

AND THE WINNER IS (MAYBE): GOLIATH!

What if Goliath was only fooling with David? What if he just pretended to be hurt and was really waiting for David to come closer so that he could grab him? Couldn't be, you say? This is not the way it was written down, right?

Well, yes and no. Let's face it – in real life it is usually Goliath that wins and David loses. It would be nice to think that the little guy always wins but we have all heard the cliché that you can't fight city hall and, you know, it is valid most of the time.

On the other hand, the results aren't always all that obvious. I will let you be the judge. You see, the Goliath in this story is our own Los Angeles Times, a corporate giant with a *de facto* print media monopoly over an area where it distributes close to 3 million newspapers each day and a couple of hundred thousand more on Sundays. The Times has uncontested political, economic and cultural influence and no real competition. For the overwhelming majority of Angelenos and others – if it hasn't been reported in the Times, it just didn't happen.

A good example of this is the very recent conference, in July, of over 3500 Christian pastors who came to Washington D.C. to lobby their Senators and Congressmen on behalf of Israel. Yes, that's right, 3500 *pastors representing tens of millions of their congregants*. Have you heard of this? I didn't think so – the Times didn't mention it and neither did the Washington Post or that other Times, the one in New York. I will write a column about it but I am an insignificant David compared to the Los Angeles Goliath.

But I digress. My brief fight with the Times was about the homemade rockets that were featured in the Times articles again and again and again.

On June 26 I wrote a letter to the Times about it. Here it is in its entirety:

“ ‘Homemade’ evokes a lovable granny baking, cooking or making soup for her family. It is used to convey a feeling that a homemade product is wholesome and good for you. It also implies that it was made in a home.

“The Times has been constantly using the word “homemade” to describe the deadly Kassam rockets used by the Palestinians in their attempts to murder as many civilians as possible – most recently in stories on June 25 and 26. I wonder if you could indicate whether your reporters had visited the homes where these rockets are lovingly prepared

and whether the homes also manufacture homemade cars or refrigerators? If not, where did this term come from and how did it come to be applied to deadly destructive weapons?

“In February 2006 a Kassam hit a home – a 7-month old baby and 3 adults were wounded; on March 28, 2006, two Israeli Arab shepherds were killed by the “homemade” rockets? Is that cute enough to deserve the “homemade” label?”

“Sincerely, Si Frumkin”

The Times did not publish my letter. Neither did I hear from the Times reader’s representative to whom I sent a copy and who is supposed to respond to any unfairness a reader points out. I didn’t expect anything else so I just shrugged and wrote a somewhat longer piece that went out in my “Graffiti” newsletter and to a bunch of friends via email. It was translated and published in a number of Russian-language publications and on several Internet sites and blogs. Still, I realize that I was probably out-published by the Times by a factor of 1000:1.

But then a funny thing happened. The Los Angeles Times stopped using the word “homemade” in describing Arab rockets! I noticed that a few days after I sent my letter the report from Israel spoke of “makeshift” rockets. The rockets continued being “makeshift” for the next few weeks as well as “primitive”, “inaccurate” or “crude”.

I felt like David looking down at the fallen Goliath. I thought that there was justice and fairness and all the rest.

And then, on 7/21/06, on page A12, there was an article filed by the Times Wire Services, a subsidiary of the L.A. Times that distributes news to hundreds of publications. Here is an excerpt:

“The (Israeli) army has adopted a new policy of attacking homes in civilian areas where weapons – such as *homemade rockets*...- are secretly stored...”

And so here we are. The grandmas are apparently back making these rockets and the Times just couldn’t help itself, and so, it resumed its old ways.

Well, it was nice while it lasted.