

Resource: Wall poster stories



Tank at the house

During the days of Israeli army incursions into Bethlehem in 2002, an Israeli tank was stationed on Hindaza Hill in front of our house. All of a sudden, while I was preparing breakfast, the tank started shooting in all directions. I saw people running into their houses. A woman fainted and I rushed to her, offered her water and waited at her side until the tense situation was over. After a while, people started to come out of their houses again. Then I heard that a young man had been killed while rushing for safety.

Mary from Bethlehem

*Supported by Janny Heerbeek and Sjaak Kuijer
Gouda
Netherlands*

Through the drainage pipe

My husband used to go to Jerusalem for his work but because of checkpoints and permit problems, he was forced to travel through the Wadi Nar by-pass road to the east

of Jerusalem. Frequently there were mobile checkpoints on this road. One day, my husband and his friend escaped the Israeli soldiers, who were on the look out, by crawling through an underground drainage system. In the end, they reached their workplaces safely.

Arlene from Bethlehem

Supported by Friends of Young Bethlehem
Gouda
Netherlands

Heritage

Once I was at an Arts and Heritage Exhibit in Tel Aviv. An Israeli lady approached me while I was touring the exhibition and told me, "This is *our* heritage". I responded quickly, "No, this is our *Palestinian* heritage". The Israeli woman brought a book with the title "Qawar of Jordan," to show it was not Palestinian heritage. I looked into it. It was written by a Palestinian author living in Jordan.

Therese from Bethlehem

Supported by Women in Black
Groningen
Netherlands

I am steadfast

I am a town councillor: I work hard inside my house: cooking, doing my daily tasks at home, taking care of my husband and children while at the same time working to earn a living. I also try to volunteer and participate in public activities. My friends and family strengthen my sumud (steadfastness) and encourage me, as a woman, to work in the fields of peace-building, Christian-Muslim living together, and interreligious and intercultural communication skills.

Fayza, from Doha, south of Bethlehem

Supported by Ruben de Jong
Rotterdam
Netherlands

House demolition

One day I went to the village of Al-Walajah west of Bethlehem accompanied by two university students from France. We went there to visit families whose houses had been demolished by Israeli soldiers. I was the translator. As we approached the small house, I saw a large heap of stones nearby that had once been a family home. The mother and the father welcomed us and the students started asking questions. The house looked so familiar... and then I discovered that the mother was one of my students whom I taught

at Bethlehem Secondary School for Girls. Oh poor Siham! She told us that her house had been demolished twice in one year. But it was built again by ICAHD* - an Israeli organization opposing the Israeli policy of demolishing Palestinian houses.

**ICAHD: Israeli Committee Against House Demolition*

Jala', from Beit Sahour

*Supported by Annemie de Boeck
Edegem
Belgium*

The bell

During the first Intifada, Israeli soldiers came to our neighborhood looking for teenage activists. They asked for them but did not find them. They kept ringing the bell of our house but we didn't open the door. At last my mother had a clever idea to stop them ringing the bell. She put off the electricity! The soldiers became angry and started shouting. When my mother finally opened the door the soldiers were very aggressive, "Why did you put off the electricity?" She answered quietly, "It was an electricity cut." One of the soldiers went to the electricity meter and kept the bell ringing in response to what my mother had done.

Randa from Bethlehem

*Supported by Mary C. Grey
Twickenham
UK*

We lost below zero

The wall affected our economic situation in a terrible manner. As we say in Arabic, 'We lost below zero.' My brother and his wife had a drugstore and a store in Bethlehem for different kinds of products. They had twenty-three people working for us; twenty-three families lived from their business. But because the stores are close to the Wall, and people do not like to come there, there are no employees anymore.

Melvina from Bethlehem

*Supported by Japke van Malde
Leiden
Netherlands*

I am a dying woman

I used to belong to the Anglican Church in Jerusalem and was a volunteer there. I arranged the flowers and was active with the other women. Now I cannot go to Jerusalem; the Wall separates me from my church, from my life. All my life was in

Jerusalem! I was there daily: I worked there at a school as a volunteer and all my friends live there. I rented a flat but I was not allowed to stay because I do not have a Jerusalem ID card. We are imprisoned here in Bethlehem. All my relationships with Jerusalem are dead. I am a dying woman.

Antoinette from Bethlehem

*Supported by Martin Kofflard
Rotterdam
Netherlands*

Stand-off

I went to the checkpoint with my children after getting my Easter permit at the parish. As always, our rings and jewelry had to be put in the basket to go through the metal detector. My nine-year old daughter took off her bracelet. She went in and out of the metal detector several times, each time taking off something new but the machine kept beeping. Then the female soldier behind the bullet proof glass asked her to take off her pants, right there, in public. Can you imagine? Would you allow your daughter to take her pants off just like that, with everybody around? I told the soldier, "Why can't you take her somewhere private to search her?" She asked me to go back to Bethlehem. I told her, "You have nothing to do here, go back yourself to Tel Aviv."

Mary M. from Bethlehem

*Supported by Caritas, Jerusalem
(logo)*

The Wall Is on my heart

After the Wall around Rachel's Tomb was built, I felt terrible. Nobody was walking here, only the cats and dogs. The wall creates a feeling... the feeling that it surrounds you; that you are not permitted to move. Every time, every day you see the Wall. When I look outside through the window to see the sunrise or the sunset the Wall is in front of me. When I go to the Wall I feel that something closes in on my heart, as if the Wall is on my heart... When I see the Wall I also feel ashamed of myself, because it is created by human beings.

Melvina, from Bethlehem

*Supported by Lenie van Malde
Amsterdam
Netherlands*

Baking bread

In the Jalazon refugee camp, north of Ramallah, during a curfew the Israeli military severed the supply of gas and electricity. The women made a communal fire, which was kept burning with old shoes and rags when the wood had run out. When the soldiers came to put the fire out and throw away the dough, the women resisted, shouting: "Go

tell your leaders no matter what you do, no matter what kind of restrictions you impose upon us, we will not allow our children to starve. We will find a way to bake bread, and all your efforts to destroy our spirits are not going to succeed. What God has created, no one can destroy!"

From: Jean Zaru, "Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks."

*Supported by Thea Hesselink
Enschede
Netherlands*

The baby and the soldiers

Israeli soldiers were beating up a man in a crowded street. From all sides people rushed to the scene. Suddenly a woman with a baby came forward to the man and shouted: "Why is it always you who makes problems and goes to demonstrations! I am fed up! Take this baby of yours! I don't want to see you ever again." She laid the baby in the hands of the man, and ran away. The soldiers left the scene in confusion. When quiet came, the man returned the baby to the woman. They had never seen each other before.

A story from Nablus during the first Intifada (the late 1980s)

*Supported by Marijke Verhage
Haarlem
Netherlands*

Rescue

During one of the Intifada days, I, a young Palestinian woman, was four months pregnant and lost my baby because of Israeli tear gas. I was terribly depressed since it was the second miscarriage I suffered during the last three years. A week later I visited a medical doctor in Jerusalem for a check up. Coming out of the doctor's clinic, I saw, nearby, on top of an escalator an Israeli child who was recklessly playing and about to fall down. Thoughts rushed through my mind. Should I leave him and let him die the way the Israeli soldiers let my boy die a week ago, or should I make a desperate attempt to grab him? All of a sudden, I felt an impulse that made me hurry forwards. Throwing myself in front of the boy I prevented his fall.

Sylvana, from Bethlehem

*Supported by Thom Geurts
Tilburg
Netherlands*

Tax revolt

During the first Intifada the people of Beit Sahour had quite a lot of verbal confrontations with Israeli soldiers. The people organized a tax revolt under the banner of the American civil war: "No taxation without representation." They refused to pay taxes and after some weeks, the Israeli army came to each of their houses, one by one, to

confiscate household items. After their houses had been emptied some of the Beit Sahouri women told the soldiers, "Please stay, you forgot something. You cannot leave without my curtains."

Rana, Beit Sahour

Supported by Hiltje Wuite-Harmsma

Hengelo (Ov)

Netherlands

Return

When I was in Lebanon, I went to the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. We were carrying flowers to take to the collective graveyard that commemorates the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in 1982. On the way I met a woman who was in her late sixties. She asked me: "Where are you from?" "I come from Bethlehem, Palestine," I replied. She hugged me and kissed me. She even wanted to kiss my hand and she started to cry. She didn't want to leave me, and she said, "Please take me with you."

Jizelle, a teacher from Beit Jala

Supported by Sonja van Wier

Gersloot

Netherlands

On the ground

I am a Ukrainian woman married to a Palestinian man. During one of the last incursions of the second Intifada, Israeli soldiers gathered all members of my family in the house and ordered them to lie on the floor. At the time I was pregnant, but they forced me to lie on the floor too, along with my children. We had to stay on the floor for four hours while the soldiers were watching TV in our house. At one point, one of the soldiers started to laugh and throw sweets at us while we laid there.

Irina, living in Bethlehem.

Supported by Machtild and Johannes

Aachen

Germany

Worries

Once during the second Intifada, I was at my home in Bethlehem while my husband worked at a restaurant in Beit Sahour. All of a sudden, relatives and friends started to phone me to ask about my husband. I called his phone, but he did not answer. Then, I heard the sounds of shooting. I put on the TV to see what was going on. There was breaking news that a man had been killed at my husband's restaurant. I became very worried but there was nothing I could do. Late in the evening, to my great relief, my husband came back home safely. He explained to me that he and other workers had to hide behind the walls of the restaurant during the Israeli shelling.

Ghada, from Bethlehem

*Supported by Rosemarie Wechsler
München
Germany*

Reaching out

The Wall is like a sign to say: "Go away from here". It is intimidating. It is taking more and more of our land. If you go from the checkpoint toward Gilo you can see all the land that was taken for its construction, and the land what we can no longer access. Some of the land that was taken had belonged to my grandparents. Despite everything, we must continue to resist. To continue with our daily life is already a form of resistance. One example of resistance is coming here every day to the Sumud Story House. The Israelis want to stop our lives by pushing us out. We can resist with any sign of life, and any activity helps, because activities make people want to stay here. It doesn't have to be political. You can organize a concert or another cultural activity. These are ways that we can reach the world and the world can reach us.

Rima, from Bethlehem

*Supported by
Heleen ter Ellen
Brussels
Belgium*

Stuck

You drive next to the Wall (near Qalandia) but there are also buildings bordering the other side of the road. They built the Wall in the middle of the street and you're stuck between it and the buildings in a narrow channel, like cattle. You know what happens with cattle: The cattle are lined up and the machine takes them one by one while they can't move, like in a cage. The same happens to us. You cannot run away. You cannot backtrack. You cannot go left or right. You are stuck between the Wall and the other buildings. You're in a line and whatever happens, you cannot act on your own or control your own destiny. This happens all the time.

