



# *Palestine*

*passing on the promise  
holding onto the key*



A black and white photograph showing the ruins of a building. In the foreground, there is a large pile of rubble, including broken bricks and debris. A tree with sparse leaves stands on the left side of the frame. In the background, the remains of a structure with white walls are visible, some of which are still standing but heavily damaged. The sky is a uniform, light gray.

PRESERVING OUR NARRATIVE



Fifteen-year-old Hasan Jaber went to bed thinking of his older brothers who were among the men keeping watch over the village that night. Too old to be ignorant of the trouble that was brewing, Hasan was nonetheless too young to be trusted with such an important and dangerous responsibility.

So instead, he lay soundlessly in his bed among his younger brothers, listening to the rhythmic breathing of his mother and sisters in the next room. His brother, Saleem, 23, was also fast asleep, having just been relieved from his night watch shift.

Perhaps Hasan let his mind wander to his school work or, maybe, because spring had come, he was picturing the flowering fig trees that in a few months would bear the delicious fruit he loved so much. Palestine is a blessed land and the bounty that spring brings forth is a testament to the richness of the Holy Land. Figs, peaches, olives, dates, cactus and pomegranates all grew within the vicinity of the Jaber household. Perhaps Hasan was thinking about the fruit-bearing trees when at last he fell into an uneasy sleep.

It was the last night he ever slept in his own bed, in the home that had been in his family for generations.

*For in the early morning hours of April 9, 1948, death and destruction came to Deir Yassin.*

In the dead of night, explosions and gunfire could be heard in the distance when Hasan's older brother Mahmoud burst through the front door. Members of the terrorist Zionist groups, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, had nearly surrounded the village, and the fighting was fierce. There was no time to lose. The Jabers had to get out while there was still a chance of escape.

Hasan, in a pair of shorts and barefoot, gathered his younger siblings and headed out the door. He carried one younger sister on his back, and held another by the hand. His younger brother did the same. He had no time to put on his shoes. Their mother stayed behind to help the fighters and nurse the wounded.

So in isolating darkness and with no adults to guide them, Hasan and his siblings began the slow and arduous walk toward their uncertain future. They did not know then that they would never live in Deir Yassin again.

## THE NAKBA

The Deir Yassin massacre was not the first perpetrated by the Zionists who were enacting their plans to ethnically cleanse and take control of the Holy Land. The event has been memorialized in the collective Palestinian consciousness. It is the enduring symbol of the beginning of the dispossession of the Palestinian people.



Palestine became a mandate territory of Great Britain after the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Under British rule, the number of Jewish settlers continued to grow as did the pressure to realize the Zionist plan of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. On Nov. 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly – under heavy pressure from the U.S. government – adopted Resolution 181, which effectively carved Palestine into two states; one Arab and one Jewish.

At the time of the partition plan, there were approximately

**1.2 million Arabs and 608,000 Jews living in Palestine,**

according to historian Walid Khalidi, author of *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*.

**The partition gave 54 percent of Palestine to the Jews, many of whom had been living in the area for less than 10 years,**

according to Richard Curtiss, former U.S. diplomat to the Middle East and a co-founder of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs. At that time, 500,000 Palestinians were living in the area that was put under Jewish control.

During the months leading up to the Nakba and until the armistice agreement was signed in January 1949,

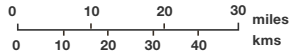
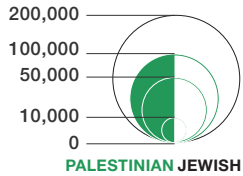
**more than 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes; 13,000 people were killed. The Zionists eradicated more than 500 villages and towns, completely erasing some of them from the face of the earth.**

"By the end of the war, hundreds of entire villages had not only been depopulated but obliterated, their houses blown up or bulldozed. While many of the sites are difficult to access, to this day the observant traveler of Israeli roads and highways can see traces of their presence that would escape the notice of

the casual passerby: A fenced-in area – often surmounting a gentle hill – of olive and other fruit trees left untended, of cactus hedges and domesticated plants run wild. Now and then a few crumbled houses are left standing, a neglected mosque or church, collapsing walls along the ghost of a village lane, but in the vast majority of cases all that remains are a scattering of stones and rubble across a forgotten landscape." ~ Khalidi, "All That Remains."

# PALESTINE

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY SUBDISTRICT, WITH PERCENTAGES OF JEWS AND PALESTINIANS, 1946



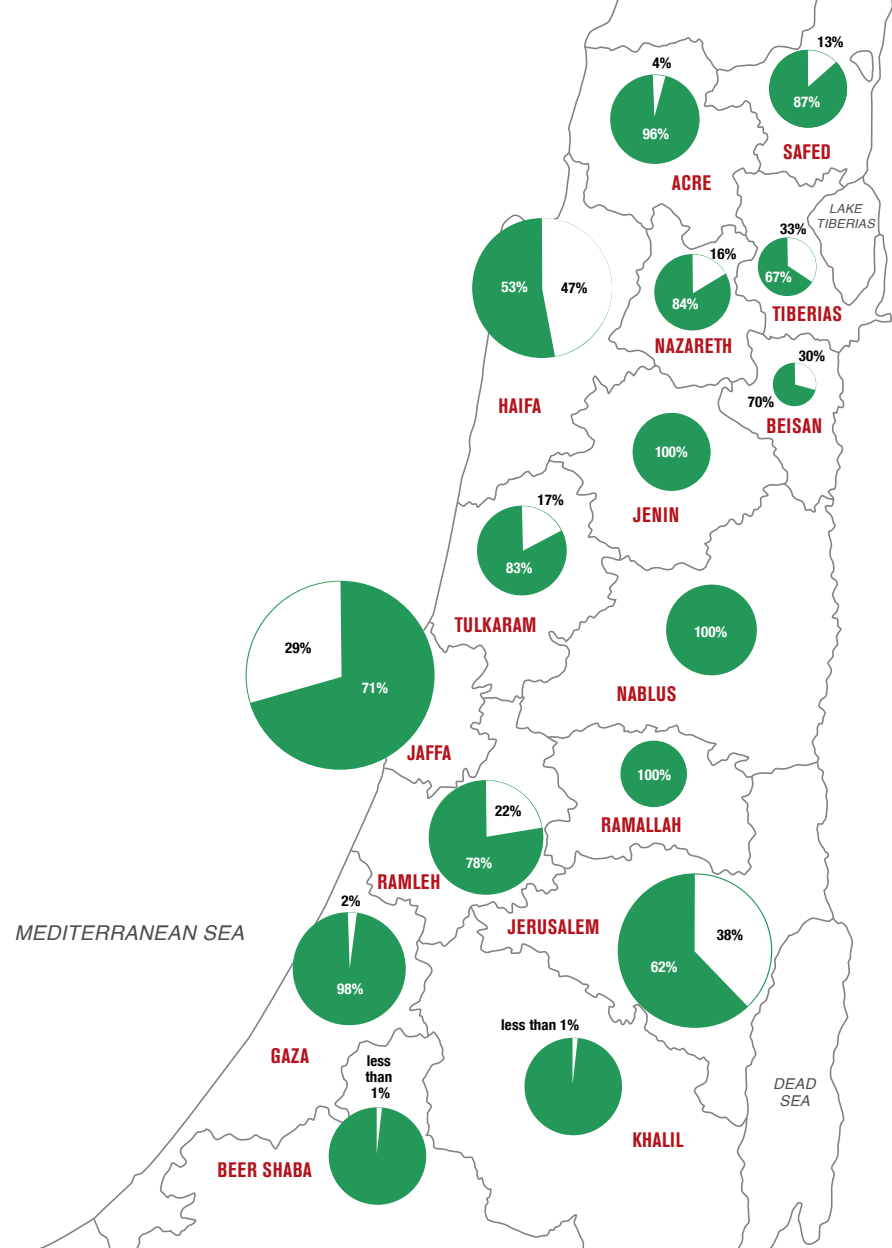
The source of this map is the Supplement to a Survey of Palestine (Jerusalem: Government Printer, June 1947). It was subsequently published as United Nations map no. 93(b) in August 1950.

According to British sources, the semisedentary Bedouin population of the Negev was ca. 100,000 in 1946.

Arab land ownership: 90 percent

Jewish land ownership : less than 7 percent

(Source: Walid Khalidi, "Before Their Diaspora")



The number of villages and hamlets completely destroyed by the Haganah, Irgun and the Stern Gang differ. The book "All that Remains," which is a comprehensive report on the depopulated villages undertaken by the Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington D.C., Birzeit University in the West Bank, and the Galilee Center for Social Research in Nazareth, put the count at 418 while the Web site Palestine Remembered counts 531 such villages. The discrepancy is due to the different methodologies used to determine whether a village existed and was populated by Arabs before 1948.

**BY JANUARY 1949, THE NEW STATE OF ISRAEL HAD CONQUERED 78 PERCENT OF PALESTINE.**

## **POLICY OF ETHNIC CLEANSING**

Each year on May 15, Palestinians and those in solidarity with the cause, commemorate al-Nakba or "The Catastrophe," which is also the day the state of Israel was created. The commemoration is important because in the remembrance of the catastrophe also lies the hope that Palestine one day will be whole again and its rightful inhabitants will once again people the blessed land.

But the Nakba is not just one historical event. It is a process that began with the formation of Zionism in the late 19th century and still continues today.

**"THE NAKBA IS A PROCESS THAT DEVELOPED THE SYSTEMATIC DISPOSSESSION OF PALESTINIANS; IT'S THE DESTRUCTION OF A CIVIL SOCIETY FOR THE INTENDED PURPOSES OF A COLONIAL ENTERPRISE TO BE SET IN ITS PLACE,"** said Dr. Hatem Bazian, professor of Near Eastern and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and chairman of the American Muslims for Palestine. **"THE NAKBA IS NOT AN HISTORICAL EVENT BUT AN ONGOING EVENT. GAZA IS AN ACTUAL DIRECT LINK TO A PROCESS STARTED IN THE LATTER PART OF THE 19TH CENTURY THAT CULMINATED IN 1948 AND IS CONTINUING TODAY."**

Dr. Bazian was referring to Israel's three-week offensive against Gaza that began on Dec. 27, 2008, and which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,400 civilians and the wounding of more than 5,300. Israeli officials have said the bombardment and invasion were in response to rockets being fired into southern Israel from Gaza. But statements from Israeli leaders themselves speak not about retaliation but of advancing a policy of ethnic cleansing, which has been in effect for decades and that includes transferring Arabs out of Palestine and even murder.

### **Consider the following quotes:**

"I believe that it should have been even stronger! Dresden! Dresden! The extermination of a city! ... I am not talking about rockets - not even a stone will be thrown at us. Because we're Jews. ... I want the Arabs of Gaza to flee to Egypt. This is what I want. I want to destroy the city, not necessarily the people living within it."  
~ Reserve Colonel Yoav Gal, an Israeli Air Force pilot, told Army Radio during the Gaza offensive on Jan. 11, 2009.

"The goal of the recent war on Gaza aimed to destroy and annihilate the enemy, not to take prisoners ... some 80 jets focused on various targets in Gaza; then the tanks began their assault. We fought the Gentiles with all our willpower and force." ~ Chief Military Rabbi Brigadier General Avi Ronzki to Israeli troops on the first anniversary of the war. Quoted in "Total racism, total war," Al Ahram, Dec. 24-30, 2009.

These chilling accounts echo earlier statements - some made more than 100 years ago - by the men who founded Zionism and the state of Israel.

"We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border ... both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly." ~ Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, 1895.

"The concept of 'transferring' European Jews to Palestine and 'transferring' the Palestinian people out is central to Zionism." ~ David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, 1944.

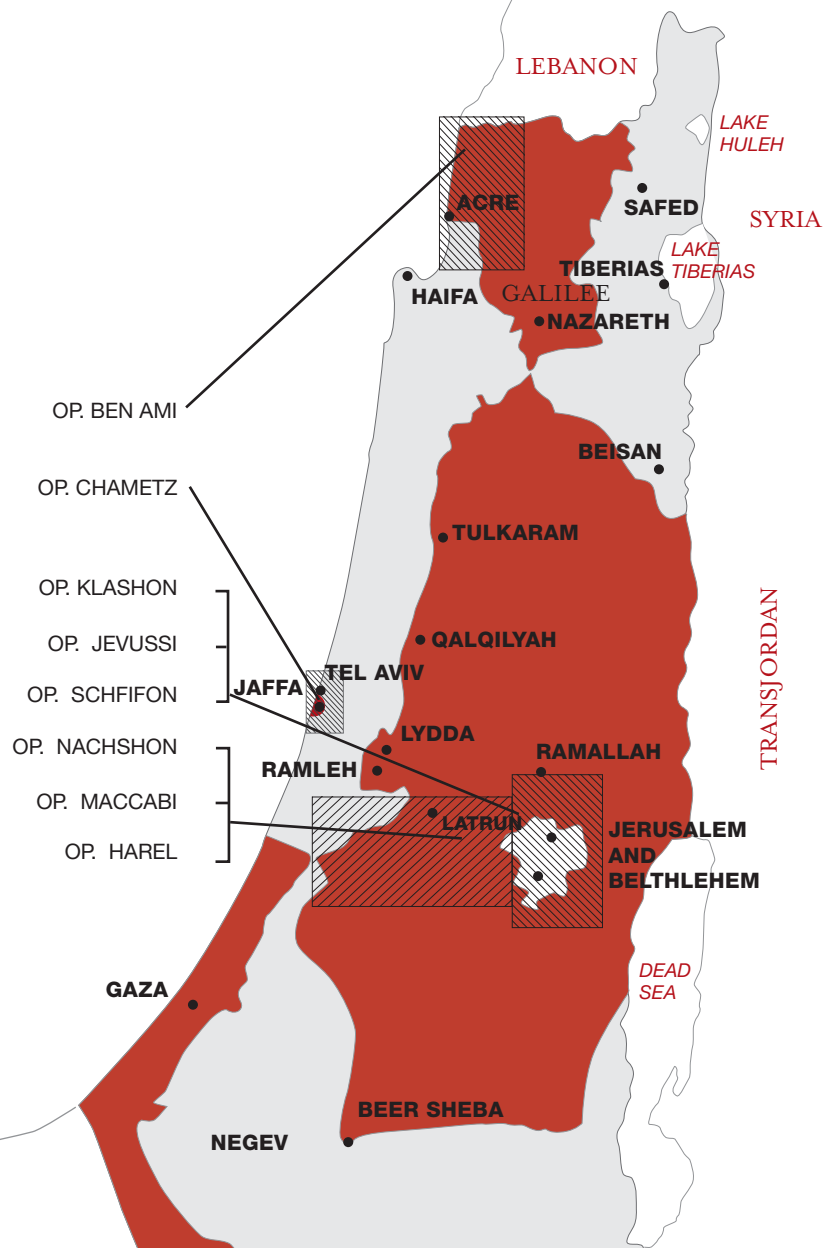
"It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both people ... the only solution is a Land of Israel ... without Arabs. ..." ~ Yosef Weitz, director of the Jewish National Fund's land department and founder of the Transfer Committee, 1944.

