

Pales tine Verb atim

An event organised by

Meeting Ground

Theatre Company

and supported by

Artists Against The War

Readers at Palestine Verbatim on May 28, 2002 Trafalgar Square, London:
Tim Block *Actor*, David Calder *Actor*, Lesley Cook *Actor*, Debbie Findlay *Actor*,
Andrew Hawkins *Actor*, Janet Henfrey *Actor*, Lucy Jameson *Director*, Adah Kay
University Lecturer/Activist, Sarah Maguire *Poet/Translator*, Chris Mannings *Teacher*,
Sarah O'Keefe *Actor*, Veronica Planton *Actor*, Colin Prescod *Playwright/Chair*,
Institute of Race Relations, Maggie Steed *Actor*. Harriet Walter *Actor*



PALESTINE VERBATIM



On Tuesday 28th May 2002 from 6pm to 7.30pm in Trafalgar Square London actors, poets, film-makers, teachers and activists read out personal accounts of how life had been over the past two months for the people of the Occupied Territories of Palestine and for people in Israel opposed to the recent re-occupation.

One by one the readers read out to a public audience the accounts and testimonies which we had been sent or had collected from websites. There was a short introduction and a short speech at the end thanking the participants and asking for donations to Medical Aid for Palestinians.

There were no political speeches just the words of people over there read by people over here and listened to in a public space.

We watch the news on TV. We see shots of tanks, guns and stone-throwers. We hear statistics and we hear what politicians say, but we're none the wiser because the core reality of human experience, the one thing which might help us make sense of things, is absent from the account. This event was an attempt to make space for these personal stories to be heard.

Johnathan Chadwick
Maysoon Pachachi

Everybody that was present felt the impact of this event. Here are some comments of participants and audience:

“ Just as the event commenced, a small posse of five young teenage boys invaded our platform, the plinth of Nelson's column. There was no malice or menace in them, but they seemed set on disrupting anything within earshot. For ten or fifteen minutes they wandered about the fringes of the plinth, mounting and dismounting one of the monumental lions while shouting to each other - attention seeking. The readers carried on, undaunted. Magically, the moment came where the boys ceased their noise. Perched atop the plinth, draped over the lion, they were listening (one of them open mouthed) - listening to the words of a grandmother from Ramallah, describing the desecration of her home by the Israeli

Defence Forces. They had silenced themselves - surely not out of some sudden political insight, more likely struck by the sense of purpose which united the story-tellers and the many who stayed and stood to listen. ”

Colin Prescod, reader

“ What made the pieces so particularly devastating was their very telling precision and detail in their chronicling of what has gone on. The way in which they were read somehow mirrored that.

As I said last night, I liked the way you kept the readers anonymous, letting full focus fall on the readings themselves - although their faces and some of those in the audience were well-known and familiar. ”

Susannah Tarbush, member of the audience

“ Thank you so much for organising this event. It was a privilege to hear people's stories. Somehow clapping after each one did not seem appropriate, though. I try to avoid a feeling of powerlessness by thinking if I was one of those people, at least I would want my story to be heard. The voices were beautiful as well. Strange though to find myself just standing in the blustery wind and thinking about it. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to take time out from work/family to do that. ”

Josephine Henderson, member of the audience

“ The event, which I approached with the gravest misgivings, did work well because the witness reports gradually built up to a crescendo. Also some were deeply shocking in a way that could not be conveyed by the papers. ”

Elfi Pallis, member of the audience

“ I would like to congratulate you and your colleagues on this successful and important event. The accounts of victims and witnesses were powerful particularly as the reading of the actors brought these accounts to life in a very vivid way. The addition of Israeli refuseniks' and internationalists' accounts to those offered by Palestinian witnesses and victims avoided the possibility of desensitising the listener through sheer repetition. ”

Abbas Shiblak, member of the audience

“ Tuesday night was good - the point that each reader brought up that I thought was powerful was the talk of resilience. ”

Liz Khan, member of the audience

“ Thank you very much for organising Palestine Verbatim at Trafalgar Square last Tuesday. It was a very moving experience for me, and for the people around me. Every once in a while, I looked around to see the reactions of the people, and you could hear a pin drop. As for the 'hooligans' sliding on and off the silent lions in the Square, well, they finally gave up, and ignoring them was the best thing the performers did. That said, as they were shouting, I kept on thinking of Palestinian children their age, living under occupation, and not even getting the chance to slide off anything, not even boredom!!

The choice of the readers was excellent. They complemented each other, and their reading was heard, but neither too loud, nor 'in your face'.

This should be a 'beginning' and a 'means' to a bigger 'end' in the future.

I am in the process of preparing a story-telling session for the British Museum as part of the Diaspora Festival this summer. For this, I have been reading one old folktale after the other, in preparation for my work. When I was listening to your readers, they sounded like the Story-Teller, the Hakawaati, who used to tour Palestinian villages with his Wonder Box and musical props, telling stories about heroes, jinns, kings, poor men, love, jealousy, victories and defeats. Palestine Verbatim should

become like a travelling Story-Teller, touring one venue after the other, telling people the modern-day stories of people living under occupation. ”

Reem Kilani, member of the audience

“ First to say thank you for asking me to be involved. It was a pleasure & privilege to be able to read out and pass on the feelings & thoughts of people, whose lives are so traumatised by Israel's military actions. E-mails from the heart, which allow a small insight into the 'other side' of the news we all read and watch daily. ”

Tim Block, reader

“ What I felt more strongly than anything was an incredible sense of commitment from all the readers clearly to communicate the experiences of others. Not being a performer myself, I was concerned that I would be very nervous, but because we were all there to enable others to be heard, this was not the case at all.

I very much liked the fact that we were outside, as it felt appropriate for people to be hearing stories that are never openly read in such a public place. I also think it took the pressure off our audience, who were free to come and go. This lack of obligation actually seemed to make people more inclined to stay. The speaking of these accounts just for what they are, without a political bent, is so simple, yet it seems to me to be one of the most successful and progressive forms of communication.

