

May 30, 2009

About My Arrest

by Adib Mansour

Again on May 30, the Roosevelt Island Little League game ended before the completion of the bottom of the last inning because of RIOC's field rental policy (which does not take into consideration games that go to over-time) and the fact that the field, as in previous weeks, was not ready on time. The day ended with dozens of children out side the Public Safety office, some crying hysterically, mostly all afraid, confused and angry.

The game was to start at 9:00 a.m. but could not start until closer to 9:30 because there were no bases placed on the field and the coach had to get his own. The game had to be cut short to (five innings instead of six) because our allocated time ended. The teams were disappointed but accepted the decision.

Once the first game ended, I sat with my son during the first three innings of the second game, but left to prepare a picnic for my family and some friends. As I was leaving for the picnic, Karine Wong, whose son was playing in the second game, called to inform me that the game was cut short before the end of the last inning by Public Safety. They were brought in by off-island teams after a confrontation with a Roosevelt Island parent. The Little League's permit from RIOC ended at 1:00 and it was now 1:45 p.m. I went out to the field with my camera to document the incident.

I found both Purple and Green teams sitting outside the field, being told by their coaches why they had to stop the game. The scene was very emotional. On the other side of the field, I approached parents arguing with both RI Public Safety and the visiting players. The islanders included Carolyn Christianson, Christina Ewing, and Dan Fitzgerald, to name a few. Shortly after, the visitors took the field and started batting practice.

In what I heard as a sarcastic tone, one of the off-island players asked the kids and parents to leave the field "before you get seriously hurt." I was in the process of leaving the field with the rest of the remaining crowd, taking occasional pictures, when I spotted the two Public Safety officers approaching.

Upon their arrival, I stopped to take a picture of the officer dismounting his bike –officer Wilson Toro- who walked towards the crowd and, directing his words to me, he said, "leave the field". He then came closer to me and, louder, said, "I told you to leave the field," to which I responded, "Not before I take this last picture of the kids being forced out of the field in this manner" –perhaps I should have phrased it better to avoid any misunderstanding of my peaceful intentions- and proceeded in taking his picture as well as the Roosevelt Island parents and children in the immediate background. Officer Toro then pushed me, in my ribs, saying, "I give you 10 seconds to leave." I turned, in pain, and said, "Don't touch me." He responded, "You don't want me to touch you? I'll show you what that means." He dangled his handcuffs in front of my face. He twisted my arms to the back and locked the handcuffs very tight on my wrists. I

handed my digital camera to Peter Alber (Green team coach) and asked him to continue documenting the events. Meanwhile, Officer Toro was saying: "I'll teach you a lesson."

At this point, he pushed me in front of him, scattering the crowd. Some responded to this by saying, "That is not necessary, sir," and "You're doing this in front of the kids?" A couple of residents stood in front of the arresting officer and asked him to release me at once. He lifted his hand in a threatening way pointing to one parent's face and asked her to move out of his way. She responded, "If you're going to arrest him, you should arrest all of us." The argument went on for a good minute or two when Mr. Toro pushed me in front of him and over the ledge onto roadway beside Eastwood. Another other officer stayed behind, calmly talking to the crowd.

On Main Street, another parent –who seemed to know the officer- approached Mr. Toro and begged him to release me. Mr. Toro responded, "He disrespected me." I turned to him and said, "I never raised my voice, never used bad language, never acted in any disrespectful way." At his point, parents and children were witnessing the events. The situation was getting more tense. One parent was yelling, "Are you kidding me? You've arrested him? Are you kidding me?" Officer Toro called on his radio and asked for backup. Two officers arrived, dress in street clothes. Officer Toro said to one of them, "Arrest the guy who's taking pictures. Arrest him now." But that arrest never happened.

Once we arrived at the Public Safety offices, the crowd grew in number (over 40) and in frustration. Children followed us through the doors. I was taken into the back room and was told to sit down because I was about to "learn a lesson." I said that I preferred to stand. He went for papers. I took my phone out of my pocket with my right hand and called my wife, who was in lower Manhattan having a business lunch with the vice principal of my son's school. I told her that I was being arrested and that our son, who is 10 years old, was left crying and scared outside. (To my knowledge, Public Safety made no attempt to account for my minor child's whereabouts as they took me away.) I was able to ascertain that a friend had taken responsibility for him, but he was hysterical and scared. Other residents also called my wife who was now in a taxi. By phone, she tried to calm my son.

