

Life Under **BLOCKADE**



a collection of essays

The American Service Committee (AFSC) announced the “My Life Under Blockade” Essay Contest in October 2018 as a part of their Gaza Unlocked campaign. AFSC invited young Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 24 currently residing in the Gaza Strip to submit a personal narrative essay. The goal of the contest was to encourage students in Gaza to reflect and write about how the blockade has affected their lives as young people and as students. This is a collection of a dozen of the 42 submitted essays.

AFSC would like to thank all of the writers who submitted their stories. We would also like to thank the following for their contributions in making this project possible: Ali Abdalbari, Jihad Abusalim, Heba Alhayek, Refaat Al Areer, Jennifer Bing, Ronna Bolante, and Miranda Kharsa.



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Prison Without a Roof

written by Karim Abualroos

A friend of mine, who lives in the outside world, has once asked me “how do you describe your life in Gaza?” It is painful to answer this question, as you will think a lot about the answer. I eventually said: "Gaza is a prison without a roof."

I always wonder how is it possible for a man to live for many years walking in the same streets, listening to the same words that are repeatedly said all the time. To see the same people daily, to buy from the same shops. See the walls, the sidewalks and the vehicles themselves. It is the curse of repetition, the repetition of all things.

So how if that man was a writer! A musician or an artist! It's a real tragedy for the Palestinian artist living in Gaza. He doesn't have the foresight to develop his creativity, and pour imagination into his mind and heart.

He is shackled all the time. Hearing the explosions and the constant sound of warplanes. Seeing images full of blood and dead bodies. Forbidden from traveling, and forbidden from expressing his opinion. He is simply unwanted in the eyes of the world.

The artist lives in a crisis of alienation and exclusion in Gaza. He can't express his ideas freely in a difficult political reality and under a siege that prevents him from communicating with the outside world. He can't hear the voices of the others.

We live in Gaza City as strangers to this world, as if we are in another life. A life unlike the life of the rest of the world. They have electricity all day every day, while we have it for only four hours a day. They don't think about the difficulty of getting water to their homes, while we consider it a basic problem. They don't get distressed by the explosions, shelling and destruction, while we see it all as a comedy play.



I am nearly 22 years old. I lived with the siege day by day, and it lived with me. I survived three wars where I saw things that bring bloody memories.

I suffer throughout the day from basic needs. All I know about the world is from the internet and the books I read. I see the world through the stars when I look at the sky. I see beautiful smiling faces from a city in Denmark painted on a cloud above Gaza. I see a girl dancing ballet in Paris rushing in front of me with the sunshine on Gaza.

I dream of completing my higher studies in political science and international relations in a different academic environment, and new sources of knowledge. However, the lack of opportunities and the difficulty of travel prevent me from achieving this dream. I am working hard, while I am trying to get a chance to travel, to increase my knowledge, reading, and researching skills. My desire is to build a knowledge base and create an important entry for the academic study in order to obtain a master's degree scholarship in a prestigious university.

Our contact with other cultures is almost non-existent. I don't remember that I ever ate any kind of food other than our Palestinian food. No one ever joked with me in French, which I don't understand. I never got to know the cultures of other people. For the siege in my conception isn't exactly to close the fence and prevent me from traveling, but to prevent me from seeing the world, besieging my mind and my heart, forcing me to remain locked in my



thoughts, beliefs, and feelings.

The siege on Gaza has created major disasters in all aspects of life. People in hospitals suffer from lack of medicine. Companies and traders suffer from the difficulty of bringing their goods. People are forbidden to travel, whether it's to see their families, to get a treatment or just to have a vacation. Students are struggling day and night to get out of Gaza to complete their studies.

We are in prison. The walls surround us from all sides. The sky is our gateway to freedom; neither the sea nor the land is capable of making us feel alive. Both are walled with military fences. But no one can fence the sky. Whenever I feel that life is narrowing and the siege is getting stronger, I look at the sky and I remember that it is open, it will always be open, and the prison is never complete.

I published a novel last year, entitled "A Drowned Seeking No Survival." In it, I wrote about the lives of young intellectuals in Gaza -- how they define the siege and the way they fall in love. I wrote about how they fight extremist rhetoric and how they seek to spread hope. I wanted the world to see Gaza through my pen and my novel. The novel came out and I got to participate in international and local book exhibitions, while I am still trapped in Gaza. The novel went around the world and its writer is still in his very place because of the siege.

Gaza is not a city of hatred and violence, nor does it deserve death or destruction.

The siege on Gaza has made it a tired city, a city of miserables and expatriates. Full of wasted energies, full of shattered youth, and full of beauty with nowhere to appear. Gaza is a city of children, dreams, culture, literature, and music. Full of heritage and folklore. Full of programmers, technologists, engineers, and brilliant minds. Nevertheless,

the world always turns its back on them, to convince them that their salvation is individual. Yet Gaza continues to offer a tremendous humanitarian model to the world.

Gazans defied the power cuts and turned it into beauty. They turned the suffering into poetry, symphonies, and writings.

In Gaza we need the world to hear us once, only once. Once we will say everything, and then we will be silent forever.

Gaza is a Blockaded Planet

written by Ali Abusheikh

Since I was a kid, I have considered the sky a sanctuary of sorts, especially at night. The sky is both my “bedtime story” and its narrator whenever I struggle to sleep.

On the night of October 26, 2018, I couldn’t sleep, so I opened the window and stared at the stars in the sky. I decided to tap into the little, innocent kid still inside and started to count them, while making sure to separate the real stars from the warplanes. I was totally engaged until I heard two intense bombs, freezing me in terror. A bright, orange light reflected on the glass of my window, followed by the immense sound of another bomb. My body started to shake and I rushed to open the windows of our house so they wouldn’t shatter (one of the many self-preservation techniques any Gazan learns at a young age).

Then I ran to the hallway, where I found mom sitting on the sofa, listening to a local radio station. I gave her a hug that filled me with relief and a sense of safety; her touch always does that for me.

Once I felt a little safer, I went back to my bed and burrowed under a thick blanket to protect against the chilly breeze wafting in from the half-open windows. I didn’t dare to gaze at the sky again, so I stared at the ceiling instead. Still, with the electricity out, the light of the moon offered some company and even a little consolation.

My mind wandered to all of the little things of which I am deprived in this blockaded, isolated planet of ours--Gaza. I recently started to call it a planet because it has a very different and abnormal atmosphere than in other parts of the Earth. It often even seems like it’s easier for most people to travel to the moon than to visit us. Gaza is considered such a dangerous, evil place that most people are not allowed in or out, unless they have special connections.



Still scared, I recited short verses from the Holy Quran and zikr until I finally slept.

The next morning, I woke to the sound of another bomb, which was both good and bad. It was bad because I started my day with a shock of foreboding, and good because it acted as an alarm and got me up and off to work early. I call it “work,” but I would rather call it “hell,” “the art of taking advantage of people” or “the killer of energy and dreams.” In Gaza, the unemployment rate is about 60 percent now, and even if we are fortunate to have a job, it usually is either not related to our major, is very underpaid and/or requires us to work six days a week for long hours each day. In other words, even securing a job typically means giving up on your dreams and even your friends, since you’ll rarely find the time to see them. People abroad typically work to save money or travel the world, but Gazans work to survive or get the experience needed to be eligible for a fully funded scholarship outside, since we can’t afford to pay anything. Of course, even if we secure a scholarship, the chance of getting permission to leave Gaza is minimal (unless you can afford a large “coordination fee” to the Egyptians). Nevertheless, despite a dark, unknown future, we persist in pursuing our dreams. The phoenix is the logo for Gaza City, which means arise from our ashes.