Thank you for organising such an important event. ”

Lucy Jameson, reader

To organise a PALESTINE VERBATIM event:

1. **You need a public venue**, a town square or a park (You can even do it inside)
2. **You need to get permission** and if the public address system you use is not run from a battery then you will have to seek a source of electric power. When we did our event in Trafalgar Square the Greater London Authority insisted that we had public liability insurance. This was easy to arrange.
3. **Organise a Public address system.** We got somebody who was used to working in Trafalgar Square and who brought along a set of steps to make access to the plinth easier. Ask around there's bound to be a knowledgeable supplier near you. This was our largest single expense.
4. **Get hold of about 10 people who are willing to read.** These can be actors, poets, teachers, writers or ordinary mortal human beings. It's surprising what talents people have when they are called upon
5. **Organise good publicity.** We distributed about 2000 leaflets. About 200 people turned up. Somebody told us that we might have done better had it have been slightly later in the evening. We started at 6pm. Think about the time carefully. Produce a press statement. Try to make contact with local radio and newspapers.
6. **Stewarding and taking a collection.** We had about 10 stewards. Two on stage and two at each corner of the crowd. They were distinctive in tee shirts borrowed from Palestine Solidarity Campaign. We did not cover our costs but we made a small donation to Medical Aid for Palestinians in whose benefit the collection was taken.
7. **Good to have a banner.** To draw attention to the event from afar we had a simple banner which said PALESTINE VERBATIM. We tied it round Nelson's Column. We can let you have the banner or we can put you in touch with the person who made it
8. **What is being read out.** Use our material. We collected the accounts from friends and from websites particularly www.electronicintifada.com. Adapt what we did, update it with your own material. Our material takes about 1 hour 20 minutes to read. You can keep people standing around and listening in the open air for no longer than this.
9. **You think you need help.** Contact us immediately. We really want to see this event put on again. We can help you with practical advice and help:

chadwick@meetingground.demon.co.uk

maysoon@oxymoronfilms.demon.co.uk

Tel: 020 7263 9807 or 020 7272 9324

Zuhair Sabbagh

from Ramallah

The situation in Ramallah was not rosy prior to the Israeli invasion. The city was invaded twice before. The residents of Ramallah and other cities, towns, refugee camps and villages suffered a lot from the invasions as well as from the Israeli military siege. More than 129 military checkpoints deprived 3 million Palestinians from freedom of movement. People felt captive inside their localities. We did not know that the worse was yet to come.

On April 6th, we were awakened by a telephone call from a neighbour. He calmly informed us that three tanks and two troop carriers had surrounded our apartment building. We got dressed at once and prepared ourselves for the uninvited visit of the Israeli army. I sneaked a look from the window of the verandah and saw two tanks stationed at the corners of our building. From the kitchen window, I could see another tank. Their cannons were pointed at our flats. The scene was frightening and revolting.

My 10 year old daughter, Orjuwana, rushed to her room and brought out her 3 favourite dolls and a teddy bear. Then she went back and brought a children's book in Hebrew. She displayed the book between the teddy bear and the dolls. I asked why she'd brought the Hebrew book. "I don't want the soldiers to take away my dolls and teddy bear. When they come, they'll see the book and won't take my dolls and teddy bear." I and my partner Maha, placed our two identity cards in a handy place and opened our door a little.

Finally, six soldiers entered our apartment. The officer asked for our identity cards and took mine to carry out a security check. The officer and a soldier ordered me, while pointing their M-16 guns towards my back, to walk in front of them and show them our apartment. While we were in our bedroom, the officer asked me "Do you have any weapons? I said "no I don't." Then, while I was showing them our library, the officer asked me: "Do you have any inciting material?" I said, "I do not work in incitement. I am a lecturer of sociology." "Where do you teach sociology?", he retorted. "At Bir-Zeit University." Then the soldier remarked: "Oh, this is the university of the Shaheedim", meaning the "terrorists". I decided not to respond.

from Bethlehem*Bethlehem, 8th of April, 2002*

Here I am in the place where Jesus was born, now a most terrifying place. Monday last week, we woke up at 1am. I could hear bombing and shelling everywhere. At 4 I ran to my mother's room and hid under her bed because the bombing was very close. My father looked out the window and counted 20 tanks all around the house. They entered the old town of Bethlehem near the Nativity Church. My father has a shop there. Since a week, no one is allowed to walk in the street or look out from the windows.

Our house has 2 floors, one for us, the other for my uncle and his 3 small children. We stay all the time in this place because it is safer there. I don't move, I just watch TV.

11th of April

Today was the worst day. Not because of what is happening in Bethlehem – we got used to it. Tanks all around, I can't sleep, I can't study. I just cried all day about what is happening elsewhere, especially in Jenin.

Now I hear tanks near my room. I don't feel afraid. I wake up at the sound of bullets and I go to sleep at the sound of bullets. I wasn't afraid when 2 days ago, I went out to buy some bread with my 4 year-old cousin...The situation in the church is still the same. I called Father Rafael. He's there in the church. He said they had not eaten anything for six days.

I can't really write everything because I can't translate my feelings into normal words. In this world, the truth is buried. When you say a word of truth you are smashed and killed under their tanks.

Alaa

from Nablus

Israeli forces used Alaa's family's building as a military post. Residents who were arrested were brought to the building.

We could hear the interrogation, the beatings, the cursings. Once they put detainees on the stairs because there was no room anymore. We could see them blindfolded and their hands tied behind their backs. They were interrogating one of the detained and when he refused to give an answer they shot him in his stomach. The Israeli soldiers were afraid to carry him so they forced us to carry him to the tank.

One week of fear came to an end when the Israeli soldiers left the building. They did not tell us. Our neighbours came to open the door and told us that they had just left. We went quickly upstairs to see what had happen to our apartments. My mother preferred to stay downstairs. She was afraid to watch what they had done.

More than 100 Israeli soldiers had stayed in our building, turning it into a military camp. They have stolen computers, eight mobile phones, gold, as well as other things we discover every day.

When I entered my own apartment, I preferred to leave it immediately. I saw my books, diaries, and memories in the bathroom. I see bullet holes everywhere. It is hard to watch the wall on which I have stuck my best memories, pictures, and poems, and see it sprayed with bullet holes.