# PALESTINE

ZIONISTS MILITARY OPERATIONS OUTSIDE THE UN-PROPOSED JEWISH STATE, APRIL 1 TO MAY 15, 1948

- Proposed Palestinian State
- Proposed Jewish State
- ▨ Area Of Zionist Military Operations Outside Proposed Jewish State

This map is based on the map published in Walid Khalidi, ed., "From Heaven to Conquest" (Beirut: Institute for Palesine Studies, 1971), p. 759





According to Donald Neff, a former Jerusalem bureau chief for Time magazine, ethnic cleansing was at the core of Zionism, whether it was the ultranationalist Revisionist Zionists under Polish founder Vladimir Jabotinsky and later Menachem Begin or the “mainline” Zionists headed by David Ben-Gurion.

“While the two major factions of Zionism disagreed on tactics, their ultimate aim of maintaining a Jewish state free of non-Jews was the same. . . . In the Revisionist’s vocabulary the goal was the same, if more expansionist and expressed in more pugnacious words. Former Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, a leading spokesman of Zionism’s right wing, commented in 1993: ‘Our forefathers did not come here in order to build a democracy but to build a Jewish state,’ Neff wrote in an essay titled ‘1948: Zionism and Jewish Terrorism.’ The essay is included in a collection of Neff’s work in the book, *Fifty Years of Israel* (American Educational Trust, 1998)

## PLAN DALET AND THE TRANSFER OF PALESTINIANS

The Zionist plans for transferring Palestinians out of their homeland was made clear in Plan Dalet, the master defense plan of the army, the Haganah, dated March 10, 1948. The manifesto outlined how the Jewish conquest of Palestine was to be carried out. A major portion of the plan detailed how Jewish fighters were to secure and take control of villages and areas outside the boundaries the United Nations had set for the state of Israel.

“Zionism’s responsibility for the Palestinian exodus and diaspora is an integral part of the genesis of the State of Israel,” historian Khalidi wrote in a 1961 article titled, “Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine.”

According to Khalidi’s article, the idea of transferring Arabs out of Palestine predated the Nakba by decades. In the late 1800s for instance, Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, promoted the idea of the “lesser evil.” That is, **“any hardship inflicted on the indigenous population of the land chosen by them was outweighed by the solution that the Zionist possession of the land offered to the Jewish problem,”** Khalidi wrote in “Plan Dalet.”



**“It was a deliberate act  
to empty the land of its  
original inhabitants.”**

“The yardstick of the lesser evil became the moral alibi of the Zionist movement, dwarfing and finally submerging the anguish of its victims. Thus Herzl could say with little qualms of conscience of the indigenous population of the land to be possessed: ‘We intend to work the poor population across the frontier surreptitiously by providing work for them in transit countries but denying them any employment in our own land.’”

**More quotes:**

“Under present circumstances Zionism cannot be realized without a transition period during which the Jewish minority would exercise revolutionary rule ... during which the state apparatus, the administration, and the military establishment would be in the hands of the minority.” ~ Chaim Arlosoroff, director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, 1932.

“If it is clear that a substantial amount of land would be made available for the Jewish area, the most strenuous efforts should be made to obtain an agreement for the exchange of land and population. ... It should be part of the agreement that in the last resort the exchange (transfer of Palestinians) would be compulsory.” ~ Royal Peel Commission report, 1937. (Source: Khalidi, “Plan Dalet”)



“It is the duty of Israel to explain to public opinion, clearly and courageously, a certain number of facts that are forgotten with time. The first of these is that there is no Zionism, colonization, or Jewish State without the eviction of the Arabs and the expropriation of their lands.” ~ former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, quoted in the Agence France Presse, 11/15/1998.

Khalidi writes that the idea of transfer resurfaced near the end of World War II, both in Britain and the United States. **In 1944, the British Labor Party Executive said the Arabs should be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. And ex-President Herbert Hoover advocated transferring Palestinians to Iraq in order to accommodate immigrant Jews, an idea the American Zionist Emergency Council applauded.**

These statements and reports as well as studies conducted by academic scholars – including Israeli academics – refute the propagandized theory that Arab leaders told Palestinians to leave their homeland as the Zionists have asserted for more than 60 years. Neither Khalidi nor British writer Erskine Childers, who examined the back files of the Near East monitoring stations for both the British and American governments, found any evidence that Arab leaders encouraged mass evacuation of Palestine. To the contrary, Arab leaders told the Palestinians to stay put.

“Not only was there no hint of any Arab evacuation order, but the Arab radio stations had urged the Palestinians to hold on and be steadfast, whereas it was the Jewish radio stations of the Haganah and the Irgun and the Stern Gang, which had been engaged in

incessant and strident psychological warfare against the Arab civilian population,” Khalidi writes.

Israeli historian Benny Morris wrote in his book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* that he found no evidence suggesting Arab leaders encouraged evacuation.

“I have found no contemporary evidence to show that either they (Arab leaders) or the Mufti ordered or directly encouraged the mass exodus of April-May (1948). As to the Palestinian leaders, it may be worth noting that for decades their policy had been to hold fast to the soil and to resist eviction and displacement of communities.”

Sometimes the orders to evacuate came from top Jewish officials. On July 13, 1948, the Haganah turned its attention to the Palestinian villages of Lydda and Ramleh, “forcefully compelling the entire population of as many as 70,000 men, women and children to flee their homes,” Neff wrote in *Fifty Years of Israel*.

“That same day, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ordered all the Palestinians expelled. The order said: ‘The residents of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age.’ It was signed by Lt. Col. Yitzhak Rabin, operations chief of the Lydda-Ramleh attack. Rabin later became Israel’s military chief of staff and served as its prime minister from 1974-77, and from 1992 until his assassination in 1995. A similar order was issued for Ramleh,” Neff wrote.

Plan Dalet showed intention and planning to rid Palestine of its indigenous population, AMP’s Dr. Bazian said. “It was a deliberate act to empty the land of its original inhabitants.”

It is important to recognize that policies for ethnic cleansing already were in place before Israel became a state because it clarifies the issue of responsibility when it comes to the Palestinian question. Many view both Israel and Palestine as innocent victims of events beyond their control. That view leads to the erroneous conclusion that neither is responsible for the situation in Palestine today, and as such both have equal narratives. But when one acknowledges that Zionism has at its core a plan to force the dispossession of the Palestinian people, it is possible then to assign responsibility to the oppressor and hold them accountable, making compensation to the injured party possible.



“Eviction and dispossession were actual events and as such we can hold Israel or the Israeli society responsible,” Dr. Bazian said.

## DISPOSSESSION

The Nakba in 1948 resulted in the expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland. Some 13,000 were killed. Several thousand more were displaced within the newly created state of Israel. After Israel’s Six Day War in June 1967, in which it illegally occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, another 350,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes.

Palestinian refugees and those internally displaced (IDP) represent the largest and longest-standing case of forced displacement in the world today, according to Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights.

About 4.6 million refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in 2008. Nearly one-third of them live in 58 recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Dispossession continues today through a variety of programs and policies that deny Palestinians their human rights in violation of international law. What’s happening today is the direct result of the Nakba and the racist policies inherent in Zionist ideology.

“Our government has been playing a role in the Palestinian dispossession,” Bazian said. “The American public is involved and has been a partner with Israel from 1948 to the present.”

**Today, the policies of cleansing the Holy Land of Palestinians can be clearly seen.** Low-intensity transfers have been ongoing, according to Badil. Those living in the Occupied Territories have been most severely affected. For instance, between 1967 and 1986, some 21,000 Palestinians per year were displaced from their homes. Sources of direct and indirect transfer include revocation of residency rights, expulsion, home demolition, land confiscation as well as mass detention, torture, military closure and curfews.



## AND THE POLICIES ARE AFFECTING MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN PALESTINIANS ALIKE .

In "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," former President Jimmy Carter writes the Apartheid Wall on the south side of the Mount of Olives, where Christians believe Jesus delivered the Beatitudes, has cut off thousands of Christian worshippers from their church, Santa Marta Monastery. The house of worship now lies on the Israeli side of the 30-foot-high concrete barrier, and its parishioners cannot get permits allowing them to enter.

"For nine hundred years we have lived here under Turkish, British, Jordanian and Israeli governments, and no one has ever stopped people coming to pray. It is scandalous. This is not a barrier. It is a border. Why don't they speak the truth?" Santa Marta's priest, Father Claudio Ghilardi, asked.

The Apartheid Wall has displaced and isolated hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, Carter writes. The 170,000 citizens of Bethlehem, for instance, are surrounded by the Wall, which has trapped another nearly 400,000 Palestinians on the Israeli side, cutting them off from their farmlands, gardens, jobs, schools and families, Carter writes.

"The Wall and disengagement plan are the culmination of 70 years of Zionist policy. The Palestinian ghettos that exist today serve a dual purpose: To exert severe economic and social pressure on the Palestinian population in order to force them to leave; and to allow complete control of the Jewish settlements who remain in order to facilitate the expansion of the Jewish settlements onto their confiscated land."

Perhaps Ariel Sharon summed it up best when he said:

"You don't simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away ... I prefer to advocate a more positive policy ... to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave." ~ former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, quoted in the article "Forcible Removal of Arabs gaining support in Israel" in the London Times, Aug. 24, 1988.

Israel has never recognized the right of refugees to return home, against the dictates of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Resolution 194. So while Israeli law will give instant citizenship to any Jew regardless of



nationality, Palestinians who were born and raised in the Holy Land cannot return to live in their homeland. People who want to regain residency status after Israel revoked it for one reason or another or those wishing to get residency for a nonresident spouse must apply for family reunification. The process is limited by quotas and lack of transparency, according to human rights group Badil. In fact, between 1967 and the early 1990s, Israel approved fewer than 10 percent of all reunification applications, the agency reported.

Israel also uses home demolitions not only as collective punishment but also as a means to force Palestinians to leave. According to Badil, Israel has demolished more than 24,000 homes between 1967 and the beginning of 2009. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions puts that number at just over 20,000 demolished homes. However, the figure doesn't take into account the nearly 2,500 homes the IDF completely destroyed in the December 2008/January 2009 Gaza offensive, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights.

The genocidal attack on Gaza is another example of Zionist policy to ethnically cleanse Palestine. A report submitted on March 27, 2009, to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says "the recent indiscriminate and disproportionate Israeli military attacks against Gaza resulted in unprecedented forcible mass displacement."



Though the exact number of displaced people is not known, the report estimates at least 90,000 people – including 50,000 children – were displaced. Most of these people were already refugees from 1948.

Despite the dire news, Dr. Bazian thinks it still could be possible to redress the issues facing Palestinians today. After all, UN Resolution 194 gives Palestinians the right to return to their homeland and to be compensated for their lost properties. But nothing can be done without an immediate end to the occupation, Dr. Bazian said.

"There must be justice and fairness in how to articulate a solution amenable to those who were injured in the process since the Nakba."

The American Muslims for Palestine is working to memorialize the narratives of those who were displaced during the Nakba and afterward. AMP wants to give voice to those individuals whom Israel and the world, through its inaction, have rendered voiceless and by so doing educate the American public about Palestine.



## TESTIMONIALS

Even after more than 60 years, they cannot believe they still are not allowed to return home.

That is the consensus of the people interviewed for this booklet. Even after more than six decades, after marrying and raising families, retiring from successful careers and contributing untold talents to their communities, the Palestinians who were caught up in the great upheaval of the Nakba still cannot fathom that the homesteads they were forced to leave remain elusive and unattainable.

Though unique, their stories share common threads of close-knit families, of working hard and playing harder. And to a person, they would gladly give up the relative ease and wealth of their American lifestyles, if they could only go home again.

Six people who were children and young adults in 1948 shared their journeys with AMP. Their tales abound with examples of hardship and perseverance, of loss and hope.

Here are their stories. Their text has been edited for length and clarity. Sometimes, the use of a translator was necessary. AMP has made every attempt to keep the dialog as close as possible to the original interview.

# DEIR YASSIN



## YUSEF BASTE

Birth date: Aug. 25, 1940

Father's occupation: Dairy farmer; shopkeeper

1945 population: 610

Date of depopulation: April 9, 1948

In the predawn hours of April 9, 1948, members of two paramilitary groups crept into the sleeping Palestinian village of Deir Yassin and systematically slaughtered more than 100 women, children and elderly. And with the massacre, out of which was born the state of Israel, began the dispossession of the Palestinian people that continues until today.

Men who would later become prime ministers of Israel ran the two militant Zionist organizations. Menachem Begin was the head of Irgun while Yitzhaq Rabin commanded the Lehi, also known as the Stern Gang. After fighting and killing the villagers who were standing watch, the Zionists stormed into home after home, lining inhabitants up against the walls and shooting them in cold blood. Others were stabbed to death and women were raped and tortured.



Yousef Baste was 7 years old at the time. While he said he does not remember much about his childhood until that point, the massacre is etched clearly in his memory. He saw his uncle gunned down in the street outside their house. He saw his grandfather killed by a grenade a Zionist fighter lobbed through a window.

Menachem Begin became Israel's sixth prime minister.



Because the Baste family home was the first one on the village's eastern entrance, the family relocated to an uncle's house further in town.

Pandemonium broke out as the Zionists broke down the door and ordered everyone out onto the street. They forced Yousef and his family members to walk on the body of their dead neighbor, the local baker. Yousef, his grieving mother and grandmother, and various other relatives were forced to leave barefoot and with no belongings. Their men lay where they had died with no one to look after the bodies. They heard later, that the Zionist militants dumped the corpses into dry wells, but they do not know for sure.

Yousef's family became separated. His father was defending the village so was not at home when the Zionists came. Yousef's uncle, who was hiding under the bed, was never heard from again. No one knows what happened to him.

It took days for the family members to become reunited. Here is Yousef's story:

"At dinner, we used to play with the kids, you know, football. Soccer. In that time, we didn't have any kind of more fun in the village except to play football and soccer.

They start  
remembering  
who's dead,  
who passed away.

"Really, when we're 8 or 9 years old, you can't remember so many things. But the Nakba, exactly we know what happened.

"Experience was, in that day, the Nakba— See, in the town, my father had about five houses – one next to the other. So, my three uncles were married. And each one, he has his own room. Like townhouses, now.

