Maria Mourad Final Paper April 12, 2007

By: Maria Mourad

Rehab Amer still lives the nightmare of her children being taken away from her arms 21 years ago. She's no longer striving for the truth to prove her innocence or fighting to get her kids back. She wants to ensure that no mother goes through her pain.

The story of Mrs. Amer is a story of a mother's heart that was torn apart a million times a day for 21 years. It's a story of an infant that was deprived of her mother's milk at one day old and two children whose innocence was stripped away.

Mrs. Amer was accused of killing her 2-year old son, Samier Amer, in 1985, after he hit his head in a bath tub and caused her to lose custody of her three remaining children. She was charged with second degree murder and was acquitted by a jury in 1986. The state refused to return the children to their parents due to the unknown cause of death and they were kept in foster homes.

The Amer children still live in every corner of the Amers' house, which Rehab calls the "museum". On the walls of each room are pictures of a family that was forever destroyed. Artifacts such as their first clothes, first shoe, and their drawings are hanged on the walls. Their beds are neatly done. Their bears, their musical toys, their dolls and their piano are all there. "Zinebe's foster mother gave this to me after Zinebe was taken away from her at 3 ½ years kicking and screaming to be placed with her siblings at the Stampers'," Mrs. Amer said, holding Zinebe's favorite doll. "I use their bedroom as my prayer room," she continued.

Her bedroom is filled with photo memories of her children. In one golden frame, there is a collection of shots with the kids during her visits to the foster home. "I saw my kids an hour a week for three years, after which my visits were terminated," Mrs. Amer cried. "I refused to plead guilty and lie about killing my son to cover up the mistakes of Oakwood hospital and the state."

Mrs. Amer, 45, graduated in 1985 from Henry Ford Community College with a degree in nursing. At the time of the accident, she was working at a doctor's office in Dearborn and quit as soon as her son, Samier, died. "My family became my career." Mrs. Amer said. She was only 20.

Due to the allegations against her by medical doctors, the Michigan State Department of Social Services now called the Family Independence Agency, declared Amer and her husband, Ahmed, to be unfit parents in 1989. They subsequently lost custody of their three remaining children, son Mohammed Ali, now Adam Lee, and daughters Suehier and Zinebe, now Suzanne Brook and Zine Rochelle.

"My children being taken away from my arms is a never ending nightmare," said Mrs. Amer. "It's as if someone ripped your heart apart and said your heart is not for you to keep anymore."

"I was accused of killing my son even though I was acquitted by the jury, I still lost my kids because I didn't lie about killing my son," Rehab said. "My husband lost his parental rights because he supported me."

What is a mother to do when national exposure, more than $700,000 in legal fees and 19 attorneys failed to get her children back? Mrs. Amer says "You have to trust that even if the whole world is unjust, God is just and He is my best witness that I never hurt my son Samier."

Unbeknownst to Rehab, Samier was suffering from brittle-bone disease, an inherited disorder that causes bones to break easily, often from little or no apparent cause and that has no cure.

Mr. and Mrs. Amer were not told about their son's condition at the time of his birth and the medical records of Oakwood Hospital were not revealed after Samier's death. "Doctors lied under oath," Mrs. Amer said. "The hospital had records of the disease; we couldn't get the records for 10 years."

During the appeals, Mrs. Amer became pregnant with her son Hussein. Had the state learned of her pregnancy, Hussein would have been taken away from the hospital the same way Zinebe was. "I hid in my basement for four month, I didn't see the daylight," Mrs. Amer said.

She fled to Lebanon, Syria and Egypt looking for a safe place to give birth and protect her newborn. Voices of her children and memories of them followed her everywhere she went. Hussein Amer was born in Windsor, Canada in 1992. "The minute he was born he crawled to my neck and hid his head," Rehab cried. "My baby was afraid, he was born with the fear I had during my nine months of pregnancy."

Hussein Amer was Mrs. Amer's nephew for 13 years. "My son went through a lot during his childhood," Mrs. Amer said. "He was always hidden in front of people and the media," Mr. Amer continued.

In August of 2001, the Amers saw their children at the Stampers' for the first time after 13 years. "The bond was very strong," Mrs. Amer said. "Mohammed Ali told me that even though he was told I killed his brother, deep inside he knew I was innocent."

The Amers visited their kids regularly on birthdays and during holidays at the Stampers' home in Clarkston. Overtime, the relationship became strained with Mrs. Stamper. "After September 11, Mrs. Stamper changed the visits to the church and began sending me emails about Islam," Mrs. Amer said. The Amers continued to visit their children at the church. "I told my kids that even though I am Muslim and they are Christian, we are all a garden of flowers with different colors and smells. We are all beautiful and loved by God," Mrs. Amer said.

On January 17, 2002, the Amer parents decided to exhume the body of their beloved son Samier after their daughter Sueheir told them she will not believe her mother is innocent until she dies and goes to heaven and asks her brother. "I knew by the grace of God something had to be done," Mrs. Amer said.

Retired Wayne County Medical Examiner, Dr. Werner Spitz who performed the autopsy on Samier's body, said the sight of the body was astonishing, "as if someone had preserved his bones for 21 years to prove her innocence," he continued. "It hurts enough to burry your own child once, I had to bury Samier twice," Mrs. Amer cried. On May 17, 2005, Samier's death certificate was changed from "homicide" to "accidental."

"The certificate was a gift for my children to prove my innocence and bring relief to them," Mrs. Amer said. "But my innocence upset Mrs. Stamper. She sent me hateful emails and accused me of tearing the family apart. Mrs. Stamper called my pain and sorrows junk and garbage."

Adoptive mother Essie Stamper, 70, of Clarkston said Mrs. Amer has put her through hell for 18 years. "I gave her a chance and let her in my house," Mrs. Stamper said. "How many adoptive parents allow the biological parents in their house? My children are now adults and they make their own decisions."

Mrs. Stamper said that the kids are out of her house. The Amer children are now adults aged 24, 23 and 20. They grew up with adoptive Christian parents who raised them to believe that God had saved them from their birth parents.

"Mrs. Stamper sent my children away to missionary school in Texas," Mrs. Amer said. "She was afraid my children will remember what they were fed and turn against her. It is true my children are now adults but they still feel obligated to Mrs. Stamper. It is easier for them to hate me than betray the Stampers' who raised them to despise me."

Mrs. Amer has returned to her job as a nurse after her son's death certificate was amended. She is a nurse at the Heart and Lung Center in Dearborn. "She is an honest and trustworthy person. She is very patient and caring with the patients," said Dr. Yousseff Danvishvar. "I love my job, it gives me the satisfaction to know that I am helping others and making them feel good," said Mrs. Amer.

"I try to keep myself busy at all times," Mrs. Amer said. "I volunteer at various organizations including ADC (American Arab Anti-discrimination Committee) and CAIR (Council of American Islamic Relations)." She is also very active at her mosque.

Mrs. Amer is also working with her husband on a proposed bill along with State of Michigan representative Gino Polidori to ensure that no other family goes through their pain. "Laws must change. The Amer Act will make sure that when a child is taken away from his parents, he is placed with relatives, with people of his own faith and within his own community," Mrs. Amer said.

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"My kids were fighters, but their spirit was broken," said Mrs. Amer. "I was a fighter and I will continue to be a fighter until my mission is accomplished."

Information about the proposed bill, can be found at www.thepetiitonsite.com

Visit our photo album to learn more about the injustices that tore our family apart and how Samier's Cries from the Grave revealed the truth.

Parents Crying Out, Justice for All.