Twelve days ago, a building in our street, less than 40 meters away, was completely destroyed. Eleven people were living in that building. The family that lived there was poor. Missiles struck the building and it was destroyed completely. The family has been buried in the rubble. We could not reach them. Nobody dared to leave their home. They would be shot and killed immediately. After a week, when the curfew was lifted for a few hours, we rushed to the building and started to remove some cement blocks. We found the body of the father. We could hardly recognize him. We continued digging. We found the grandfather and the wife of the dead man. They were still alive. Then we found absolute horror. The bodies of eight children, all were dead!

Gila Svirsky

Israeli peace activist

The week was filled with activity from the Israeli peace movement. Members of the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace held a quiet, but powerful, conference, bringing together 200 leaders of peace and social justice organizations in Israel for strategy talks.

The ranks of the refuseniks - soldiers who refuse to serve the occupation - are growing. To date, over 450 have signed this statement. Some have been jailed (including my daughter's close friend - we're proud of you, Amichai!) and then released.

The Israeli media now refrain from giving this phenomenon any publicity, as part of its policy of acting as cheerleaders for the government, rather than reporters of Israeli current events.

The Ta'ayush organization continued its cutting edge solidarity work, planning visits to a military camp deep in the desert where several thousand Palestinians are being held in "administrative detention" - no trial, no due process, no exposure of the evidence - all under the accusation of being terrorists.

Jamil Hilal

a resident of Ramallah

3rd of April

Hheavy rain all night and all today, as well as heavy mist over Ramallah...The occupation is expanding daily while the USA is watching and general Zinni in Jerusalem does nothing. The Palestine Authority is being demolished as institutions, as infrastructure and as a project of statehood and independence. But it is not only the Palestinian Authority that is being destroyed but also political society. NGOs have ceased to work or function, all this on top of an economy that has been systematically strangled.

If the Palestinian Authority ceases to pay salaries and wages, then at least a quarter of the labour force is left without any source of income, in addition to the 20% that depended on income from work in Israel; most of the remaining labour force, employed by the private sector and NGOs, is out of work. The prospect of starvation on a large scale will become real in two to three months maximum.

A Palestinian grandmother

from Ramallah

When they lifted the curfew for 3 hours on Friday, I decided to go to my house to pick up a few more things, especially clothes. My daughter called out to me. She wanted to make sure that I had a key to the house. As it turned out, the last thing I needed was a key.

I headed to our house walking, as there was no other way to get there. You know, at my age and with my illness, it is not so easy. Still, I was determined, but the army, even with the lifting of the curfew, would not allow me to get near my house. So I began to go through the kitchen gardens and backyards of homes – if you can imagine – until I got to my house.

The first thing I saw was a chained back door. My neighbour came out and told me that she had chained it after the Israeli army left as it could no longer close properly. They had stayed there for several days she said. I went to the front door and found it totally destroyed, with our veranda glass all shattered. I went back and went in through the back door with my neighbour's help and went to the stairwell. I just could not believe my eyes, the door to our apartment was sitting out there in a slanted, odd position, and part of the wall was sitting out with it. I was aghast. I went into the apartment and again, I could not believe my eyes – there were things thrown everywhere, with many crumbs on the floor, rotten leftover apples, Matzos and other things I cannot describe.

I went to the kitchen, and all was out, much was broken. I went to the bathroom and it was hell. They had apparently used it in ways as if they had never used a bathroom before. And then I went to my grand daughter's room and found all her clothes, toys and stuffed animals in a state, all on the floor and I could not take it anymore and started crying. I decided to leave. As I left, I cried even more as I saw our family pictures all over the place: our wedding pictures, the children, birthdays, all torn or thrown on the floor like this. I rushed out with tears in my eyes and back again through the kitchen gardens and backyards, thinking – Can this be real?

a British member of the International Solidarity Movement working with the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees

Tuesday

Dave and I entered the besieged city of Nablus by walking over mountains and dodging Israeli Defence Force tanks. A group of French Peace activists arrived and we decided to walk from the centre to two of the refugee camps, Balata and Asker, carrying food and medicine. We set off, 26 internationals and 6 Palestinian medical personnel. Within 500m of leaving the centre the IDF snipers were shooting around us but we continued walking waving white flags. We were allowed through the checkpoint with very little hassle (due to the international presence and the press who had appeared). We made it to Balata camp and gave out some of the aid then continued on to the Asker camp. We were stopped by a tank and APC repeatedly firing above us... On our way back to the centre we came to the same checkpoint and were refused permission to pass. We were told to wait for the military police. They took over an hour to arrive and when they arrived we were told the internationals could pass but not the Palestinians. We refused to leave them behind and the IDF proceeded to beat us all up to try and get to the Palestinians who we were protecting with our bodies.

The IDF took away the four men and beat them then made them kneel in execution position whilst they cocked their guns behind them. The two Palestinian women were surrounded by the internationals and at one point an IDF soldier came up to the group of four women I was with and said if we didn't let them take the Palestinian women we would be shot. We still refused. The IDF eventually allowed the four men to go and all of us walked back to the centre. The IDF were completely unable to deal with our non-violent reaction to their violence. When beating us up the IDF used their rifles, kicked people in the faces and bodies and used stun grenades, they also shot around us. One of the internationals suffered a concussion, there were numerous other facial injuries and internal bruising.

Majdi al-Malki

Suddenly, we found ourselves right in the middle of the battle that we were trying to avoid by leaving our house. And so we hid in one of the rooms that we thought was relatively safe. We heard many explosions, and Dalia, our eight year old began to cry and cry and cry. We held her and tried, as you can imagine, to comfort her. This lasted about half an hour. Once it quieted down, I took a look out and discovered that shells had entered in shops and buildings right around us.

When it quieted down, we thought that the battle was over. And so I began to assure Dalia, and tell her that she would not go through this again. By night-time, she discovered that our sitting area, located right in the middle of all the rooms was the safest place, so she decided to sleep there, and insisted that I sleep with her on the floor, on a mattress.

At about 2 am Saturday morning, once again, we began to hear shelling and shooting even heavier than before. I estimated that all this came from down below our house, but had no idea where it was directed. Dalia of course woke up and sat on my lap in great fear. After a long half hour of shelling, suddenly the neon light fell, the house shook; it was as if we were in the midst of an earthquake, glass broke, we had no idea where, it sounded like everywhere, and Dalia was stunned with fear. Everyone else crawled into our hiding area, including Reem our one year old.