"So that day, my uncle was— he had a gun, and he got killed in front of the house.

"He was watching the town. There were about 15 people, 15 to 20 people, each one securing the town.

"And, when the fight started, we got all of the family together – the three families, my uncle who was married, and even us, me and my mother, my sister – in the same one room. And my grandfather. And, even my grandmother and my mother, too. My father, he was securing the other people.

"Okay, so when we put – my grandfather, my grandmother, he put all us in one room, and she locked the doors. The Jews started coming and fighting and knocking on the doors, to open the door and that. My grandfather, he has (a grenade). And he pulled it and he throw it from the window. So the Jews catch it and throw it back to us. So, thank God, in that time the only who got killed was my grandfather. Only he was killed. Only one who got killed.

“When he threw it from the window, I think they’re supposed to wait a few seconds to throw it. He pulled it, and he did, and (the Zionist) throw it back to us.”

(Mrs. Nabiha Baste) I explain sometimes that this is how afraid he was. He wants to do it fast; he was not thinking about the time. He just threw it so fast before the time. The Jews were so smart – catch it and throw it back.

“After a few minutes, my aunt’s husband comes from the other window. To check. And when he sees us, when he sees my grandfather – you know, the blood on the floor and everybody crying, scared and crying. So the Jews keep punching on the door.

“If you don’t open the door, we’ll bomb the house” and so on, so on. So my grandma, she asked him to promise they won’t kill us. So what we go do, my aunt’s husband, he slides underneath the bed. He slides underneath the bed. So I open the door.

“My grandma, she opened the door. And (a Jew) gets in and starts looking here. ‘Where is the gun? Where is that?’ And he starts looking like that, and he takes all of us out of the house. Took us from the house. Even didn’t let us put the shoes on.

**“... and most Deir Yassin people go to Silwan.  
So when we go to Silwan, they put us in  
schools to sleep. So the Silwan people start  
bringing food, blankets and giving it to us.”**

“So they take us from the house. My aunt’s husband, he’s still in the house. When we go out, I think they come from the other side and take him. What happened to him? We don’t know. So after that, we have next to my grandfather’s house a baker, a bakery for making bread. So he (a Zionist militant) takes the old man that is in the bakery. He kills him. He kills him on the street and makes us walk on him. He said, “This is an old man.” He’s an old baker.

“There’s so much; we are scared. We have to go on the road. So my mother and my aunt say, ‘Come on, walk! Come on! Come on! Come on! Yella, yella,”

“No one says no. They have to walk. And he started to take all the village people and some people who live very far from Jerusalem, like around Ein Karem. Women and kids. One of them who left took us to some house with big yard in front of the house. They take all the women and the kids there.

“In that yard. Most of the village who was still there, they take all us in that place. And the men, the young men, were taken. All the young men, maybe like 10, 15 of them. The Jewish take them. So they’re killed or taken hostages. I don’t know.

“So in the afternoon, maybe the afternoon, they bring some trucks and take all the people and the families in trucks. Couple, two, three trucks come in and take us in trucks, like the women and the kids.

“They took us out of there. So they take us on trucks. Before we get to Jerusalem, we (stop at) Givat Shaul. This is between Jerusalem and Deir Yassin. So when we get there, they’ve got some big garage or something over there. And they start taking all the women inside, and take whatever she had – gold, money, anything to take from the women. After they take all the gold, the money and everything, whatever she had of value, they go back on the trucks again. So when we get back on the trucks to take us to Jerusalem...

“There is no food to eat, no. So they take us back to the trucks, the trucks to Jerusalem. When we hit Jerusalem— it’s not too far, like two miles, three miles; not too far between Deir Yassin, Givat Shaul, and Jerusalem, maybe four, five miles, not that far. And they take us there and get some Arabs over there. I don’t know what to call those people – not government. They were (responsible people, leaders in Jerusalem) from Dar Hussein. They start asking the women what happened. They took us to somewhere in Jerusalem. And the women start to say ‘My son go, my husband die’, you know.”

(Nabiha): They start remembering who’s dead, who passed away.

“So those people take us to Jerusalem and they put us, in Jerusalem, in some location by Al Aqsa. They get started and say, “Okay, now you have to go into a small town.” One town is called Silwan, the other ‘Izzareeya. Abu Dis. And most Deir Yassin people go to Silwan. So when we go to Silwan, they put us in schools to sleep. So the Silwan people start bringing food, blankets and giving it to us. So we stay in Silwan. Some people stay in Silwan, some people go to ‘Izzareeya, some at-Tur. This is the town which is very close to Jerusalem. So Deir Yassin people go some here, some there. They go to four towns; this is what I remember: Silwan, at-Tur, ‘Izzareeya, Abu Dis.”

Initially, the residents of Deir Yassin believed they would be able to go home within a few days. But after several days passed, they began to consider other options that included getting to towns where they had friends or family residing.

Yousef’s father, who survived the massacre, spent several days looking for his family. Yousef did not know whether his father was dead or alive. Finally, he found them.

“There’s so much; we are scared. We have to go on the road. So my mother and my aunt say, ‘Come on, walk! Come on! Come on! Come on! Yella, yella,’”

“We don’t know ‘til we see him (if his father was alive). There was so much happiness and crying (when they were reunited).

Still they had no word about the dead who were left behind.

Like you see someone coming from the other family and you ask, 'have you seen my family? You seen my brother? You seen my wife?'

"Nobody knows. My grandmother start saying they were put in holes, wells. And they dump all who're dead in that— in one place. (Yousef's maternal grandmother lost six or seven relatives in the massacre). No one knows. No, because the Jews take all the women and children, all the young — about 15 or 16 people, young men, we don't know what happened. The just took them somewhere and killed them.

"It took two days for people each start looking for his family, 'Where is he?' and 'Which town he's going to?' They start coming and ask, 'Oh, have you seen my family? My mother? You seen my wife? You seen my kids? Where's he going?' The other one said, 'Oh, he's going to this, he's going to that town, he's going to that town.'

"Families were separated, like I said, separated in four towns — or more. Nobody has no money, no clothes, no nothing. Only they had to look for people (to take care of them) for a week or two days. He thinks— everybody's thinking — in one week or a couple days go back to Deir Yassin.

"Everybody got upset. My mother, my grandmother.

"About us, kids, we we're scared. So what is going to happen? We don't know because we start looking to my mother, grandmother, crying and screaming. Like my grandma, she said, 'Oh, I'm going to go looking for my father. I'm going to go looking for my brother.' Because nobody knows who's been killed or not killed for so many days.

"The fighters had to run away when his ammunition ran out.

"Run away. So where he run away? Some run to Ein Karem, some were hiding in some places. This is why nobody knew who's got killed, who's not killed. Two, three days after they start coming, you can go from town to town, there to those towns closer to Jerusalem. Like you see someone coming from the other family and you ask, 'have you seen my family? You seen my brother? You seen my wife?'

"That's why I keep telling my mother, 'When you go back to Deir Yassin?' She says, 'Okay, okay, okay, Insha'Allah, Insha'Allah.' Because everyone's thinking soon to go back to Deir Yassin."

When it became apparent they could not go home again, Yousef's father decided to take his family to As-Salt, Jordan, where he had a friend.

"We stayed there at As-Salt, we stayed there. So my father, he died after maybe two years. My mother-in-law, she used to say bleeding, bad one. Maybe because of the war. She said it get worst and worst and he was about 50 years old when he died.

When the Six Day War  
started in June 1967,  
her father sent his  
children to Jordan.  
He refused to leave.

"After he died — I have another sister. I have one from Deir Yassin and one, she's born in As-Salt - I tell my mom I want to go work.

"I'm maybe 10, 11 years old. I tell my mom I go work.

Yousef sold vegetables on the street.

"So, when my uncle moved to Amman, I start sleep by my uncles in Amman because he came back every day.

"So I start working with my uncle in construction. So my mother, she stayed in As-Salt. And when my uncle moved, and my aunt and all that, moved to Amman, my mother, she get married to a man from As-Salt. So, when she get married, I get mad. I don't want her to get married. So I start living by my uncle in Amman."

When Yousef was about 18, he began to make plans to go to South America with the United Nations plan.

"So I start plans to go out of country. So I make papers and I go to Brazil.

"We signed papers. It's all in English. And we don't know what we signed. I just want to go, I want to go. I left my sisters with my uncles. My mother, she stayed in As-Salt with her husband and different families.

"They put us in the bottom of the ship from Beirut to Italy. We thought it was bad, the water's coming to us! It was a small ship, not big. We start screaming. So, we go to Italy, to Genoa. So we took from Genoa a big ship. Even they called it Fred At Sea or Fred R. C., something like this. They name their ships. That was a big ship, a big one. It took us to Brazil.

"So, I stayed in Brazil until 1964. The first year, really, or year and a half, you know, working like a horse.

"Selling merchandise from house to house. Only thing we can do is sell merchandise from house to house. Clothing. Men clothing, women— mostly women clothing.

"After that, I have a friend, when he sees us working, not playing, he says, "Okay, how about if we open a store together?" So we go to a state called Rio Grande del Sur in Brazil, looking for some location to open a store where

we'd work together. So I did, we go to a town called Levramento. This is between Uruguay and Brazil. On the border. In that time, it's called two sister cities because this house is in Brazil, that house is in Uruguay. On the street, no security, no guards, no nothing – like brothers. So we open over there a business.

"We sold clothes, general merchandise, for men and women. It was successful because the guy who helped us to open the store, he used to have a factory in San Paolo. (Hasan)

"He was Palestinian from Deir Yassin. My wife's uncle. He went to Brazil in 1953.

In 1967, my father said, If the  
Jews come and they run over  
my neck with a tank,  
I won't move from here.  
I won't forget Deir Yassin.

"The family stayed, they stayed in Brazil, those people, until 1962. And he went back to Jerusalem, first time, because, like my wife, she said when the kids go home from the school, start eating, they start crossing themselves (in the manner Catholics do when they pray).

"Now it's the time to go back. They didn't want to lose their kids for that. He goes back to Palestine. This is before 1967. I think that was back in 1961 or 1962.

Yousef stayed in Brazil for another year. But the Brazilian currency was devalued, which affected his business. He decided to come to America.

"I came right to Chicago. They dropped us in Florida, Miami, so I come here to Chicago.

"When we come here, I start working. I had, maybe here, less than six months and they called me to go join the Army.

"The U.S. Army. Because when I got my visa from there, they signed papers if any war or anything happen to the United States, you'll be in it. So at that time there was Vietnam.

"My friend and I we go take the test. We don't pass. (The exam was in English, which they did not understand well at the time). In my mind, if I passed I was going to go back to Brazil."

Yousef had married a woman from Uruguay and together they immigrated to the United States. They had two sons. But after a few years they divorced. Yousef later married Nabiha, a Palestinian woman whose family also fled Deir Yassin. She was born in Jericho. They have nine children.

Yousef worked a variety of factory jobs in Chicago, along with working in sales in Florida. He also owned a Subway sandwich franchise, where he was allowed to keep pork products off the menu.

Nabiha was born in Jericho in 1950. Her family had fled there after the Deir Yassin massacre, she said. Instead of settling in a refugee camp, her father built a simple structure for his family. When the Six Day War started in June 1967, her father sent his children to Jordan. He refused to leave.

As a child, Nabiha remembers a hard life, but one that compelled her to study.

“How you live? There were no toys like here. But when you have no money, you become stronger sometimes. I studied, and I studied. I wanted to grow up better than I lived.

“In 1967, my father said, If the Jews come and they run over my neck with a tank, I won’t move from here. I won’t forget Deir Yassin.

“My mother said she wouldn’t leave her husband. So they gave the truck and money to a driver and we unmarried kids went to my married sisters in Jordan.”



But while in Jordan, Nabiha worried about her parents so she walked back to Jericho. The 25-mile trip included crossing the Jordan River. She brought back her sister and some cousins. But after ascertaining her parents were OK, she returned to Jordan, where she finished high school. She then went to a two-year teacher college and became a teacher.

The Baste family has returned every year to Palestine and Jordan. Once, their trip included a visit to Deir Yassin, which has been absorbed into Jerusalem. They were not allowed into the Baste home, which is still standing. But they were permitted to sit on benches in the yard.

## DEIR YASSIN



### **HASAN JABER (ABU YASSIN)**

Birthdate: Sept. 17, 1933

Father's occupation: Farmer, stone cutter

1945 Population: 610

Date of depopulation: April 9, 1948

From the comfortable living room of his Bridgeview, IL home, Hasan Jaber, known to everybody as Hajj Abu Yassin, talked about happier times in Palestine. Before the Nakba, his days were marked by favorite customs such as wedding parties and the poems participants would recite to each other or by collecting delicious ripe fruit from heavy laden trees.

But the Nakba changed all of that. When he fled for his life – barefoot and with nothing but the clothes he was wearing, Abu Yassin never thought he would become a permanent refugee.

In telling his story Abu Yassin wants people to know what really happened in Deir Yassin as he remembers it and as his family recounted it. Much myth has grown up around the village, which symbolizes the Nakba. But not all stories are accurate, Abu Yassin said. Less than 100 men fought off the Jewish invaders for 12 hours. The Zionist forces had wanted to surround the entire village from all sides. They had thousands of men while Deir Yassin had fewer than 100 fighters, Abu Yassin said. The men were able to force the Jewish terrorists back so they could only amass on the eastern side of the village. Had they been successful in surrounding Deir Yassin, Abu Yassin believes they would have slaughtered all the village's inhabitants.

In the end, the villagers had to stop fighting for two reasons: The back-up fighters they expected from Ein Karem appear; and they simply ran out of ammunition.



"They fought till the last bullet. We stayed in Deir Yassin because we never thought we'd be alone. We know we faced a lot of Jewish enemy but we stayed in Deir Yassin because we never thought we'd be alone without the help of the enormous army in Ein Karem. Nobody showed up. That's why we lost the battle. That's why we lost Deir Yassin.

Abd al-Qadir al Husayni, the commander of the Palestinian militia fighting in the area, was killed in the battle of Qastal on April 8, 1948, sending his troops into disarray. Other men had been fighting in Ein Karem, which was close to Deir Yassin for a week before the Deir Yassin massacre, Abu Yassin said.

Here is Abu Yassin's story of his dispossession:

"I remember everybody in the village because it is a small village. It was about 650 inhabitants and we know each other. We were all together, working together, loving each other, a close relationship.

"Most of them were farmers and stone cutters. Our village was 2 kilometers west of Jerusalem. Now it is a part of Jerusalem. It is surrounded from the east side.

