

Narrative resources

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The Artas participants during an advocacy performance



SCHOOL CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES (14-16 YEARS)

The Mukhtar's Mercy

Four years ago, a large truck crossed the center of my village carrying vegetables and fruits for sale. After the driver sold his goods to the village dwellers, he left a location near the "Ain" (spring). When he drove up the hill, some boys jumped on the back of the truck. When the driver suddenly put on the break in the middle of a slope in the road, the boys fell down from the truck. One of them, 12 years old, came under the tires of the truck and was crushed.

He died immediately. The driver left the scene quickly as he was afraid for being killed by the child's family. He hid in a neighborhood of the village named Al Jouroon (treading place) and took refuge in a nearby house lest an angry crowd would follow to kill him.

The dead boy's father happened to be the chief of the village (mukhtar). When his boy was brought dead in front of him, the crowd informed the mukhtar that the boy's killer was hiding in a nearby house. Quickly, the mukhtar went to the place and informed the owner of the house that he, the mukhtar, would be responsible for the safety of this driver.

The chief took him to his house and invited all family members and the local community to a meeting. When all were present including the driver's family and the village dignitaries, he brought the driver next to him and delivered a very short statement: "I forgive this driver for the sake of God."

A story of a catastrophe thus ended in forgiveness and generosity. It gave a good example to all the villagers.

Songs of Praise Entering the Prison Cell

This is a story of a political activist who was imprisoned by the military authorities. He was kept in a solitary cell. He felt hopeless and frustrated while listening to religious songs and praises to God coming from a nearby prison cell. After days of being annoyed these songs singing the Lord's praises began to console this prisoner.

When he kept hearing those praises, they started to support him in his sumud [steadfastness] and suffering. A sense of a calm peace and joy entered his heart and mind. Throughout his imprisonment of many years, the prayers and songs of praise compensated for his despair, frustration and suffering.

My Father's Example

My father has been a pious and religious man and practiced the virtues and values of mercy, love and tolerance. His love for God, neighbor and even the enemy was noticeable and much appreciated by the majority in my village.

Last year, some thieves attacked our house, stole money, shot down my young brother and ran away. The killer was caught by the village dwellers and brought up in front of my father after receiving a heavy beating and injuries. All my family members were angry and shouted, "Let us kill him as he killed our dear son." My wise father silenced them, then raised his hand to the sky, saying, "Leave him, God will judge him. From my side I will forgive him. I beg you to forgive him and God will judge him."

My dad's forgiveness made this killer into a human and peaceful man. My father's example was a great testimony to the principle of "Love One's Enemy" in the presence of all the people of our village.

The Qur'an and the Key

He was a young student in grade twelve. After his first semester marks were 96%, he came back home very happy. His father hugged him and promised him to purchase an expensive car if he would get a 98 grade in his tawjihi [matriculation exam].

Days passed by, the boy studied very hard, sat for the tawjihi exam, and scored 98%. He ran quickly back home shouting "My dad, dad..!" He did not find his father who was still at work. He kissed his mum's head and waited for his dad's arrival. His father got the news immediately. When he came, he told his son, "Take this gift."

The father gave him a box with a Quran. When the boy saw the gift he threw it in his father's face saying, "After all my hard studying, you are giving me a Quran?" He left the house very angry and sad.

After some days of absence and reflection, the boy repented for his wrongdoing and came back home. He was shocked to discover that his dad had died on the same day that he gave the gift. He entered his father's room and found the box open and the Qur'an thrown on the floor.

He began reading some Quranic verses. All of sudden he discovered a car key inside the box. This was what he had wanted to receive from his late father. He went into a shock, fainted, started weeping and crying. After hours of rest, his mum's family members came to accompany him.

Then he decided to begin a new life. He sold the expensive car and donated half the car's price to buy wheel chairs for those with special needs. His new slogan in life became: "Don't judge quickly, stay respectful, have a strong will, and you will succeed."