This battle went on and on and on till 6 am in the morning. Those were the longest 4 hours in Dalia's and certainly my life.

Four days later, we were able to get back to our house, when the curfew was lifted so that people could obtain basic provisions. First, we were shocked by our stairs, so dirty, leftover food, leftover urine, leftover everything. As we entered, the entire door was broken and out of place completely. We went in, there was unbelievable dirt around, all over, everything thrown to the floor.

In the bedroom, all was on the floor, and then we began to discover what they had stolen: all my wife's gold, my children's jewelery, even the little gold bracelets and ear-rings of our one year old Reem that people usually give here at the birth of a girl; They also stole my sunglasses, my cell phone charger, there was no money in the house that I left, but they had stolen our Dalia's pocket money, around 50 shekels that were in her piggybank. They tore the curtains. The kitchen utensils were on the

floor, our provisions, like rice and lentils were on the floor, and the bathroom, I will not speak about the bathroom.

Even Dalia's storybooks and toys were torn and on the floor. And they also tore out Dalia's drawing of tanks as well as her notebook of stories. They even stepped on and soiled Reem's bed covers for a reason I just cannot understand. All the other neighbor's homes were destroyed in the same way.

I just cannot understand. I can see that they wanted to use the house to sleep and rest, but I cannot fathom why they would destroy and steal this way. I feel bitter, very bitter.

Jara and Tamer's mother

from Bethlehem

Some of Jara's games reflect the political situation. Yesterday she asked me to stretch my hands so as to handcuff me and put me in prison. In fact, there are some hundreds of blinded and handcuffed men from the Bethlehem area who are presently held in a military camp above Beit Jala. In another game, Jara takes a tree branch and uses it as a walking stick, playing a man who is injured by Israeli shooting. Afterwards she picks up the stick and makes a shooting gesture. Like kids do, she brags in front of the other children that she belongs to the shabab, the armed young men.

She parades with her breast forward, shouting ween al-sha'ab 'arabi - where is the Arab people, a well-known song often displayed on local TV. Meanwhile she keeps laughing and tells other kids not to be afraid. She divides the world into people who shoot and who don't. Watching Tony Blair on TV, she suddenly asks, "Does he shoot?"

Palestine Counselling Center emergency hotline

The phone rings again. His name is Malek. He is still scared - he can't breath - he hears the soldiers outside - he is originally from Jericho - but he can't get home. He's scared.

"I'm isolated ... I'm scared. I have contacted my family in Jericho and I'm still scared."

'Try to contact your neighbors in the same building and talk to them - it may comfort you. Take deep breaths, move around and turn off the TV, think happy things...about your family in Jericho. Think happy things ... you will go home to your family soon in Jericho.'

Malek was still scared and decided to go upstairs to his neighbor's apartment.... He never made it. Think happy thoughts... you will see your family soon. They will meet you at the entrance of the city - in your casketthink happy things...Malek..... we know that you were scared but we did not expect you to be shot in cold blood as you were leaving to your neighbor's house because you were scared - your words were supported by the fear in your voice. We still have the notes we took from your calls....

"I'm alone in a restaurant - I'm 19 and I'm alone - I don't need food -but I'm scared...I'm scared, I feel isolated...I contacted my familyI'm scared."

Assaf Oron

an Israeli army reservist and a refusenik

I did and witnessed as a matter of fact, deeds that I'm ashamed to remember to this day. And fortunately for me, I did not have to witness or do anything truly 'pornographic', as some friends of mine experienced. Since 1987, this cruel, impossible, unnatural, insulting reality in the Territories has been exploding in our face. But because of our unshakeable belief that the Palestinians are monsters who want to throw us into the sea, we reacted by trying to maintain what we've created at all costs. This meant of course employing more and more and more force, with the natural result of receiving more

and more and more force in return. When a fledgling and hesitating peace process tried to work its way through this mess, one major factor (perhaps THE factor) that undermined it and voided its meaning was our establishment's endless fear and suspicion of the Other. To resolve this fear and suspicion we chose the insane route of demanding full control of the Other throughout this process. When this Other finally decided that we're cheating him out of his freedom...violence erupted, and all our ancient instincts woke up.

There they are, we said in relief, now we see their true face again. The Arabs want to throw us into the sea. There's no one to talk with...and they understand only force. And so we responded as we know and love, with more and more and more force. This time, the effect was that of putting out a fire with a barrel of gasoline. And that's the moment when I said to myself, No, I'm not playing this game anymore.

The Israeli government, in its policies of Occupation, has turned the Territories into a greenhouse for growing terror! We have sown the seeds, grown them, nurtured them – and then our blood is spilled and the centrist right-wing politicians reap the benefits. Indeed, terror is the right-wing politician's best friend. You know what? When you treat millions of people like sub-humans for so long, some of them will find inhuman strategies to fight back.

A resident of Ramallah

who prefers to remain anonymous

Shops are already being destroyed. Waiting for our turn. Female suicide bomber detonated herself in a supermarket. Go figure. We're living in a pressure cooker. One has to ask what it takes, what level of hopelessness one has to come to in order to blow oneself up, though I don't agree with this tactic. Israel's killing innocent civilians, and I don't think it's okay for Palestinians to do the same, though I refuse to call them (the bombers) terrorists. Obviously I feel awful about the victims of the bombings, but I include the bombers themselves victims, as well. Everyone's a victim of this occupation.

Samira and I are afraid to go to sleep. We sit on the living room floor and listen to our refrigerator hum, waiting for the army to come to our neighborhood. Maybe we sound silly, but if you try

to imagine knowing that men with M-16's are invading neighborhoods all around you and actually entering people's flats, you can begin to imagine the fear we're feeling. We're going to bed now. It's 3 am and we don't think they're coming tonight.

Hakam Kanafani

Ramallah

Still under siege. We remain in high spirits. We were not allowed out of the house again today. The Israeli army declared Ramallah a war zone. Funny, I thought this was a vacation of some sort. I'm glad the Israelis clarified the situation. All these dead bodies, all this destruction needed an explanation. We finally got one: a war zone.