**BEFORE THE NAKBA, HIS  
DAYS WERE MARKED BY  
FAVORITE CUSTOMS SUCH  
AS WEDDING PARTIES AND  
THE POEMS PARTICIPANTS  
WOULD RECITE TO EACH  
OTHER OR BY COLLECTING  
DELICIOUS RIPE FRUIT FROM  
HEAVY LADEN TREES.**

"Most of the Jewish villages were connected together. The only way to get to Jerusalem was in between the Jewish villages.

"Before 1948, let us say, there were not bad relations. They used to work with the Jews. But our people they did not sell them any piece of land.

"Two to three months before the battle of Deir Yassin, the Jews offered our people to live in peace with them on the condition they did not allow any other persons to come to the village. They offered the treaty but our people they did not accept it. They refused it because the treaty said no villager could help the resistance.

"There was a big battle, very well known, called Qastal. That very famous battle took place on the other side of the valley, from the west side of the village. Between our village and Qastal was a valley. Already many people from Deir Yassin were part of that battle so they couldn't accept the treaty.

"The question was why they would attack Qastal and Deir Yassin. They had a strategic place. They controlled the road to Jerusalem. They wanted at that time to open the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

"In that time, I was 15 years old. All my older brothers and sisters, they used to help, and myself, you know, helped my father. They made gravel. They used to help make gravel.

**“I remember everything. I remember everything. After the refusal of our people to accept the treaty, we knew there was going to be an attack. The villagers noticed that and they tried to dig trenches. They put places to protect themselves on the roofs, like barricades.**

“They emptied a few houses on the east side. One of them was Baste’s house because it was only 200 meters from Givat Shaul.

“We did not have a chance in that time to help, only as assistance because we were not allowed to go out on night watch because of our age.

“But I have three older brothers, which one of them was killed there and one of them was wounded.

“Saleem, 23, was married with one daughter. He was killed. Saleem, they captured and killed him in cold blood.

“Everybody they captured older than 13 years, they killed them.

“Mousa, 21, was wounded. The other brother who was night watchman was Mahmoud. He died here.

Saleem was in the first shift, so he was asleep when they (Zionists) came. They came about 2 or 3 o’clock a.m.

“They killed them in Deir Yassin. They took about 12 people together, and took them outside and killed them.”

Abu Yassin did not know at first his brother had been killed. Most of the dead were women and children, he said.

“The ladies who were taken prisoner told us. They used those ladies to evacuate the wounded and the dead, so they put them as a shield. The resistance was really fierce, so the Jews used the women to remove the bodies. The Zionists wouldn’t do it because they would be exposed.

In the morning of the 9th of April, like 3 a.m. or a little earlier, everybody was awakened by the sound of bullets and bombs. My brother Mahmoud was the second shift, came and said the Jews had surrounded us. It was an attack, a very big attack.

"He said everybody who is not a fighter has to leave, but you have to wait. There was no escape except from the west side.

"We're fighting but get ready (to leave). Everybody who was armed, he knew where to go. The battle started. In the first two hours, the resistance was winning and they were opening an escape route. The resistance pushed the Jews back to the east side.

A teacher from Jerusalem, her name was Hayat Salem al-Bilbaysy, when the people – the ladies and children – were leaving, she felt ashamed to leave. She asked for the kufiyeh, she put it on and she went back and fought and was killed.

"So now they have the battle only on the east side. Still the Jews did not come to the inside of the village. The few houses they took on the east, they were empty. And my brother they captured him because he was closer to the east side.

"The battle started and was very fierce. There were too many Jews. Our people were never scared of them. Morale was high. They fought for 12 hours, till 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They (Arabs) were hoping that assistance would be coming from other villages. Some fighters from Ein Karem were stationed in Qastal and they were hoping they would come. But nobody showed up.

"They were good fighters and that's why they kept them at bay for that long. They were trained well. Like my brother, the one that was wounded, he could shoot a wire in a distance. He was a good shooter.

"But in the afternoon, they ran out of ammunition. There was no way now to stay there. When they pushed them back to the east, they opened the way for the women and the children ... I took my small sisters, carrying one on my back and the other one by the hand.

**"My mother was helping the fighters and helping out nursing the wounded. My mother's name was Jamila Ahmad Salah. She saved a person who was wounded. He was shot in the chest. He pushed him from the battle and some people took him and he was saved. His name was Ali Qassem. My mother and some other village woman helped fight.**

(Some village women on the east side could not leave their houses because of the heavy fighting. During a lull in activities these women would go out onto the streets and remove the dead, Abu Yassin said.)

"A teacher from Jerusalem, her name was Hayat Salem al-Bilbaysy, when the people – the ladies and children – were leaving, she felt ashamed to leave. She asked for the kufiyeh, she put it on and she went back and fought and was killed.

"We went to Ein Karem. It took about 1 ½ hours because it was mountains. Every woman and child who could walk out ... they were told to leave.

One day was not enough to find who is alive or who is dead. And for people who were missing, it took longer. After the people see each other, everybody ask about his family.

"The battle ended at 3 o'clock (in the afternoon). Every house, the Jews occupied, they opened it. If any Jew was found dead (near a house) everybody in that house would be killed. They killed everybody in that neighborhood.

"We know the people being killed this way. We know them by names. And if the Jews found one dead Jew on the street outside a house, they'd kill everybody in the house.

"Shakir Mostafa was in the first shift so he was asleep. When the battle started, he woke up and took his machine gun and started shooting from his house. After the battle finished and the Jews came to that area, and there were many Jews killed there, they killed everybody in that neighborhood. This is one of the reasons more martyrs and more people died.

"I don't know exactly what happened with one lady ... (a relative) They slaughtered her son on her lap. His name was Fouad Jaber. And she kept his blood on her clothes a long time after they left. That's what she said.

"When we got to Ein Karem, everybody started looking for each other. We left with no possession, no jewelry, no money. My mother, even though she was one of the last to leave, she didn't bring any money with her.

"One day was not enough to find who is alive or who is dead. And for people who were missing, it took longer. After the people see each other, everybody ask about his family.

"My father was not alive. He died in 1944. My brothers and we in the same night we go to Ein Karem. We knew about my brother ... about the Jews murdering my brother.

"Even after the family was reunited, it was very sad. We never dreamed we'd leave our village this way.

"After Ein Karem, we went walking to Jerusalem the next day. We stayed in an abandoned school. We didn't have any covers or anything.

"The people who fall prisoner, they (the Zionists) killed about 38 and took the women and children and put them on trucks. They took the gold and money (from the women) and put them in trucks.

"But ourselves we walked from Ein Karem to Jerusalem, walking. Even the sick people. My brother carried one of the sick people on his back. We were taken in by the people of Silwan.

**“Every family took a family, like the migration of the Prophet (pbuh). Everybody shared. Almost a whole year, they shared everything – food, clothes. They never harmed anybody. There were like the Ansar. I still remember how honest and generous they were.**

“Then we went to Abu Dis, toward Jericho. We stayed in Abu Dis for about 1 to 2 years. We lived in a tent.

“Then we went to Jericho to a refugee camp – Aqbat Jabr. We and my mother – the single people. But my brothers who were married they went to different towns closer to Ramallah. They worked in stones.

“My older sister stayed in Abu Dis. The next to older emigrated to Amman.

“By then it was almost 1951. I studied a little in Silwan and then I studied in Jericho. Then I emigrated to Brazil in 1954.”

Abu Yassin went to Brazil on his own, with help from his family. He did not travel on the free program offered by the United Nations. He was afraid he would lose his rights to return to his country. He traveled to Brazil with Mousa. Eventually, Yahya and Mahmoud followed.

They lived in Brazil for 10 years and supported themselves as salesmen. He was successful and built a factory, which produced shirts.

He married a Lebanese Muslim woman in 1956 and they had two girls, Fatima and Leila. One day, the girls came home from school and before they ate, they made the sign of the cross over themselves, a tradition popular with Catholics. Brazil is a Catholic country, and Abu Yassin was afraid about the impact the religion was having on his children so they returned to Palestine in 1964.

In Jerusalem, he bought a machine that made gravel and continued in the same business his family was in before the Nakba. But after three years, he decided he wanted to leave again because the living there was tough. His younger brother Yahya, who was a truck driver, also wanted to leave. They applied for and received visas to the United States. Their brother Mousa also applied but was turned down. He moved to Venezuela. Brother Mahmoud stayed in Palestine.

Eventually, Abu Yassin became a U.S. citizen and applied again for his two brothers, who then joined him in the Chicago area.

Abu Yassin continued in sales. He went to Puerto Rico to work as a salesman for 8 years before coming back to the United States.

But ourselves we walked from  
Ein Karem to Jerusalem,  
walking. Even the sick people.  
My brother carried one of the  
sick people on his back. We were  
taken in by the people of Silwan.

He then went back to Jerusalem where he was a partner in a jewelry store. He then opened a jewelry store in New York with his nephew. He eventually sold the store and retired.

Their mother had started working as a midwife in the refugee camp. She continued in that profession in Jerusalem, where she died on Feb. 18, 1998.

Despite his business success and the comfort in which he lives today, Abu Yassin would gladly give it all up if he could just go home to Deir Yassin again.

“When you lose your hometown, you lose everything.”

Abu Yassin stopped to collect himself as tears gathered in his eyes.

“There’s nothing like the house I was born in. I’d rather go and live there and leave all this wealth. I’d be happier.

“We never thought we’d leave Palestine for that long and that it would be called Israel.

“There’s nothing like your birthplace. It’s very hard, if someone is born and raised there to forget that until he dies.

“In springtime, we had all kinds of fruits. Dates, figs, peaches, apricots, pomegranates, zaytun (olives).

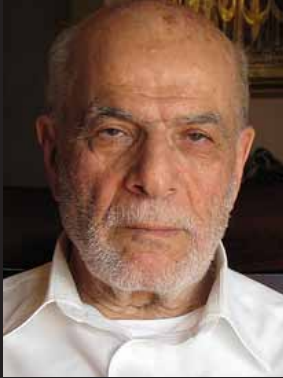
“What you find here doesn’t compare to what you find in our village. There’s a lot of rain here and they lose their flavor.

“We used to walk to Aqsa with my father every Friday. We used to have Bus #38 in our village, but we would walk. I knew every inch of that (mosque).

**“I remember the good times with my father and my mother,  
when we lived in peace.**

**Now if you stay a long time in front of your house  
(while visiting Deir Yassin),  
they’ll call the police.”**

## SAR'A



### **MAHMOUD ABDELHAMID SALAH**

Birthdate: May 1, 1932

Father's occupation: Farmer of wheat, barley and corn

1945 population: 340

Date of depopulation: July 18, 1948

Mahmoud Salah's childhood was filled with the wealth of fresh air, fresh produce and a loving family. In the tiny village of Sar'a, about 15 miles from Jerusalem, Mahmoud remembers the times spent with his father in the fields and orchards during harvest.

"My father, he always carried me on his shoulders after he was done with his work. We'd go into the grapes and fig trees and I'd wait until dark," while his father harvested the fruits, Salah said. "He'd just take me with him just to enjoy the trip from his work to the gardens."

Salah's father was actively involved in his young son's life. So much so, that he persuaded school officials to allow Salah to enter school early, though he was just 6 years old.

"I used to walk about 3 kilometers each day. ... (The school) belonged to four villages. There was no water there. A man used to bring his water on a donkey."

Salah described his childhood as "very happy," though it was vastly different than what most American children would comprehend. There were no toys, no modern conveniences. His father plowed his fields with the help of two oxen.

There was no electricity.

“Electricity was for the Jewish settlers only,” Salah said from the living room of his Bridgeview, Illinois, home. “It was a rule of the British.”

There were Jewish settlers already by the time Salah was born, but the two peoples coexisted peacefully.

“Before 1948 we never had a problem with the Jews over there. It happened when the strangers came from outside, the immigrant. The British opened the sea for them. They used to come by ship with no passports, no nothing. Just come in and settle.”

**“We start fleeing the village because it was on our head ...  
AIRPLANES WITH BOMBS.  
They used to hit us with mortar and we had nothing.  
WE COULDN’T DEFEND OURSELVES.  
We had to leave because we had no army.**

Salah is referring to the immigration into Palestine of Jews from across the world. In fact, the Hebrew army, the Haganah, began bringing in illegal Jewish immigrants in the mid-1930s, according to Khalidi, who referenced the book “History of the Haganah,” (Jerusalem, Yad Ben-Zvi Publishing, 1983, page 1463.) The British frequently intercepted these illegal immigrants and transported them to camps in places such as Cyprus. By the end of 1947, some 35,000 to 40,000 illegal immigrants were housed there. But for those who made it to the Holy Land, there was one condition they had to meet. They had to be “young and ready upon disembarkation at Tel Aviv to join immediately the combat units of Haganah,” according to the “History of the Haganah.”

Salah grew quiet and struggled to keep his composure when asked about the day Zionist actions changed his life.

“I was 15. It looked like this day,” he said, referring to the spring-like weather.

“One day, my mother, she left the house to collect some (herbs and greens) from the mountain we used to eat. You know Palestine is a blessed country. Even in the spring there is some grass you could cook it and eat it like the mushrooms. My mother left to collect some for us and she didn’t come back ... Maybe until dark, you know. Then I went and looked for her. And when I climbed the mountain, it was my mother coming from there, and she was shaking. She said 15 Jews from Haganah and Irgun with weapons, rifles. They circled her....”



Salah abruptly stopped talking at this point. He shut his eyes tightly and blinked a few times before taking a breath and resuming his dialog.

“They make a circle around her and they start saying ‘kill her.’ The other one said ‘kill her.’ The other one said ‘kill her’. Finally, one named Yousef, he spoke Arabic and he said, ‘Don’t kill her, because ...”

Again, Salah broke off. Retelling the story was causing him obvious distress.

But he continued to say the man named Yousef convinced the others to release his mother. From that moment on, his mother fell into ill health, Salah said.

“That’s what my mother told me. She started to be sick. And finally, my mother, when we left the country in 1948 and we went to Jordan near Amman, she was paralyzed and she died.

“That’s that I believe. When 15 armed men surround a lady and they’re telling you they’re going to kill you ...”

But the family did not leave Sar’a immediately. Several villagers were keeping watch for the Haganah at night. Finally, the Zionists came from the west side of the village; they occupied Sar’a on July 13-14, 1948.

The villagers were not able to protect themselves.

In fact, though the Zionists’ “Plan Dalet” called for the violent takeover of areas even outside the borders given them by United Nations partition, the Palestinians – and the Arab armies sent to protect them – were ill-prepared for the better armed, fortified and trained Zionist forces and militant groups.

General Ismail Safwat, of the Arab League Military Committee, submitted a report to Jamil Mardam Bey, prime minister of Syria and chairman of the Palestine Committee of the Arab League, on March 23, 1948. He described a dire situation.