It also was the day we changed our time one hour earlier for winter. But our phones don’t change automatically; they won’t do so until Israel changes its time, as well. Yes, even smartphones don’t recognize our independence! Palestine doesn’t exist in the digital world. It exists only in our hearts.

On my way to work, I heard another bomb and started to pray for a ceasefire. I kept asking God to forbid any war from happening. Life is already miserable enough without a war! For example, I never allow myself to sleep when we have electricity. I have to make sure to do the laundry and charge the family’s phones and laptops. We never know when we will have electricity again, so I must take advantage of it when

I can. Most importantly, I keep an eye on the outside faucet so when the water comes, I can turn on the generator that pumps it from the underground pipes into the storage barrels on our roof. We schedule our entire life according to the few hours of electricity we are given.

One day, on my way back home from work, I felt upset, so I decided to listen to music and walk through the city (as I usually do). I couldn't enjoy my walk, however, as it seems my city has stopped embracing me. Each time I look at the sky, I feel very small; I feel how closed-in the horizon is and I sense the absence of light. I have given up on turning to the sky or sea for refuge. The Gaza Sea is merely a lake where Israeli warships lurk. The sky seems open, and yet I feel as if we are birds with broken wings, imprisoned in a cage with invisible bars above us, as annoying Israeli drones keep a constant watch on us. My city is filled with nothing but a mix of melancholy and depression, relieved only by a few shattered pieces of hope. I would like to see my city smile so that the smell of life, of which it has been robbed, spreads into its weary houses, streets, sea, and inhabitants. When will the curse of mourning and death leave my oppressed city? When will the colors of the rainbow return? I love Gaza, it's a beautiful city, but I hate all those who try to make it look ugly in our eyes.



A Balloon's Murder

written by Ehsan Wael Yousef Bader

What could a dusty atmosphere indicate? Well, it could indicate the continuous sneezing fit, having to take off my glasses all the time to clear them, washing all my clothes immediately after reaching home or cleaning the car before that person who will use the dust layer covers it to write, "WASH ME, PLEASE!" Since March 30, the dust has gained an additional meaning for me. The dust now indicates standing in the heat on Fridays, a few meters from the barbed wire on the Gaza Strip's border, listening to the protesters' bustle mixed with the unstoping sound of the Israeli soldiers' gunfire. Alongside with the mixture of anger, anxiety, and anticipation scenes separated into the faces of participants in the Great March of Return.

Contrary to what might be imagined, this does not reflect all aspects of the protests, for you can hardly manage your face to any side without seeing a colorful kite tail fluttering in the air heading relentlessly towards the east, breaking the white and black smoke, announcing a new kite one of the kids has succeeded in letting go into the place he cannot. Slightly higher, you will find a squadron of white balloons flying alone, as if they see the way, to the occupied territory. The scene in the sky blends between smoke, dust, tear gas, and between the colorful kites and balloons. While on the ground, it muddles between the scenes of the numerous ambulances, casualties, crowds, the sound of bullets and drones "Zananas," and the scenes of children reciting national poetry and singing enthusiastic songs.

Therefore, if I want to mention the most explicit characteristic of the Great Return March, I will find nothing more apparent than the contradictions that this unauthorized mass gathering brings together. Perhaps the most prominent example is that the place in "Malaka" camp, the far east of Shuja'iyya neighborhood east of Gaza City, seems to be the farthest place Gazans can reach, which is indeed far



from the centre of the city where our houses are. It is at least 12 kilometres away from my home; I live in the western part of the city, and yes, 12 kilometres are a big deal for Gazans. On the other hand, for my friend, whose family was expelled by the Zionist gangs in 1948 from the village of "Al Muharraqa," "Malaka" camp is the closest place to his "real" home, which is less than eight kilometers from the place we are standing in, less than the distance to his home in "Al Shati" refugee camp to the far west of Gaza City. Although mathematics tells us that the house, located eight kilometres to the east, is closer than the one 15 kilometres to the west; the Israeli occupation, however, says (via weapons and bombs) that these eight kilometres are the farthest place my friend cannot reach. In the March, the farthest thing we can often see is the sand dunes that Israeli soldiers hide behind, firing poison gas and tear gas at us.

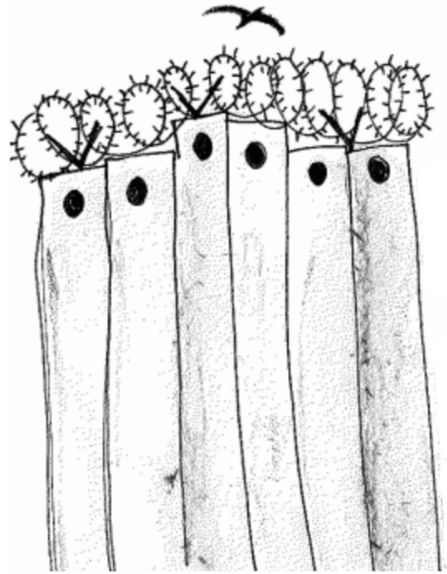
The heavily armed soldiers hide behind the barricades with weapons and shields to shoot the unarmed protesters who hide behind a black smoke curtain, caused by the burnt tires (which obviously prevents anything but bullets).

Last Friday, while I was standing in the same place every Friday, I saw, for the first time in my life, a soldier lying normally on the ground, but not completely hiding, in front of the rest of his comrades behind the sand curtain, as if he is in a dialogue with them, convincing them that the gunman is not the one who hides, but they are persuaded "they are already hiding in the ground by their harmony with it, while we still seem so exposed."

The strangest thing is that the most noticeable thing I realized when I saw the exposed soldier, who was less than 200 meters away, was that he had a face, mouth, nose, and a pair of eyes, just like a normal ordinary human being. Perhaps this should not seem interesting at all, but it did not only raise my attention but also aroused my mind. How

could a person who has no problem with killing the eight-month-old Laila al-Ghandour, the white-dressed medic Razan al-Najjar, and the other 200 peaceful protesters look exactly the same as a natural human being?

Notwithstanding that the sound of live bullets became familiar, this one suddenly penetrated my mind, maybe because it was accompanied by a signal coming from my eyes that this "human" soldier was now aiming his weapon at them (my eyes). I had already thought once about how each one of the hundreds of casualties that I had seen since the marches began, does not check himself after hearing the sound of a close shot, but begins to check his beloved ones around him, and if he found them all okay knew that mostly he was the wounded. I also thought about how each one of them, just like me, has a mom, aunt, and grandmother at home putting their hands on their hearts all the time in continuous prayer to see him coming back with a foot walking, not leaning on crutches, or carried on the shoulders in a worst case.



I immediately looked at my father, who was standing right beside me, but the situation seemed normal, and he did not seem to have been targeted this time, either. With a glance at my body, which seemed to be painless and redless, the destiny of this bullet became a riddle to me. However, this ended a moment later, when I saw a group of medics hurrying toward a young man lying on the ground, surrounded by a

red pool. This happened at the same moment I saw what appeared to be the remains of a punctured balloon.

I did not know whether the bullet I noticed was the reason for the punctured balloon or the murdered guy. But what I knew was that this soldier, who looked "very human," did not seem to distinguish between the destruction of a balloon and the spirit of a human being. Both committed in the same effort, thinking and scorn.