Maha, from Ramallah

*Supported by Gerard van Breevoort
Amsterdam
Netherlands*

Music

The Wall next to my house divides people. Music brings people together. I am a music teacher, and I know that music is a language which all people can enjoy. Music gives my pupils joy and life. Among my pupils have been my niece and nephew. My nephew has become an excellent pianist. Once I made a piece of music for a national song when I taught at a school in Beit Sahour. The occupation forbade the song... Imagine!

Rana, from Beit Jala

*Supported by Protestant church in Boxtel
Netherlands*

Donkey to prison

Today I live with my family in Walaja village. It isn't really our village. We named it after our original village that we had to leave behind [in 1948, during the Nakba]. We can still see our village on the hillside across from us, but we aren't allowed to go there. My son Taha was taken to prison when he was thirteen. When he was in prison, he built a miniature replica of the Al Aqsa Mosque. He dreams of praying there one day, though the Israelis won't give Palestinian men a permit to pray there till they are over fifty. My son Mustafa is a farmer. This winter he was carrying firewood home to us. The Israeli soldiers stopped him and made him stand out in the rain till nightfall. They took his donkey and told him they were taking his donkey to prison.

Hind, from Al-Walajeh village

*Supported by Ecumenical women's group Twente-Bethlehem
Enschede
Netherlands*

Ein Karem

I was born in Ein Karem in 1934. My grandmother was also born there. Ein Karem is a very old village where Muslim and Christian people used to live together. The Zionist army came to the village in 1948 and they were shooting. We were forced to leave because it was dangerous to stay. I was 13 at the time. Once, we went back to Ein Karem to see the village. We couldn't visit our home because the Israelis were there and they prevented us. My mother wanted to see our house, our furniture, our clothes and other belongings. But the Israelis didn't let her enter, instead, they locked the door.

Rose, from Ein Karem

*Supported by Ecumenical women's group Twente-Bethlehem
Enschede
Netherlands*

Diabetes

I have a son who was born with diabetes. Initially I took him four times a day to Caritas Hospital in Bethlehem, sometimes walking there in the rain. I refused to give him the shots myself because I couldn't bear seeing him injected and at the time I was pregnant and often felt depressed and tired. So I even walked with him during times of curfew. However, after a while I took a decision that I had to be strong in order to support him. Since that day I started giving him the shots myself and kept encouraging him. He is now twelve years old, in the seventh grade, an excellent student in his class and wants to study medicine.

Sandra, from Bethlehem

Supported by Ecumenical women's group Twente-Bethlehem

*Enschede
Netherlands*

My knees shaking

The soldiers would come and beat at the door with their guns. I had to go down. It was always me. If my husband had gone, they might have shot him. It was too tense. I went down the stairs with my knees shaking and I let them in. Upstairs my children would be crying, "Now is the time for shooting."

Carol A. from Bethlehem

Supported by Ecumenical women's group Twente-Bethlehem

*Enschede
Netherlands*

Laundry

It was during the second Intifada, or uprising, when the conflict was hot. One day in 2002, while it was curfew, I was putting up my laundry on our balcony. Suddenly, the soldier opened a small window and put out his gun. I tried to communicate with him to ask what was going on but he refused to speak. I was obliged to go inside but I observed him from my bedroom window until he went inside his tower. So then I returned doing my laundry again. Unfortunately, the soldier again climbed out of the window and I moved quickly inside. This happened no less than ten times and in the end I really drove him crazy and made him loudly screaming inside his watchtower.

Carol A., from Bethlehem

Supported by Ecumenical women's group Twente-Bethlehem

*Enschede
Netherlands*

Banging my head

Once during the first Intifada, at the end of the 1980s, some young boys from the neighborhood were throwing stones. Among them were my two sons who suddenly ran into the house. From the window I saw the soldiers approaching so I quickly sent my sons through an inside door to my father-in-law. When the soldiers knocked on the gate I told them that I had not seen anyone. They did not believe me and banged my head against the wall. I felt terrible. All I wanted was to protect the boys.

Farida Muslah, Beit Jala

*Supported by Keizersgrachtkerk
Amsterdam - Netherlands*

No compensation

Once my family and I went out to stop the Israeli bulldozers which were in my village to build the Wall. I shouted in the soldiers' faces, "Go away, this is my home." The soldiers told me, "We will give you compensation." "All the money in the world will not compensate me for the loss of my house," I said. A soldier tried to provoke me by arresting my brother. I grabbed and held my brother but the soldier pushed me and I fell on the ground. He started to beat me and my brother too. He even threw teargas at us. I tried to stand up to fight but fainted. An ambulance took me to the hospital.

Nadia, 38 years, Al-Wallajeh

Supported by Keizersgrachtkerk
Amsterdam - Netherlands

Furious settler

Once, at the end of the 1980s, I was watching the news. Suddenly, my husband, holding our baby boy of 10 months in his arms, rushed in through the front door and slammed it. A rifle crashed through the front door window and shattered the glass. I jumped over the glass and opened the door. A furious settler stood before me and shouted that my son had thrown a stone at his car window. I told him that my son could not have done it. He threatened to come back and kill whoever had done it and as he left he shot at our water tank on the roof. The next day he came back. With my heart pounding, I brought my elder son to the door. I knew he was innocent. After looking at him, the settler left.

Jala, from Beit Sahour

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen – Netherlands

Imagine that I die

One night, in 2008, I heard an ambulance. We turned on the local TV where the death of five freedom fighters was announced. They were killed in the centre of Bethlehem. Among them was our neighbour, in his early forties. The next day, following the Palestinian tradition, I went to offer condolences to his wife and children. His wife was in shock but after she had composed herself, she told me about her late husband. To be able to immediately hear any sound of intruders he used to sleep in the living room. Once he told the children, "Imagine that I die. Kiss me, and I bid you farewell." Afterwards he asked the children to take good care of themselves and their mother. Upon hearing this, I felt conflicting feelings: sadness, but also dignity and strength.

Nathalie, from Bethlehem

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen - Netherlands

Breaking the curfew

On 25 February 1994, the delivery of my daughter's baby was close. She called me to go with her to the maternity hospital in Beit Jala. It was the day that a fanatical Israeli settler killed dozens of Palestinian worshippers in the mosque in Hebron. The Israeli army imposed a strict curfew in the West Bank. I immediately left the house but at Manger Square I was stopped. The soldiers threatened to use their guns if I would not go home. Later in the night, it became rainy and cold and I saw my chance. I chose the narrow roads and reached the hospital where I saw my daughter and grandchild for some hours. I went back home trying to stay away from the soldiers and continued doing this each day for a week. I broke the curfew hours so as to feel the joy of our new baby.

Helen, from Bethlehem

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen - Netherlands

Intifada wedding

At the end of the 1980s, during the first intifada, my brother married a girl from Ramallah. A day before his wedding, PLO leader Abu Jihad was assassinated and it became extremely difficult to travel. At the checkpoint the soldiers only permitted the bride and her father and mother to cross to Bethlehem. After an exhaustive journey they reached the bridegroom's home. There were only ten people there, including the bride and bridegroom. The bride could only wear her wedding dress at an office near the church, as the Intifada regulations did not allow people to celebrate a joyful event. There was no dancing party and no honeymoon.

Lorette, from Bethlehem

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen - Netherlands

Hug

During the first Intifada Israeli tanks stood in front of our house. Our young men had to pass here to reach their work places in Jerusalem. The soldiers used to stop and delay them. They were sometimes made to stand for hours facing the wall of our house. One day, the soldiers stopped two young men. We couldn't hear the talk but the soldiers started to beat them. Suddenly, a woman in the street came out shouting and screaming. We heard her saying that the young men were her children. She hugged them and asked the soldiers what they wanted. She saved the young men whom she actually did not know.

Melvina, from Bethlehem

Supported by Inholland Studiereis groep 2012
Netherlands

Proof

Once I had an appointment at Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem for a scan of our fourteen-year old son. I went with him to the Bethlehem checkpoint and showed my permit and his birth certificate as proof that he was under sixteen. However, a soldier claimed that my son was older and that the birth certificate was false. When I tried to convince him he started to shout at us and another soldier heard us. That one began to interrogate me in Arabic and eventually he allowed us to pass. When we reached the next gate, still another soldier stopped us. Luckily, the soldier who gave me the previous OK stood nearby. At last, my son and I could go to hospital.

Sahar, from Bethlehem

Supported by Boet family
Gouda - Netherlands

Sodium

During the first Intifada, at the end of the 1980s, while I was in front of my house in the Anatra quarter of Bethlehem, I heard school children screaming. They had inhaled tear gas thrown at them by the soldiers. I went back to my house quickly and prepared a bucket of water with sodium carbonate. I hurried out to help them. The soldiers were after them, shooting tear gas canisters and even live bullets. Some of the children fainted. Although a soldier yelled at me, I handed the clothes soaked in the sodium water to the fainting boys to help them coping with the tear gas. Some soldiers tried to grab the clothes from the boys but they did not succeed and at last they had to retreat.

Ellen, Bethlehem

Supported by Doopsgezind Wereldwerk
Netherlands

Blindfolded

During a curfew in the first Intifada, the Israeli military came to our quarter and ordered all men to leave their houses and get into the army jeeps. I ran out quickly and told the men's wives. We at least wanted to bid them farewell before they went to jail. All women of the quarter came out. From a distance, they started shouting and waving at their men who were in the jeeps but the men did not respond. After hours of interrogation and humiliation at the Israeli military camp, our husbands came back. We asked them, "Why didn't you wave back to us when the Israelis took you?" They answered, "We did not see you because the soldiers blindfolded us."

Um Nidal, Beit Sahour

Supported by Doopsgezind Wereldwerk
Netherlands

Deaf and mute

Once during the first Intifada the Israeli army imposed a strict curfew on my hometown, Beit Sahour. People were forbidden to go out - even for prayers in the mosque or the church. My mother was very pious and she insisted that she would not miss any Friday prayers in the mosque. She used to say, "I fear nobody except God." At four-thirty in the morning she decided to go downtown to the mosque. After walking for about one kilometer she saw an Israeli jeep and a border policeman called to her, "Where are you going?" She continued walking slowly. The policeman stepped out and approached her. She made gestures that she was deaf and mute. The jeep continued to follow her until she finished her morning prayers and reached home.