“Jewish forces in Palestine number no less than 50,000 fighters,” Safwat wrote. “It should be noted that the Haganah forces include the Palmach armored formation, estimated to have 5,000 to 6,000 combatants. This is a highly trained mobile formation, which the Jews themselves consider an elite commando force.” In addition, the Zionists created the “Local Defense Forces” – militia groups of colonists. They numbered another 20,000 fighters.

By contrast, the total number of Arab troops, including armed Palestinian militia, was about 7,700, according to the report.

**It is no wonder then, that when the Haganah started shelling Sar’a with mortar in July, the villagers left en masse.**

.. FINALLY, THE UNITED NATIONS CAME, THE RELIEF AGENCY. THEY STARTED TO COUNT US. THEY USED TO GIVE US RATION CARDS AND WE USED ON LINES, AND WE WOULD TAKE WHATEVER THEY GAVE US. WE LIVED IN TENTS UNTIL THE SUMMER CAME IN JERICHO. IT IS LIKE A DESERT. AFTER THAT, WE FEEL IT IS VERY HOT AREA. I REMEMBER, WE USED TO FIND SCORPIONS, SNAKES.

In that time, the United Nations came and gave us tents. We stayed there. It was organized. Monthly, they come to the camp and they give people food.

"We started fleeing the village. "They hit us with mortar. We went to the next village, fleeing," Salah said.

And so began the exodus of Mahmoud Salah and his family. Their journey of wandering lasted for more than a year. They traversed the miles on foot, braving the elements and living under trees and in caves, in some cases, shuffling the 20 to 30 family members from village to village until they finally came to rest in the Kalandia refugee camp about six miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Here is Salah's tale of his dispossession:

"We start fleeing the village because it was on our head ... airplanes with bombs. They used to hit us with mortar and we had nothing. We couldn't defend ourselves. We had to leave because we had no army.

"We left, my father, my grandfather, my mother my sisters. (In all between 20 and 30 members of Salah's family left Sar'a.)

"They killed a man. He was just taking care of his farm. He didn't come to his house so we were wondering what happened, you know? And we left to look for him. We found him dead with his two oxen. We took him. We carried him and we buried him with his clothes because we considered him as a shaheed. We didn't wash his body.

"I remember we were settling in a valley. Its name was Khalit al-Jama. We were there and the Egyptian army came and took whatever arms we had with us. We were living under oak trees and in caves and under rocks for just under six months.

"Airplanes (dropped) leaflets. They said to leave. They said, don't listen to the Egyptians. Just leave the country.

"I never believed that we will come back as soon as they used to tell us. I'm not just angry. It is more than angry because, you know, in that time they gave me a scholarship to be in Jerusalem College ... I nearly finished high school. Before the war my father told me I had to go to Jerusalem because they gave me a scholarship. I didn't go because of the war. When we started leaving, I remembered I had books in my house and I said I would go back and get them. When I tried to get back in the house, the bullets were coming. I couldn't go. I got nothing.

"I heard there was a bomb. There was a mosque over there, the al-Samet mosque. When I saw that, it was leveled. After that, all these villages they were gone. My village was a strategic village. It was in a high, high mountain. They started hitting the whole villages with airplanes. I don't believe the propaganda they say that the Palestinians are leaving their homes because they want to leave.

**"No, it is a lie. It is a lie. I remember with what they were hitting us.  
I remember a big bomb and it didn't explode. I remember.**

"If anybody says that we left the village because of our choice it isn't. We were forced to leave.

*There was nothing,  
no houses.  
No nothing.  
They destroyed  
everything.*

"The valley (Kahlit al-Jama) was far away from our village in the District of Hebron. We are walking in mountains. We used to sleep in caves. We left our country (Sar'a) to the train station. We went to the village of Zakariyya. We went to Hadul, to Bayt Natiff village and stayed about one month. After that we left for that valley. We stayed there six months until the winter started, about November or December.

"We used to have some wheat, some barley. We used to go to grind it and to make bread and eat it. When we felt we were in trouble (immediately before they left Sar'a), under the planes, the soldiers coming, the machine guns, we felt we had to take some.

"We went from that valley to Halhul, to al-Shuyukh. We stayed in al-Shuyukh about the whole winter. We settled in an old building. My uncle, father, grandfather, our sisters, my brother... we were about 20 30 people just in one room. It is old, old building and it was cement. But we had nothing to cover ourselves with.

"After that we heard some help come from the Red Cross and we left that village to the Bayt Sahur near Bethlehem and Jerusalem. We stayed overnight for two days in a garage. It was still winter time, maybe January.

"We had a friend. He has a truck. He said, 'I will take you to Jericho.' We left in that truck to Jericho ... all of us. We settled there. We found refugees, you know. We found tents and we started taking food from the Red Cross. We used to get shortening, some chickpeas, like flour, something like that. They used to give us sardines.

"Finally, the United Nations came, the relief agency. They started to count us. They used to give us ration cards and we used on lines, and we would take whatever they gave us. We lived in tents until the summer came in Jericho. It is like a desert. After that, we feel it is very hot area. I remember, we used to find scorpions, snakes.

The United Nations took us to the district of Ramallah. The village of al-Jeeb, the Bir Aziz area. We waited over there two or three months. The people of the village, they start to protest us. The United Nations decided to take us to Nabi Yakub, it is in the district of Jerusalem.

We stayed over there almost until December. A rain storm came up and destroyed most of our tents. We have to leave by ourselves. Nobody came for us. We went to a village. Its name is Jabaa. The people of Jabaa treated us very good. They are good people. We stay in their houses for no rent.

After Jabaa, we had to leave. We left to Kalandia camp. Now it is a big, big location. In that time, the United Nations came and gave us tents. We stayed there. It was organized. Monthly, they come to the camp and they give people food. Finally, I have to look for work. I used to work in the street. (road construction work) I thought it was too much of a problem.

(According to the United Nations Relief Works and Agency, Kalandia Camp opened in 1949. It is located in the West Bank about six miles north of Jerusalem.)

"I sent a letter to the chief of the United Nations agency in Beirut. I sent a letter and I told him, 'I have a family. If I don't have a job, I will kill myself. I'm telling you the truth.'

"There were no people.  
*Nothing.*  
No human there in all the village.  
All the area around it was empty."

"I remember, I was working on a truck. We put rocks in the truck and we used it to make the airport near Jerusalem. A lady came with her car. And she stopped in the street and she said, 'Who is Mahmoud Salah.' She said you have a job from Beirut.

"It's my level of education. At that time, nobody had a high school diploma. (The woman hired Salah to wash dishes in the refugee camps. After about three months, he went back to Kalandia Camp, where he washed dishes for 5 ½ years. He became the assistant manager.)

"In 1961, the United Nations opened the way to South America for every young man. To Venezuela. Brazil, Argentina, Columbia.

"If you leave the family behind you, no more food. No more monthly line. They pay you for the ship from Jerusalem to anywhere you want. But ... they cut everything (to the remaining family members). I have to go to the unknown (to make money to send back to his family.)

"I told them I want to go to Colombia and from Colombia, maybe, I have to jump here to this country.

"On June 12, 1961, I left my family to go to Beirut. I stayed there for five days. Then we went to the Turkish ship. A small ship and they put us in the basement of the ship. If you open the window you'd be very cold. If you shut the window it is hot, and it is trouble.

"We left Beirut to go to Egypt, Alexandria; then to Napoli, Italy. After seven days, we went to a big ship. Its name was Americo Vespucci. We took that ship to the shores of Marseille, France and we left to Barcelona. We got out from the ship and we went in Barcelona for a while. We went from Barcelona to Canary Island, then through the Straits of Gibraltar. After Gibraltar we went to the ocean for 15 or 16 days. It was just water and fish. When we reached Caracas, we found people like us. Arabs. We stayed there a while, then we went back to the ship. We spent a night in the ship and we left Venezuela to an island, Curacao. We wait about three to four hours and we left to Cartagena.

"It is Colombia. It was a hot country, poor people, the same as us. I found a lady, she has a basket and she has five children in it, and they had no clothes. She's asking for help. I told the people with us, about 20 young men from around Jerusalem, I say, 'We are crazy. We came here to make money and you see this lady, she is asking for help.'

"We left for Bogota. In Bogota, I used to carry clothes. Go door to door, for 4 ½ years. I sent them (his family) whatever I could but it was not good enough. The United Nations, they stopped giving the family food. The work was not good.

"In that time, in 1965, it was a law from this government here, the United States by President (Lyndon) Johnson, that just whoever married a lady from anywhere in South America, he could get a visa to this country.

"I had to be smart. I had to fool somebody, make a trick with somebody. I made a trick with this lady here. (his wife, Blanca. He was 19, she was 32.)

The couple married and emigrated to the Chicago area. His wife converted to Islam and together they had six children. Salah owned a grocery store and he was robbed five times. Once he was shot.

When Salah left Palestine in 1961, he didn't see his mother again until 1975. She died in 1979 in Amman, Jordan. He travelled to Palestine a few times with this family; once in 1999 when his father died.

In 1995, Salah took his entire family back to Sar'a. There was nothing left.

**"We went over there, to my village. I tried even to know where is the grave of my grandfather. I didn't find it. The whole village - it was leveled. The graveyard - all of it is trees. You can't find the graves. I tried to get some grapes from what my grandfather planted there. I had to put my fingers through the thorns. (A thicket had grown up around the grape vines) I got some of them. I ate some and brought some back to Amman. It was very sad you know.**

Khalidi's book, "All That Remains" bears one scant paragraph about Sar'a today:

"Stone rubble and iron girders are strewn among the trees on the site. A flat stone, surrounded by debris and inscribed with Arabic verses from the Qur'an, bears the date A.H. 1355 (1936). On the western edge of the site, stands a shrine containing the tombs of two religious leaders. A valley to the northeast is covered with fig, almond and cypress trees."

Salah remarked about how trees and other foliage had taken over the place that was once his home.

"Around the village, it was trees. We prayed there. I prayed inside the trees. I prayed two raka. There was nothing, no houses. No nothing. They destroyed everything.

"I believe those trees prayed too because Allah says the trees pray. This is why I prayed. It is very happy, but sad. It is sad. You are in the area where you were born and you can't even stay there. You have to leave as soon as possible and it makes you very sad.

"There were no people. Nothing. No human there in all the village. All the area around it was empty."

## EIN KAREM



### **OMAR MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM DAUD**

Birthdate: July 1, 1929

Father's occupation: Farmer, landlord

1945 population: 3,180

Date of depopulation: July 18, 1948

Ein Karem is a beautiful village nestled along undulating hills and cultivated terraces. It is a place rich in history and majesty.

Omar Muhammad Ibrahim Daoud, of Ein Karem who now lives in Norrth Riverside, IL, points to the place where the Prophet Zakariya raised Mary the mother of Jesus and where the Prophet Yahya, known to Christians as John the Baptist, was born.

Despite more than 60 years of exile from his beloved village, Daoud can still clearly recount experiences he shared with his family maintaining each of the 19 pieces of property they owned. When the family left Ein Karem in July 1948 during the Nakba, they left behind more than their orchards and vineyards. A younger sister and his infant son were buried in the soil, which Daoud is no longer allowed to inhabit.

To be sure, Daoud has had an adventurous life, from his participation in the resistance to the Zionist takeover of Palestine, to his stint in the Jordanian army where he became a machinist. In the United States, Daoud was an inventor and he even earned a patent in 2001 for his Accident Prevention System for Vehicles. He has met Muhammad Ali and Elijah Muhammad. And he counts 43 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren among his blessings.

Daoud's cheerful, optimistic demeanor belies the pain that forced exile has had on him. During two interviews, Daoud did not answer questions directly about how he felt about leaving Ein Karem, but the sentiments came out in other ways. Perhaps the most notable is

his pride in his village, its beauty and spiritual heritage. Thanks to his son, Daoud – a journalist in Jordan – the Daoud family has been able to catalog a treasure trove of Ein Karem facts. Omar Daoud has marked the 19 plots of land his family owned on a village map. A corresponding key reveals details about each plot: its size, what kind of fruit grew there, etc. Daoud has copies of the land deeds, stamped and with his father's picture.

Still the anguish can be heard in this plea: "Who are you to give away my land?"

At nearly 80 years old, there's not a night that goes by when Daoud does not pray so he can return to Ein Karem to live before he dies, he said.

"You dream. They left in the Nakba with the key in their hand," Daoud said. "You think two weeks you come back, three weeks you come back. It's been 60 years we've been waiting."

Daoud's story is disjointed as we moves swiftly from one memory to another. The following are excerpts from his story:

## "The day I was born was a revolution."

Daoud proudly proclaims that fact as if the uprising on July 1, 1929, against the British and Jewish settlers somehow became part of him the day he was born.

While Jews had settled in Ein Karem and resided there peacefully before World War I, the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate of Palestine changed that co-existence. Daoud was raised on resistance. It was all around him.

He enjoys telling the story of the British plane that crashed on his father's property in 1938:



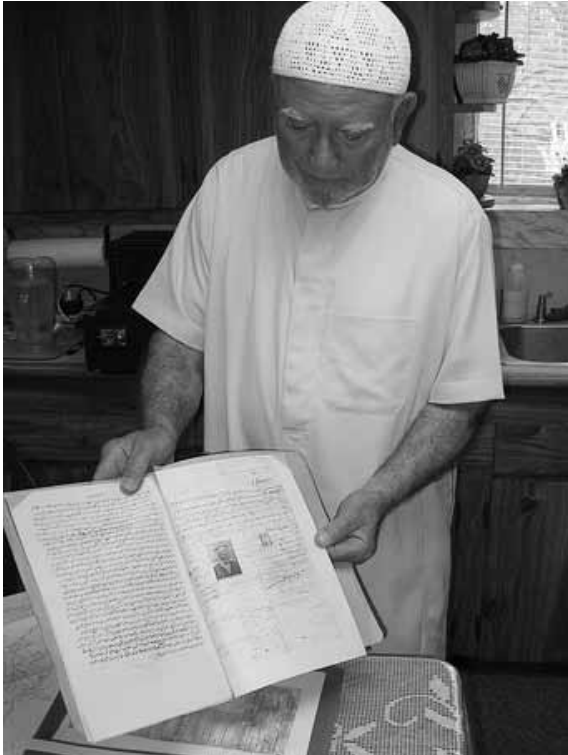
"When she crashed, I was in Kolonia (near Ein Karem). I jumped from there about 7 kilometers when we heard the news it crashed in our land.

"The airplane crashed when they were delivering the mail to the police station. At that time, there was a revolution against the British. Still the revolution was slowing down but it was still there.