I called my friends in Egypt and around the world. I called my Jewish friends too. Both are in shock. I asked my Jewish friends, "are you better off today than you were before Sharon?" I got no direct answer, albeit, I got some anti-terrorism sentiments and 'we must defend our civilians' comments.

The Israeli army is moving from one house to the next looking for terrorists. God, with 3 million Palestinian terrorists still alive, the job is difficult to conclude. 2 of my terrorist neighbours – one is 3 years old, the other is the CEO of Palestine's first mobile network – are gingerly looking outside through their window. A father and his daughter, 2 terrorists, in turmoil. The mother – she is a pregnant terrorist – is asking them to move away from the window. The father, always upbeat, calls me and invites me to his house for lunch. He is willing to share his food and water with a neighbour. Reckless, yet inspiring. I decline, and I offer to come for tea instead. He insists. I decline again.

Ghadir

from Nablus

F-16 fighter jets and tanks shelled unmercifully the Old City. 4 ancient soap factories were shelled, the heritage of Nabulsi, Kan'an, Masri and Rantisi, destroyed. 2 of the factories simply vanished from the earth. These factories are

the history of Nablus. They have been the main source of economy throughout the centuries.

One of the oldest mosques in historical Nablus, the al-Khadra, was hit when an F-16 jet fired missiles. In fact, most of the mosques and a church in the Old City were severely damaged. There was nobody inside the mosque. There was a curfew. There is no military reason for destroying this mosque.

Most of those who were killed in Nablus were civilians. The grandmother of the Shu'bi family was recovered from the ruins of her home. Among the 7 family members, only she survived. She lost her husband, her son and his wife, who was pregnant, her daughter and her grandchildren. The grandmother said she kept hearing her 2 grandchildren moaning for 2 days before they died.

Poorly armed Palestinians stood bravely in an attempt to defend their city, their heritage, their people. They were killed and others were forced to surrender in the face of heavy weaponry and taken to unknown destinations. Those who were lucky escaped and fled outside the Old City. The Israeli army shelled them from tanks and planes.

The 78 martyrs in Nablus were kept in a refrigerated truck belonging to Al-Safa milk factory. They were not allowed to be buried until 2 days before the Israeli soldiers left the city center. They were buried in mass graves. No funeral was allowed. All the families of martyrs received condolences at the same spot. Bereaved mothers, sisters, wives, daughters stuck on badges with the name of dead loved ones. Some of them had more than one badge. Members of the Shu'bi family wore 6 badges.

Residents of Nablus, after being locked up in their homes for 17 days, poured out to the dusty and ruined streets, filled with damaged or destroyed cars, broken street and traffic lights. They saw their city in ruins, their businesses looted, offices turned into rubble, electricity and phone lines cut, water networks destroyed. The broken sewage system and piles of garbage added to the misery.

They cried when they saw the destruction. They cried out their helplessness to see the ruined history of their city. They are witnesses of hatred and 21st century barbarism.

It will take a long time before life returns to normal. Grief and anger is left.

Islah Jad

from Ramallah

Jad was shot. A bullet in his head, how and where nobody knows. The group with him do not know what happened to him, but everybody thought that he was arrested with them. Maher, my son, had insisted that Jad spend the night in our house. We knew he had no family in Ramallah, but he was shy and insisted on leaving. If he had not gone, he would still be with us, safe and alive.

Jad was found stripped of his clothes, except his underwear, in one of Ramallah's streets in a pool of his own blood with his clothes beside him, with one of his boots missing. He was lying in the Ramallah Hospital morgue for 11 days, nobody recognized him.

Some people advised my son to check the morgue, just in case. My son saw Jad's green jacket and the blue shirt he had lent him the last time he was in our house. He was cold. The jacket and shirt were full of blood, but he realized immediately that it was Jad, his dear friend. Dead.

We saw Maher coming out of the morgue and we all collapsed. "We told his mother" said Maher " but she does not want to believe us. We had to ask a photographer to take a picture of him to send to her. But the problem now, is how are we going to send him to his village while we're under curfew and taking the road to Nablus is like Mission Impossible?"

To this hour, we don't yet know what to do. Maybe an angel will come tomorrow morning to take his body back to his home and to his mother.

Alaa

from Nablus

One night they took away my younger brother. He was wearing jeans and shoes. They did not tell us where he would be taken. The only word in Arabic they know is 'uskout', meaning, shut up. We were afraid that he was taken away to be used as a human shield. When my younger brother understood that he was taken away to be used to enter the old city, he started shouting to warn anyone in their way. The

Israeli soldiers got angry and started to beat him heavily. They continued to take him to several homes, entering from the roof and pushed him in front of them. They fired their gun while they rested it on my brother's shoulder.

My brother fainted and he was beaten again. Fortunately, after a few hours they brought him back. He was bleeding heavily. He lost consciousness again. Today, he still suffers both physically and psychologically from what he experienced. My older brother was taken immediately after the Israeli soldiers entered the building. After one week, we got him back.

Sam Bahour

from Ramallah

I just got off the phone with my brother-in-law. This is what he said: He was taken at 10:30am Friday after being told to come out of his home. At around 11:30 they were put in buses and taken on the Pesgot settlement by-pass road, via French Hill in Jerusalem to the Israeli military camp on the West side of Ramallah. They were dropped off in a dried up human sewage hole next to the military base. They stayed there until the next morning, outdoors with absolutely no shelter, food, etc. It was and still is very rainy and cold here.

At around 11am on Saturday they were taken inside the military base, 10 at a time, to be interviewed and photographed. Each was pictured (as they do in the movies) with their ID # on a carton under their chin.

They were then distributed to 3 sections each with 2 tents. He estimates that there were over 700 Palestinians being held. Every 5 prisoners were given 3 80 x 180cm sponges to sleep on. With the rain these become soaked. On the second night each five prisoners were given a wooden pallet to put under the now soaked sponges. He says that people have not slept for days.

Each tent was given one meal for 130 -160 people, which comprised of: 6 tomatoes, 15 apples, 15 cucumbers, bread (which he said was left-over from Passover), and uncooked frozen chicken schnitzels.

