

Ranan Lurie: A STAR OF DAVID

Whoever said a picture is worth a thousand words has underestimated the work of Ranan Lurie. Lurie's caricatures, published in 100 countries, expose international leaders (sometimes with their pants down) and portray events with great humor. They are also imbued with keen political insight and uncanny foresight. Global leaders recognize that "Lurie's Opinion," appearing as a weekly page in *Time International*, offers much more than a good laugh with one's morning coffee; it influences political opinion—so much so, former Prime Minister Nakasone of Japan invited Lurie to a special luncheon in an attempt to mollify the artist's future depictions of him. Syndicated in 1,092 publications, with a daily readership of 102 million, Lurie has earned a place in the *Guinness World Book of Records* as the world's most widely syndicated political cartoonist.

With a white Rolls-Royce parked in the 500 foot-long driveway leading to his \$6,000,000 home, Lurie is hardly a starving artist. He derides political agendas and antagonizes terrorist organizations in his cartoons, so his home is well guarded by state-of-the-



BY ALIZA DAVIDOVIT

art security and his German shepherd Annie, who is known to attack suspect visitors.

The Soviet K.G.B. once demanded that *The London Times* discontinue Lurie's anti-Communist cartoons or face the expulsion of its correspondents in Warsaw and Moscow. Lurie ignored them and amazingly, a few

years later, his work was syndicated in 12 republics of the former USSR.

Who is Ranan Lurie?

He doesn't answer. He side-steps a request to draw a caricature of himself. Yet, he does not hesitate to say that he recognizes his faults. He's short-tempered and can easily end up in a scrape. He's a perfectionist with very little tolerance for incompetence.

Besides that, Ranan Lurie, a 6th generation Israeli, was born in Egypt in the wealthy home of his paternal grandfather who migrated to Egypt from Palestine in 1917. When Lurie was 1-day-old, he and his parents returned to their home in Tel Aviv.

The Jerusalem Research Institute for Jewish Genealogy found that the Lurie family forbears trace back to the House of David. Among

50 great names who grace the Lurie's past are Dr. Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Rabbi Isaac Lurie, the founder of Lurianic Kabbalah and Rashi, the greatest of biblical commentators.

Ranan, which means fresh in Hebrew, is very creative. "In fact," Lurie says, "Judaism is a religion of creativity; in that regard, I am very reli-

gious. Creativity is my religion. If you analyze Jewish philosophy and its way of life, you will find that Judaism is made up of rules that free the mind for creativity. A person's duty on this earth is to move forward through creativity."

Lurie also expresses his creativity in oil portraiture. On July 24, 1977, Lurie's "Expandable Painting," a form of painting that starts inside a house and continues outside, was the subject of a full page article in *The New York Times*. On January 2, 1996, Lurie was granted a United States Patent for creating a braking system that varies intensities of light and sound to warn motorists of rapid stops. To some extent, he has perpetuated his "religion" by instilling the spirit of creativity into his four children.

Although Lurie's pen can cut like a sword, no one can accuse him of hiding behind his work. At 14, amidst hostilities and violence, a young Lurie joined the Irgun (Israel's underground army at the time of independence): "I told them I was 16 because I wanted to join a combat unit, not spend my time sticking pamphlets on walls. Before long, I ended up in the top unit."

It was also not long before the happy memory of his bar mitzvah (he was appointed captain of his soccer team) was supplanted by memories of war. During Pesach, in 1948, the young artist suffered severe wounds to his right hand. One third of his unit was lost in combat in Jaffa.

Lurie then joined the Israeli Defense Forces before he was 16, again lying about his age. He became a combat soldier, was enrolled in fighter pilot school (though he washed out for flying too low over the beach at Herzliya) and was the youngest army officer in the history of the Israeli army. With a wide grin Lurie admits, "I always did exactly what I wanted." This upset his father who



Former Prime Minister Nakasone of Japan with Lurie.

contacted a general and asked, "Are we in such a desperate need that kids have to fight for us? My son is not even 17 years old."