The Party

written by Rahf Ayman Hasan Elhallaq

“There’s going to be a party tonight!”

It’s 12 a.m. The entire house had gone to sleep and I’m sitting lazily on my desk studying, trying my best to ignore the infuriating buzz of the drones roaming above my head. I read the message my friend sent me, smile, and reply with a “yeah!”. I have to finish as much as possible before the electricity goes out. So, although I feel extremely tired, I keep working.

There’d been four killings on the border today and our side threw some rockets at the Israeli soldier camps near the borders as a response. So, as usual, I was expecting a night full of action. But, you see, Israelis never respond to the results of what they started early. They always wait until it’s past midnight so that their mission’s results could be more successfully terrifying.

It is said that waiting for a bad experience to happen is harder than living the experience itself. I can’t say that I’m sitting on pins and needles or that I’m actually scared, however. Situations such as these happen every now and then in Gaza.

I haven’t reached the level of complete indifference as some people here have, but neither do I feel any great fear as some others still do. We always fear the airstrikes might cause casualties near the targeted places. And there’s always the fear of things escalating and possibly developing into a serious war. But, there have been enough similar nights or, as people here in Gaza have come to ironically call them, “parties” to convince us that the possibility is weak. Usually, everything ends with the rising sun of the following day. It’s a strategy they use to scare us and remind us: “we are here.” So, I sit and wait.



I wait just like everyone here waits for everything. Our life in Gaza, as some of you might already know, is a constant state of fearing and waiting. We are always waiting for electricity so that we can resume our lives like normal people, study, work, do our chores, watch T.V., charge our phones and laptops, etc. New graduates are always waiting to find a job, and if, after a long search by some miracle, they do find a good suitable job they will have the exceptional experience of waiting to be paid half their salary once every three months.

We are constantly waiting for the Rafah border to open, waiting for medical supplies, waiting for a war that we dread yet know is coming, waiting for an airstrike, waiting for the siege to end, waiting for freedom, or waiting for things to simply improve; we feel privileged when we get a full eight hours of electricity!

Some people have started to look upon these things as a distant Godot who never comes. A Godot that keeps you waiting and hoping until he renders you desperate. People like me, though, are still clinging to the hope that things will get better soon. Every nation that has been occupied in the past has had to sacrifice for its freedom. We've been resisting dispossession, slaughter, imprisonment and torture for 70 years. Are we to give up now?

The first missile strikes, and as my heart starts thumping hard in my chest, I automatically jump out of my chair to open the windows. A shiver runs through my body as gusts of cold wind slap my face. But what other choice do we have! We'll have to bear the cold for a couple of hours. I cover my younger siblings well and go back to studying.

However prepared or indifferent you may be, you never escape feeling that bitter sensation of being punched in the stomach whenever you hear the missiles breaking through the layers of air, whistling all the way down, then smashing unmercifully into the ground afterwards. For the next hour, I was neither able to sleep nor concentrate on my homework. Most of it passes in thinking and absentmindedly watching the curtain above my desk dance

forward and backward instead. There were nearly five other airstrikes during that hour; and with each one of them, my heart leapt into my throat causing my guts and lungs to clench themselves until I could hardly breathe for a few moments, then everything went back to normal.

A murmur reaches me from my parents' room. The bombing must have wakened them. I slowly walk to their room to see if everything's alright. Everything is fine. As I tip-toe back to my room my dad catches me and calls: "Go to sleep, baba; there's nothing serious. Hopefully, the IDF will get bored soon and move to another spot."

Since my attempts to continue studying were hopeless, I take his advice, close my books and tuck myself into bed. The news says there are no deaths or injuries until now. Thank God!



Almost everyone will wake up tomorrow, get dressed, drink his coffee or tea then set off to his school, university or work. They will talk about tonight, of course. They always do. And if you were a Gazan you would know that there would be an interesting variety of opinions to hear. Some will say it was a "terribly terrifying night." Some will say that it was "pretty scary." Some will say it was "just like all the other nights similar to it, a sleepless night full of noises." Others will say they only felt angry because the airstrikes had disturbed their sleep. Some will even go as far as to crack jokes at what happened. They will discuss the matter for a while, then they will resume their daily duties as though nothing unusual happened the night before. And who can blame them! When you've survived three wars and twelve years of blockade, your definition of real danger gradually changes.

Another half hour passes. Nothing Happens. The party is over.

“Good! Now I can close the windows.”

A Seeker Who Seeks Nothing

written by Haneen Jamal Abed Elnaby

There were eight sleeping mats in the dining room. My family and I huddled along the wall; since it is surrounded by rooms on all sides, it is the safest place in the house. Israeli soldiers in tanks had bombarded the area and we tried hard to keep silent, afraid we'd attract attention. Then, a missile hit the corner of our house and what seemed like a dense fog filled my vision. It had caused our balcony to collapse. We ran like chickens to the bathroom, but Mahmoud—just 2 years old—refused to come, crying for his toy car. My dad rushed to grab it and we shivered in the cramped bathroom for what seemed like hours, but was only a few minutes, until the tank lumbered away.

Thank God, it was just a dream. I awakened abruptly. Oh, I am late! The bus would leave me behind! I rushed to my university, drawn by my love for romantic literature. "Hello, everyone! You'll have a new assignment this week," the teacher announced. "You must read the preface to the Wordsworth collection, along with the background material I gave you, and write a review by next Saturday. That means you have only one week." That night, if anyone had called me, I would not have paid attention, because I am transported somewhere else when I read Wordsworth. I opened my laptop and read slowly to make it last longer. Literature is my escape from bombs and drones; I consume it like a parched person in a desert given a mini cup of water.

Then my bed started shaking. It was an Israeli F16—for real this time. I clutched my laptop and ran to the ground floor, where my family was already cowering in one room. You'd expect to hear them crying, but they were laughing instead—at me, running with my laptop. They didn't understand that without literature, I'd die too. "I need to finish this essay by tomorrow morning," I said instead. "But we don't have electricity



now," my mom objected. She was right. The F16 had damaged Gaza's only power plant. "How could they do that to me?" I cried. In the morning, I tried to offer the electricity outage as an explanation, but my teacher merely responded by pointing out that all of us lived in the same harsh circumstances. No excuses. I had saved my laptop, but I had failed anyway. I cursed my life; all of my efforts had been for naught. I returned home with a gloomy face, refusing to talk to anyone and lying listlessly on my bed. Then, my mom came in with a smiley face and a piece of cake in her hand to cheer me up. "Haneen, what happened?" my mom asked. I told her I had failed for the first time in my life because of the damn power outage. My tears got the better of me and they flowed. My mom hugged me, reminding me gently that I am a fighter. I tried to think in a positive way. At least, I have the love and support of my mom. Failing at one assignment doesn't make me a failure. I will just work harder. Four hours of electricity per day is the structure that defines the life of a student here. Candles and flashlights are essential if you want to read or study. One day, I hope I can be transported out of Gaza, standing on the edge of Glencoyne Park, gazing on the daffodils about which Wordsworth wrote so eloquently.



A Terror to Remember

written by Sarah Nafez Hammad

Saturday 27, December, 2008. I remembered the scene very clearly, me sitting on the uncomfortable cylinder between the rider, who was my brother Mohammad, and the handlebars of the bicycle. At that moment, all I was concerned about is how to arrive at my primary school as quick as possible because of the pain I was feeling in my knees as I had to raise my feet up all the time to avoid touching the chains of the bike. I wondered why there is not an invention of a two-seat bicycle? It was a significant issue for me that I was deeply thinking of.