Every section had access to 3 outdoor toilet units, like the ones

used at construction sites. This was for around 150 people. He says these toilets were a total mess when they arrived, overflowing and really bad. The prisoners asked to speak to the commander in charge to request a pipe or something to open the drains and when he came hours later this is what he said and I quote: "You know the difference between me and you? I'm a human. Go open them with your hands."

May

a resident of Jenin City, whose house overlooks the camp

The army came into Jenin on Tuesday night. On the second day, they started using Apache helicopters to bomb the camp. There were 9 helicopters – we sometimes would hear 2 missiles within a minute. The resistance was day and night, the resisters had prepared themselves and had collected weapons. For six days the Israeli army was unable to enter the camp.

People surrendered because there was no food, no water, no electricity, the children were hungry and houses had been burnt. Tanks would shell the first floor of a house, and helicopter missiles the top floor, so the whole house would burn. I could see from my house people leaving the camp last Monday, the second wave left on Tuesday and the third wave today. The people who stayed were families who had sons in the resistance, and they finally left when the fighters asked them to leave when they had no more bullets....Each fighter who had no more bullets would drop his gun and dress in civilian clothes to join a group of people who were leaving.

On Monday, when the first wave of civilians left the camp, they were shot at. It was panic. They were grouped in Haifa Street, which separates the camp from Jenin town. Women and children were separated from men, they were ordered to sit on the ground. There were about 150 men. They had to take off their clothes and shoes, and for those who might have been fighters, they had to stand naked and were tied up by their feet in groups of 5. They were taken to a village called Rommane and three other villages. ...

The curfew was lifted on Sunday, and when people went out the soldiers would shoot at the ground in front of them, so people couldn't go out to buy any supplies. Right now, I don't have water, electricity and food; the neighbours gave us some

bread today. Firefighters distributed food yesterday and today, but they haven't reached our area yet.

Today, the last wave of people left the camp, men under 15 or over 60 were allowed to go to Jenin town, about 70 people came to our area. Some were barefoot. They were starving and thirsty. We collected food for them in the neighbourhood. They were exhausted.

A 70-year old man, whose son died recently, explained that he had been through the 1948 war and that this time was much worse.

Before they were allowed to go to Jenin, women were gathered in one room. A soldier started beating one of them, another soldier started shouting and saying that women should not be beaten. The other soldier cursed him.

Bulldozers are now still destroying houses. It seems that collaborators told the IDF to hit the houses of the fighters and when they gathered to eat, the place where they were would be bombed. The army was trying to hide what happened by asking people to bring corpses lying in the streets inside the houses, and they are now bulldozing houses and burning them to hide the corpses under the rubble.

Nadera Ahmad Gazzawi

30 years old from Jenin

They begin to speak on the loudspeakers for the guys to come out, just the guys. It was three minutes before the last prayer for the day and my husband says to the guys he just wants to pray and get out. They say, come let's go, but he says 'No, I just want to pray and then get out'. My husband was not a fighter. He was just an ordinary man.

He gets out of the house and they order him to take off his clothes. So he begins to take off his sweater and they say take off all of your clothes so he continues to take off all of his clothes. That was near the house. So they say to go to the center of the camp, that is where they are collecting the guys. He says 'I don't know where the center of the camp is'. So they say 'let someone from the neighborhood show you'. He asks them for some of his clothes. He says, 'how can I go without clothes?'

The soldier says 'put your clothes in the black bag and contin-

ue! So he puts his clothes in the black bag. When he reaches the middle of the camp, they just shoot him from the back.

He knows where the center of the camp is but he says he doesn't know because he doesn't want to go there like this, with no clothes.

After they shoot him, a boy of 15 from the neighborhood approaches his body and falls down unconscious from the sight of the body. So they ask some people to take him aside. They refuse, because they are afraid of the soldiers, but the soldiers are afraid to go near the body, so they force them by putting guns up to their heads and tell them they must first take off his pants and take him aside.

So they do it.

They don't find anything in his trousers, they don't find anything on his body as they suspect, so they just go inside the tank and run over his body and then my husband's body.

Kathy Kelly

**member of the International Solidarity
Movement visiting Jenin**

As we climbed higher, entering the demolished center of the camp where close to 100 housing units have been flattened by Israeli Defense Forces, we heard snipers shooting at a small group of men who had come to pull bodies from the rubble. Covered with dust and sweat, and seemingly oblivious to the gunshots, the men, all residents from the camp, pursued the grim task. With pickaxes and shovels, they dug a mass grave. They pulled four bodies out of the rubble, including that of a small child. Little boys stood still, silently watching. One of the many soldiers who stopped us as we walked into Jenin City, several days earlier, told us there were no children in the camp during the attack. That was a lie. But now I wonder if it may have become a strange truth. The concerned frowns on the little boys' faces belonged to hardened men.

An older boy, perhaps 10 or 11 years old, helped carry his father's corpse to the mass grave.

Jeff sat down on a rock and shook his head. "After September 11, I drove toward New York City, and all along the highway carloads of volunteer firemen sped past me, coming from all over the

country, to help at Ground Zero. Here, bullets paid for by US taxpayers are being fired on people simply trying to bury their dead."

A family trudged single file, silently, uphill through the debris, carrying their belongings on their heads. Their faces were wracked with grief. One woman carried an infant in her arms. No one spoke as they approached the hilltop. At the top of the hill, in front of a house that was still somewhat intact, a large family was seated as though posed for a family photograph, surrounded by devastation.

Thawra led us to what was once her home. The house is still standing, but every other house in the area is completely demolished. She quickly collected some clothes, then went to the third floor and returned holding her fiancé, Mustafa's, blue jeans in her arms. Her eyes welled with tears. We began to wonder if she had lost all hope of finding Mustafa.

A few feet away, Hitan, age 20, and Noor, age 16, dug through the debris with their bare hands to retrieve some few belongings. Hitan found a favorite jacket, torn and covered with dust. She fingered the pockets, then set it aside. Noor laughed as she unearthed a matching pair of shoes. Then Hitan saw the edge of a textbook and the sisters began vigorously digging and tugging until they pulled out five battered and unusable books. Noor held up her public health textbook. Hitan clutched *The History of Islamic Civilization*.