A 'No' Characterized Our Relation

I was brought up in a family of a boy and me as the only daughter. My parents used to treat me and my brother differently. When I finished my daily studies, I was refused to visit my friends. I felt lonely and isolated despite my intelligence and very good academic marks.

I did my best to convince my parents to give me some freedom. However, they always said "no." This "no" characterized our relations despite our mutual love. My need was just to have good and intimate communication with others.

One day our school introduced in my class a project called "Palestinian Youth: Sumud and Advocacy," through the AEI. I joined the training sessions and I learnt and acquired some dialogical and non-violent communication skills. I started to approach my parents better by posing questions, listening and convincing. I had a numbers of meetings with one of my trainers who became close to me and helped me.

My trainer and I sat several times with my parents and things became clear. The "no" was because of family, society and religious traditions. Slowly my mum began to accompany me during the visits. A kind of new friendship with my mum developed and the traditional restrictions began to slowly melt. This became a positive turning point in my life, thanks to this new way of learning I received at school.

Checkpoint Fear

I am a school girl from Al Shurfa neighborhood in the village of Battir. This neighborhood is closer to our school [in Beit Jala] than to other schools in Battir. The problem, which caused me fears and delays and absences, was that when going to school early morning I had to pass by a military checkpoint.

I joined our school project about non-violent communication, advocacy and sumud. My teachers gave me advice about how to talk about the problem with the school counselor so as to help me in my psychological situation. The PNA police who are stationed next to the Separation Wall in front of our school participated in the sessions and workshops. They helped me and other classmates to cross the checkpoints and other barriers. My school delays and absences stopped. My fears and feelings of shock decreased.

Obligated to Pay the Taxes

My grandparents and their sons including my father lived in a simple house. My grandfather owned a game store for his livelihood. This provided for the educational and health needs of his family.

However, after 1967 the occupation started repressive actions on a daily base against the Palestinian people. In 1987 the first intifada started and people went to the streets demanding their freedom and independence.

The occupation did not response positively. Their forces began to arrest the stone throwing youth and put them in jails. The Israeli government imposed curfews for days, weeks and months. High fines were imposed on people due to their refusal to pay taxes. At that time the occupation requested my grandfather to pay taxes like others but he rejected. After his refusal his house and shop were taken over and confiscated.

My grandmother stored some products at our relatives and friends' places. In the meantime, she was worried about my father and uncle after their graduation from high school. Both were active in the resistance. Before my father and uncle had the chance to leave for Greece to continue their higher education, the Israeli army arrested them and kept them for two weeks. My grandparents were obliged to pay the taxes in order to have them released.

Nowadays we live with our relatives in Beit Sahour in a quiet steadfastness, in spite of the ups and downs due to the unresolved political situation.

Oh Mum, Where Are You Going?

I woke up when hearing the terrible knocking and kicking of boots on our door. It was 2:30 early morning. The noises were unusual. They came from the soldiers of the Israeli occupation. "Oh mum," I shouted in shock and fear. She replied, "It's OK, my dear son." Immediately, my mum put on her hijab while the soldiers shouted "Open the door!" The kicks on the door damaged parts of it. My mum went quickly and opened the door.

The soldiers pointed their guns to my mum's chest. It was a horrible moment. The captain shouted, "All in the house must leave immediately." My mother cried: "There are small children. How can I bring them outside in such a severe and cold night?"

The captain had a sharp and loud voice. He ordered the soldiers to kick all out and ordered the family to have their arms pointing to their back. Later on the captain ordered my mum to bring her ID card. He declared, "You are under arrest." I was shocked, like my two young sisters and older brother.

Shouting, crying and shedding tears – that was what we did. Our close neighbors rushed to us after the soldiers left. I started to cry, "Mum, Mum where are you going? Why are you taking my beloved mum after my dad's death?" Our dear neighbors comforted my family and me. We then read the Quran and prayed for the Almighty God to give me and my family strength, patience, sumud and hope.