A little later, I told Mr. Toro, "I need you to know that I am diabetic and that my glucose is going down and that I was feeling dizzy". I asked him if he could please get me something to eat or drink. (It was much past my lunch time and since I had taken insulin in the morning. It was crucial for me to eat on time.) Mr. Toro stood right in front of me, face to face, and whispered, "You should have thought about that before." I told him that if I didn't have something sweet to eat or juice, I could pass out." He replied: "I am diabetic too", then said "I'll wait until you to pass out so I can take you to the emergency room, then take you to prison." I was shocked at this threat and went silent. He walked away from me and sat at a desk diagonal to me, gathering paper work. At this point, I started seeing white flares, a sign that my glucose is dangerously low. I said, "Excuse me.... I am diabetic and require immediate attention because my glucose is getting dangerously low. May I please get some juice. I have money in my pocket and will pay for it." To this, Officer Toro repeated that he would wait until I fainted, then would call the ambulance, then take me to the emergency room and then to prison – so I could learn my lesson." Within hearing range of a couple of other officers who rolled their eyes and slightly shook their heads. Another officer, who had been on the field at the time of the arrest, said in a very calm

voice, "I will get it for you. Is Pepsi good enough?" I said it was. He offered to pay for it himself.

At this point, I called Dick Lutz of The WIRE and told him what had been happening. When Officer Toro heard what I was saying, he ran to me and demanded my phone. I told him that I needed it to call my lawyer and my doctor. He twisted my hand and caused me considerable pain. I screamed towards my phone, "Dick, I am being physically assaulted, I am being hurt." The officer then twisted my arm so much I had to release the phone. He ended the call.

The phone rang right after, so I asked Mr. Toro to "please hand me the phone; this must either be my wife or my lawyer." Officer Toro shut off the phone and said, "Let them reach you now." He put the phone on the table out of reach. He then stood in front of me and asked me to empty my pockets. I told him that I wouldn't, and could not anyway as I was handcuffed to the wooden bar against the wall. He frisked me and emptied my pockets. It was only at that point that he read me my Miranda Rights. (He omitted the part about the right to a phone call and an attorney.) He said that I was arrested for "Disorderly Conduct" and asked me if I understood what he said. I told him I did not because I was never disorderly. He said, "I don't need you to understand, I have a witness." He turned to one of the officers in plain clothing then asked him to be his witness.

Soon after, the Chief Guerra came into the room and left with Mr. Toro.

I heard a friend (Virginia Chambers) yell out loud in the entrance, "He is diabetic. Do you know he is diabetic and requires attention?" Following her request the same calm officer brought me a large bottle of Pepsi. I started drinking fast as I realized it was a little bit too late. I was weakening at the knees and couldn't hold the bottle any longer. I collapsed on the bench behind me and the bottle dropped to the floor.

One of the officers in the room asked me if I was OK. I asked him to bring me the soda back as I was getting much weaker. I drank soda fast and sat on the bench looking down at the floor, with my heart beating fast. It took 5-10 minutes before I started feeling better.

Suddenly, the door at the back of the room opened and Carolyn Christianson was standing with about 20 children. They started chanting, "Free our coach, free our coach." Public Safety personnel closed the door and asked the kids to leave. On the other side of the building at the front entrance, I also heard people arguing. One of the Public Safety people in the room with me, speaking on the telephone with her mom, said, "There's a riot outside."

After a while, Public Safety Chief Keith Guerra came into the room and told me that someone would bring me paperwork to sign, and then I could leave.

Soon after, Officer Toro and a civilian-clothed officer walked toward me. Mr. Toro said that I have to sign a Summons with a July 21 court date. I asked about the charges. He replied that the charge was disorderly behavior. I replied: "For the record, I want to say that in no way did I conduct myself in a disorderly manner." They said nothing in response and I was again asked to sign the paper. I did. I was then uncuffed and Mr. Toro started collecting my personal belongings that were scattered in different places in the room. I told him my headset was incomplete. He said, "That's how it was." I answered that it was not missing when I had it in my possession. They looked for it for a few minutes and found it on the floor.

I wondered why there was no procedure, such as placing all my items in one place? Why was I chained to the wall for a long time before my rights were read to me? Why was I not allowed to call my lawyer? Why was I not allowed to call my wife and let her know that our son was left alone with no supervision? Why was I arrested in the first place, and only me, while exiting the field and stopping for a few seconds to take the last picture? I had arrived at the end of the events, quietly taking pictures, with no connection to the disturbance Public Safety was called for.

Upon my release I went to the front desk and told them that I would not leave without placing a complaint against Officer Toro. I was told that I would have to return on Monday (June 2). I insisted on getting the paper work before leaving. It was handed to me.

Outside Public Safety, more than a dozen children were waiting for me with hugs and high-fives. My son cried quietly, giving me a long hug. He later told me that the arrest and how the events unfolded on the field were very scary. Several adults had been waiting. Some were concerned about my diabetes as they knew I was on my way to lunch when I stopped by to document the situation at the field.

I learned later that several kids were traumatized by the events. One, whom I coach in soccer, ran home and called his mother, who had to hurry back from Manhattan to console him. A nine-year-old I help coach in baseball cried so much that her mom had to take her home, where she “passed out for several hours.” One child sat next to me and placed his head on my shoulder for a long time; another gave me balloons.