman's career has earned recognition from other Antiochians involved in peace studies. "Jay is one of the most creative, conscientious, forward-looking, accomplished, decent, visionary workers in his field," said Gordon Fellman '57, professor of sociology and chair of peace, conflict, and coexistence studies at Brandeis University. Former professor Irwin Abrams counts Rothman as one of the first peace studies students at Antioch College. "He has become well-known nationally and internationally for his work on mediation," said Abrams, an international expert on the Nobel Prize in Peace. "He has a very special approach." Upon concluding the yearlong fellowship, Rothman and his family will return to their home in Yellow Springs. Rothman said his work remains grounded in what he views as a distinctly homegrown, Antiochian experience. "As the world became more complex, Antioch became the doorway to walk through to understand it," he said. For more on Rothman and his work, visit www.ariagroup.com.