I have no idea what was waiting for me a few minutes later.

I was in the fourth grade, it was a normal day and a normal morning. I was late for school, and I missed the bus. Therefore, Mohammad took me on his bike to school while chatting about several things out of my curiosity all the way. I arrived at school, I was in the middle of the school yard, walking to my class, I turned for the last time to say bye to my brother (I was so emotional!). Unfortunately, I couldn't see him, he had already disappeared. I thought that he went home, but actually he didn't!

Ten minutes have passed, I was sitting peacefully at my desk, a sudden thundering explosion has penetrated my ears, shaking the ground strongly. In a trice, the whole school stood up with one shriek. Before I understood what that was, I found myself standing in the schoolyard, looking around to see a flood of children, who were running and screaming, coming from all directions out of their classes. In a few seconds, the whole school was in the yard, which was fully stacked. Now, all of us were looking above at the sky, staring with horror at thick black smoke clouds covering the entire sky. And before realizing what happened: "Bombing!! bombing...bombing...there is a bombing..."



another bombing!” Actually, we could not count how many bombings were there!

I was shaking, but I didn't cry. I was terrified just like everyone else, and the bombing never stopped, am I going to die now? We all ran towards the school's gate. Regiments of children were there as far as the eye could see. We were all children crying and running to the exit, but where to go? Our feet were leading us without any awareness of what was happening. A very massive bombing blew my ears drums. I thought the school was being shelled because of the extremely loud sound, but it was NOT. It wasn't the school and the proof is that I am still alive! The rising smoke in the black sky and the strange stifling smell! Our screams! We were trembling, crying, and screaming unconsciously and running aimlessly. Our bodies moved, but our minds were rigid. I did not understand anything; I was really scared to death. And...my brother, Mohammad?

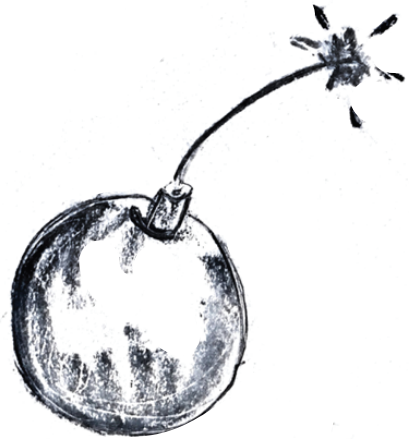
Oh yes, Mohammad was gone, what happened to him? Did he arrive home or not? Where should I go right now? And surprisingly while I was still crying, I saw him standing in the middle of the crowd of the kids. Actually, I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but I recognized him; he is the only tall man in the middle of a big white and blue striped crowd in the UNRWA schools uniform. He was looking for me; I swiftly raised my hands up, waving and screaming. Truly, I was very scared that he might disappear before I reached him, I don't know why I thought of such a possibility. Finally, he saw me and lifted me out of amidst the crowd. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but I recognized him; he is the only tall man in the middle of a big white and blue striped crowd in the UNRWA schools uniform. He was looking for me; I swiftly raised my hands up, waving and screaming. Truly, I was very scared that he might disappear before I reached him, I don't know why I thought of such a possibility. Finally, he saw me and lifted me out of amidst the crowd.

Later, I learned that Mohammed had by chance met his friend near my school. And while they were talking, they heard the first thunderous

bombing. Expeditiously, he came back for me. We went out to the street, which was full of the very terrified people. There were high school students, middle school students, some adults, and lots of school children.

"Mohammad, what's wrong? What's happening? Where are we going? What about the other kids? How could they go home? There is no bus! They shelled a place near the school and maybe they shelled the school too! What about our house? Did they destroy it? Call home, please, call Mom." He cannot hear me, the voices of the kids screaming is louder than anything else. We rode the bike, and I remembered I was thinking of the other students. I was with my brother while they were not! How could they find their way home?

The streets were in total chaos, nobody understood what's going on. We arrived home. My mom was waiting for us anxiously: "Thank, God" she said as soon as she saw us and we gathered around the television, which was broadcasting from the targeted location. A scene I saw for the first time, strange and terrifying. I won't forget it as long as I live. I saw men, no but shredders on the ground and lots of blood. The camera shivered violently while conceiving the event. Our bodies were shivering from the horror of what we were witnessing. I couldn't believe that this scene is being filmed in the very same place I was a few meters away from few minutes ago! A few hours later, the number of martyrs rose to 200, including women and children, and more than 700 wounded. Breaking news: Israel declares war on the Gaza Strip.... "War?" I only know this word from The National Education school subject. In that moment, I only had a misty idea about this word, but the following 21 days taught me it's meaning so well that I wished such a word had never existed!



Dear Blockade

written by Tarneem Hammad

Dear Blockade,

I was 14 when I first met you. You never asked me to be friends, you just took over my life. You grew as I grew. I'm writing to you because you're a part of my life. Blockade, you're wrong and I want you to know that you're wrong. You make things difficult, more difficult than I can imagine. Some days I can't get out of bed; other days I can't stop crying. You're wrong because you forced me to adapt my life to the humiliating shrinking electricity schedule that is cut for 3 days in a row. You're wrong because when I made it to high school, I had to study using candle light while Mom is awake worried at some point this candle would fall down and burn us sleeping. My brother Ali walks around wearing a half-ironed T-shirt knowing that people will excuse him because they know the power went off in the middle. I know that some people can afford the cost of a back-up power generator, but not all.

You're wrong because water is an essential right for all living beings including animals and plants but you made it polluted for us. You're wrong because for some families, running water is just a far off dream.

You're wrong because when I made it to university I had to work ten times harder than students all over the world using charged lanterns. I graduated thinking my hard work will pay off and I'm special enough to get a decent job. This time I was wrong, I turned out to be special just like everyone else, a graduate and jobless. I volunteered for two years and was exploited by managers. Then, you rewarded me with a job that wasn't enough to cover expenses for a week. When I thought that I got a decent job, I shared my happiness with my foreigner friend to find out that she gets paid three times more salary than I, doing the same work, - just because she's not living under blockade.



You're wrong because you taught me it always hurts to be the one who survives. I survived three wars, expecting death every second and hearing familiar names of the dead on the news. You caused me nightmares. You made me so removed from my feelings and so cut off from the world. I became so careless and depressed at the same time. I'd like you to apologize for ruining me psychologically.

You're wrong because you turned watching disabled youth in the street into a norm. You're wrong because you made stories of death, injuries, loss and suffering as a daily basis of my life.

You're wrong because you made my passport questionable to every security in the world. Oh, sorry, you're wrong because you don't allow me to travel. You're wrong because you deprived thousands of hard working students from their scholarships. You're wrong because at some point we, Gazans, have to change our dreams because a very old blockade would crush our dreams as it crushed our people.

You're wrong because you killed my cousin who waited for weeks to get a permit to receive treatment outside Gaza because you're preventing proper medicine to get inside Gaza. You're wrong because my neighbor and her sick son are desperately waiting for a permit from Israel to leave Gaza and get medical treatment. You're wrong because I don't feel safe or free anymore. As I write I cry knowing how much you have damaged me. Knowing how I cannot be myself because of you. Please, leave and never come back.

You're wrong because you force a little child to search through the rubble from the devastating 2014 war to find steel and stones to sell in the local market.

