

**ACTING PATRIOTIC COLLECTION
SEPTEMBER 11 DIGITAL ARCHIVE**

**INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE GRUENTHAL
CONDUCTED BY JAMES RIDGEWAY
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Q. So will you...will you just start by saying, you know, your name and what you do an how you met Fred?

G.G. My name's George Gruenthal and Fred's my roommate. He's been my roommate, I think, for about eight years although I've known him way further back than that.

Q. So...and what do you do?

G.G. I'm a computer instructor.

Q. And so when did you first hear about Fred's situation? Can...what did you see and what...Just tell...(inaudible)...

G.G. I heard when I came home that evening, my other roommate called me. She's...she was...she came in when Fred was under arrest with all the various agents over there and she told me that Fred had been arrested. Apparently, there were something like three New York Police Department detectives, two FBI agents and one Immigration agent. Fred had been arrested at the restaurant as Nelly told you, and afterwards they came with him back up to my apartment. At that point, I think, nobody else was there.

And then my other roommate, who is a legal resident from the Dominican Republic, came in. They started asking her questions, although she doesn't speak very much English. They didn't speak any Spanish but they asked her for her papers, they showed her the pictures. They didn't know anything about what these pictures were about, but they asked her if she had seen any of the people there so they didn't know...even know these were pictures of martyrs, people who had been killed by the Israeli army. And anyway, she told me the story when I came in that night.

Q. So then, you...you were the first person that was able to talk to Fred?

G.G. Fred had contacted an old time lawyer of his first, but then he called me, I think, a couple of times that evening. They had still...They were holding him first at the INS Detention enter in downtown Manhattan and he called me couple of times from there, told me some of what happened, that he had been arrested, that there were asking him all sorts of questions about the pictures, you know? What he knew about terrorism and all of this stuff. The pictures had nothing to do with terrorism. It was people who were involved in struggling against Israeli occupation in Palestine, but he didn't have any thing directly to do with the pictures. As...as Nelly explained, these were pictures that another

friend of ours had left at this restaurant where we had all gone after this community forum.

Q. So then did any cop or agent or anything ever talk to you?

G.G. No. Nobody ever came back to talk to me, no.

Q. And so that's...What else...I mean, how...what other things have you encountered in terms of...since Fred's been in jail? I mean, you've gone to see him...

G.G. Yeah. Oh, one other thing that they did that I was told was, although Fred had said, yes, they could come up to his room which was only a room in the apartment; that he could not authorize them to go anywhere else in the apartment, besides asking my other roommate about her papers which she had nothing to do with the case whatsoever. They also came into my room and took pictures in there which they claimed was security reasons. I don't know what they thought; that somebody was going to jump out at them and if they took a picture of the person that would do something, but there wasn't anybody else there. I think they wanted to take pictures of whatever they could see, books on the wall or anything like that.

Q. Did they take anything away?

G.G. Not to my knowledge. It seemed that my computer had probably been put on and then turned off rapidly but I couldn't swear to that.

Q. So they're...so did they take anything from the apartment at all?

G.G. From my room, nothing, not to my knowledge. I don't know whether they took...if they took anything from Fred's I don't know.

Q. So did you see Fred in prison?

G.G. I went to visit him once, yes. I spoke to him a few times and visited him once. So...

Q. So how did that strike you? What was that like?

G.G. Well, he was in good spirits. Apparently he had not been mistreated really except for, you know, being in confinement for weeks for, you know, for...for no particular good reason. You know? The prisoners...first of all, he was put in jail in New Jersey and when he was arrested and lives in New York it makes it difficult. I don't have a car. It makes it difficult to get out there. I had to go when I could go when another friend of ours could also go with a car and so forth. Even conversations, as Nelly mentioned, there's a total phone racket from the jail. Prisoners are not allowed to use any of these regular...they can only make collect calls, can't use any of the regular calling services. They have to use the special one for the jail, which for a five-minute call costs somewhere around fifteen dollars and apparently the jail makes a whole lot of money. We tried to calculate that they

must make tens of thousands of dollars a year just on...on extra charges for the phone calls. But...

Q. Was it hard to see Fred, I mean, to...

G.G. It wasn't hard in terms of...you know, they have certain hours when you can see...I...I work irregularly so it wasn't that hard for me. I could go on a day off. But you can't go on a weekend. I think you can go sometimes on the evening. But for people who work full time during the week it's hard to go out and...and see the prisoners.

Q. So what...what do you...what do you pra--...What do you do when you go there? You...just tell...

G.G. What do you do? You...you have to show your ID. I think picture ID, and there's a limit of two half-hour visits per week from anybody, right? So we had to kind of coordinate to make sure that, you know, two people didn't use up the half...their half hour each and then a third person then wouldn't even know about it and go and find out that they'd say sorry; he's over used his visiting time.

Q. So you go in, you show them the ID...

G.G. Yeah. And I think there's one session where you can actually sit face to face with the person. We did it through...through...you know? There's a glass booth and you pick up a phone on each end with a certain amount of static and, you know, ten other people in the same row talking to...to their friends and relative inside so it's a little hard to hear. It's not like a real personal close up visit. Even, as far as I understand, when they have the whatever they call the...the face to face visits without the phone, you have to sit across on a bench and there's again, ten people all talking to their friends all at the same time so it's...

Q. But you never did that. You...

G.G. No, I didn't do that. That's...There's only one session a week. I couldn't...I couldn't make it out for that.

Q. so the total visiting hours were an hour a week?

G.G. Correct. Yeah. so even when I went out, together with this other friend with a car, we had to split the half hour visit so we both saw him for about fifteen minutes each.

Q. so what did...what did this, you know, prison strike you as? I mean, what was your impression?

G.G. You don't see very much. Right? You don't see anything of the inside. You go into a waiting room, there's a little kind of security gate like an airport security gate that you go through, and then there's several basically rows of, you know, plate glass with the

phones and you see the prisoner on the other end. But you don't see anything else of the prison itself.

Q. Okay. That's great. Thank you very much.