Um Mohammed, Beit Sahour

Supported by Jan ter Ellen
Den Haag - Netherlands

Cracks in the wall

One morning, while my father and I were drinking our coffee, the Israeli military came into our village with bulldozers and digging machines. They wanted to build a road to prepare for the Wall. They started by blowing up rocks. The explosions felt like earthquakes. From that day on I warned all the people that these explosions could

cause cracks in the walls of our houses. As soon as the army came into the village, I told my neighbours to open the windows and leave their homes. After our protests, the army promised not to use dynamite, but after one and a half weeks they continued, even before morning prayers. Later on, they uprooted our olive trees and I started to take part in demonstrations and advocacy campaigns.

Nadia, from Wallajeh

Supported by Iona Foundation
Netherlands

Talking back

During a day in the first Intifada, I went to buy bread. It was raining heavily. Suddenly I got a call to come home quickly as Israeli soldiers had entered the gate. Back home I saw several soldiers pointing their guns at the children in our house. I started to shout at the soldiers, "Go out of my house immediately! Why did you enter my house without permission?" They said, "We want to take the boy because he tried to stop us coming in the gate." I asked them, 'Where is your officer?' And raising my voice I continued, 'I will go with you wherever you go. Why do you take the children of Palestine from inside their houses when they don't do anything?' After a while they started to listen and left the boy.

Antoinette, from Beit Jala

Supported by school students and inhabitants of Boxtel
Netherlands

Ahmad and Mitri

During the First Intifada, when my father was in the garden, a boy came running in shouting that the soldiers were chasing him. My father embraced him as if he was his son. The soldiers arrived and ordered the boy to come to them. My father shouted, "This is my son" and started to wave the stick that he carried because he did not see very well. The officer asked my father the boy's name and my father answered, "Ahmad." Then he asked my father his name and he told him, "Mitri" [a Christian name]. The officer became angry. "The boy is Ahmad and you are Mitri. How can that be?" My father quickly told him that he had adopted the boy and baptized him when he was a baby. The officer told him, "OK, don't be afraid, but don't let him throw stones again." Ahmad embraced my father and my father offered him a glass of tea.

Georgette, from Bethlehem

Supported by Assumptionisten en Interreligieus Platform Boxtel
Netherlands

Sponsored by Cordaid (21 posters, and 4 photo posters)

On the run

In late 2000, our house in Beit Jala was shelled by the Israeli army and we were forced to move to the first floor. A day later, a rocket went into our washing machine. Amidst the flames we ran into the street but luckily the fire was extinguished quickly. The following day we went back only to hear more shelling so we decided to move to my daughter's house. While staying there my son Milad was injured by a shelling. We took him to hospital with the shooting and shelling still going on around us. The receptionist called for doctors but there was no response. Then the local TV and radio stations appealed for doctors to come. One doctor, Bashir Marzouka, happened to be listening to the radio and hurried to the hospital. He immediately performed an eight-hour operation and managed to save my son's life.

Laila, from Beit Jala

Fear

During an Israeli military incursion into Bethlehem, in 2002, I was alone at home with my son Fuad. I was pregnant with my second son George. All of a sudden I heard noises at the main gate where Israeli soldiers wanted to come in to search the place. I was frightened and about to faint. The soldiers screamed and slammed the doors of the rooms. One of them looked gentle and brought a glass of water for me. The others went into the room where my son was sleeping, covered with a blanket. A soldier took away the cover, thinking he was one of the wanted youths, and my son woke up frightened and crying. I calmed him. When the soldiers discovered there was nothing in the house they left. Fuad still wakes up at night in fear.

Rana, from Bethlehem

Homeward Bound

My grandmother, Mahbuba, used to walk secretly to old Wallajeh. Her house was evacuated during the *Nakbah* (disaster) in 1948, and our family was not allowed to return. But she kept visiting the old house and the nearby fields to bring us some food. One day, during her secret travels, an Israeli soldier shot at her and she was injured in her neck. She continued her walk back while bleeding, and managed to reach our house. She told my family that she felt something warm flowing down from her shoulder. We took her to the hospital where she was treated. Afterwards, she kept the memory of her home alive and dreamt that she would return, at least once, before she died

Nadia, from Wallajeh

I caught his hand

During the June war in 1967, when I was a child, we lived in a simple shelter, a cave for sheep. My parents divided the cave into two parts: one for the animals and the other for our family. My family thought about leaving for Jordan as we were all afraid of the Israeli army. Some of the family appealed to my father to leave the cave but I was worried about him and about us. So many terrible things could happen if we tried to escape to Jordan. One day he decided that he wanted to leave. He was at the doorstep and was about to put on his shoes but I hid one of them among the remains of an animal. I also caught his hand and held it tightly. In the end, he managed to stay steadfast in our house. He did not become a refugee for the second time.

Maysara, from Bethlehem

The tanks and the child

During the first Intifada my brother, Mustafa, came back from his preschool. He was running and crying because four Israeli tanks were slowly moving behind him. My mother hurried to lift him up in her arms, asking him, "My child, what is wrong with you?" My brother answered angrily, "Look, the Israeli tanks are behind me." While he cried, soldiers stepped down from a tank, approached my mother, and came into our house. They asked, "What is the boy saying?" My mother answered, "He is afraid of you and your tanks." The soldiers started to laugh. They didn't care at all about my mother's or Mustafa's feelings. In fact, they looked proud of their terrorizing behaviour.

Nadia, from Wallajeh

Trapped

During the second Intifada, it happened once that I was on my way to my mother in law. Suddenly I heard shooting and shelling around me. I saw Israeli soldiers firing at

Palestinian fighters in Beit Jala. My heart started to pound. I was trapped between the two fighting sides. One Palestinian fighter saw me and pulled me away to a narrow road. Other fighters held my hands but I did not hear any of their comforting words because of the heavy shelling which continued for what felt like an eternity. Afterwards, I didn't know how I reached home. I had a nervous breakdown. I continued to hear the sounds of shooting and shelling, and had terrible nightmares for more than six days. After I went back to work, ten young men visited me and asked about my health. They turned out to be the fighters who had saved me and protected me.

Ellen, from Beit Jala

Roots

I cannot imagine myself to be away from this land. My parents are in the US and they always try to encourage and push me to join them in their freedom. As for me, I do not know if that is the kind of freedom I'm looking for! My roots are here in Bethlehem... and my future is also here, in this Holy Land. I have my Palestinian ID, my relatives, my house and my land.. Here, where the olive trees have such strong roots that no one in the world can uproot them.

Odette, from Bethlehem

Hiding in the storage

Once, near the start of the second Intifada, Israeli soldiers were running after young stone throwers. Out of fear of being arrested and beaten the teenagers were hiding in the houses. The soldiers thought that somebody had thrown stones from our house so they entered it by force. My children were very frightened. One of them hid in the storage room in the kitchen. The soldiers came in shouting and started to damage the furniture. One of them was about to throw a teargas canister in the direction of the cupboard where my son was hiding but my mother managed to stop him. The soldier did not know how to respond and left.

Farha, from Bethlehem

Accordion

When I was 17, I bought an accordion. I wanted to let the children be happy, to change their situation a bit. During the uprising, when nobody could go out, I opened my home for the children and I played the accordion for them on the veranda. They were singing, "The world is beautiful. Let us be happy. Let us love each other. Let us have peace here." While there were shootings outside, at home it was safe.

Vera, from Bethlehem

Giving back

I am a Palestinian, Moslem woman. My family and I always believed in Moslems and Christians living together. In 1949, the Christian Abu Doh family decided to leave Bethlehem for Chile. They approached my father, asking him to live in their house and look after their shops in downtown Bethlehem in exchange for payment. My father agreed. My family continued to live in this Christian family house until 1970. Then they were able to build a new house for themselves. No one from the family in Chile came to claim their house. According to our Palestinian traditions, my father could have kept the property because the owners were absent and nobody knew about them. My father, however, managed to trace some distant relatives abroad and absolutely insisted in giving them the house and the shop.

Huda, from Bethlehem

The boy

At the beginning of the second Intifada, in 2000, a boy from Aida camp visited my husband's shop near Rachel's Tomb to buy a sandwich. It was just after the Friday prayer. At that moment some youths gathered in the area to throw stones at the Israeli army in the military tower near the wall. The soldiers started to fire live bullets at them. We heard that a 13 year old boy was shot in the head and had died. A curfew was imposed so that my husband and his old mother were trapped in the shop. My husband used a carton for his mother to sleep on, but no sleep was possible as the soldiers made too much noise. After the curfew was lifted, my husband heard that the child who was killed was the one who had bought the sandwich.

Rana, from Bethlehem

Ramadan evening

One day during Ramadan, we sat around the table waiting to start the prayer in which we ask God to accept our fasting. We were eager to eat the delicious food that was prepared. The bell rang and a group of armed soldiers entered. They started wrecking our furniture and showed no respect for the sanctity of the month. We were made to move out of the house. Only our disabled brother stayed behind. When they had finished inside, they brought my brother out in front of them, like a human shield. They said, "If you allow your children to throw stones at us, we will demolish your house." They even hit my brother when he did not cooperate because of his disability. I shouted

at them, "Leave him, he's sick". Afterwards we felt cold and hungry but couldn't eat anything.

Um Ahmed, from Bethlehem

On the way home

After the Palestinians were expelled from their homes in 1948, some of them tried to return by taking bypass roads. Many were shot for doing this. One of them was Al-Haj Abed-Rahman. He left his pregnant wife and two hungry sons to go back to his house and bring food for them. When he got to the front of his old house an Israeli mine exploded and he died immediately. His poor wife was so worried after hours of waiting that she decided to go and look for her husband. On her way home, Israeli forces saw her and shot her in her arm. She kept bleeding for hours until she died, leaving two orphans.

Um Ahmed, from Bethlehem

New house, old stones

Um Mohammed lived in a small room in Wallajeh village. Her childhood as a refugee, and her lack of privacy meant that she always dreamt of building a house. Her husband said, "That is too expensive." Um Mohammad replied, "We can bring stones from the ruins of our house that was demolished in 1948." Her husband replied, "But our grandchildren will go back there one day and they should remember our house and our suffering." She said, "That's true but we will not take *all* the stones." After a while, her husband agreed even though he knew it would be dangerous. Despite the Israeli patrols, the two succeeded in carrying stones on the back of their donkey to build their new house. Later on, Um Muhammad used to sit in her home proudly telling her children the story of their house. She also kept asking them to defend their right of return.