The general, after looking into the matter, responded, "I am afraid we have a small problem: your son is already an officer."

By the time Lurie was 17, he was also a cartoonist at *Maariv*, the daily Israeli newspaper—a profession that did not please his father. At 20, he graduated from the Jerusalem College of Arts and published the first of his ten cartoon books. When he was 24, *Life* magazine published two pages of his cartoons. *The New York Times* was publishing him on a regular basis. He became an accomplished journalist and editor-in-chief of *Tavel*, a news magazine published in Tel Aviv in the '50s.

In spite of his success, Lurie's father maintained that there were only four viable professions: accounting (his father's), law, medicine, or engineering. When Lurie's younger brother, Oded, said he too, wanted to be a cartoonist: "My father put down the paper he was reading, took off his glasses and looked at my brother with a serious gaze. Then, in a warning tone he said 'What! Do you want to

end up like your brother Ranan?' So today my brother is a CPA."

In August of 1954, a five-page article written by Lurie appeared in *Maariv*. It was the story of how he boarded the Egyptian Navy's flagship while posing as an Australian journalist in Venice and earned Israel's highest writing award.

It happened while Lurie served as a reserve officer on an Israeli frigate anchored less than 200 meters away from the Egyptian ship. Determined to board her, he assumed the name William Brown, rented a gondola and approached the well-guarded *Domyat 44*. With an ingratiating smile, he introduced himself to the senior officer, and got his name, Mustafa. He then asked for a tour of the ship and to meet the captain. Although he expected a refusal he also knew there would be a change of guard at four o'clock, a time usually assigned to junior officers.

Lurie returned later that day, and as expected found a junior officer on duty. "Tell me, is my good friend Mustafa on duty?" Lurie asked, "He promised to give me a tour of the ship." The young officer, apprehensive about Mustafa's "good friend," allowed Lurie to board the flagship. With his great charm and chutzpah, Lurie charmed the officers and spent more than two hours drinking Egyptian coffee, playing backgammon and touring the ship—including the ammunition room. He took many pictures with his gracious hosts, including one in front of a 20-mm anti-aircraft cannon, which was not supposed to be photographed.

The Egyptian officers further violated security by telling him that Egypt was planning a military action against Israel within the year. Cold sweat ran down Lurie's spine as one of the junior lieutenants said, "If one of those dirty Israelis ever falls into my hands, I

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would know what to do with him," and then with a decisive hand motion, cut across his neck with his finger from ear to ear.

When they returned to Egypt, five of the Egyptian officers were arrested. In 1977, when Lurie interviewed Sadat in Cairo, the Egyptian President shook his finger at him and said, "I have not forgotten what you did to my men."

In the meantime, Lurie became a hero in Israel. "It made things very easy with the girls," he says.

Anwar Sadat is but one of the many prominent individuals that Lurie has met and interviewed. But prior to those meetings, there was one more war to be won: the Six Day War. While Israel was growing vulnerable and absorbing the

hatred of five hostile Arab neighbors, Lurie was in Montreal, invited by the Canadian Jewish Congress to exhibit at Expo 67's Israeli pavilion.

Lurie, a reserve major in the paratroopers, was told things looked very grave. He desperately tried to get a seat on the next available flight to New York, but thanks to his friend, Charles Bronfman, he was able to hitch a private plane ride.

On May 29, 1967, Major Ranan Lurie commanded a unit of 300 men on the Jordanian border. "Our brigade's mission was to stop the penetration of Jordanian and Iraqi troops into the Israel's narrow neck, and prevent them from cutting the country in half" (*Life*, June 30, 1967.)

Because Lurie insisted his men dig deep trenches, they survived severe

shelling, while many Israeli soldiers in a nearby unit were wounded and killed. If the unit was shaken up by the shelling, its fears were allayed when Lurie received a notice from intelligence saying that half the Egyptian air force had been destroyed. Their first mission was over. It was time to move on.