Inheritance

My younger brother approached me and asked me to close the door of the main room. He said, "We have to tell you about our father's death." I was sad and depressed. I moved to the sitting room to see my two other brothers. I saw my father's lawyer talking to them.

I was shocked when a loud discussion started. I looked at the lawyer, asking "What's wrong? Do we have to arrange any procedures? What do you want to tell us?" The lawyer said, "It is about the inheritance procedures. Your late father had many possessions." My younger brother said, "We want to finish these procedures fast. I have some businesses and I need my share from the inheritance. My brother wants to get married and work with me in the business."

I criticized my brothers, "The inheritance is our right but we just finished the funeral. What do you want the people to talk about us?"

The lawyer spoke loudly and emphasized that all of us should sign the papers and that he later on would take over responsibility.

I responded to the lawyer, "Okay, that's fine with me. I don't want anything from the inheritance. I will sign the documents and concede in favor of my brothers." I could not anymore bear what was going on and left the house in a hurry and angry.

I felt so bad, I went looking for a place to relax and try to accept reality. Hours passed. Then I got a phone call. I answered and heard the lawyer asking me to come quickly to the government hospital. I went rushing to the hospital as I wasn't aware what was happening. After entering the hospital I saw the lawyer wounded.

I was shocked, and immediately asked him, "What happened to you?" He replied, "After I left your home with your two brothers, we went into a car. After a couple of minutes we had a car accident because your younger brother was driving fast." I asked him, "What happened to my brothers?" He replied, "They are in danger, treated at the intensive care."

Suddenly someone came in and informed us that both my brothers had died due to bleeding. The lawyer offered condolences to me and said, "They were looking to get their inheritance but fate gave you their inheritance, in addition to more sadness."

YOUNG WOMEN'S NARRATIVES (18-30 YEARS)

Halla

Thirty years ago, a beautiful, innocent girl was born. She was named Halla. When eight months old, she got an infection and had fever. Due to her parents' ignorance and neglect, the fever caused a weakness in her hearing and speaking. When growing up, she suffered a lot because of this problem. Her classmates used to make fun of her, and her neighbors and relatives looked at her as an 'unnatural' girl.

Later on she decided to leave school. After some years Halla started to feel that she became a burden to her family as she did not continue her studies. Halla faced many problems while trying to achieve her dream to find a job. She tried to improve her personality, depend on herself and face her physical problem.

She asked her family to help her to go to a sewing center so as to learn sewing. She worked for 15 years in this field and became a skilled sewer. Through her work she supported herself and her family. She became a valuable person in an unjust society. Halla is now a girl full of hope and determination.

My Brother Controlling Me

I'm an eighteen-year old girl. We were with three girls and one boy in the family. My brother was much spoiled by my parents. Everyone had to listen to his word in the house, particularly his sisters. My sisters and I suffered a lot because of him, as he did not give us freedom to do anything. I felt an inner conflict about whether or not to leave or stay steadfast in the house.

I decided to stay but without letting my brother control me anymore. Every time I argued with him I tried to change him and respect me, but my parents always supported him. That's what made me even more annoyed. I continued my life with a determination not to let my brother control me.

Later on, I got married. I decided to teach my children that males and females are equal in rights and duties. I will teach my son to respect his sisters and not to control them.

The Stone

Ali is a 12-year old boy. He is the oldest in the family. He used to take care of the sheep when coming back from school.

His mother used to say: "Ali, Ali... Wake up my beloved... Wash your face, prepare yourself and come to have breakfast, it's ready." Ali then answered: "Okay mum." Afterwards Ali took the sheep to graze.

The green lands have become day by day more difficult to access because of the confiscation of lands by the occupation. It happened that while Ali was tending the sheep and singing a Bedouin song, the sheep started to run away quickly. An Israeli vehicle came towards Ali. One of the soldiers got out and told him: "Go away from here or I will shoot you."