You're wrong because a fisherman often returns from the Gaza Sea to his family with empty hands due to the heavy access restrictions that led to the disruption of livelihoods and a dramatic decrease in the fish catch. As you

grew, my fear grew with you. You're wrong because you keep tightening your grip on me and my people, from unemployment to financial cuts to water shortage to electricity cuts to wars to borders closure. You're not dear, you're just near. You're inhumanely wrong and I wish you to fade away quickly. My heart and soul cry for help as I try and fight against you. Yet, I laugh and smile once in a while because I love others enough not to put them through the same misery I'm going through.

By the time you finish reading this, we'll have both come to a conclusion about the whole thing: I hate blockade and I AM STILL HERE. That means only one thing, it didn't kill me. Not sure of what will happen next? Will I endure more till I die or endure more till I finally live? Nothing hurts more than waiting since I don't know what I'm waiting for. So until I endure more, I'll just have to dust myself off, pick up my feelings and thoughts, and follow my dreams. I just have to remember how many people out there supported our cause. I hope whoever is able will end you very soon. I'm still young, I still need to find who I am and why I am here. I still want freedom and independence. I still need to do what I love, I still want to rise and I still want to live. I will work hard to get a better life and I will keep fighting you for the sake of my dreams. There is always more to me than you. I'm 24 and I wish not to see you in my mid-twenties.

Please, leave

-The girl you ruined.

I Hate Red!

written by Marah Mahdi

"I hate red!" I said when we were buying some clothes for Al-Eid, an Islamic day that comes after Ramadan, the religious Islamic month when Muslims fast to purify themselves from sins.

"Your brother loves it," she said.

-Excuse me, why should I wear something another person likes?

-You are a girl, each girl must love red.

-What? Who said so?

-Shush, everybody is staring at you, behave!

-Ah, yes as usual. Ok Mammy, do whatever you like!

I could not negotiate more.

On the way home, she asked me "Why do you hate red? You have never told me!"

I was listening while looking to the moving road. Yes! I still remember that as if it was yesterday.

We were in the fourth grade in 2008. She and I were sitting next to the blue wire net that shields the windows that UNRWA schools were famous for, it was midday.

"I love your red scarf, you look like snow white." I said.

-Thank you, Marah.

-What were you doing yesterday when I called? Your mother said that you were busy!

-Yeah, I was drawing Sonic, but not the blue one.

-For sure, the red one.

-Yeah, you know I die for red.

-But you don't watch this cartoon.

-But, you are obsessed with watching it, I am drawing it for you, to keep



remembering me.

-Hahaha, don't worry, I will keep remembering you, you will stick in my face till your grandsons come.

-No, I don't want to be a gra...

A thunder sound, in the mid of a sunny day, interrupted her laugh and turned it to panic.

-Oh no, what is this, Marah?

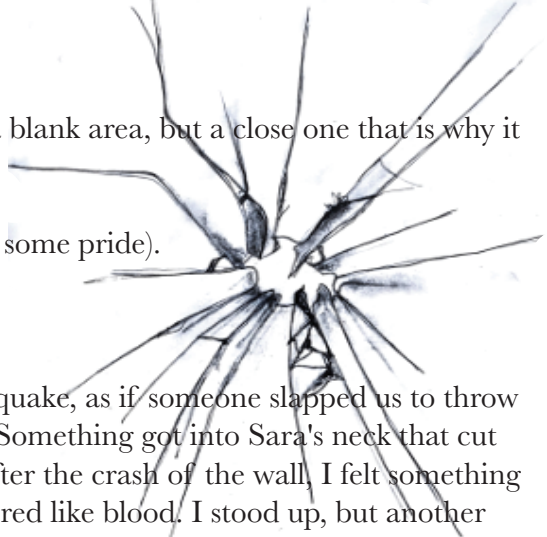
-It must be an Israeli bomb in a blank area, but a close one that is why it is noisy.

-Haha, I love your sensibility.

-My pleasure (I smiled showing some pride).

-What will we do now?

-We will go to bu...



Another thunder with an earthquake, as if someone slapped us to throw us back to the wall to crash us. Something got into Sara's neck that cut her skin. I could barely move after the crash of the wall, I felt something warm on my right hand, it was red like blood. I stood up, but another earthquake pushed me to the wall again, my head hit the wall, I didn't know that I am that powerful a person. The wall broke, my rubber glove got stuck to an iron stick, I didn't know how did this stick come out from the wall, as if they were feeding the wall iron. I raised my right hand to get it out from the stick, but that red liquid was still there, I didn't want to stain my white rubber glove with any red thing, I didn't know what it was, so I raised the left one. I stood up, the wall was kneeling, making a cliff. I felt as if I was in an impossible mission. I went out somehow, the classroom was full of dust and broken stones. My steps crumbled some glass. I looked at the window, then asked loudly "Sara, who has broken the windows?"

Then I remembered Sara. Somehow Sara moved to the other class, an inner power came from my weakness. Running to Sara, checking her

pulse. I could not move my right hand. That moment I realized that the red liquid is blood, I was wounded. I remembered Sonic when he saved that girl from that doctor, so I imitated him. I took off my rubber glove and rubbed my right hand. I took the scarf off her neck, and I started pressing on the cut, to stop the blood, she was not awake.

-Please Sara, wake up! Wake up.

I didn't know how the waterfall in my eyes was turned on. The flood in my eyes prevented me from seeing her.

The sound of the ambulance was getting closer. I started shouting!

-Help! Help! Help!

I shouted until I felt that my blood was boiling, my face became so hot, my eyes are full of tears.

-Help! Help! Help! Hel..

Another earthquake! But this time, I woke up at the hospital. They cut my school uniform, they started weaving the wounds. I screamed as if I were a mother giving birth. The doctor was holding me to her chest, turning my eyes away from what the other doctor was doing to my right hand, and she said "It is OK, you can do it." She could not know that I didn't even feel the pain.

My mother's fingers snapped in my face asking me "where did you go?"
A moment of silence!

-"Why do you hate the red color?" she asked.

I replied whispering, "It brings bad luck."

My Life in a Nutshell

written by Hatem Raafat Mohammed Saadallah

Congratulations, YOU HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED TO UNITED WORLD COLLEGES!

My heart jumped, my face sweated, I was in awe.

Deep inside, I was dancing like I never did before. Finally, I will leave Gaza, for Japan! Is this finally the Utopia I dreamt of living in? Is it a dream? I do not believe it, I am not able to handle all this happiness!

A pop-up came out of my mobile, a message on Facebook, “Congrats, Hatem! You made it.” That was a friend, so it was actually true. I almost fainted.

My life completely changed. Suddenly I became a star, people questioning me about how I got accepted, more congratulations coming. Many colleagues envied me, I felt uncomfortable. It is right, I worked hard for it, but still not totally sure whether I deserve it.