"When the plane went down, everybody said the pilot hit the tree. But the British didn't believe that. We had the best shooter in Ein Karem, his name was Ali Khalil. And they accused him of shooting the airplane because after the investigation the British found a bullet.

"And right away (the British) demolished his house. Ein Karem felt bad for him and they collected money and built a new house for him. That was in '38. I was at that time 9 years old.

"This is the street, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Jaffe. We never mention Tel Aviv, Jaffe. Now when the airplane crashed, I was here. It's almost 7 kilometers and I ran like crazy. When I reached there, already the Christian people took the pilot. He wasn't injured real bad.



"The following day they came and took the airplane in a truck. For me I can't say (which story is true). I was too young. Lately, after I grew up, we heard these two stories; I can't push one over the other. He was the best shooter, not only in Ein Karem."

Over hot tea and Arabic coffee, Daoud points to the Ein Karem map where he has marked out all 19 parcels of property his family owned. He had written a corresponding key that included descriptions of the land.

"These are documents to our land, in Hebrew, English and Arabic. See my father's picture here with the stamp? Here, we have 19 pieces of land.

"This is 1933. Those pieces are all our land, marked with yellow. For example, take number 1. I used to go with my mother and my father there to pick up fruit from this area. In summertime, we'd go from here to here (pointing out places on his map).

"Each part of the land, I marked it and wrote something about it.

"Number 2. My beautiful sister, she was 14 years old. She was the most beautiful girl in Ein Karem. She was going to the place to get water. When she came back home, it looked like some people gave her the (evil eye). There was nothing wrong with her. But she couldn't reach our house. Ten meters from our house she collapsed (and died). We put her in the neighbor's house.

"I am at that time 7 years old. They sent me to my mother. She was (out) picking fruit. And I started screaming from the road. 'Mama. Come on! My sister died.'

"She came in and she lost her head. Two, three days, she was running through all the garden. That's the only girl she had. There was no sickness, nothing. She really was the most beautiful girl.

"I ran from here, all the way up to here to call her (points to the route on the map).

"Number 3. Now you pass from our land here ... Now, in the present time, I went there I can't recognize it because they built houses. And they built Hadassa, the hospital, but we used to play soccer there.



"Most of our pieces of land have fruit orchard, grapes, zaytun (olives).

"Places like this one, this has grapes only. This has also grapes. This has zaytun only. This is mixed with fruit trees and it was so beautiful a place, people came from Jerusalem to make picnic there. My father let them do that.

Daoud's mother would harvest the olives and other fruits and place them in large jars to sell in Jerusalem. But the best pieces would be laid on top. Daoud recalled with pride the fact his parents took the best fruits and olives and distributed them among the poor at the mosque.

"In order for us to keep up with (the harvest), my parents hired someone from Kolonia. I remember 17 big jars filled up with oil (from their olives). They would take one or two jars to Jerusalem and sell it. We had another two or three places like this.

"It wasn't easy to collect all the stuff from here. In the summertime, my mother would carry the stuff and the following morning she would take the bus to Jerusalem to sell the stuff.

"This is the biggest piece my father had. He hired some people to dig the ground and take the stone. He hired people from Jordan. After he finished, he made a fence and a home. This is the place (of their summer home). The total was three or four dunum, which makes about 2 acres. This was the biggest piece of land.

"This was our life. And (we had) no Frigidaire.

"We lost all of this in the Nakba.

"Everybody was in the resistance against the British.

"Israel was already established but we were still in Ein Karem. We fought. We were in this mountain here, and I shot with a big rifle and I hit one airplane.

Daoud cannot remember the exact date the Zionists took over Ein Karem. The history books set the date as July 18, 1948.

"I can't remember the date to be exact. At that time, who cares about the date? We just took our keys and we thought in one week we'd come back.

"My mother brought some things, but not everybody brought something.

I am at that time 7 years old.  
They sent me to my mother.  
She was (out) picking fruit.  
And I started screaming from the road.

*'Mama. Come on!*  
**MY SISTER DIED.'**

Of course, it makes me sick,  
not just angry (to see someone  
else living in his home). Who  
are you to give away my land?  
*Like that man from morocco  
living in my house.*

"Later, some people sent some people back to bring the stuff. I know people from Ein Karem, who went. They had to sneak into the houses. In that time, Ein Karem still wasn't occupied like today. Now after it was occupied and every house had some people it was more difficult.

"Was it dangerous? The question was you were safe from the Jews, but you're not safe from the Jordanians. Some guy went back to his land to get something. He was safe from the Jews, but who caught him? The Jordanians and they gave him 15 years. The Jordanians were the protectors of Israel.

"My mother took the simple things, like the bedding. My father died about two months before the Nakba. In that time, when we left Ein Karem, there were my mother, my brother and his wife, me and my wife and my youngest brother without a wife. Six people. In that time, when we left, there were six people. If you count me now, I have 43 grandkids and about 7 great-grandkids. Alhumdulileh.

"I was fighting in Jerusalem before the Zionists attacked Ein Karem. I started fighting in Jerusalem with my leader, Ibrahim Abudayyeh. When we lost our position in Jerusalem, and I got shot, we moved to Bayt Jalla.

"In Bayt Jalla, my position was to repair all the anti-tank riflery and all the big guns coming to us from Egypt. I took all the big guns, cleaned them, oiled them and dried them and everything .

"The family went to Jordan after Ein Karem. Daoud worked as a machinist. His brother got a visa to the United States in 1952. Another brother followed in 1956 and Omar followed in 1966.

Since his emigration to the U.S., Daoud has visited Palestine and his beloved home in Ein Karem. He found he was not welcome.

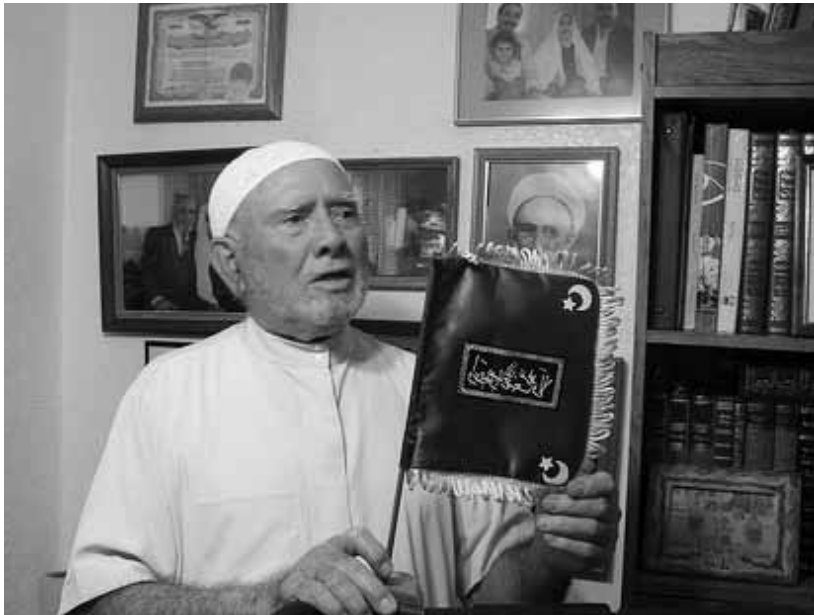
**"When I went the first time, I went in 1973. They (the Jewish people living in his house) wouldn't let me take a picture even. When we start taking picture they got mad. Terrible. It's my place. Where I was born, where I was married, where I have ... It's too much. But we make it. One time, my mother, God bless her soul, went there and they wouldn't let her go (in to see the house).**

In 2000, Daoud and his two brothers, Muhammad and Imran, went to Ein Karem. It was the first time they had all reunited at their homestead since they fled the Nakba in 1948. He had a picture of the three of them standing in front of the wall that surrounded their boyhood home.

"That's me and my youngest brother, my oldest brother. That's my house. A Jewish guy from Russia lives there now. My son made an interview with him. My son asked him why he chose Ein Karem, and the man said 'Ein Karem is the best village in Palestine.' That's what he said. I heard the interview.

"Of course, it makes me sick, not just angry (to see someone else living in his home). Who are you to give away my land? Like that man from Morocco living in my house.

"Our house is a two-flat. A man from Morocco lives (on the first floor. The Russian lived on the top floor.) See in front of my house here? When the Germans take Poland, they brought high school girls from Poland and they lived across the street from our house.



**"Everything is in my heart. How many times do I get up in the night and every time I pray, 'God please send me back. Send me there, send me there. I want to live one or two weeks in Ein Karem, in the place where I grew up."**

**You dream.**

**They left in the Nakba with the key in their hand.**

**Two weeks you come back, three weeks you come back.**

**60 years we've been waiting.**



## **HASAN AHMED HASAN KISHTA**

Birthdate: June 12, 1945

Father's occupation: Farmer

1945 population: 680

Date of depopulation: April 3, 1948

Sitting in the office of a local businessman, Hasan Kishta's cheerful demeanor and positive outlook are no substitution for his resolute determination to 'never surrender' what is rightly his. While Hasan jokes and laughs, and is full of childhood stories from back home, he has never forgotten the indignation his family faced as they were forced out of their home and into exile, leaving behind his family's fertile citrus orchards and the stinging As-Salt air of the Mediterranean Sea.

From a worn manila envelope, Hasan pulls faded documents dating back to 1917: Property tax bills for his grandfather's and his father's land. He produced the marriage license for his grandfather, with the words "Government of Palestine" stamped clearly in English and Arabic at the top. Hasan was only 3 years old when his village was cleansed. He has scant memories of life before the Nakba. Much of that day is etched into his memory by the stories his brothers and family told. But the memories come alive a few months into their forced exile. It is as if the harsh reality of life as a refugee forced him to suddenly grow into a cognizant child. Hasan said his memory is clear from about four months into their new life as displaced people.

Here is his story:

I had two brothers and two sisters.

The oldest brother is called Mohammed. The one in the middle called Mahmoud and me, the youngest.

Sisters, the oldest is called Sumeya, and the one after her named Khaireyah.

The older brother (Mohammad) died here. He was a professor at Governors State University. He died in a car accident in 2000. He was in curriculum, science education. (Mohammad Ahmed also was a cofounder of Universal School in Bridgeview, IL). He had a PhD from University of Iowa.

Mahmoud also finished his PhD in mathematics at University of Missouri, Columbia. He is now working in Jordan. He's the dean of the math department at Philadelphia University.

I came to go to school. University of Minnesota; (bachelor's of science) in mathematics. And then Purdue, a master's in computer science and then Governors State, a master's in computer science - all from illiterate parents and illiterate sisters. They never got to go to school. Oh, I got a (bachelor's) in computer in University of Minnesota, 1974 (in addition to a bachelor's in math)

The only thing I can remember (before the Nakba) is we had a black dog that I used to ride and go with to the Mediterranean seashore. It is close by. Yes, that is the only thing I can remember.

I would say, yes, it was (a happy time). The weather was very nice, plenty of food, there was sheep, there was donkey. There are camels. My father also worked - there is a term in Arabic call Hadar - it's exactly like a trucker today except instead of using a truck he used a camel. He will load whatever it is for people for money and move it from one place to another; big things of olives, big things of oranges. They cultivate their oranges. They want to move them to the sea. They want to take them to the sea. So they need somebody with two, three camels to move them. ... So my father owned a camel and when things are slow he would use that.

My oldest brother Mohammad actually went to school in Yafa, he would go there every day and go back. Sometimes, we had relatives there and he would stay there overnight. ... He (Mohammad) probably completed fourth grade by the time of the Nakba.



**It was actually good times, happy times, simple life. The main thing, it was secured. Like there was no fear a boy or a girl would be kidnapped, there are no robberies. That was the basic general atmosphere. People knew each other; they lived neighbors all their lives. Small villages are sometimes close, tight. Related to each other, married from each other. That's basically it.**

... Ijlil is a suburb of Yafa and Yafa is next to Tel Aviv, yes there was some communication between the two (Jews and Arabs). There were some Jewish settlements. My dad kept talking about Herzliya. Yes, it's still there. If you look at the map, it's there.

It was very peaceful. It wasn't confrontational. It seldom happened but there was no hard feeling in that time because the Arabs, or the Palestinians, at that time didn't sense the danger that was coming. After all, why would they differentiate between Jews and Christians? They looked at both as the same. If Christians can live among them for hundreds of thousands of years, why not Jews?

Actually a Jew, who my father knew very good, as we were packing the truck and loading the truck leaving with two or three more families, this Jewish friend asked my father for them to stay. But my father would not stay because everybody from the whole town was leaving. The news from Deir Yassin influenced everybody. (Editor's note: Actually, according to historian Walid Khalidi, Ijilil was depopulated on April 3, 1945, six days before the Deir Yassin massacre took place.)

They used it (fear tactic). They are masters. They knew exactly what to do. It was a plan. Every step they took, it was planned very carefully. And we did not, you know? We were naïve, politically naïve; unaware of the world events. And, sadly, the people who were aware, I would say they were, they, they, mostly collaborated with England and the Jews. I'm talking about the Palestinian elite; the ones that were aware what was happening.

I mean my dad could not see the flux of the immigration of the Jews coming to Yafa, but others were aware of that. Others were traveling around Palestine and seeing new settlements coming up. My father did not see that. He was a farmer going to his piece of land and coming.

AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE: Do you remember the day you left?

A: I barely remember that. I remember, probably, three four months after. I remember when we left we went from our town to another town that was away from the seashore. It's called Teerah There are many 'Ataras in Palestine. There is four or five of them. This Teerah is next to Yafa. We stayed there until it was captured by the Jews - probably a week or two weeks. Then we left and settled in a cave for few months and then we moved into the city of Tulkarm.



If you look at the map, Tulkarm is parallel to Yafa. So you have influx of refugees coming from Tulkarm. There was no United Nations at that time. No housing, no tents yet. So we settled. ... there was a park in the middle of the city with lot of spruce trees. So each family took a spruce tree and settled underneath that and we stayed there for probably four, five months. The spruce trees are still there. I visited them with my children. And then, the 'generous' United Nations gave us a tent.

And I remember now... from there, really, memory starts getting sharper.

What I do remember is this: My oldest brother Mohammad carried me on his shoulders while we were fleeing.

AMP: How do you know that?

A: Because I was told. We always had this when I got upset with him, he'd say, 'Listen. I'm the one who carried you.'  
(Mohammad was 11 or 12 at the time)

(There) was a refugee camp. It's on the outskirts of the city of Tulkarm. It is east of the city of Tulkarm; still there. It is so cramped now. The tents were circular. The size of the tents was probably the size of ... 12 by 12. It was a circular tent. Many

**... when the regular schools opened I went and registered myself, by myself. (I was probably 6 ...**

occasions at night the tent would fall because of the rain and the wind and we'd get up, and the mud! And (we'd) try to make it stand and, yeah, it was really muddy. It was muddy. There were no bathrooms.