The soldier held his gun and threatened Ali. Ali caught a stone from the ground to hit the soldier, but he then remembered that these people took his land and nothing could stop them except God. So he threw away the stone and went back home.

Maybe he gave up, or maybe he believes that God has a plan for everything, and that the sun of freedom will rise one day.

Designer Dream

I am an optimistic girl and have hope that one day I will be a designer. I want to be a famous designer and build a name inside and outside Palestine. Since I have a supportive family who all the time tries to listen to me and encourage me to achieve my dream, I think nothing will stop me.

But many times when I hear my friends at school how difficult their families are regarding their future and what they want to study and where, I thank God that my family is different and open. I think parents have to educate their children well, specially girls, if they want to change society.

Where There Is a Will There Is a Way

When I was in the last year of school, I told my teacher that I wanted to be an interior designer. The teacher smiled in an ironic way because she knew that I do not know how to draw and even don't like drawing. I told her that I liked this kind of study and that I wanted to work hard in order to succeed.

Then she asked me: "Does your family or your community [in Artas] accept such a study for you as a girl? I told her I knew they would initially refuse but that I could convince them to support me.

Thanks God I graduated with high grades. Now I am working as a designer and my family supports me. Nothing is impossible because where there is a will, there is a way.

Look at Life With a Smile

Once upon a time, I was looking at the window and saw a drop of water flowing on the glass. This image gave me hope and helped me to look at life with a smile and with love. I began my day recalling this image taking a cup of coffee and listening to the voice of the Lebanese singer Fayrouz. Then I prepared myself for the trip with the Arab Educational Institute.

The trip allowed me to visit the village of Walajeh and see the beauty of nature despite the ugly wall and nearby settlement surrounding the village like a prison. This visit gave me the chance to learn to know new people from different background and hear their stories about their needs.

I was so happy to get to know them and feel the love and respect they share. It was not just a visit or a trip, it was a wonderful day that allowed me to understand and hear the other. It was a good experience to understand their way of living and what it meant to live in such village. I went home and re-told the stories to my family. Special thanks to the AEI for giving us this opportunity.

Baby Ali

I am a girl from Walajeh village, west of Bethlehem. My neighbor was on bad terms with my family. Their conflict was a result of a quarrel about a plot of land. My dad went to the court and the case lasted for more than three years. All the family, including my brothers, my sister and I stopped talking with our neighbor or accompanying their children to school. A hostile atmosphere prevailed.

Suddenly, one night my mum heard shouting and crying in our neighbor's house. My dad rushed quickly in his pajama and entered their house. The neighbor's wife was about to deliver a baby. Without a word my dad brought his car and took the wife to hospital because the family had no car.

My father stayed side by side with the neighbor until his wife gave birth to a baby. There was joy and a feeling of gratitude due to my dad's help. After hours, the neighbors and my dad came home safe and happy. The neighbor decided to name his new baby "Ali," after my father's name.

This new life contributed to the beginning of a very constructive dialogue. The neighborly relations returned. Now both families live side by side in harmony and respect. This was for me as a young girl a great and inspirational event.

I Succeeded to Convince My Family

At first I was not convinced about the idea of the project, and to work on such an initiative as a woman. However, after I attended the training meetings I started to like the aim of the project, especially the idea of doing something of help for our village Artas. We decided to focus our initiative on the waste problem in the village.

As women we realized that our mission would not be easy and that we would face many obstacles, especially from the society's point of view. My family did initially not accept that I would succeed in such an initiative. Despite this, I insisted to continue until the end. What encouraged me even more was that I succeeded to convince my family.

I approached them by saying that the advocacy initiative was for the sake of the development of our village. Afterwards I began to work harder and more enthusiastic with the other women so as to make our village more beautiful and cleaner. Many other male and female youth started to like our work. They were encouraged to cooperate with us which added richness to our campaign.

First Initiative by Women

I'm a twenty – year old girl and a divorcee, living in a small village [Artas] in a patriarchal and male society where traditions restrict girls' ambitions. I was a small girl with big dreams and ambitions, successful in my study. My dream was to become a doctor to help poor and needy people.