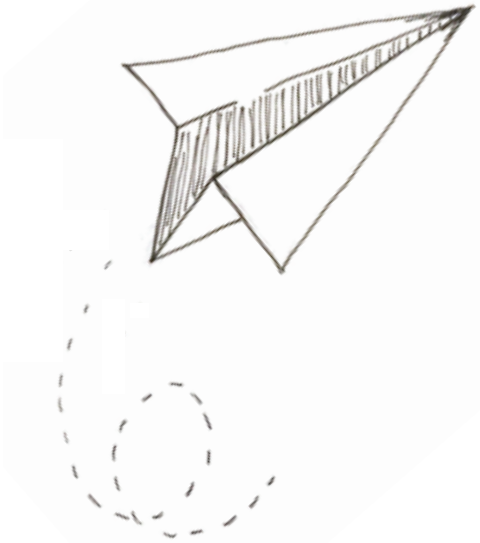
I read more about the imposter syndrome, how it affects achievers when they feel not deserving of what they have gotten. I was living an internal conflict. Eventually, my happiness prevailed. The school said they had sent me the visa papers by mail. I was in contact with colleagues from different countries; they received the papers, proceeded with the visa process, and yet I had not received them. They were stuck at port of Ashdod, and waiting was the only option. Twenty-nine days later, the papers arrived. I was told that we have no Japanese embassy in Gaza, the only way was to send the papers to Tel Aviv. I rushed and found an office, sent the papers, and kept waiting. When I received the visa successfully, I got hope back. However, I did not realize what was awaiting me. The school just started, my next step was to reach the school. I only need to get out, I thought to myself, I



only need to pass through Egypt or Jordan - it is not hard. I was struck with a feeling of despair. While traveling is considered a pleasant experience for other people, it is literally an inferno for Gazan people. Gaza is a nice place, I lived for all of my life here. I owe this place all of the things I learned, all the feelings I felt, the love, the hope, and every single success. I can never dislike this place.

Spent the next days scrolling on Facebook, hoping to finally receive my permit and leave to pursue what became my only hope. I felt my life clinging to Japan, my mind was there, while I was physically stuck in Gaza. Every single atom of me wanted to go there. Time was passing fast, I was in pain. I fell into deep depression, I questioned everything, I asked myself a hundred times, WHY ME?!

Everything was unanswerable, I received questions from Japan, why can you not come? I had no answer. I felt anger growing inside me, about myself, about the community, about Gaza, Palestine, Israel, politics, religion, school system, World War I, World War II, and these imaginational boundaries that kept us apart. I wanted to speak up. I sent emails to tens of human rights organizations asking them for help and support. I did all I could have done. Unfortunately, none of this worked out. A week passed, then two, a month, two months passed, no light was at the end of the tunnel. I decided not to give up. I initiated a social campaign on Facebook with the help of my parents. It worked well, people were angry just like me, many shares were starting to pop up.



My appeal reached the president of the country, he directly asked to get me out. When it finally worked, I was leaving, I did not feel happy, I felt lucky and relieved that I survived the hell. I thought that it was weird if a person wanted to leave, he needs to receive a direct support from the president himself, otherwise, there is no hope.

When I left, my visa was already expired, it forced me to stay in Jordan for three weeks alone, without my parents or any supervision, to renew it. All of this is the consequence of blockade, I would have not faced all of this if I was not from Gaza. I used to count the odds of me being born in Gaza to anywhere in the world. It has always been a frustration.

And after coming back to Gaza, my view totally changed. Gaza is not anymore the hell I always imagined. Gaza is home, and home can never be hell. Gaza was my incubator, that raised me for the world. Gaza is family and friends. Gaza is love.

I pray every day for this place to be better, I never lost hope in it. I keep telling myself, you know, this place is going to be better.

And that is what pushes me to keep growing and learning, ignoring the lack of the appropriate environment. It encourages me and other youth to speak up, express ourselves and talk more about Gaza, to try to make a change, no matter how minuscule it seems. We have hope in life.

Living in a Savage Rose Named Gaza

written by Daliya Safi

I am one of those one million, eight hundred and sixteen thousand bloody red fatigued yet still not withered petals. The rose I am melt in once was white and free as any savage rose is supposed to be. Its petals were able to fly anywhere, but they always preferred to stay as my grand-ma used to say. Then, a dirty cage of hell compressed all of them to kill. The thorns of our rose resisted so well until the petals split apart and fell. Day by day, night by night, the briar rose will keep bleeding until the end of this twilight. For I was born red as each petal of this rose is by now. Although red may look charming to many, its cost equals thousands of petals and a million liter of pure blood and begging tears.

Despite my young age, I have lived in wars; I have seen death spinning around me wondering why a fragile and delicate petal like me is still alive. I have smelled the heavy scent of fear mixed with a hardly bear-able wail cutting my breath and making my hands shake. Our rose is sick; it is barely breathing. The cage grows each day and night, but its cracks become narrower and smaller. I wonder for how long I will be able to stand. The splinters of the still lasting war bother my forever lasting soul. My soul is also caged but with the sorrow of the truth. For it knows as nothing better how agony burns the blood inside your veins making all your squeezed gloom flame out of your exhausted eyes. However, how we are still alive? We are now at the endings of 2018. While almost all the fields in this world are living, learning, working and breathing, our rose is torn away from its field. All we do is to learn what we can learn. Studying is the only joy left for us. Petals have no jobs unless fortune once smiles to someone's red burnt heart. I guess the outside world barely believes the reality of our life. Some may say: "It is impossible to cope with the daily electricity cuts and shortages of health care and clean water." Well, in wars, our enemy bombs the electricity station so we continue our last days in fear, darkness, and unacquain-



tance of what is happening or what may happen.

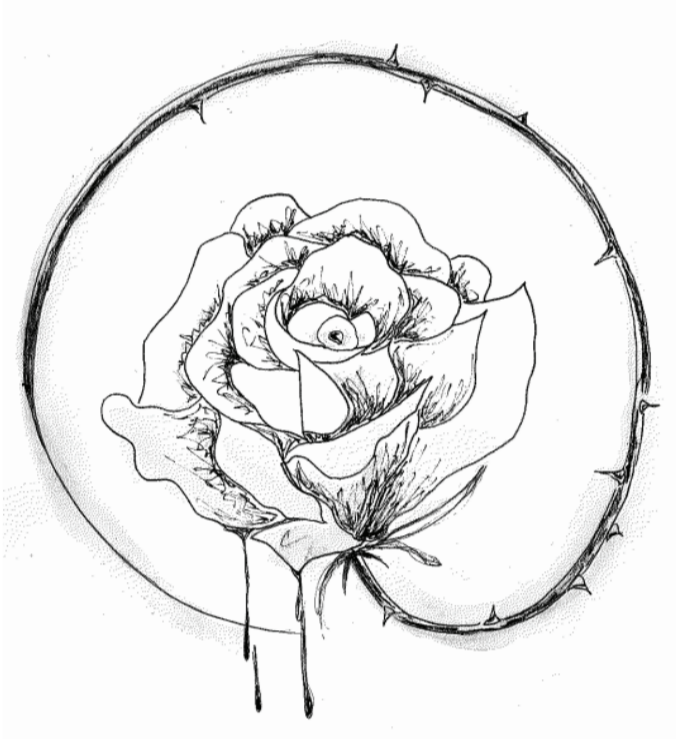
Now, I am a university student in the English literature department. It was a really hard decision to make. During Tawjihi, I was thinking unstoppably of which specialization I shall choose. I am the kind of person who loves many specializations and would not mind mastering them all, but the reality is way different. So, I had to choose one. I thought of Architectural Engineering, but then I remembered our math and physics teachers who told us that they had a dream of being successful engineers and studied five years at the university to finally end up facing the reality of not being able to work as an engineer, especially if you are a woman. So, they studied another year to simply become teachers after six whole years of studying. And that was not something I would like to end up with. Then, I thought of Veterinary Medicine, but unfortunately this specialization does not exist in Gaza Strip. Although it may count as a main reason to give up, I still have the ambition to help the stray animals as much as my simple possibilities are. English Literature was the most suitable specialization in this case. English is an international language that is needed in many fields. English Literature is a department I really admire and enjoy learning. For me, this specialization is a survival key that may help me in the future. That is how I finally made my decision.