Um Ahmed, from Bethlehem

Premature birth

One night during the second Intifada, in 2002, when I was six months pregnant, the Israeli military bombed the Palestinian military headquarters of Bethlehem. The massive explosion made me very afraid and I started to go into labour. I was quickly taken to hospital where the doctor gave me drugs to delay my baby's birth. Unfortunately, the birth pains increased the next day, and I gave birth to a premature baby. For three months he was kept in the incubator. Afterwards I did everything I could for him to grow up well. My son is now in high school and is very smart.

Marianne, from Bethlehem

Under the boots

In the summer vacation, my eldest son used to help his uncle in his shop. One day, Palestinian youths organized a demonstration, expressing their anger by shouting and singing. My son took part in this. The soldiers started to fire tear gas at them. The Palestinian youths reacted by throwing stones and then ran away. My son went to hide in his uncle's shop but Israeli soldiers followed him and dragged him out. They beat him all over his body while they kept their boots on his head. His uncle tried to get him free but was threatened himself. My sister-in-law, who used to have an American passport, tried to talk him free but was told, "You are American. You shouldn't be here. Leave the country for your safety." At last, my son was released.

Rana, from Bethlehem

Arts at home

I am a teacher in Bethlehem and live close to the Church of Nativity. During the time of the Bethlehem invasion in 2002, the Israeli army imposed a curfew for forty days. Soldiers took over the house. Seven of my family were locked in one room, including my sick grandmother and two children. The home became a prison. In order to keep the children's minds away from the soldiers and the shooting, I got them to draw on the walls and encouraged them to sing songs, assuring them that the soldiers would leave soon and that this was their home no matter what.

Samia, from Bethlehem

Olive harvest

Because of the Wall the Israelis confiscated our land full of olive trees. We cannot cultivate it anymore nor build upon it. In the past we used to harvest the olives with all the family together, young and old. Schools were closed for a couple of days and everyone was on holiday. All the family went to the land and put down blankets under the trees. During the picking we sang traditional songs. We left a part of the olives for oil and salads, and the rest we kept. But now we are buying instead of selling oil. In fact, we can barely buy oil because of the economic situation.

Aida, from Bethlehem

Sexual harassment

At checkpoints we as women are more vulnerable than men. When I reach the checkpoint I am worried. Girls are verbally abused and sexually harassed. It depends on the group of soldiers at the checkpoint. I work overtime and at night they sometimes let me pass home and sometimes not. They humiliate me. Because of all this you reach a kind of turning point after which you feel too depressed to leave home. This is the main issue for me. You feel obliged even not to come at work as you might be hurt by the abusive words of the soldiers. Our traditions do not accept this kind of behavior.

Maysa, from Doha

The pigeon

There was a little boy who was holding his toy, a pigeon. While he was playing, he had a dream. He dreamed about another world where he could talk about his toys and his hobbies, his interests and his dreams, instead of talking about guns, blood and killing. A world where he could run and play with his friends. In that world was no war, no tanks, no rockets, and no shelling and bombing. A world full of peace. A bullet, an evil bullet, came like a thief and entered his heart. It took his soul and his dream away. His pigeon was beside him, right there next to his motionless body. But the pigeon remembered the boy's dream, and came to life and flew away. It decided to tell his dream to the world. And it decided to make this dream come true.

Story by Jennifer, Jumana, Rasha and Nisreen, 16 years

The box and paradise

Last night I had a very strange dream. I saw myself stuck in a black box. Everything around me was so black and no one was beside me. I couldn't move nor breathe. God was holding my hands and he asked me to have faith in him. I kept praying for him and believing in him... Then suddenly I felt myself in a place like paradise. I saw lovely flowers and green trees. But the thing that attracted my attention most was a white pigeon carrying an olive branch. It gave me hope that everything will get better no matter how much time it takes.

Story by Nadine, 16 years, from Bethlehem

Poster 3

Don't know why

I live near the wall. There were always young boys throwing stones at it and at the Israeli soldiers. One day a young boy, about twelve years old, went into a shop near the

wall and bought something small. When he left the shop, a soldier shot him. I don't know why, maybe because they thought the small package from the shop was a stone and he would throw it. From that time on, Palestinian policemen are always present at this section of the wall, to ensure that no Palestinian boys have to die again in this way.

Ellen, from Beit Jala

Supported by: Building Bridges
Burnley
UK

Love

My son fell in love with a girl from Jerusalem. It was difficult for him to visit her because he needed a permit but she was able to come and visit him here in Bethlehem. He could not get permission to visit her even when she became ill. After four years she died. She put in her will that she wanted my son to carry her coffin at the funeral. He tried to get a permit to do this but this was denied. He decided to go to Jerusalem without a permit. The Israeli soldiers caught him, beat him badly and put him in prison for thirty days. He missed the funeral. He had a nervous breakdown and was ill for two years.

Ellen, from Beit Jala

Supported by: Friends of Clemens and Marijke Egelie,
Driebergen
The Netherlands

Walking after surgery

My son needed an operation on his throat. This had to take place at the hospital in Jerusalem. I spent many hours trying to get the right papers and permit so that we could go to Jerusalem, even though my son was very sick and needed the operation as soon as possible. On the way back, we were with my brother-in-law who is allowed to pass through the checkpoint in his car. This would be a lot more comfortable for my son than walking. However, the soldiers refused to let us stay in the car and I had to walk through the checkpoint with my son, who had just had major surgery. My husband was not even allowed to walk through and had to drive all the way round to Beit Jala to enter Bethlehem from that side.

Mona, from Bethlehem

Supported by: Building Bridges
Burnley
UK

Come back tomorrow

In 2006, my father became sick and his doctors advised him to go hospital in Jerusalem because they have more advanced medical care there. He received a permit from the Israelis and went to Jerusalem. After being in hospital in Jerusalem for two days, he started to ask for me. I tried to get a permit but each time I went to the office, the officers told me, "Come back tomorrow." I have a sister in Holland and she was able to visit my father while he was in hospital. I live so much closer to the hospital than her but I was unable to visit him. In the end, my father died before I was able to get the permit to visit him.

Nadia, from Bethlehem

Supported by: Michelle Thomas
Elida, Ohio
US

One day it will fall

I really don't like to look at the wall. My young son recently asked me when we walked by the wall what a specific graffiti painting meant. It was a picture of a dove with an olive branch. I told him that it represented peace and that we, as a Palestinian people, hope we will have peace in the future. But in fact, I don't want my children to look at the pictures and the colours on the wall and to ask me what they mean. What can you say? Most of the time I try to ignore the wall. I know it is there but one day it will fall. We still have hope and as long as we have hope, everything is possible.

Mira, from Bethlehem

Supported by:
Lydia Kuttab Brenneman
St. Marys, Ohio
Barbara Martin
Elida, Ohio
US

A wall in my country!

When I grew up, without the wall, life was very different. We were free, we could move around, go to Jerusalem and visit family and friends. I feel miserable when I see the wall. It is a wall in my own country! I always worry about my children, how growing up in this situation will affect them. I think it will be very difficult for them. When we drive by the Wall, they ask me, "Mum, did you see that new painting? Did you see that new picture on the wall? Who painted it? What does it mean?" I think all the graffiti means the same, that living here in Bethlehem with the wall is very difficult and that everybody has a difficult story.

Abeer, from Bethlehem

Supported by: Friends of Clemens and Marijke Egelie
Driebergen
The Netherlands

Why the wall?

When the wall was built, my children asked me: Why did they build this wall? I answered that the Israelis built the wall because they thought they needed it. At the AEI [Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem] they once asked the children to make a drawing of what they thought about the wall. My little George drew the wall with a ladder, so as to climb over it. Children do not understand why the wall is here, they are too young. What to tell them?

Rawan, from Bethlehem

Supported by:
Joke and Rudy
The Netherlands

Too late

In January 2002 my son was in his house and was shot by an Israeli soldier. He was still alive but was bleeding heavily and needed medical help as soon as possible. It was two hours before the ambulance was allowed to reach his house. They took him to hospital in Beit Jala. His injuries were very serious and he was losing a lot of blood so the doctors said he had to go to hospital in Jerusalem and have major surgery. In order to go to Jerusalem he needed a permit and this was only given after three hours. Only my son was allowed to go to Jerusalem; my husband and I could not go with him. Unfortunately, the permission came too late. On his way to the hospital in Jerusalem he died in the ambulance, without his family present.

Umm Mounir, from Walajeh

Supported by Alexandra and Zohair
The Netherlands/Tunisia

The Box

Two neighbors, Muslims and Christians, came together after Ramadan in a friendly atmosphere. During their feast days they were used to congratulate each other and share food. However, the Christian family received sad news. The mother, Sofia, told her friend Fatima: "The bank sent us a warning that they are going to confiscate our shop because we did not pay the bills. Our shop sales and income were not good and my husband has been ill. He does not know what to do." Fatima: "Oh, Um Mikel [mother of Mikel], why didn't you tell me?" After ten minutes, the Muslim neighbors arrived carrying a box. Sofia opened it. "Gold bracelets!" "Take it. And take this," as the family handed her 1000 Jordanian Dinar. "If I had more, I would give it to you." No wall could separate them.

By Rawan, St. Joseph School - Ramallah

Headache

Christians and Muslims have been living together in this land for centuries. On a school day in February last year, a Muslim friend and classmate of ours, Haneen, felt dizzy. She got a headache and felt very tired. Before class was over, Haneen put her head on the table and fainted. Her classmates, both Christian and Muslim, tried to pick her up and take her to the school director, but were not able to do so. One of the girls rushed for a private taxi to take her to hospital. After two days in hospital, Haneen recovered. When she learned about all what happened, she was very grateful that her Christian and Muslim teachers and classmates had cared for her. It is a story like this that makes us proud of the compassion that flows among the people of Bethlehem despite the situation we live in.

By Hannen & Jumana,
Evangelical Lutheran School Bethlehem

Accident

One day I witnessed an accident. A young man riding a motorcycle hit a tree. My Christian friends and I ran for help. I called an ambulance and we stayed by him until he became conscious again. We recognized him and phoned his family, he was a Muslim. When his parents arrived at the hospital and learned about how we helped their son, they were really thankful. They praised God and said "Thank God that here in Palestine we are still like one family." In Ramallah, Muslims and Christians live in freedom and

peace with one another. I am willing to sacrifice and give of myself to others in my community. During our joint feasts we visit and greet each other and welcome each other with sweets.

By Marwan, a ninth grade student at St. George, the Orthodox Church School in Ramallah

First aid

In my Muslim family it has always been common to tell stories. A few days ago, my grandmother told me a story which I will always remember. Because of a curfew imposed by the Israeli occupation during the Intifada at the end of the 1980s, my father and his family were all at home. My father was at the time six years old and played outside. My grandmother cooked lunch. While my father was playing near the house, he fell and hit his head. My grandmother was so shocked that she lost her voice after she heard all the crying. My grandmother's neighbor, a Christian nurse, heard what happened and came running out of her house to help my father. She carried my father to her house. After some time she was able to stop his bleeding and put bandages on his head. Without this woman's selfless caregiving, my father would have lost his life.