She stood and pointed emphatically at the small hole she and Noor had dug. "You know," she exclaims, "underneath here, there are four televisions and two computers! All gone. Finished."

I asked Mohammed if he knew a man sorting through a huge mound of rubble next to where we stood. "He is my cousin. That was our home. He wants to find his passport or his children's documents." Mohammed's cousin then sat down on top of the heap that was once his home, holding his head in his hands.

An army surveillance plane flew overhead.

"We are clear," said Mohammed. "We are not animals. We are people with hearts and blood, just like you. I love my son. I want the life for my family. What force do we have here? Is this a force?" He pointed to the wreckage all around us. "Do we have the atomic bomb?" "Do we have anthrax?"

Daoud Kuttab

journalist, director of the Modern Media Institute and Al Quds Educational TV Station, Ramallah

"Eat, drink and destroy". This was the Hebrew graffiti left on our bulletin board when our building was occupied, our television station taken off the air and our premises were converted into a detention center.

We had tried to build a TV station that was neither a government mouth-piece nor a commercial station living by game shows and shampoo

Early on, senior leaders in the Palestinian Authority were not happy with us. When we broadcast live sessions of the elected Palestinian Legislative Council, Palestine TV jammed us. When we aired a session dealing with corruption in the Palestinian Authority, I was arrested and held in a Palestinian jail for 7 days.

On our screens we have dealt with children's rights, problems of early marriage among young Palestinian women, physical and sexual abuse of children, our society's lack of respect for individuals with disabilities, the environment, public health and family planning.

We felt that we were contributing to building a cohesive progressive society that would be the foundation of an independent state.

We embarked on a brave television co-production; a Palestinian-Israeli version of Sesame Street. We wanted to teach both our children mutual respect and tolerance.

When the latest Israeli incursion occurred we tried our best to keep our cool despite the next to impossible mission of running an educational television station in such times. Tanks were rolling around our city, our staff were under curfew and we were cut off from each other except for telephone contact. We repeatedly broadcast 13 public service messages co-produced with UNICEF with the aim of helping parents and children deal with the trauma of violence.

The soldiers destroyed our studios, stole cameras, videos, computers and irreplaceable video archives and data. Our two remaining staff members were arrested and held for four hours in the cold before being released. Moments before their arrest they turned off the transmitter fearing that the Israeli soldiers would repeat what they did at another local station, Watan TV,

where they kicked out its staff and after a while started broadcasting pornographic material.

On the monitor of a non-linear edit suite contributed to us by the Danish government, they wrote: 'the price of terrorism'. A family photo of one of our staff with her 7-year-old daughter was crossed out with a large X.

Perhaps the most telling graffiti left by the Israeli soldiers on our college campus were the words: PALESTINE NEVER.

Osnat

an Israeli film-maker who lives in Tel Aviv.

With Palestinian friends she organized the first joint Israeli-Palestinian Human Rights Film Festival in January 2000

I'm so happy to hear from you... Yes these are horrible days, more than I could imagine in my worst dreams. It's not that I didn't expect things to explode. Visiting the West Bank and Gaza like I did, seeing all the expansion of the settlements while there was no progress in what was called then the "Peace Process", it was a question of time. But still it is very hard to understand or realize the real meaning of it. I didn't think, for example, that I wouldn't be able to see my friends in Ramallah for so long. 18 months!! But more than this, that I wouldn't be able to help them in their hard times or do anything except demonstrate which doesn't help here now at all. Not less is to see what is happening to the people here.

How the majority has become so blind to the suffering of people that live so nearby their homes. I realize it now more than ever that for most of the people and for sure for the government here - the life of Israelis is worth much much more than the life of Palestinians. Not that it wasn't like this before. It's been like this since 1948, with the kind help of the UN.

It just drives me crazy. I can't stand it. This Apartheid culture.

I keep in touch with many of the other festival guests and for all of us it feels like another time, another world, but, yes, I keep up the hope..

Sam Bahour

from Ramallah

I am receiving many messages from Israeli friends who are trying to offer help. Truth is they feel just as helpless as us under curfew, or for that matter, as an American under Bush. Here is an excerpt from one friend, an Israeli mother: "...really all words mean nothing anymore. Israel is the real loser, the ugly aggressor. Just like after Hitler Germans were ashamed to be Germans, now Israelis are going to be in the same position. No matter how many Palestinians are killed Israel will never succeed in justifying stealing your lands, your lives, your futures, your safety, and all they can, and then calling you terrorists because you don't take it quietly enough!..."

My girls are doing fine. We have been extremely lucky so far. The band we created is now fully able to recite "We Shall Overcome". We have more work to do on the accent and rhythm, but we will be ready for the activity we are planning. To sing to the tanks while Powell is in the area...maybe he can understand English, civil rights style. My oldest daughter Areen, keeps asking the same question about the meaning of the word "overcome", "Does it mean, at the end, both sides will not kill each other, you know the Israelis visit us in Ramallah as tourists and we go to Hafia as tourists". I assured her - exactly.

Nadine, my 2 year old has her first vocabulary down pat, *dabab-ba* (tank), *takh* (shooting) and *tayerah* (helicopter). Not only can she differentiate, her reaction takes appropriate shape depending on the size of the blast or sound. She freezes, tilts her head and noticeably puts her ear to the air and either heads straight to mom, or says *Bahh takh* (shooting gone) and continues her daily activities, which now happens to be potty training.

Islah Jad

from Ramallah

I had to wait for an hour to get some meat. While I was waiting, women told their stories. An old woman wearing a cross around her neck berates the butcher: she used to be called 'za'ima', (boss or leader), and was welcomed with a cup of coffee, but now she's been standing around for an hour and nobody has even looked at her. The butcher is too busy serving

the crowd. She turns to me, "They came to search my house yesterday for who knows what. They want to steal; they were not searching, but I did not keep my tongue in my mouth, I gave them a very cold shower, I told them 'You steal our belongings to make us beggars. We will never tend our hands to you, not for our rights nor for our living, we will stand up again and take our rights!' He did not like me talking it seems" she says, "because then he pushed me aside, see my arm with these bruises? But I don't care. They will not make me feel afraid!"