What is my next step? For us, Palestinians, it is hard to tell what future is waiting for us, or if there is any future as well. In spite of all difficulties we face, we, the people of Gaza, still have the desire to live “We teach life, sir.” So, my next step is to take a master’s degree and become the echo of the unspoken words, the tongue of my people and the scream of my soul.

Lately, our petals protested peacefully at the borders of our enemy’s ghoulish cage and called this protest “the Great March of Return,” but it seems even a peaceful protest could end up killing almost 200 innocents,

including children, women, medics, and journalists. Moreover, 14,700 were injured. In my point of view, I do not want my people to die in vain. Our blood is precious, and our soul is priceless. Our foe is a bloody monster who has no mercy. This monster enjoys swallowing the weakest and the strongest of us, wherefore we have enough hills made by our own stacked corpses.

These petals need to live in peace. They are the clearest evidence of their root existence. This rose must not be ever forgotten or vanished. A rose is not a rose without its petals, and a ceaseless sacrificing for a rose could end up sacrificing the rose itself. We are the rose, but if we disappear, no briar rose will ever exist.



Raed's Life Under Blockade

written by Raed S. A. Shakshak

Hello. My name is Raed, and I don't have a life. I'm not writing this essay to win. I'm writing this because I want to get my voice heard (complain), especially since you're a foreign organization. I just want to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. My life under blockade is laborious and miserable. Not just mine, mostly all lives. But today, I'm writing about mine in detail. A thousand words are not enough. I could write books. I've had depression that makes me careless, just like I'm careless whether I win or not. I'll walk you through it. I'll do you a favor and stick by your rules since it's your contest.

To be honest, I never felt the bad circumstances we live in in Gaza till I traveled to America in 2016. It was a scholarship I got, through which I got to know what real life, normal life if I may, is like. The moment I got back to Gaza I immediately had depression. My name is Raed and I spent the past summer sleeping almost naked on the floor because it was so hot, and I had no electricity for most of the day. I barely use my devices, so that kills me as a technofreak. I couldn't study online like I should do. I couldn't work online. I couldn't stay in touch with my international friends. And at some point, I had to give up on some great opportunities because I couldn't apply. I gave up on simple dreams, like to be a writer, because my laptop, whose battery lasts for 30 minutes or maybe even less, needs electricity. I could go on and on, but it should be pretty obvious to the blind. We live in 2018, and I get electricity for three to four hours a day. I can do nothing with four hours of electricity. I'm paralyzed. I can do nothing but sit in the street and think about how my life's being taken away from me. How I can never be productive in this community. I've become a liability, despite all the skills I have that qualify me to be super productive.

We got used to life without the simplest human rights. We have no freedom, so we're technically slaves. But of course no one is willing to



admit that. Slaves don't get clean water. Slaves wash in and drink dirty and unhealthy water. Slaves' lives matter, but don't at the same time. They should matter. We don't get access to health care. It makes sense since we're slaves. Frankly, I feel so lame and stupid to complain about unhealthy water and shortages of healthcare. A serious issue we got in Gaza is the unemployment issue. Am I saying that because I'm unemployed now, even though I'm still a student, and it would be a bigger issue to me when I graduate? Yes! I care about that issue because I'm a youth, and I'm supposed to be at the top stage of my life. I believe youths are the foundation for any community. Without them, that community is so weak. The Gazan youths are unemployed, and therefore are broke. I am broke. It sucks. Did you know there are a lot of students who don't attend college on a daily basis because they can't afford to pay for transportation?



Hint: I'm one of those students. Do you know how many opportunities I miss just because I don't live in the center city, Gaza City? I'd be perfect for most of those opportunities! Whether they're jobs, voluntary work, community services, initiatives, etc. Do you know how much I hate that? No words could express how frustrated I am with that issue. Do you know what bothers me the most?

It's that because I miss on all those great stuff, I got zero experience. What do I need experience for? Good question! I need it to apply for graduate programs. That's a huge deal to me. Take a moment to see how I suffer in silence.

I hate my university more than you can imagine. Nevertheless, I believe

in the power of education. I believe it's the one and only way to change a nation's present and future. I believe we have a wrong system. I want to take it down and replace it with a better one. It's going to be a lot like the one I experience at Juniata College. I want to educate myself and study what I need to learn in order to create that change. I want that to be my future. It doesn't have to be in Gaza. My future doesn't concentrate on a specific group. But I'm more interested in working with foreign people. I want to help smart African students to get the education they deserve. I want to help smart and qualified students anywhere. But because I'm focusing on those who are poor, like me, I think a lot about the Africans. I never got the guidance I needed. I want to guide the future RAEDs.

I face challenges on a daily basis. When it comes to school, financial challenges top my head. I don't struggle academically, simply because I'm so good. But each semester I live in fear that I may delay it because I won't be able to pay its tuition fees. I dismiss most of my classes because I don't attend because I can't afford to. Sometimes I use someone else's phone to take pictures in the lecture, and ask them to send them to me later. I don't have good devices. Maybe instead of getting the winners Kindle tablets, get them Fire HD 10 instead. They're way more useful for students (and they're almost the same price). Trust me, I know better. We got bad teachers, and a bad system. I study on my own, so I don't need them. I'm fine. That's pretty much it!

30 Minutes...A Thousand Times Over

written by Nadya Faisal Siyam

At times of war you become extra alarmed. You become a navigator as you try to predict how far each bombing is from your house and who of your beloved lives near the area you've predicted. And when you're done with your calculations, you pray you were wrong.

My dad works as an orthopedic surgeon at Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa Hospital. Whenever there is an attack on Gaza, dad, along with other doctors, stays at Al-Shifa for days to deal with the huge number of injured they must treat. Operation Protective Edge, the 2014 assault on Gaza, was no different.

My four little siblings, Mom and I stayed alone without Dad throughout the 50 day assault. Dad used to call us once every day and insisted to speak to each of us separately, even if it was for 10 seconds. Yousef, our youngest, was a year and a half old then. He would hold the phone with his two tiny hands and say the very few words he was able to pronounce "baba, yella ta'al- come on dad, come home". Being the eldest, I had to wait until they're all done talking to hear Dad's voice at last.

- Be safe. Take care of your Mom and siblings. Distract our little ones. Make sure the door is locked and the windows are open.

- Okay Dad.

Dad...please come home, at least at night. We worry about you.

-They need me here. And I'm safe sweetie. Come on, you know nobody bombs a hospital.

He stopped me from objecting any further with a short tired laugh. He sounded older, maybe because of the lack of sleep.



One afternoon, my mum and I were preparing Iftar (the meal which Muslims break their fasts with during Ramadan) and listening to the news on the radio. It got to the point when we couldn't keep up with the number of deaths and injuries. Most of the reported bombings that day were in Rafah and Khan Younis - the southern parts of Gaza Strip. We lived in the northern west part of the strip so the sound of bombings was far.

The landline phone rang. The voice of my uncle attacked my ear with a loud piercing scream as I picked the phone. "Why isn't he picking the phone? Your dad is home, right?" he cried hysterically.

"No," I replied with my shaky voice, "he is at Al-Shifa. What's going on?" His voice was lower this time. It seemed he was crying; however, I immediately dismissed that thought. "Ya rabi, oh god! They threatened to bomb Al-Shifa. The IDF called for an evacuation. They're going to bomb the hospital."