AMP: Was there running water, was there a well there?

A: Never. There was two orchards next to the refugee camps. Each orchard were for oranges and citrus, and each one had its own well for irrigation. And the people of the camp, especially the ladies, used to go and carry the water and bring it to the camps.

So, I remember I used to go with my mom, walking barefoot, both of us and she is carrying they empty clay jug on top of her head. And she would bring the water, fill the water, I'd get tired. She would carry it on her head. They used to roll a piece of material and they would place it on their head and when they placed the jug on top of that it kind of settles in, and they balance that. My mom used to carry me. The same for wood. She used to go to the near mountains and cut the wood. All these chores were done by the women, which proves we were liberated long before the West. This is the most honorable job a woman can do to serve her family. Enslaving women is sending them to work in an office, working for a boss that bad...

I need to tell you this story. One day, in these orchards, my father used to work as a farmer. He will go and do irrigation, and remove the weeds. ... He used to work there whenever they had work on a daily basis they gave him 1 shilling.

And now, one day while we was living under the trees – this is before the luxury (of the tents) my father was at work and my mom was sitting with my older brother and probably with us and a man comes along and he says, 'Where's your family?' and my brother points him to my mom and the man asks my mom if he can take my brother Mohammad with him so he can take care of his sheep in a far away town 20 km away and live with him. And mom says, 'Yes,' and the wages will be a saa of qumh, wheat, like 10 lbs. of wheat a year. Write down – a year! Plus, he feed him.

My mom never saw this person. This person just passing by and he saw my brother, tall and handsome, 12 years old, and he thought that my brother can help him with the sheep so my mom says yes.

So, my brother goes with him. My father comes at night. Where's Mohammad? Ok. What's the name of the man? Which town? No clue. ... Just to give you really, (an idea) there was no danger, by the way; the safety, the security, the trust.

The war between Palestinians and Jews had nothing to do with the Palestinians themselves. The poor tends to trust. The poor does not analysis the situation – so innocent. And my father really got upset.

Now. Let's go now and follow my brother, can we? He goes there. The man is nice to him. My brother goes with this man and lives with him close to the city of Qalqilya. And he sleeps with the sheep and in the morning he takes the sheep to the mountains, make them feed and then will brings them back. Back and forth, back and forth, Ok? One day, he really got tired of this. He missed his family. All of sudden he said, 'I'm going to leave.' So he rode his donkey and came back by himself.

I am owner of it (land) and I cannot get in. They question me, why are you here? What do you want to do? Where do you want to go? Why? Somebody comes from Russia and they give him the red carpet. I am the native who was there; I get questions. Why? My kids have a hard time going there because they are young. They (Israel) don't want the young. They intimidate them. They make it so it is impossible for them; so they hate going and that's the policy. That's the point. They make it so hard.

AMP: Without the wheat?

A: Without the wheat.

AMP: How long was he gone?

A: Probably six months

AMP: He had no pay then, whatsoever?

A: No

AMP: When he came back, what did your parents do?

A: They were very excited, very happy

AMP: And they did not care about the wheat?

A: The heck with the wheat! At least the kid is back.

AMP: Do you remember him coming back?

A: Yes. I remember him coming back.

AMP: Do you remember him leaving?

A: Yes, because I was there. It made me feel sad, but not that sad. You see, you know, probably my mom welcomed the idea because there was hardly any food. When he came back my brother, he worked. We have ... vendors, but this vendor was selling sandwiches, liver sandwiches. So he hired my brother Mohammad to blow the air on the charcoal so he keeps the charcoal lit. For two loaves of bread a day. That's what they paid him. Don't shake your head.

The same thing happened with my brother Mahmoud. He sold hareesah, cracked wheat. They sold it in the market in the city Tulkarm. What I'm coming at is kids their age lost two years of schooling because parents were concerned about bringing any kind of income. They let the kids work for meager money, for whatever it is. Then when the tents came, they start going to school.

United Nations provided the school. UNRWA provided the schools. I went to school. I went to what is called a kuttab.



It's not as religious – it is not religious as the West (believes). ... It is a non-formal school. A religious man teaches them Arabic language and Quran. And I had to beg my father to go to school. Because he thought that I was too young, (I was) 5.

And then when the regular schools opened I went and registered myself, by myself. (I was) probably 6. I remember the principal asking me, saying, 'Did you go to school?' And I was referring to the kuttab school and I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Ok. I will ask you one question. If you know it I'll put you in second grade.... If you don't I'll keep you in first grade. And I said, 'Go ahead,' and he said, '5 plus 7,' and I said '12!' And he said 'Second!' And I went to second and it was the biggest disaster of my life because in all the time I was the youngest. Kids picked on me sometimes, and they wouldn't let me listen to their stories. They said, 'You are too young! Get away.'

It was a very beautiful life. I have fond memories of the tent. Lot of friends. Lot a lot of friends. Sometimes we went to the garbage dumps and we ate; and we picked the peels of the oranges and we ate the inside of the skins. Whenever we passed by a grape on the street I'd pick it up and ate it. Bananas, we never saw. Meat, we never saw. Very, very few times; very little. Money, it was as rare as ... whatever. But it was secure. We did not probably feel the pain of our parents.

(My brothers), they were affected differently. Both of them came late to the tent at night, the boys. They spent most of their evenings with their friends from the city of Tulkarm, away from the refugee camp. Overall, I had a good feeling about.

AMP: Do you keep in touch with any of these friends

A: Yes

AMP: Where are they, are they here or back home?

A: Home. Still in the refugee camp.

AMP: But they have houses now, right?

A: If you can call it a house. It's like a structure. It's a structure, if you can call it a house. It's a structure on top of a structure because the family grew so they would build a small room on this side and push a wall this way, you know, they have to do whatever they have to do.

AMP: So how did it happen that you and your brothers left and they stayed there?

A: Beautiful question. My brothers, both of them, were tutoring. They left the United Nations schools and enrolled in government schools and they became in touch with the boys of the city, not the refugees, the locals. And they started to get to know their families. So my brothers started tutoring some of the kids and getting paid for it. From the fifth grade and sixth grade, they would tutor kids in second grade and third grade and tutor.

If you can call it a house. It's like a structure. It's a structure, if you can call it a house. It's a structure on top of a structure because the family grew so they would build a small room on this side and push a wall this way, you know, they have to do whatever they have to do.

My oldest brother got to know a family called Karmi. As you can see Karmi comes from Tulkarm. (He) started tutoring them. And then the father of this family gets a job in Kuwait. At that time, we're talking about the early '50s, and so he goes to Kuwait and leaves his wife and his kids behind. One of the kids name was Omar. He enrolls in Mohammad's school. So he starts picking him up in the morning and bringing him back in the afternoon from school. And he stayed that way probably for a year, year-and-a-half. Finally, the family decide to join the father in Kuwait. When they went there, they urged the father to bring my brother to Kuwait to get him a visa to go in high school there because he was a ninth-grader then. So he gets him to go there.

And from there our journey from moving from the refugee camp started.

Because he (Mohammad) started after he graduated from high school, he started working in Kuwait and started to send us some money. We were moving from the refugee camp and rent one room in the city and then two rooms with a kitchen. And now we are in the '60s, '63 '64. I graduate from high school and then I went to Algeria, North Africa.

I went to Kuwait in '63, '64 for nine months, worked there, then came back after a year and went to Algeria in the summer of '64 and stayed till '69 teaching with my high school diploma in the city of Anaba, beautiful city on the eastern side of Algeria next to Tunisia. Then in '69, I came to Minnesota.

My two brothers were already here. Mahmoud, when he graduated from high school in Tulkarm, he attended a two-year teacher preparation college. He got a job in Bahrain. All that I know is he came to the U.S. in 1966.

AMP: So all the sons were gone by the time of the Naksa, the Six Day War in 1967?

A: Oh yeah, we did not see it; '67 we did not see it.

They went to Minnesota and that's where I went. Mohammad came and went first to Montreal and he had difficulty there so he stayed there for a year and from there he transferred down south to Minnesota.

AMP: How did he pay for college? Did someone give him money?

A: Not a penny. He worked two years in Kuwait, saved 1,000 Kuwaiti dinars and came with it to go to school. We knew the only way out of the refugee camp is through education.

AMP: You all were here getting educated. What happened to your parents and sisters?

A: We started ... the moment I landed a job in Algeria, my father stopped working and the support for the kids and family started. Soon as my brothers started working and I started teaching, 1/3 of my salary went to my father every month.

**But, we are  
Palestinians  
every minute.  
That's the  
way we live at  
home.**

They were in the city by this point, but in Amman. (Because of Naksa) they went to Karama, there is a small town called al Karama, close to the river. The Karama battle took place while they were there, In 196(8). And then they went to Amman after that.

Only my sister lives there. The other one also died.

AMP: How did you finance your college education (all the brothers started in bachelor's programs)?

A: We worked. I worked in Creamette. There's a noodles company called Creamette. Green packages. I worked from 11 o'clock at night 'till 7 o'clock in the morning, for three continuous years, and paid for my education.

AMP: Did you have trouble with the Minnesota winters?

A: I hated it; couldn't stand it. If I had airline ticket to go back, I would have gone back to Algeria. But in the end, I found the people of Minnesota to be very nice. No prejudice really.

AMP: So you split up and went to different colleges, but you all ended up here. Well, you and Mohammed did. Did Mahmoud ever come here?

A: Mahmoud was more fortunate. He worked overseas in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates all his professional working career. He's in Amman (currently).

I got married from a lady that lived on 63rd Street and Beitounia. Because when I was in Minnesota, I wanted to get married. There were no Arab girls in Minnesota. So I phoned my brother Mohammed, who was here teaching at Governor's State. I said, 'Brother, find me a wife.' So he found this family and I came down and saw the girl and the rest is history.

He (Mohammad) got married to a lady from North Dakota and Mahmoud got married to a lady from North Dakota.

I have four boys and two girls.

*(Of Hasan's four children, Ali, 30; Nahawand, 29; and Safaa, 25; are registered nurses. Ali just finished a master's degree in nursing. Hamza, 28, received a bachelor's degree in computer science and Amir, 20, is studying to be either a dentist or a pharmacist.)*

So, from two illiterate parents you can see it is not intelligence; it is just hard work and tawfiq in Allah subhana wa ta Allah. Decency, hard work and humbleness, and having good niha, good intention, and be proud of our heritage.

I'm not ashamed that we lived in a tent. Not ashamed that our mom walked barefoot. We say it. We don't want to hide it like most of the people because that's Allahs will. This is what Allah gave us. Poverty is never a shame. Rasulullah, (saw) was financially poor. What keeps us going is faith in Allah subhana wa ta Allah. I'm Mad. Mad at the people who can do and do not do.

Don't give excuses to anyone. Never surrender.

Every speck of the dust in Palestine belongs to me. The air belongs to me. And the water belongs to me. The sky belongs to me. The land belongs to me.

**Ok. They want to give us money instead. Hasan Kishta will not take it. I will face them. If I cannot bring my land back, I will face them on the Judgment Day and I will say, 'Allah, they took my land and I was feeble and unorganized and I could not take it so take it from them.' No peace until my land on the seashores of the Mediterranean is returned. Somebody has to pay the price of living in a misery; For my family. I'm gonna make it personal.**

AMP: Tell me about the first time you went back to Palestine.

A: (Silence, soft whistle) I waved my kids away. I did not want them to stay next to me. I was stubborn. I did not go back until 2005.

I went to Ijlili and I went to Seedna Ali where my mom was born. The two towns do not exist anymore. Ijlil does not exist at all. Not a brick. Seedna Ali, where my mom was born, the only standing building is the mosque. It's on the water. It's on the seashore. It's beautiful and it's open and people can pray in it. It's clean. It's small, but clean. And it was very sad to stand in the middle of it because I could see my mom as a little girl, two, three years old, probably, playing in that court, You know?

(Silence)

So, I have been going there every year; seeing my friends.

AMP: When you went back to the park in Tulkarm, did you see the trees you lived under?

A: Absolutely. Trees. Still there. Absolutely. Yes. It's there. It's really very sad.

It is sad. It is positive because you have to go on. You know. I look at it positive but without allowing myself to forget or allowing myself to compromise. I don't believe in half solutions.

I am owner of it (land) and I cannot get in. They question me, why are you here? What do you want to do? Where do you want to go? Why? Somebody comes from Russia and they give him the red carpet. I am the native who was there; I get questions. Why? My kids have a hard time going there because they are young. They (Israel) don't want the young. They intimidate them. They make it so it's impossible for them; so they hate going and that's the policy. That's the point. They make it so hard.

*But, we are Palestinians every minute. That's the way we live at home.*

## AL-RAMLEH



### **ZUHDI MATARIYEH**

Birthdate: June 20, 1945

Father's occupation: Farmer

1945 population: 127,270

Date of depopulation: July 12, 1948

Zuhdi Matariyeh was barely 3 years old when the Haganah Zionist forces and the terrorist Irgun gang swept into his village, wielding machine guns and arresting healthy young men.

Zuhdi cannot remember that day. He also cannot ever remember a time when his entire family was intact, living peacefully at home and among his numerous aunts, uncles and cousins. The entire extended family was ethnically cleansed of their birthright, their homeland, their homes and lush orchards of figs, lemons, oranges, mandarins, apples and olives on July 12, 1948.

But he knows the stories of his brothers' arrests and daring escape intimately, as if the day the Zionists moved into al Ramleh is a day that is etched into his identity. The stories became his birthright as much as the soil of Palestine that courses through his veins.

Three of his five brothers – Ibrahim, Jamil and Khalil – were arrested and sent to unknown locations on July 12, 1948. He remembers being told that it was the month of Ramadan, Zuhdi said. The Zionists came under the guise of wanting to provide identification cards. There were no ID cards, just a one-way transport to an open-air prison, something akin to a cattle ranch. There was no shelter, just a wire fence surrounding the perimeter of the land, where thousands of Palestinian men from the ages of about 15 to 50 were corralled. The prison was near Galilee, miles and miles from the rest of the Matariyeh family.

Ibrahim was a shoemaker and Jamil, who had quit school in fifth grade to help the family, was a shoemaker's apprentice.

Here is Zuhdi's story:

I have five brothers and two sisters. I am the baby. I remember when I was there always playing outside of the house, in front of the house, around the house. I didn't know at that time what the difference was between Jewish and Arabs, you know. I was three years old. But one of my memories, I remember, my sister carried me to big tree and while she carried me I fall from her. Even I busted my head here. See this? This is from 1948 (points to forehead).