By Ibrahim, from Beit Jala

The milkman and his donkey

Once a milkman from Beit Jala used to sell fresh milk while riding his donkey. Among his customers were the priests of the Mar Elias Monastery to the north of Bethlehem, an area which became part of annexed East-Jerusalem. The man was lucky enough to cross the Israeli checkpoint to sell his milk with his donkey without a permit. One day, the milkman arrived with his donkey at the checkpoint. Israeli soldiers asked, "Where is your permit and your donkey's, too?" He answered, "You have been allowing me to cross to sell my milk for many years." So they told him that his donkey could pass with the milk but he should stay at the checkpoint. The donkey went directly to the monastery, as this was its routine. The monks at the monastery emptied the barrels of milk, the donkey came back to the checkpoint and the Beit Jala milkman returned home. Everyone waiting at the checkpoint as well as the soldiers were astonished.

By Elias, from Beit Jala

Rolling down

During the second Intifada, my older friend was chosen to participate in the national basketball competition in the United Arab Emirates. He had to pass through a checkpoint east of Bethlehem in order to cross the Allenby Bridge into Jordan and take

a night flight from Amman. To cross the checkpoint quickly, he decided to leave his car, carry his luggage and climb the hill nearby the checkpoint. When he reached the top of the hill, sweat dripping from his face as it was July, the soldiers saw him. They began chasing him and while running back he fell with his luggage from the top of the hill. He rolled all the way down - getting cut by rocks along the way- and ran back to his car. He waited for hours until he passed the checkpoint, then continued his long journey to Amman. Unfortunately, he missed the flight because of the delay, and lost the chance to participate in the tournament.

By 'Alia, from Bethlehem

Laughing and mocking

During Christmas season in 2012, my mother and father were given Israeli permits to visit Jerusalem. While crossing the checkpoint, my father had to pass the metal detector. A few years ago, my father underwent an operation on his hip, and the surgeon had put metal plates in his hip's joint. He had a doctor's note to prove it, which he showed to the soldiers. While he normally passed without problems, this time soldiers started laughing and mocking each time the metal detector made a sound. My mother shouted at the two soldiers: "I want to see the commander who is in charge." The commander came and she explained the humiliating situation. The commander apologized and asked my father, "Do you want to submit a complaint against the two soldiers?" My father answered him, "No, but I want them to behave well and treat people humanely."

By Daisy, from Bethlehem

Praying on the alphabet

Once a little girl in Bethlehem went for a walk in the countryside. She lost her way and did not know how to get back home. She panicked and was afraid. After a while, she saw a farmer who asked her, "Do you want me to show the way back to your house?" The girl replied, "Yes, and I have been waiting for you to help me." "How?" he asked. "I was praying." He asked her, "You are a little girl, you do not know how to pray." She answered him, "I know the alphabet. I recited all the characters and I asked God to compose them into sentences and prayers to send me someone to take me back home." The farmer was touched by her confidence and faith in God. Even when you are small, you can overcome problems by a strong faith, though the obstacles may look unconquerable - like this Wall.

By George, from Bethlehem

Lama

Last Christmas my family decided to go to Jerusalem as we got the Christmas holiday permits from Israel. My father was the first person to go through the checkpoint. The soldier asked, "What is your family's name?". My father answered, "Lama". The soldier repeated the same question and my father gave the same answer: "Lama". The soldier lost patience and kept asking repeating the same question. The soldier started shouting. People started crying and nobody knew what was happening. The captain of the checkpoint came in a hurry to investigate the issue. He questioned my father again, "What is your family name?" My father answered again in a very polite way "Lama". After some moments the captain realized what the problem was. The word "Lama" in Hebrew means "Why." In fact, a good question at those checkpoints.

By Mary, from Bethlehem

Suhur and Iftar

The doorbell rang. Muriel, my Christian friend, and her mom were there. She came to wake us up for the *suhur* [Ramadan early morning breakfast]. Muriel explained her coming early, "I did not hear your voice and was afraid you would not wake up for the *suhur* and this would keep you, my dear Lama, hungry throughout the school day." Then my father invited my friend to share with us the *suhur*, "Please help yourself and share our customs in the same way as Lama shares and participates in your Christian feasts." Muriel came with her parents to the evening *Iftar* [breaking the fast] meal and gave me a gift as she entered the house. It was a beautiful crescent. We all waited until the Ramadan calls for the *Iftar*. Then, we began to eat. We broke the fast with dates and carob juice, then we all ate. It was a wonderful evening filled with joy. For the moment we could forget about the occupation.

By Lama, Latin Patritacate School – Ramallah

Tree blocking the road

Three brothers graduated from high school in Bethlehem. After receiving their certificates they noticed that the religious education mark was missing. They asked the teacher and he answered them, "Come back tomorrow and I will give you the mark." The three brothers walked home. On their way, they found a fallen tree blocking the road. The oldest two brothers passed by the tree and did nothing. The youngest brother began to pull it from the middle of the road onto the pavement. His two brothers started shouting, "What are you doing?" But he continued moving the tree away. By chance the teacher was walking behind the brothers and saw what the youngest brother was doing. He shouted to him in front of the other brothers: "The religious education mark for you is 10/10. Religion is also about the way we deal with obstacles like a tree on the street." And, we can add, about the many other obstacles that block our roads and freedom of movement.

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By Ali from Bethlehem, cousin of the three brothers

Rubber bullets

One month ago, fifty-two young people from my camp and I myself decided to stop the Israeli occupation forces who entered the camp looking for wanted youth. We blocked the road to the houses by putting garbage containers. The soldiers started throwing gas bombs. We threw stones back. Three of the soldiers fired rubber bullets. Thirty-six youth were injured. I was hit by three rubber bullets, one in my foot and two in the back. While they were shooting, I saw a woman with her three children, all wounded. We couldn't manage to retreat and seek medical treatment. A 23-year old young man managed to throw a stone on an Israeli jeep, but was hit by a soldier in the face which fractured his chin. When the Israeli forces retreated, we all ran to a hiding place. Finally, an ambulance came and took me and the others injured to the hospital for treatment.

By Mahmoud, from Arroub camp

Pointing a pistol

When the second intifada started in 2000, the school program was interrupted several times. As a result I failed in the *tawjih*, the matriculation exam. In the next year I repeated my class and scored 78 in the exam. I enrolled as a student at Al Quds Open University for four years. Throughout this period I both worked and studied. During my university vacation I went to work in Israel, but once a female soldier pointed a pistol at my head. It was winter and she made me stand in the cold for a long time. All I was doing was looking for a job to be able to continue my university education.

By Moath, from Bethlehem

Bribe

My friend Adel is a poor young man from Bethlehem who has a son who suffers from liver problems and needs medical care. One day, Adel wanted to get an official permit so he could admit his son to a government hospital in the city. He went to the local health department and submitted the necessary documents. However, he was rejected. Adel tried to explain the urgency of his son's case, but the man handling the paperwork did not listen. Adel was disappointed but after some thinking and hesitation, he gave the man some money as a bribe. Immediately this employee's face and his behavior changed and he treated Adel differently. All the medical reports and necessary papers were signed without any trouble. Adel was happy because he was able to save his child but felt bad because he needed to bribe the man.



By Mahmoud, from Bethlehem

Born in Bethlehem

My husband's cousin married a German woman. They have lived in Germany for thirty years. Every summer, he comes back to visit Palestine. Two years ago, he came with his wife and when they arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, his wife presented her German passport. She was treated with politeness and respect. When his turn came, he presented his German passport and the officer started interrogating him in a disrespectful manner. This was because his passport showed that he was born in Bethlehem. He and his wife both got very angry and nervous. He shouted at the officer saying, "Why do you treat me like an animal?" The Israeli airport authorities ordered him to return to Germany. They told him, "You can visit the West Bank via Amman, Jordan."

Written by Baha, from Bethlehem

Volunteering

I rented my small house for a year to an American volunteer. He came to volunteer at the YMCA in Beit Sahour. Because of the visa period that Israel gives visitors, he was only able to volunteer for three months, then he had to leave for a neighboring country in order to renew his visa. He travelled to Turkey for four days and came back through Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv. The Israeli authorities, after discovering that he was a volunteer in Beit Sahour and serving the Palestinians people, refused to let him go to the West Bank. They made him sign a document that declared he would not be able to return for four years. They ordered him to leave the country to the US within 24 hours. He was very angry about such bad treatment for no reason except that he was a volunteer at a Palestinian organization and working for the causes of justice, freedom and peace.

Written by Fareda, from Beit Sahour

Crying in despair

I remember what happened to my close friend. He was twenty-years-old and suffered from a heart problem. The doctors installed a pacemaker in his chest to regulate his heart. One day, he suddenly became very tired and didn't feel well, so he went to the hospital in Israel. After some tests he was able to go home, but a few days later he became exhausted and very sick. His parents called an ambulance and they went to the northern checkpoint of Bethlehem in order to go to the hospital in Israel. All of his family members and friends, including me, were with him. But the Israeli soldiers did not allow

him and his parents to pass because they did not have permits to enter Jerusalem. After a short time, he passed away at the checkpoint crying and shouting in pain.

By Adel, from Bethlehem

Israeli ambulance

I am a young Palestinian and I was born and raised in Beit Sahour, a small town outside of Bethlehem. Two years ago, I met a girl, a Palestinian refugee from Bethlehem. We married and she got pregnant. During her sixth month of pregnancy she started to have some complications and as a result, she delivered the baby three months early. Due to the complications, the baby needed an operation. My wife herself also needed to go to Al Maqasid Hospital in East Jerusalem for treatment. When we reached the checkpoint, the soldiers refused to let us pass, despite the baby's critical condition. They asked us to call for an Israeli ambulance, but when it arrived, they did not allow my wife to accompany the baby. After a long and heated discussion, the soldiers allowed us all to pass. The ambulance obliged me to pay 250 shekels. In the end, we were admitted to the hospital.

By George, from Beit Sahour

Dance

During a dance party at a celebration, I was sitting at a table with a group of friends. A beautiful girl caught my attention while passing by my table. My heart started pounding, I went and asked my sister if she knew the girl. She said, "I don't know her and even if I did I wouldn't tell you." She added, "Go ahead and introduce yourself." After mustering up enough courage, I went forward toward the girl's table. I approached her father saying, "Uncle, I came to you to ask your permission in order to dance with your daughter." Her father answered me, "I have no objection." At that moment, I became more daring and asked the girl to dance with me. She accepted. We danced together for a long time as if no walls and darkness existed.

