

**From:** joyce@mybrotherfromanothermother.org  
**To:** "maura.ruby@macerich.com"; "Melissa.Eigen@Macerich.com"  
**Bcc:** Joyce Schriebman  
**Subject:** Table Talks and the Danbury Fair Mall  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 19, 2017 9:37:00 AM

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Hi Maura and Melissa,

Thanks for stopping by the table yesterday to talk with us about Table Talks. As I explained, Table Talks is a project of [My Brother from Another Mother](#), a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Generally, Table Talks was created to *un-strange the stranger*. The rise of cultural and social diversity in our country enriches the fabric of America in many ways. This growth, not surprisingly, also emphasizes our differences—differences that create boundaries between communities that are often hard to penetrate. Table Talks is an opportunity for people to see, meet, and talk with The Other. There's nothing exotic or foreign about a Jew and a Muslim drinking Dunkin' Donuts coffee in a mall. The visual of us sitting in the food court translates into ordinary. Mainstream. It breaks stereotypes. Even for those folks who don't stop to talk.

Specifically, Table Talks is a chance for people who might not come into contact with Muslims and Jews to have conversations. Again, the environment is key. Table Talks succeeds because it takes place in a neutral, normal space. And what's more normal than a food court!

In addition to the venue, Table Talks' success relies on being in one place, at a specific time, every week. Regularity is key. Some folks stop by our table for only a few minutes, but they're very excited about the project and want to come back and spend more time. We figure they'll tell friends about the opportunity for conversation, and, in that way, word will spread. But if we're not at the table when folks are expecting us, the project fails.

We are also approachable. We present ourselves in a way that lets people know the conversation is friendly and hassle-free. We don't solicit. We simply make ourselves available. That's why Table Talks needs a visual invitation for people to pull-up-a-chair. The Quran says, "There is no coercion in religion." And there's no coercion in coffee chats either!

We meet people where they are. Some folks ask about Islamic or Jewish practices (e.g., head coverings, gender issues, or education.) Others want to know about our individual purposes for creating Table Talks. One person asked us for advice on how he could help his children become more comfortable with diversity. Another wanted to know if she could come to a mosque. Only one person mentioned anything remotely political, and that was after it became known that Eman is Palestinian and I'm Jewish. To the question, "How do you feel about how the current administration is handling the Middle East?" I responded, "Eman and I welcome any and all avenues to peace between people."

And, of course, I told you the story about Dale Walter, the author of the inflammatory anti-Muslim Newtown Bee Letter-to-the-Editor, who, on my invitation, came to the mall to talk with us. I encourage you to visit [The Table Talks Journal](#) to read a brief recap of each week's experience,

including the encounter with Mr. Walter.

I appreciate the position you're in, Maura, and also yours, Melissa. Earlier in my career, I was the Vice President of Industry Relations and Marketing for the Community College Foundation in Sacramento, California. I have experience with corporate partnerships and will do my thinking cap to see if I can come up with a win-win scenario for us. I doubt our purchases, which are about \$50-\$100 a week, are of any consequence. But maybe there's a greater mall objective that we can fit into. Perhaps we can brainstorm together...?

I look forward to your reply and to exploring this matter in more detail.

*Table Talks: building understanding one cup of coffee at a time!*

Warm regards,

Joyce

**Joyce Schriebman**

(415) 531-0985 P

(475) 289-3175 F

*"Never attribute to malice that which can just as easily be attributed to ignorance."*

[joyce@MyBrotherFromAnotherMother.org](mailto:joyce@MyBrotherFromAnotherMother.org)

[www.MyBrotherFromAnotherMother.org](http://www.MyBrotherFromAnotherMother.org)