Loneliness crept into me, and I had a sudden desire of having a regular chat with dad. I wanted to make him tea-extra mint and complain to him about school and homework. Then he would call me a huge drama queen while pulling me into a fast hug. We could watch Taken movie for the hundredth time. Dad would say a couple of times throughout the movie, "it's incredible what a father would go through for his daughter." And I would roll my eyes and say, "it's over exaggerated."

"Nobody bombs a hospital," dad said. "Nobody bombs a hospital, sweetie." And I trusted dad.

I don't remember when Mom got next to me but there she was. She must have heard what uncle said for her face was unreadable and her eyes were wide open gazing at a fixed point on the floor. My grip was so tight on the phone as if letting go of it meant death. Our living room became a desert where I had to fight for every bit of air.

A couple of minutes later...

An ear bleeding, bone shattering raid sound spread like venom throughout the neighborhood. And our building was shaking as if it was electrified. The telephone started ringing again. Seconds later, my mum's cellphone rang too. Patriotic songs were playing on the radio in the kitchen making the whole situation seem like the last scene of a tragic movie. I hated that I suddenly recalled dad's tired laugh. I hated that my brain was already making assumptions. I hated that mum tried to answer the phone. I hated that I started crying. My siblings rushed out of their rooms looking for a safe haven. They always did this when hearing a loud bombing, dug their heads in our laps with their hands on their ears, eyes tightly closed, teeth clenching. My fear was different. I let go of Yousef and hurried to the kitchen window looking out for the heavily dusted smoke, attempting to trace the exact location of the bombing. My brain began making the calculations that led me to the conclusion I couldn't speak out loud. Three blocks away to the south from our house. That is the location of the hospital.

The next 30 minutes were the longest in my life. We were sitting in the living room waiting to face the truth. The phone rang seven times. And each time it was either a relative or a neighbor asking if we know what happened. Mum calmly replied "no" each time. And we waited. And I died once. Twice. Twenty times. A hundred times, and we waited. We learned eventually that the hospital was bombed. No deaths were reported. Thankfully, they managed to evacuate the targeted building in time. And only its entrance was bombed. No reason for the bombing was provided, however.



I trusted dad, but it wasn't he who

shouldn't have been trusted. How naïve it was of me to think no army is cruel enough to bomb who he has already bombed, to kill the dead, to call a hospital for an evacuation.

Humanity shouldn't be trusted. Dad was alive but for 30 minutes he wasn't. And during this time, I died a thousand times over.



Meet the authors

Karim Abualroos

I'm Karim Abualroos, a Palestinian writer and researcher who lives in Gaza City. I graduated from the department of Political Science at Al-Azhar University - Gaza. I have published a novel entitled, "A Drowned Seeking No Survival." I also published many articles and studies in magazines and studies centers, including "Pain Experimenters: The Knowledge Siege in Gaza" and "Intellectual Life in Gaza: Experimenting on looking in the inside."

Ali Abusheikh

I am 24 years old and an English language and literature graduate from Al-Azhar University of Gaza. I studied abroad for a year, in Chicago, Illinois during my university training. I am a writer and the partnerships coordinator for We Are Not Numbers. I consider myself a dreamer and a tea-and-book enthusiast who is Palestinian by blood, yet American in spirit. I am also passionate about becoming a prominent public speaker and writer who spreads knowledge and raises awareness about my beloved country, Palestine. Writing and speaking allow me to share the beautiful and positive parts of Palestinian culture and everyday life that is overlooked in Western media.

Ehsan Wael Yousef Bader

I am twenty years old and in my second year in college, specializing in teaching English. I hope to graduate and become a good and inspiring teacher. My biggest dream is to be an effective person and maybe a life changer through words. I am in the middle of writing my first novel about a young Palestinian man who faces life's challenging conditions.



Rahf Ayman Hasan Elhallaq

I'm Rahf Ayman Hasan Elhallaq, 19 years old and I study English language and literature at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). I live in Gaza City but I'm originally from Asqalan (Ashkelon) which is exactly beside the Gaza Strip, yet I have never seen it before due to the Israeli occupation. I don't have any published works (this will be the first), but I hope I'll be able to publish more in the future.

Haneen Jamal Abed Elnaby

My name is Haneen Abd Elnabi and I am 21 years old. I am a senior student studying English Literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. Literature is something I feel heals my soul. I am a writer for We Are Not Numbers, where I published four stories. My final story was written for Rebuilding Alliance. Reading, languages and music are my passion. My favorite novel is "A Beautiful Lie" by Irfan Master. I am in love with learning about different cultures -- Indian, Turkish and many other cultures. My English skills were developed significantly when I was accepted into Amideast's Access program in 2012, where I later volunteered.

Sarah Nafez Hammad

My name is Sarah. I live in Gaza City. I am a second year student of English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. Recently, I started working as a portrait photographer. My journey of writing has started since I was 10 years old. I wrote dozens of short stories. My passion is to be a professional writer.



Tarneem Hammad

I am originally from Qatra, a Palestinian village in the Ramla subdistrict, but I currently live in Nusirat Refugee camp in Gaza. I studied English literature and work as an English language trainer. I have written several stories published in Middle East Eye and We Are Not Numbers.

Marah Mahdi

My name is Marah, which means something basically needed in life: fun. I am a 19. I study English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. I work as a freelance translator and English language teacher. I am a bit active on my social media accounts. I write stories, songs, plays and poems in both Arabic and English and am now writing a novel. I have published my writings on some local platforms, like pal+. I dream of a better life. I wish one day I have it.

Hatem Saadallah

I am a Palestinian from Gaza City. I am currently a current first-year medical student at Mansoura University in Egypt. I work in freelance as a Full Stack Web Developer.

I write on my own blog <https://hatempalestine.quora.com>



Daliya Safi

My mother is Russian, and my father is Palestinian-Egyptian. I was born in Russia, and after three months, my family moved to Gaza. Our Palestinian origin is from Qastina "ةڤسڤسڤ", and we live in Al-Zahraa City for 19 years and a half until now. I am studying English Literature at Al-Azhar University and hope to graduate in 2019. I also plan to continue to pursue my master degree. Beside my college studies, I am learning French at the French Institute, I paint and draw, and I am interested in music. I am beginning to learn how to play the violin.

Raed Shakshak

I currently am a senior studying English language and literature at Al Azhar University in Gaza. In 2019 I just started volunteering at We Are Not Numbers. I am the assistant to the social media coordinator. I'm a new writer, with plans to write additional stories on the We Are Not Numbers' website. The first story I wrote is titled "The cat that stole my heart", which was shared on social media by foreign people and Jewish Voice for Peace. I live in the Al Amal neighborhood in Khan Younis, the Gaza Strip, Palestine.

Nadya Faisal Siyam

My name is Nadya Siyam. I'm a Palestinian living in Gaza City. I study English Language and Literature at the Islamic University, and I participate in community service activities at a couple of local institutions. I write and publish articles with We Are Not Numbers. My latest piece is titled "My Life under Blockade."



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Since 1948, AFSC has worked in the U.S., Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories with Palestinians, Israelis, and other committed activists to support nonviolence, challenge oppression, and to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. This work has guided our "Principles for a Just and Lasting Peace in Palestine and Israel." These principles support the implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law and call for an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, implementation of refugees' right of return, equality, and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