By Francis, from Beit Jala

Blank check

Al Haj Abu Ahmad taught his grandchildren to be *samid* (perseverant) and stay in the land of new Walajeh, especially because his land is near an Israeli settlement. He would tell his sons and grandchildren, "I will give my life to this land, please take care of it after I'm gone." When Israel began building the Wall, his property was an obstacle to their plans. The Israeli military could change the path of the Wall or buy Al Haj's land. They offered him a blank check, asking him to put the amount he wanted for his land. He told them, "Even if you bring me all the gold in the world I would not sell my house and land."

The military felt that there was no choice except to change the track of the wall. Al Haj Abu Ahmad was victorious in the battle of *sumud* and perseverance. After a few months he bade farewell and passed away quietly.

By Tamer, from Wallajah

In front of the Israeli flag

Five years ago, there were four friends who attended Hebron University. One of them was a Christian and the other three were Muslims. One day Israeli soldiers stopped their taxi on the Etzion checkpoint between Bethlehem with Hebron. The soldiers took the students' IDs and the taxi driver's keys and ID, and left the group waiting for half an hour under the hot sun. After a while a soldier told the group, "Go and wait in the taxi." They went to the car, but nothing happened. One of the men asked the soldiers, "What is the problem?" The soldiers told him, "Go over there and stand in front of the Israeli flag... Do you speak Hebrew?" The young man said in English, "I don't understand." Another soldier came and said in Arabic, "Stay there until we call you." He stood there in the burning sun for another hour. Finally, after hours of waiting the soldiers let them pass.

By Mustafa, from Doha

Torn apart

My house is close to Manger Square. In 2002, when I was 14 years old, I woke up at 4 AM to the sound of unfamiliar noises in our neighborhood. I got up and saw members of the resistance in the streets. I woke up the rest of my family. A few minutes later we started hearing sounds of explosions and bullets. Not long after the Israelis invaded, the resistance was surrounded and had to take refuge in the Nativity Church. Hours later, Bethlehem was announced a closed military zone. One day we heard someone knocking on our door. It was Israeli soldiers. They came in and made us all go into one room while they searched the house. They asked us if we were hiding any "terrorists." They left our house completely torn apart. They repeatedly returned to search our home. We lived in fear, silence and sometimes hunger.

By Faris, from Bethlehem

Treasure

Everyone knows Abu Ahmad for his strength and hard work as a rural farmer. He was bribed many times to sell his land, so it could be used to expand the settlement but he refused. His land is a treasure that can't be bought with money. Abu Ahmad found Israeli soldiers waiting for him at the gate that was installed before his land. The soldiers

mocked him daily, in hopes that he would give in and sell his land. But he keeps his chin up. Abu Ahmad started telling his sons about the land and how they must keep it. He looked at his land, at the crops and trees that are grown now and said, "This land, my children, is like a mother, it is the soul, give to it and it will give you in return. This land is all you have; it's for you and for your children after you.

By a nephew of Abu Ahmed, from Al Walajeh

Proud

My name is Alaa'. I consider myself Palestinian even though I was born in Jordan and lived there till the age of 6. After the death of my father, I moved with the rest of my family to Palestine. The land, the weather, the people were very sentimental to me so, as a seven-year-old I decided never to leave Palestine no matter what. So, even though I don't have the Palestinian identity, I consider myself Palestinian and I'm proud of it and I'm happy here.. Despite the challenges in living here due to the Israeli occupation, I still consider Palestine the most beautiful country in the world

By Alaa', from Jerusalem

Best grade

When I applied for college to study Cinematic Art I was first not accepted. I could not eat or sleep. I called the professor and told him not to judge people before knowing them. Next day I was conditionally accepted. Then I found out that I had to pay my tuition in full, up front. In the past, I used to receive a scholarship from the Ministry of Prisoners Affairs. This time there was nobody to help me, but I managed. For my final graduation project, I had to film a documentary. I saw reports about the settlers' assaults on the Palestinians in Hebron, and decided to make a documentary about it. When I told my professor he told me I was crazy. In fact, I got beaten and assaulted but this did not stop me from filming. I got the best grade in the class.

By Basil, from Bethlehem

Identity card

I am a female student from Jerusalem. On my way to my university in Bethlehem, I am always inspected by Israeli soldiers who guard the checkpoint at the entrance of Bethlehem. Even in the cold winter, students have to get off the bus and go through the metal detector scans and bag inspection. One day, a soldier questioned my identity card claiming that it didn't belong to me, so she stopped me and started asking me in Hebrew about my name, my date of birth, where my identity card was issued, and so on. She wasn't convinced that it belonged to me and I got embarrassed for being late at

the bus, which waited quite a long time for me. My little story is just one example of how Palestinian students experience merciless things at the checkpoints.

By Rana, from Jerusalem

Trapped

When I was a child, I was ignorant in the matters of life, and life wasn't easy for me. My family went through many difficult circumstances as my father was diagnosed with cancer, and our applications for Palestinian identity cards were denied. We were trapped; we couldn't move freely because of the Israeli checkpoints and because my father was sick and unable to provide and care for our family. I would often think about all these challenges and ask why they happened. I was so lonely and hopeless and was always so sad that all these things happened to my family, but could not understand why.

By Ghadeer, from Beit Jala

Green monsters

I didn't call Israeli soldiers green monsters when I was younger. I just called them soldiers, but when I went to college, I noticed that everyone called them green monsters (because the soldiers always wore green uniforms) so I started to say it too. They used to come into the alleyway by our house, especially if they were looking for someone. They would come in with their big jeeps, and guns, and we were so afraid of them we couldn't look into their eyes, we just would look away; we would always run and hide. One day when I was 6 or 7 years old, my siblings and I were playing in the alley, and the soldiers came in with a tank and their guns, and they pointed the laser of the gun at my younger sister's forehead. We were so afraid, she was frozen, but the soldiers just wanted to make fun of us and scare us.

By Bassem, from Bethlehem

Swimming

One summer, when I was young, my friends and I were bored, and there was nothing to do because it was during the Second Intifada [2000-2004], and we were not allowed to go anywhere and there was no electricity or water for the past 3 days. So we decided to go to a nearby school and use the pool there. We knew it was open, we just had to figure out how to get there. We called the school and the security man agreed to let us come swim. My mother did not want us to go; she said it was too dangerous. If the soldiers saw us in the streets they would shoot at us, so we had to sneak through the

streets and hide in the trees. It took us a long time but we made it. We were so happy to forget about everything around us. We were just kids, and we needed some freedom.

By 'Abed, from Bethlehem

Sneaking over

There was a small market close to our house in Bethlehem. During the Second Intifada [2000-2004], we could not go in the streets to buy food because of day-long curfews. We would sneak over to the nearby market, and send a bucket down on a rope, and call to the shop owner. He would put in the bucket what we wanted, and then we would take it and quietly smuggle it back home. In this way we could overcome the shortage of food and medicines which was faced by so many people in Bethlehem at the time.

By Elias, from Bethlehem

My parents' bed

I used to be so afraid at night. I would wake up to the sound of shooting in the distance in Beit Jala, a city near Bethlehem where I lived, but I always thought it was right outside our house. I would shake my brother awake, but my sister would never wake up so I would carry her to my parents' room and we would all squeeze into my parents' bed. After awhile, my parents decided to put all of our beds in their bedroom, and then I wasn't so afraid anymore. I thought that it was better to be together, in case anything happened, we would be together, and if we died, we would die all together.

By Faris, from Beit Jala

Afraid just like we are

I can still hear the sound of the jeeps of the soldiers echoing in the alleyway. Anytime we heard that sound, we would disappear and hide until the jeeps passed. One time, my friend and I were outside in the trees picking fruit. A jeep drove up to us and stopped, and the soldiers asked us for water. We froze, shocked that they were talking to us. We gave them water to drink and one of the soldiers was playing with a soccer ball with one of the other children. He said if his commander caught him being friendly with the Palestinians he would be in trouble, and that he was afraid of being caught, but he wanted to play with the children. My friends and I thought, "Wow, soldiers are just like us... they drink water just like we do, and they are afraid just like we are."

By Amin, from Doha



Raining rocks

One peaceful autumn day, while we were sitting in our house we heard someone shout, "Open the windows and close the doors and get out of your houses." We rushed out of the house and heard a loud noise like an earthquake. People started screaming. Suddenly I heard a crack and though the windows in our house broke, I told my sister-in-law, "I'm going to go see," as I got up from under the tree where we sat. I looked in the sky and saw rocks falling like rain. One hit me in the back. If it wasn't for my sister-in-law who pulled me back under the tree, the rock would have hit me in the head and I would have been dead. Later on, we learned that the blasts and the falling rocks were because the Israeli army was blasting the rocky terrain to prepare it for the separation wall.

By Amal, from Walajeh

Into the water

During exams in the seventh grade, my friend used to walk with me to school. On our way, we would review together. While walking one hot morning, my friend and I decided to stop at a spring to drink some water. While I was drinking water, I suddenly fell down in the water. My friend tried to pull me out but he couldn't. So, he ran to call for help. Some people came and rescued me and took me home. There they discovered that I had been hit by a bullet and was bleeding. Immediately, they took me to the hospital. I was in a coma for two days.

By Amir, from Bethlehem

Standing up

I am a Palestinian young man from Artas on the southwest of Bethlehem. I used to work inside the Green Line of 1948. When I took the Israeli bus on my way to work, an elderly Israeli woman entered the bus. She looked for an empty seat but there were no vacant seats left and nobody offered her a seat. Her clothes were wet because of the rainfall and immediately after I saw her I stood up quickly. The woman looked at me and said, "Where are you from?" I replied, "I am a Palestinian from Bethlehem." Then she quickly asked me, "Do you know that all the passengers on board are Israelis? I answered her, "Yes". She then added, "But not a single person moved aside but you Arab Palestinians have more respect to the old people. Thank you." I told her: "This is a part of our human values and education."

By Fahmi, from Artas

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DREAMS

Hope

I've been through a lot in my life while still a teenager.
I saw a man got shot right in front of me and
I saw an Israeli shooting at our house.
But I never stopped smiling and hoping.
I hope that Israelis and Palestinians will find a way
to live in peace,
and that there be no wall.