(Speaking again about his brothers' arrests), Zuhdi said, The prisoners were brought from Galilee to Jerusalem. When they exchanged prisoners, it was 11 Palestinians for every one Jew. The Red Cross is the one who made the trade.

They stay in jail roughly one year. The Red Cross bring messages from them, from Jamil, Ibrahim, Khalil, saying they still alive, you know.

(They separated the brothers. Jamil and Khalil were in the prison near Galilee with some cousins. Since Jamil knew how to make shoes, the Jews treated him better and would take him to Tel Aviv to make shoes, Zuhdi said.)

Some cousins were with him (Jamil) in Galilee. Sabri Amara, cousin, also was there.

Sabri and Khalil cut the fence and they run away from jail. They hide in the hay and they went to Ramallah.

He (jamil) didn't even know where his brother is. Only he knew about them after he came from prison. There was no connection.

I remember, (a cousin) wanted to move from house to house because he knew the Jews were looking for him. So he put on the woman's veil to move from place to place so they didn't catch him as a man. It was Faize, my cousin.

Another cousin, they put milk from unripe fig in his eyes to make it look like he has an eye disease. So when the Jews come, they say, 'Look, he can't see.'

The Jewish, they don't want somebody ... sick. They want somebody healthy.

The Red Cross, at the time, they notified my parents that your kids would be in Jerusalem. They went there. It was far about, 16 km or 10 miles. They went there where there was a big gate. And that time they put the prisoner from this gate and from this side, and they get the Jewish from the other side.

They rent a house. They (landlords) want to keep us from the house. They see how many children you have. 'We cannot keep you in the house,' (they say) Why?

**I didn't know at that time what the difference was between Jewish and Arabs, you know.**

Because, when you have many children, at that time, the bathroom is like a hole and they don't want to be filled from that family, you know. If you have too many people they wouldn't let you rent in a city named al-Bireh.

They made camps. One of the camps, al Am'ari camp, is far from Ramallah, about one mile.

At that time, (we had) a tent (for) four family. Maybe in one tent, about 15 or 20 people in the same tent. How they sleep, I remember. Your head in this way and the other person his head in this way and the legs. (Zuhdi motions to indicate that people slept in such a way that someone's head would be next to the adjacent person's feet, which would be next to the next person's head, and so on). Boys on this side, girls on the other side, you know, to fit. And the water, they used to have a big tent to bring the water and they started with small buckets to fill up with water.

## **... soldiers, they hit him while they driving from Jerusalem to Ramallah.**

I remember at that time when we start going to school in a big tent. We sit on the ground even, nothing on it. Maybe the teacher, he had a chair. And we started our life from that point.

I lived there from 1948 even till I came to United States. I came to U.S. in ... 1972. But I actually finished my education in Ramallah 1965 . I finished my high school in 1965. I went to Lebanon 'till 1969. During that was the Naksa in 1967, and I can't go back to Ramallah.

And the first time I went there (Ramallah), I get a permit. The first time I run through the (Jordan) River and I pass. The second time, they caught me. When they caught me they find I'm in university studying by Arab Beirut in 1967. They give me and five people - they find that they are educated people so they don't want to hurt them, you know - they took us in a Jeep and put us on the other side of the river. And they said. 'Cross it from here. If we see you back, we will shoot you.' I tell them, 'If you drop me today, I'm coming back tomorrow.' He tell me, 'I will shoot you,' and I tell him, 'OK,' In 1967.

After three days, I went for a month to town called Tubus, on the other side of the river, not Jericho, the other side. And through some people I cross the border and the Jewish run behind us. I find somebody have a truck and he have a water miller and he take (water) from West Bank to Jordan. And the man on the truck he tell me, 'If they catch you they'll take you in prison. I will take you with me. If they ask who are you he tell them he works with me.'

The man (Israeli), he tell me, 'The water miller for you?' And, I say, 'Yeah, for me and him.'

They took three water millers ... at that time and we cross the border back to Jordan in the truck. But when we cross it there, I want to go back to the West Bank. Then after half hour, one hour, I slide there and they tell me, 'What you doing here, water miller man?'

I tell him we sold the water in the truck, I sent the water miller man to Amman and I coming back. He tell me OK. He find the first car and tell him, 'Take him to Nablus with you, and if you take any money from him, we will shoot you,' they tell the driver. The driver is Arab, and I have the ID from Arab Beirut University. In the back of the ID, they write some numbers, the Jewish, it means

**She tell him,  
'I'm sorry to take  
some people to my  
country even they  
don't read their own  
language. Go learn  
and come back.'**

'this guy's living here.' At that time, there was no identification, nothing, even for the West Bank 80 percent, they don't even have passport. And then I went there, and after I went back to Beirut.

I finished ... my education (in Lebanon)... in 1969.

AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE: What was your degree in?

A: Economic and political science, bachelor's degree.

AMP: Then between 1969 and 1972 what did you do?

A: '69, I went Saudi Arabia, you know, I went to Board of Education. It's not my field, but I have to do something because If I go back to Jordan I have to serve in the army. I ... stayed three years. I go to Jordan by false identification when I want to visit Jordan from Beirut. ... if I go on my original ID, you know, they take me to serve two years. Anyway, I went to Saudi Arabia. I stayed three years. While I'm there, I have my older brother ... he's American citizen. First, my brother, he was living in British Honduras, my brother Jamil. He made for me some papers ... to British Honduras . Then my other brother go, 'Why you want to go to British Honduras? It's not a big, rich country, you know. And your brother, himself, is coming here.

Five of them, they came before me. The oldest brother, he came in 1965, in 1957. Ibrahim. You know how he came? He doesn't have any money. They tell him if you use your card, your UN card ... we'll pay for you the money to go there but we'll cut you from the card, and he left his wife and his kids.

He came here straight. At that time my brother, he's a shoemaker. He has a place and he have good relations, you know, and he saving money you know. He went from Ramallah to Beirut, then he came with the ship from Beirut all the way to New York, then he came from New York to here.

I came to Chicago ... from Beirut, then ... with Syrian Airlines from Damascus to Paris and Air France, Paris to Chicago. And I have been here since 1972.

AMP: What happened to your parents?:

A: My parents they stayed there. I went the first time from 1965 'till 1972. I saw them six times. They were still living in Ramallah in al Am'ari camp.

Once they came here to visit us in the United States. They stayed about three months, then they go back. Then my mother she tell him, 'Let us go to visit our sons.' He said, my father, 'I don't want to take you.' He send a letter (and said) 'I don't want to take your mother, she sick. I don't want to take her to United States and she die there. And she real sick.'



WE HAVE NO CHOICE,  
NO PLACES. WE WENT TO  
THE CAMP. THEY GIVE US  
TWO TENTS. ONE TENT  
FOR MY FATHER AND HIS  
SISTER, AND HIS SISTER  
IS MARRIED AND SHE HAS  
KIDS. WE WERE ABOUT 16  
PEOPLE IN THAT TENT.

A funny story. He was carrying a box of apples on his shoulder. One of the Jewish (army) trucks ... they was driving. ... I remember when I went there many times visiting, sometime they shoot in the air, sometime they blow the horn, (or) you are on the sidewalk and they come around you on the sidewalk and you run from the sidewalk. At that time, while they are driving, maybe they are drunk or whatever, they hit my father.

At that time, they broke his leg. Four of my brothers, they went from here in the United States to the West Bank to visit him ... he survived. We tell him to come. He says, 'Your mother sick.' After three years of the accident ... he pass away. After three years.

Jewish soldiers, they hit him while they driving from Jerusalem to Ramallah.

AMP: Do you think they did it on purpose or you do not know?

A: They don't care. It like somebody drunk and he carry a gun in his hand. You don't know what he doing. They driving like crazy. ... Sometimes, they see some kids putting tires in the street, they start shooting on the kids. A lot of kids hurt for nothing. But anyway, after that, you know, two years after that, my mother came here and she pass here. She died here and she buried here in Chicago, in evergreen.

AMP: So tell me about the day your dad carried you out of Ramleh on his shoulders.

A: At that time, you know, I remember ... that my father, he said, 'Come on,' and he put me on his shoulder. His mom tell him, 'You know, he's heavy.' And he tell her, 'What, you want him to die on the way?'

And they started. Sometimes him, sometimes my oldest sister carried me because I was three years, you know. Little bit walking, carrying, walking, carrying about 40 miles, I don't know exactly, between Ramleh and Ramallah, until we get to Ramallah ... al Bireh.

... When we went to al Bireh, we sit in a field under trees., and at that time my father he start searching until he find a family in al Bireh, they have a place they can rent it to us. (We spent) a few days under the trees. ... I remember that if a woman want to go to the washroom, they put a blanket beside the tree for laldies (to hold) it and she use it under the tree. The men, the same thing. They go all away far.

And then, after that, we moved to that house in al Bireh. The (landlady), she came and she tell my mom, I heard her, she tell her, 'Listen, you the Palestinians, you're the Arabic word for refugee, you are the refugees. You come here to fill up our washroom.' I was about three or something. (My mom) tell her, 'We pay rent.' She tell her, 'You pay rent for three, but you are more than 10 now.'

My father... said, 'UNRWA making camps for refugee people.' My mom, she tell him, 'No. We don't want a camp.' And he tell her, 'They say (it's) maybe for one month, two month, three month, then we going back to our main city Ramleh.' We went to the camp.

We have no choice, no places. We went to the camp. They give us two tents. One tent for my father and his sister, and his sister is married and she has kids. We were about 16 people in that tent. The other tent, it was my uncle and his brother and sisters, you know. After that they switch us. They give us one tent for us, one for my aunt.

**Then, after that, in about 1950, they start building small houses; each house (for) every four to six people. ... Because my father, he have six, eight ... we are 10, they give us two rooms. And the room is about this size (about 12 x 12) and asbestos at the roof. When it is raining, (it was) like someone throwing rocks. No bathroom, you know. We digging around (and) make a bathroom there. And we start our living until 1957, when my brother, the shoemaker, the oldest one, (Ibrahim) he came to the United States.**

And even when he was coming to the U.S., the U.S. counsel gave him a hard time. The funny thing, he went there to pick up his visa his paper. When he went there, the secretary sitting – you know how some people are nosy – she tell him, 'Did you hear the news?'

(He said no.) She tell him, 'You didn't read a newspaper?' He tell her, 'No, why? ... I don't read.' I remember it exactly. I was in the fifth grade or the fourth grade. She tell him, 'I'm sorry to take some people to my country even they don't read their own language. Go learn and come back.'

He stay nine months extra in Ramallah, in his shoemaker place. Every friend ... start to teach him. He used to come to the house. I have to teach him. Everybody in the family, until he start to read and write his name. Nine months ... Then when he went to Jerusalem ... he carry a newspaper with him. The secretary is not there. There is another girl. She tell him, 'What's your name?' 'Ibrahim Matariyeh.' 'What you coming for?' He tell her, 'I'm coming for my paper.' She tell him, 'Your paper is ready since 10, 11 month. You didn't know?' He didn't tell her (about) the other lady (because he was afraid he would) make aggravation and more problems. He tell her, 'No. I didn't know. Nobody tell me and I came to check.' They tell him, 'Come on. There are your papers and your ticket from Beirut to New York through ... the ship.'

Twenty-one days from Beirut to New York, until he get there.

AMP: You all ended up here. You had an education. What did you do when you came here?

A: when I came here the first year I was working with my nephew in a grocery store. Then I worked one year in an insurance company

called Peninsula insurance. Then I went to Roosevelt University for my master's degree in industrial economics. I studied there about one year. Then I find ... we don't have a future at that time because everybody is in the grocer business making money... I quit Roosevelt and I stuck in the grocery business since .

AMP: When did you go back to Palestine the first time?

A: the first time I went in 1974. I stayed (here) two years. I save the two years' money. I went there and I got married.

Her father is my cousin. (My wife's name is) Fatima. I have seven children and one from my ex-wife. I have eight. I married in 1974, Fatima, but the first one I married in 1970 when I was in Saudi Arabia. I met her while I was a student in the university. I have one son; he's a professor in Brazil. Professor of physics.

I have 11 grandchildren.

I go to my house in al Am'ari . . . In 1974, I even I took my wife there (to Ramleh) ... because at that time it was freedom between the West Bank and the Palestinian occupied places. Everybody go there. The Jewish come to Ramallah moving ... until the intifada. Before the intifada, you can go free to Jerusalem anytime you want. You go to Ramleh, Lydda, Yafa. I went all over Palestine. Visit. Some people they have families before 1948 (in 1948 historic Palsetine). They used to sleep over there, but, ourselves, all our family left in 1948. All of them. They moved in 1948. Before '48, I had cousins, uncles. It was a big family at that time.

Maybe one question that comes to your mind or to most of the American people is: Why are you Palestinians (choosing) to come to the United States. Why didn't you stay in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, any other country?

I lived in Lebanon four years. When I finished my education, I had to leave Lebanon. I'm a stranger to Lebanon.

I went to Saudi Arabia. I stayed three years. I know some people up to now stayed 40 years in Saudi Arabia, they never get permanent residency there. If their work is finished, they kick them out. We are like a stranger there – even their kids (who) are born there. ... We are stranger to every Arab country except Jordan because we was carrying the Jordanian passport. (Now, they are) taking the citizenship from a lot of people living in Jordan; some lived there since 1948.

*Here, in the u.s., we (are) admitted. it's a free country. We live, eat, our kids have education, we carry passports. We have respectability.*

The Nakba: Preserving our Narrative  
AMP, First edition, May 2009  
AMP, Second edition, May 2010

## **LIST OF SOURCES:**

Khalidi, Walid, ed., "All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948," Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992.

Morris, Benny, "The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited," Cambridge Middle East Studies, 2004.

Neff, Donald, "Fifty Years of Israel," American Educational Trust, 1998.

Pappe, Ilan, "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine," One World Publications, 2006.

"The Continuing Catastrophe – 1967 and beyond," BADIL Occasional Bulletin No. 19, June 2004.

"Deir Yassin, Meir Pail's Eyewitness Account," the PEACE Middle East Dialog Group, 1998.

"The humanitarian impact of the West Bank barrier," United Nations Relief and Works Agency, July, 2008.

"Jewish Slaughter of Palestinians at Deir Yassin Remembered," Issam Nashashibit, Deir Yassin Remembered, undated.

"Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," Walid Khalidi, Journal of Palestine Studies, ol. XVIII, No. 1, Autumn 1988.

"Selected Documents On The 1948 Palestine War," Walid Khalidi, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, Spring 1988.

"The United Nations and Palestinian Refugees," January, 2007.