I grew up and finished my school and here was the shock: Because of our financial condition I had to give up my dream of becoming a doctor. I decided to study computer systems. I worked beside studying after my dad died. Later on, I graduated from university hoping that I would find a good job in the field of my studies. However, I found a job in a school.

A year later, I got married, but I divorced from my husband a few months later. I was pregnant and had a baby boy. After passing through these experiences, I began to forget about my dreams and life became routine.

One day I participated in the project given by AEI. My participation was the turning point in my life and in my village too because it was the first initiative started by women. We worked hard together and faced all the problems.

We succeeded to change society's viewpoint about women. We proved our people that women play a big role in society and that they can work in everything as they have all the abilities needed. Through this project we raised our voices and our case reached the responsible decision makers.

Arrest in the Night

It was eight thirty in the morning. An Israeli car belonging to the department of the civil administration was circling around in our area, Makab El Samen [Khan al-Ahmar]. Suddenly the Israeli vehicle went straight to one of the houses in this neighborhood.

The father of the house said: "It's early morning, who could be knocking on the door?" And the mother said: "Oh God, what is going on?"

The father opened the door and saw Israeli soldiers standing in front of his house. He asked: "What is wrong? Why are you here?"

An Israeli officer got out from the car and said: "We are here to inspect your house." The father and the mother said: "Why? What is going on? We didn't do anything." They did not know what was happening.

The soldiers entered the house without asking and looked everywhere. Then the officer started to interrogate the parents, asking: "Where are your children? What kind of work do they do?"

The mother answered: "They all work in Khan Al Ahmar, except my son Ahmad, he sleeps inside."

Then the officer asked to see Ahmad in order to ask him why he did not work. The mother told the officer: "It is recent that he doesn't work because there is no work."

But the officer insisted to see Ahmad. He took two soldiers with him and went to Ahmad's room. They woke him up.

Ahmad was surprised and shocked when he woke up seeing soldiers around him. Before he could say anything they tied his hands and took him away without him even allowing to change his clothes.

They thus arrested Ahmad without telling the parents their reason. They left them afraid and wondering what might happen to their son.

The Day I Will Keep in My Memory

"After failure comes success." "When there is determination we can reach our goals." I did not understand the meaning of these words until I saw some powerful feminist models who showed determination, will, success, passion and strength.

I was a college girl. All my ambition was to graduate from university and get a job. However, after participating in the project presented by the Arab Educational Institute,

and funded by the European Union and CAFOD, I started to see things in a new perspective with a sense of strength, ambition and success.

When we created the Artas women's Initiative and launched the "Artas Deserves to Be Beautiful" campaign to solve the waste problem in the village, a sense of responsibility started to grow in me. I felt that I was responsible for my village, I wanted it to be the most beautiful place, and I felt increasingly a sense of belonging.

I have been watching success stories with these women. They entered the field of tax collection [going along the houses to ask inhabitants to pay waste collection taxes] and achieved success. They began entering the houses to raise awareness about the problem of waste, and others went to schools to give training sessions to students.

They explained to the students about the tools of advocacy and campaigning. As a result, they won over some students and teachers as supporters and volunteers in the cleaning campaign.

We faced many difficulties and challenges, whether from traditions or from the society which looks at us as if we are wrongdoers who deserve punishment. In spite of these challenges and others, there were some beautiful moments when we saw the people, especially the young in our society, slowly changing and joining us in our campaign.

The date 21/12/2018 was the day that I will keep in my memory and heart. It was the beginning of success. I saw some young people who used to be our opponents or neutral bystanders coming to help us and participating in the ceremony.

This campaign didn't only change the village, but also changed the people and the society's perception. Above all it changed me. I have become a girl with ambitions seeking a better future.

Many thanks to those ladies who are filled with hope and belonging, and to the AEI that helped us to start our journey of achievement.