By Christie, from Bethlehem

Dreaming

I asked a lot of people in Bethlehem: do you have dreams? For now or maybe for in the future? And they all laughed at me and said, no we don't dream.
I asked them why, isn't it normal to dream and have a dream? No they say, dreams are for kids and for the stupid. We are realistic, dreams aren't realistic.
For me it was strange to hear that, I always thought everybody has dreams and hopes and visions about the future. But then they say, yeah we dream but we don't believe it. We have dreams when we sleep but we don't remember them.
We live in the now and live day by day.

By Raneen, from Bethlehem

Surfing

Today I was walking through the streets and saw a young boy. The young boy was standing on a wooden board. I walked up to him and asked him what he was doing. I'm surfing he said with a big smile. I sat next to him and asked him why are you surfing? I want to become a surfer, I dream about it every night. I want to be on the ocean. Could you tell me your dream I asked him. He looked at me very strange but he told me his dream.
Every night I dream the same dream of being by the ocean. Taking my surfboard and running into the ocean. Feel the waves, feel the water, feel the wind. Seeing nothing but ocean, being free. Peddling through the water seeing nothing but ocean.
Then I wake up facing the wall.

By Adel, from Bethlehem

Getting out of here

Getting out of here, that is what I dream said a boy after the *tawjihi* [matriculation exam]. Why? Because I want to study in a foreign country. A specific subject? No, I just want to get out of here. There is no future here and when I study in a foreign country maybe I can stay there. Maybe build a future there. I don't want to be locked up here with a degree but no job and no money. I want to go and have a better life.

Lots of young people want to get out of here, we see no future with the wall. Our parents are against our dream and want us to stay, but with the occupation we want to live in another country and be free.

By George, from Bethlehem

I want to be a soldier

I am a sixteen-year old girl and I want to be a soldier. There are women soldiers in other countries so why not in Palestine? But I can't become a soldier, they won't accept me as a woman, I'm afraid they will harass me and bother me.

But still I want to serve Palestine and make it a better place. I want to fight for our freedom and show everyone that women are strong and can fight for what they believe in. I would love to see other girls with the same dream join the military, make the military a place where women are welcome to join.

We are all part of Palestine, men and women.

So why can't I fight for my country and for my people?

By Christina, from Bethlehem

Faded dreams

I just finished my university and I have my degree to become a doctor.

But that was not what I wanted to become in life.

I wanted to become an artist and inspire people and tell the story of Palestine.

But my parents didn't see any future in that and I was forced to study medicine.

Now I have my degree but there's no work.

I have lots of time now because I can't find work.

I decided to pick up my faded dream and work on my art.

Finally I'm an artist.

By Hanna, from Bethlehem

First dream and the rest

Ruaa always dreamed of a world filled with love and compassion. She loved studying. Her father's retirement payments got delayed. Her mother was determined to help her to stay in school, and started selling fruits and herbs to help Ruaa pay for school. One day, Ruaa was wearing a slightly different uniform, so the principal told her she will be expelled if it happens again. When she arrived home, she saw her parents in the cold collecting plants to sell, and all she could do was cry. Ruaa promised herself to study and repay her parents for all the hardships they have gone through. She attended university and she is about to graduate now. She still dreams of the demise of the occupation, and to live in a beautiful world filled with love and tolerance. Since her first dream came true, she believes the rest can and will.

By Leyla, a friend of Ruaa, from Al-Khader

Drawing

I saw a kid of 8 years old drawing on the street.
I was curious so I sat beside him, he looked at me but he kept drawing.
He was drawing a grave of a young boy.
The young boy was sitting up in his grave ready to walk out of it.
Another boy, younger than the boy in the grave, was standing next to it.
He had a football in his hands.
At the other side of the drawing the two boys were playing football together.
I saw a tear running down the boy's cheek.
I asked who the boy in the grave was and he answered, his brother.
He didn't need to say more, his brother died and all he wished for was his brother to come back.

By Fuad, from Bethlehem

Ant

I wish I was an ant
Ants are hard workers.
They provide their own food and they take care of each other.
They encourage hard work and faith in each other.
They have a strong will to live.
I want to be like an ant and be strong, a hard worker, care taker
and encourage other people.

By Usama, from Bethlehem

Do you want. . .

Do you want freedom of speech?
Do you want freedom of movement?
Do you want justice?
Do you want peace?
Do you want to experience other cultures?
Do you want humanity?
I do
Since I could think, live and breathe I think of my freedom.
I want to live, like most people in the world

By Hisham, from Doha

Summer school

My dream is to have a summer school outside Bethlehem.
Every time we have a summer school it's inside these walls.
I just want to go outside,
be free and have lots of room to play.
Just forget the wall, forget our prison.
When I grow up I'm going to be a creator,
I hope I have the power to change the wall and create it into something else.
Something that is harmless, that doesn't hurt people or imprison them.

By Adnan, from Bethlehem

Fauna

How would it be, to be an animal.
To be a lion and hunt and kill.
To be a zebra to be hunted and killed.
To be a giraffe with a long neck that can see over everything.
To be a rabbit, playful, fast and funny.
To be an eagle and rule the sky and be free with no limits.
How would the world look like if we all turn into animals.

By Jamal, from Bethlehem

Bethlehem

A holy city, a place where all kinds of people are welcome.
It's my hometown, a place where I can relax.

A safe place, a place of religion.
A wonderful place.
A place I want to build my future, my better life.
Finalize my high school education and hopefully become a veterinarian.
Bethlehem is an open prison.
In my future it is a place of freedom.
A place known for its hospitality for everyone, especially tourists.
A place where people bond and talk and be free.

By Majd, from Bethlehem

Dreams amidst darkness

As a child, everyone cares for you; they wipe away your tears when you cry, hug you when you are afraid, and encourage you when you fall down. You grow up, develop dreams and ambitions, and chase after them, thinking your friends and family will support you. When you face obstacles, you try to solve them on your own. If you fail, you call out to family and friends, but your words can fall on deaf ears. You feel abandoned, none extends his hand to wipe your tears, embrace you, or encourage you. Thousands of questions hover in your mind: why did everybody abandon me? Is it because my dreams contradict their traditions and customs? And why do I stand by others even if my point of view is different from theirs? You become enraged, walking without a destination as if you are in complete darkness, encircled by a wall.

By Safa', from Walajeh

Giving up on my first dreams

I finished last year of high school (*tawjihi*) with a grade of 94 out of 100. At the time I aspired to study law to defend the rights of the Palestinian people, especially women's rights. However, my parents didn't let me study law. So, I decided I wanted to study nursing, but again my parents rejected the idea because of the work shifts I would sometimes be required to do, as they do not feel that it is appropriate for a woman to work at night. Finally, I got frustrated and I gave up on my dreams. In the end, I studied social education because it is very disciplined, which is fitting for girls as it prepares students to be a teacher, and I like it. I believe I will be a successful teacher.

By Raneen, from Bethlehem

Olive harvest

Because of the Wall the Israelis confiscated our land full of olive trees. We cannot cultivate it anymore nor build upon it. In the past we used to harvest the olives with all the family together, young and old. Schools were closed for a couple of days and everyone was on holiday. All the family went to the land and put down blankets under the trees. During the picking we sang traditional songs. We left a part of the olives for oil and salads, and the rest we kept. But now we are buying instead of selling oil. In fact, we can barely buy oil because of the economic situation.

Aida, from Bethlehem

New Life

During the first day of the 1967 war, we prepared ourselves to go to our new house. At that moment, we heard someone shouting that we should hide in a safe place because the Israelis wanted to occupy our lands. My children started to cry, especially the younger ones. The people, including my family and I, went to safe places; some to the basements or bathrooms, others to the Nativity Church inside the Grotto. The Israelis shelled Bethlehem. When everything was over, we returned to our normal places and started a new life. The Israeli soldiers entered our land and made our life hard. The prices went higher and higher. They collected taxes and started to humiliate us as if this land was theirs.

Oral history interview by Jennifer from Bethlehem

IKV Pax Christi Solidarity Pilgrimage 2012
Utrecht, Netherlands

Would we return?

One night in 1948 I woke up by the loud voice of my father arguing with my blind grandfather trying to convince him to leave our village near Bethlehem while my grandfather refused. At that moment my mother was packing our clothes and some food; then we had to wake up, hold our mattresses and follow my father who was carrying my grandfather on his shoulders because he refused to leave the village. My father thought it was necessary for our safety. We walked till we reached a small house at the far end of the city of Bethlehem. My father said that it was the house he had rented for us to live in temporarily. We entered without any single word although we were inquiring: Why did we leave our large house with the lovely garden around it? Would we stay in Bethlehem forever? Or would we return to our dear village?

Oral history interview by Nadine from Bethlehem

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen – Netherlands.

A Lost Baby

In 1948, the massacres started with Deir Yassin. At the time I lived with my husband and my baby boy in Jaffa. My husband was a doctor. I was with my little son at home when the clashes started. I was afraid, so I stayed looking out of the window to see if my husband came back. He didn't, and I became desperate. I went to my neighbors and left my son there. When the clashes stopped I went to take my little baby but I couldn't find him. The Israelis had brought him away while taking over the Palestinian houses for occupation by Israeli families. After a week I found my baby with an Israeli family. I came over to the family to work for them as a servant in order to be with my baby. With some boys and girls I planned to kidnap my baby. First I did not succeed. At last I took him with me. I was beside myself with happiness after I had my son back.

Oral history interview by Maria from Bethlehem

Supported by Oecumenische Hagediensten
Doorn/Driebergen – Netherlands.

Flight

In 1948 we went from Ramleh to Ramallah in our cars. All the family shared a house that we rented. After staying there for two weeks, we heard the bad news that Israel had defeated the Arabs and had enlarged its territories, including Ramleh. Jordan took the West Bank of the river Jordan, and Egypt took the Gaza Strip. We were not allowed to go back to our own houses and lands. The few days that we decided to spend in Ramallah turned out to be sixteen whole years. Although we had lost everything we were lucky to be alive. Some people left without clothes, food or money. They had to walk for about two days to reach a safer place. Some of them, especially women and children, died during their journey as a result of tiredness and sickness.

Oral history interview by Joanne from Beit Sahour

Supported by Martin Kofflard
Rotterdam, Netherlands

Why the wall?

When the wall was built, my children asked me: Why did they build this wall? I answered that the Israelis built the wall because they thought they needed it. At the AEI

[Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem] they once asked the children to make a drawing of what they thought about the wall. My little George drew the wall with a ladder, so as to climb over it. Children do not understand why the wall is here, they are too young. What to tell them?