On my way back I met my son Maher with some friends, he looked tense. "Look what I found on the ground", said my son, "Jad's key with his medal, in the same place where he was shot dead."

I tried to change the subject, but Maher does not want to forget about Jad, he is haunted by his memory all the time and he has become very depressed. He does not talk, he does not eat well and he scarcely sleeps.

"Your phone is always busy!" Zahira said, "Finally I got you!" Then she starts her long narrative: "Yes, I went to Jenin and whatever I tell you is not at all like seeing it for yourself! We went to visit a group of people, they put them in Jenin's charitable society after forcing them to evacuate their homes. A very big crowd, all on top of each other, as if you were to put 20 people in one square meter! Unbelievable!

They wanted to talk, to tell their stories," said Zahira. "A woman in her forties, the wife of the Imam of Jenin's mosque (Sheikh Mohamed al Sa'adi) told me that they announced with loud speakers that all men from the age 15, should come out."

"My husband thought that being an Imam, they would spare him some humiliation, and he could not leave his old paralyzed mother, she cannot walk, she has to be carried and none of us can carry her. He decided to stay with us. Then they called for women to come out, we left together. He was carrying his mother, and our two daughters and I followed him. They stopped him and told him, 'Why did you come out when we called the women and not men? Are you a man or a woman? Let's check and be sure that you are a man!'

"They asked him to take off all his clothes including his underwear, and to turn around, then forced him to carry his mother and walk naked in front of me and his two daughters till we reached this place."

Rifat

who lives in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem. He's head of the East Jerusalem branch of an international NGO.

40 days full of sadness, fears but also anger. Anger against all, Israel, the USA, the Arab World but also the International Community which claims to be civilized. We were left alone massacred and slaughtered by the people who suffered the same just fifty years ago. The oppressed have become the oppressors.

There is no peace on the horizon, Sharon and his government don't want peace, they want to transfer the Palestinians from their land. It is not a myth, it is a reality and the future will show you that this what will happen and the International Community will say that they did not find out about this in time. Just like in Rwanda or Kosovo and many other places in the world where the victims were just left alone to face their destiny and the result was massacres and more massacres.

A report from Gaza

Life has taken on a surreal quality in Gaza. We sit in our offices more silently than usual. The news hasn't improved and no one has anything to say. The waiting game continues. When will they come for us? Nobody knows, but people here are pessimistic enough after five decades of experience to assume that it won't be long.

Sand-hill barricades have begun to appear around the crumbling camps and the towns. Children construct their own barricades from garbage, stacking it tightly in rough piles nearly as high as they are. If you close your eyes, you can imagine for a second that they are effective tank-deterrents.

And the ragged, bleary-eyed men with guns slung over their shoulders at the street corners are the superior fighting forces poised to take on the Israeli Defense Forces - the sixth most powerful military in the world - when they come rolling into town.

What is routine has become absurd. An ice-cream truck drives around Gaza City, day after day, hour after hour, with Beethoven's Für Elise piping out of its loudspeaker, as if from

a tin whistle. I'll never hear this tune again without feeling that I am caught in the eye of a storm. No one ever buys ice cream.

Islah Jad

from Ramallah

Since the Israelis left the city I have not ceased participating in meetings and debates to analyze what happened. All the people I know and saw in these meetings were smoking French cigarettes instead of the American brands. Everyone feels that something big has happened, but they don't know what exactly.

"Are we defeated?" asks one of the audience members at a recent meeting. The response was quite complex. President Arafat feels victorious. Sharon wanted to eliminate him and destroy all the Palestinian Authority, but he could not. Arafat is still in his office, and the PA will be rebuilt again.

Do the security forces and the militants feel defeated? "No, who said that they could stop the strongest army in the region with their very old, light, poor weapons? "We shall not be brought to the ground or dance to Israel's tune and timing, rather, we will simply strain and weary them rather than confronting them. We are not defeated. This is our country and we have to resist until we achieve our independence. They did not break us or our will," said one of the militants.

As for me, I don't feel defeated either. Like most in the audience in these meetings, I was not asked to resist or to participate. No one asked the people to do anything, not even to build shelters or stock food, no one talked to us to tell us what is going on or what will happen and what to do when it happens. We were just following the news and hearing the very contradictory statements from some Palestinian officials. So, as part of the people, I do not feel defeated. I am still living on my land, in my house and I am still rejecting the Israeli occupation and feel that we have to resist it by whatever means we have.

But, it is impossible, after such a brutal military attack and all the destruction it inflicted upon us, to say that nothing has changed. Yes, many changes have happened. Now we are 'fully' occupied; the Israeli army can come at any moment, to arrest, destroy or kidnap.

I realize that no one is safe now. The feeble legal framework of Oslo is broken. We are under "semi-direct" occupation. I say "semi" because the Israeli orders are not directed at us directly, but at the Palestinian Authority, unless they want to arrest some one, or demolish a house, or kill a "targeted terrorist," in this they do the "job" themselves.

That is why, at all the meetings I attended recently, people were asking for the reform of the Palestinian Authority, people were asking for a real rule of law, a genuine participation in the decision making process, an active Parliament, and new elections to renew the blood of the political system. All of these demands aim at bettering people's lives, so that they can resist better, be steadfast longer, not to enable or facilitate or to better manage the occupation.

Hakam Kanafani

Ramallah

So, I believe the best way to end is to communicate what I learned from this experience (other than rationalized cooking, of course).

I learned that my mother is God's most valuable gift. I learned that I work for a great company. I learned that I work with great people. I learned that wetting the candle doesn't make it burn any slower. I learned that resilience is Palestine's most precious asset. I learned that dignity can never be forced out of the Palestinian psyche.

I learned that us Arabs still lack the freedom to create, the will to democratize and the courage to be critical of our way of life.

I learned that only war brings the Israelis together. I learned that Israelis, unfortunately, like many terrorists around the world, still believe that killing civilians is something that is "forced" upon them.

I learned that Palestinians and Israelis are each other's predicament.

But the most genuine lesson I learned is that Life Is Good. I am happy to be alive, I am happy to still be able to breathe, to still be able to walk, and to still be able to love. Life in Palestine is not dead. We shall overcome. And yes, indeed, I know, we will be free. We will be free.

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