Lurie and his unit were then ordered to capture Ramin, an intersection. "Ranan," said his commanding officer, "it's vital and it's urgent. So, forget about common sense and get there!" Lurie ordered two jeeps and two tanks to create an advance column, and sitting on the hood of the first jeep, entered deep into Jordanian territory.

When Lurie came face to face with 40 Arab Legionnaires, he realized his tanks had fallen behind and that there were only seven other soldiers with him. Instinctively, he felt the Arabs believed that the Israeli army was behind him on the other side of the hill and ordered his soldiers to charge. "We rushed toward the Arab Legion, yelling and shooting like mad. All of them turned and started to run. Eventually they gave themselves up to



Lurie draws a portrait of Yitzhak Rabin 35 years ago at the Lurie residence in Herzliya, Israel. Rabin's children Dahlia and Yuval sit in the foreground.

the main task force. "Five of the [Arab] soldiers were wounded in their behinds by our bullets." [Life.] In six days, Israel gained an unprecedented victory.

Ranan Lurie successfully completed his call to arms and rejoined his family in Montreal.

A new chapter of his life began in 1968, when *Life* magazine invited him to New York to join the magazine as resident political cartoonist and cover artist. He has since served as senior analyst and political cartoonist for *U.S. News and World Report*, for Japan's leading newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, for West Germany's *Die Welt* and for the *London Times*. Lurie's cartoons continue to be syndicated by Cartoonists International. He's done interviews with Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Hosni Mubarak, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, Lech Walesa and many, many others.

Lurie confesses that the most unnerving of all interviews was his encounter with President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines. In 1983, Lurie traveled to Manila and offered to interview Marcos, if Marcos would allow himself to be attached to a lie detector to dismiss international suspicion that he was responsible for the murder of Senator Aquino. Marcos replied, "What a wonderful idea. I am sorry I did not think of it myself."

Later that afternoon Lurie was summoned by the Minister of Information to the hotel lobby bar. "I do not think the interview is a good idea," the minister said. "But President Marcos thought it was a fabulous opportunity to show his innocence," said Lurie.

The Minister reminded Lurie that he had a beautiful wife and four lovely children and said he

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didn't want to see anything bad happen to them. He strongly suggested that Lurie get on the morning flight to Tokyo, which they had already reserved for him. Lurie caught the flight out of there.

If one were to take, at face value, Lurie's recent cartoon depicting Peres and Clinton dancing together, one might guess Lurie feels that Israel and America are on the same team. So as Lurie reclines in his office chair with his legs resting on the paper shredder, I shift to his favorite subject, politics.

As an Israeli and as a political analyst, Lurie believes the attempt to

make peace with the Palestinians was a very smart move on Israel's part (since now the world knows that Israel wants peace). But he doesn't think it has much chance of success. He feels that Rabin, in his heart, knew he had to go through the motions but did not trust Arafat. Lurie says, "Arafat is entitled to dislike Israel and to fight what he

thinks is a just Palestinian war. For Arafat, peace is another kind of weapon to achieve his goals. He will do it by hook or by crook."

Lurie firmly believes that for there to be a viable peace in the Middle East, surrounding Arab countries will have to be categorically and absolutely democratic. Lurie explains that if Assad goes to war and loses 100,000 men, he has no one to report to. When Israel loses even ten men, the prime minister has to report to each home.

Lurie metaphorically expresses another reason why peace won't work: "There is no way you can have a beautiful flourishing home in a slum. If your standard of living is too much beyond that of your neighbors, you become a prime target and are going to get into trouble."

He sees Israel as an object of great jealousy for the Arab world. Lurie also feels that the Iranians, who are backing Assad who in turn is backing the Hezbollah will not allow any real peace.

Ranan Lurie is a man of action, not a contemplator. He doesn't waste his time, but grabs opportunity in each moment. In fact, he admits that there are not enough moments in each day and says he is working on creating the 25th hour. When I asked Lurie what he would draw if he had to draw his last cartoon, he says, "I would draw the hottest news story of the day, as I do each and every day." [Penny Press]

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At The Grand-Dancing Competition