Rawan, from Bethlehem

Supported by:
Joke and Rudy
The Netherlands

Too late

In January 2002 my son was in his house and was shot by an Israeli soldier. He was still alive but was bleeding heavily and needed medical help as soon as possible. It was two hours before the ambulance was allowed to reach his house. They took him to hospital in Beit Jala. His injuries were very serious and he was losing a lot of blood so the doctors said he had to go to hospital in Jerusalem and have major surgery. In order to go to Jerusalem he needed a permit and this was only given after three hours. Only my son was allowed to go to Jerusalem; my husband and I could not go with him. Unfortunately, the permission came too late. On his way to the hospital in Jerusalem he died in the ambulance, without his family present.

Umm Mounir, from Walajeh

Supported by Alexandra and Zohair
The Netherlands/Tunisia

Give Us Back Our Freedom

In 1948, many clashes and shootings happened. The situation got worse and there was no work. People started to leave their houses. They told us to go to Nablus just for six days. It has been 50 years now. We lived in Rafidia [in Nablous] for six months, then left for Jericho. We slept in a tent where we had a small room. We were with five boys, six girls and my father, mother, grandmother and my aunt. There was no difference between rich and poor; all were in the same situation. After that we went to Bethlehem. My children got married and they live happily now. It is true that I have property here and my work is good but I'm still a refugee. I still feel tired, even now. We still keep the documents to show that we are refugees.

Oral history interview by Rana from Bethlehem

Supported by: Pax Christi Augsburg
Coming-Together-Tour 2012

Prison experiences

[on 2 posters]

Teeth

In 2002 the Wall was built directly next to Aida Camp. In 2003 I demonstrated every day. The soldiers came and brought me to jail. I was in jail for four years. They called me and my brother terrorists. My 15-year old brother stayed three and a half years in prison.

In prison you need to wait a long time to see a doctor. I had to wait for two and a half months to see a dentist. The dentist pulled my teeth on the right side of my mouth while it hurt on the left side. So he pulled the wrong teeth. Two months later I went back to the dentist, still in pain. Then he pulled the right teeth.

Leg

I was in jail playing football and broke my right leg. After three weeks I was allowed to go to hospital. The doctors couldn't do anything anymore about my leg.

Years

Going without permission to Jerusalem is easier for me than passing through the checkpoint where I have sometimes to wait for hours. If they catch me, I'll go five years in prison.

Poems

After the wall was built, I started writing poems about the second intifada and about the Wall. The Israeli soldiers entered my home and read my poems. They took me to prison for three months. I was seventeen years old. I had to sign a paper that I wouldn't write poems again. When I got out of jail, I started writing poems again. They caught me and I was now in prison for two years. But I still write poems about the situation. I will never again sign a piece of paper which would rob me of my freedom to write whatever I want.

Tour guide

I work as a tour guide in the camp. Because I was in Israeli prison, no one would hire me. I studied two majors at Bethlehem University. This was hard for me because I couldn't speak English like other students from private schools. Afterwards I applied many times for a job, but no one hired me.

Fragments

[on one poster]

Al-Nakba

My grandparents were born in Al-Katamon in Jerusalem, not far from Beit Safafa, behind this Wall. During the Nakba, the Jewish soldiers came with their guns. It was very dangerous. My grandparents had to flee and became refugees in Aida Camp. We kept the key from our house. But in Israel they changed the locks. My home is occupied by Israel. However, it's our right to go back to our home and our land.

Watchtower

On the balcony of a house near the Wall, a child played with a plastic gun. An Israeli soldier in the watchtower shot him. The child remained in hospital for two months. Luckily he survived.

Checkpoint

When an Israeli soldier at the checkpoint saw my address, he looked at me surprised because I talked English with him. "How do you know how to speak English?" he asked. I was angry with him, why shouldn't I speak English with him? Just because I was born in a refugee camp, growing up and living there doesn't mean that I can't go to college or can't have an education.

[Poster: Freedom in many languages]

Freedom

حرية

vrijheid

freedom

Freiheit

frihed

frelsi

frihet

frihet

saoirse

rhyddid

l'libertat

liberté

libertà

liberdade

libertate

libertad

свобода

sloboda
svoboda
swoboda
свобода
sloboda
sloboda
свобода
laisvé
vabadus
vapaus
szabadság
liri
askatasun
ελευθερία
özgürlük
ازادی

[Posters with explanation of Palestinian stories]

Sumud

Sumud is Arabic for not giving up, staying resilient. It shows itself in many forms. Not leaving our lands while surrounded by settlements or the Wall, for instance. Or keeping the key of the home that once belonged to a family who was forced to leave it in 1948. Or to preserve the Palestinian heritage, not giving up our history.

It also means keeping our sense of beauty and love for the land – discovering a rare flower in the field and making a picture of it. Or taking care of our family; even marrying and getting children and educating them to keep connected to the land are forms of sumud.

And not to forget: continuing protests against this Wall of Apartheid.

Nakbeh and Right of Return

The Balfour Declaration was issued in 1917 by the British, promising the country to others without consulting us, the large majority of the population. In 1948 over 750.000 Palestinians were forced to flee as a result of an ethnic cleansing campaign. After what we call the *Nakba* or disaster, more than 500 Arab-Palestinian villages were levelled to the ground. You can still see the ruins. Despite resolutions of the UN, the Arab Palestinians were never allowed to return to their homes, and many families remained in refugee camps in Gaza, West Bank and neighboring Arab states. The UN agency for

Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, counts 5.4 million registered refugees and has established and still operates 59 official refugee camps (and 17 unofficial camps).

To those who say: It is impossible to reverse history and go back to the places where our families used to live, we say: Why is it possible for any Jew wherever he lives, with no direct connection to Palestine, to “return” - while a Palestinian, with deep roots in the land, is not allowed to go back home?

Political Solution

Behind this Wall Israel has robbed lands of Palestinian families (and the Armenian church as well). Israel's solution to the conflict is expansion of settlements and a silent or open ethnic cleansing of what remains of Palestine.

Palestinians have proposed two solutions:

- Two states: a Palestinian state next to Israel according to the ceasefire lines of the 1967 war
- One state, or a binational state or federation, in which Jews and Palestinians have equal rights.

We call for a solution which provides equal rights and implements the following rights enshrined in international law and resolutions:

- Right to self-determination
- Right to a Palestinian state
- Right of return.

And of course, the freedom of movement which we now lack.

Occupation

It is almost 50 years since the occupation in 1967 of West Bank and Gaza, 22% of historical Palestine.

What does occupation mean?

It means: to be unfree to travel in our own land, being dependent on travel permits arbitrarily handed out by the occupier. It means: humiliations at checkpoints. Waiting for hours. Violence against our bodies, homes, and our families and communities. Soldiers in the midst of the night entering homes. Imprisonment, either in a prison cell, or in our hometowns turned into open-air prisons. Bullets through water tanks on the roof. No access to the water that belongs to us.

Losing our land, step by step.

The International Criminal Court should prosecute those responsible.

Palestine and Palestinians

Today there are 12.5 million Palestinians, 7.2 million of us refugees/displaced people - 6 million from the ethnic cleansing of 1948-1950, 843,737 from the war (Naksa) in 1967, and 345,217 as a result of internal displacement within the green line or 1967 border, and 57,669 internally displaced in the 1967 areas.

Roughly 6.5 million Palestinians still live in historic Palestine though they are restricted to use 8.7% of the land and have no sovereignty even in those remaining areas.

Roughly 6.5 million Israeli Jews live in historic Palestine, the vast majority of them immigrants or children of immigrants.

[maps]

Aida camp

In a small overcrowded space, less than 200 metres by 400 metres, nearly 5,000 Palestinian refugees live in *Aida Refugee Camp*, named after a lady who owned the land that was leased to the United Nations. The refugees come from over 40 different places, mainly villages from the Hebron and Jerusalem areas. Like other refugees they lost their homes and all their lands during the 1948 Nakba [disaster].

For 6-8 years they lived in tents, hoping that their right of return would be implemented. They faced the hot sun in the summer and the bitter cold in winter. Many, especially children, lost their lives due to illnesses caught in those difficult conditions. The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) took care of education, medical care and some other public services in the camp.

After the war in 1967, many in the camp worked inside the so-called Green Line as laborers, for instance in agriculture or the building sector. Especially when the Wall was built in 2002, many lost their jobs and unemployment is presently high.

These years, youths of the camp often participate in demonstrations against the Wall and the occupation. The Israeli army regularly shoots on youth and others, enters the camp and forcefully takes away people who often stay in prison for years.

Wall Removed Near Aida Camp

In an unprecedented move, the International Presence Force for Palestine and Israel started to break down the Wall besides Aida camp near Bethlehem despite initial resistance by the Israeli army. This resistance quickly subsided after it was made clear that the removal order was explicitly given by the South African commander of the force. The inhabitants of the Camp went to the roofs to witness the trucks taking away the large 9-meter high panels over a stretch of 350 meter. It was an incredible experience for Palestinians to face again the olive trees hidden from view since 2002. The first reactions were incredulous but also determined: "This removal of the Wall is the first step towards realizing our rights," an inhabitant commented.

[Darwish quotes]

[Used on smaller posters in size similar to road name signs]

I will slog over this endless road to its end,
Until my heart stops. I will slog over this endless, endless road
With nothing to lose but the dust...

I say: *I will slog over this endless road to its end and my own*

I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends and a prison cell
With a chilly window!

I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word:
Home.

Where should we go after the last border? Where should birds fly after the last sky?
Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?

Here we will die. Here, in the final passage.
Here or there, our blood will plant olive trees.

I ask: Is it true, good ladies and gentlemen, that the earth of Man is for all human beings

as you say? In that case, where is my little cottage, and where am I?

The last train has stopped at the last platform. No one is there
to save the roses, no doves to alight on a woman made of words.
Time has ended. The ode fares no better than the foam.

Where can I free myself of the homeland in my body?

The last train has stopped at the last platform. And no one was there.

... for the thousandth time we write on the last breath of air. We die so they do not
prevail!

A boundary within a boundary surrounds us.

People are birds unable to fly

A mother reprimands the prison guard:
Why have you spilled our coffee onto the grass, you mischief maker?

A bird born from me who builds a nest in my ruins

Windows, but not for us, to exchange greetings in every language.

I am here stranger, sitting in the corner.
(What colour are your eyes? What is your name?
How shall I call to you as you pass by,
As I sit waiting for you?)

You walk as if you were someone else.

I'll ask the first to cross the path,
Have you ever seen a ghost like me,
Searching for his yesterday?

I'll carry my house on my shoulder
And walk like a slow tortoise.

...the invaders' fear of memories...

You, O Sleepers, who sleep on needles of memory!
Do you not feel the sound
Of earthquakes in the *gazelle's* hoof?

I say: Life defined only as the opposite of **death** is not life.

