

SOLDIERS IN MY HOUSE

Three Weeks to Freedom: one family's story of survival under siege

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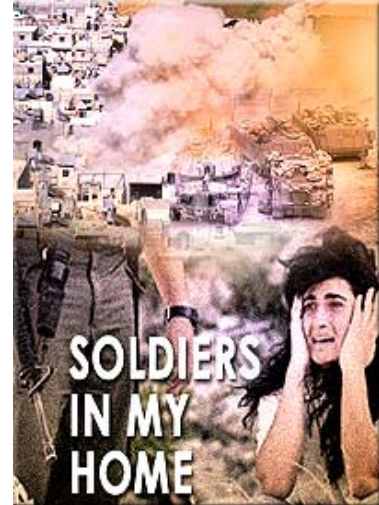
Commentary and additional information by Laura Dawn Lewis

Wafa Abu Shmais is an English teacher, the mother of four children, a wife, daughter, and an aunt. She is also a Palestinian, Arabic and Muslim, her entire life spent in an apartheid state where the simple fact of not being Jewish makes one not fully human, expendable and hated. Wafa and her family endure the type of racism and oppression not seen in the United States since the slave days and briefly glimpsed with the internment of the Japanese during World War II.

Yet surprisingly as you read her diary encompassing the three weeks in April 2002, which saw the invasion of Nablus and the Massacre in Jenin, (which Israeli hardliners still try to deny even with the film footage and testimony of Kurdi Bear, one of the D-9 drivers proving it) you'll discover Wafa could easily be your neighbor. She worries about what American mothers worry about. Her children complain about the same things American children complain about and she and her husband support each other, just like American husbands and wives support each other.

The most remarkable aspect of this diary gleans though frustration and justified anger; the hate Americans are told consumes all persons of Arabic or Muslim decent is missing. The hate is missing for a reason. It doesn't exist as it has been painted. What emerges from her writing is hope, frustration and disbelief. The image Americans have of Palestine, including heinously distorted history, biblical and actual reflects propaganda rather than truth. Wafa's story will allow you to know what Palestinians are really like. When she wrote this in April 2002, she didn't plan on having it published. She just wrote what she was feeling, seeing, thinking and experiencing. She wrote what was happening.

With the exception of some very minor grammatical corrections, the diary is just as Wafa wrote it. We are very proud to present Wafa's diary covering the three weeks of hell she and her family survived. You'll find her story inspiring as well as disturbing, yet it is a story that must be told.



Over 100 tanks descended on the city of Nablus in April 2002. What followed was three weeks of hell.

Above: a Palestinian woman terrorized with an Israeli soldier standings above her, in the background Balta Refugee camp burns: these two pictures are from June 2002. (PHOTOS COURTESY OF AL-JAZEERA).

This is one family's story of survival during the April 2002 incursion.

Since the Shmais family's cameras were destroyed by Israeli soldiers along with most of their photos, we've compiled various photographs from the Occupied Territories to help illustrate this story, the issues and fill in historical information not present in the diary. Photographs cover incidents occurring from 2002 forward in Palestine and come from a variety of sources.

INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, America launched its war against terror in Afghanistan. A few months later, God launched his earthquake against Afghanistan. Both wars were against man and nature. The following March, Sharon intensified his war against the Palestinians. His army invaded Ramallah as the whole world witnessed the human disaster Israeli soldiers unleashed on our people.

It seems we in Palestine have three Gods: the Almighty God in the sky, America and Israel on earth. The last two prove capable of being almighty and launching disastrous man-made earthquakes. Both nations proclaim their justification, a "War against Terror", though it soon became obvious this is a war against civilians, trees, animals and homes. Unarmed people, children, olive trees and houses can never be forms of terror according to the civilized world in the West or the primitive peoples in the East.

After the incursion of Ramallah, the cities of Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Jenin and Bethlehem were invaded and reoccupied. Then it was our turn. We in Nablus had been expecting the invasion for two or three days, but never could we have imagined or predicted the horrors accompanying it. The following contains excerpts from a diary I wrote during a time when an occupying army, ostensibly fighting terror, invaded and took over my house.

It has taken me a long time to pick up this diary and look at it again. -- Wafa Abu Shmais

PART 1: THE INVASION

WEDNESDAY APRIL 3, 2002

9:00 PM

The tanks and other heavy machinery began to move towards our city of Nablus, and the sounds of heavy shooting and explosions could be heard all around us. We were expecting the attack but not before midnight. They invaded from both the north and the south, and the sounds of bombs, shelling and explosions were so intense that our windows and doors shook, and some were even shattered. Apache helicopter gunships in the sky supported the tanks on the ground; they were flying low when they opened fire and watching missiles shot from those helicopters hit their targets was terrifying. Only then did my husband and I decide to stay with my parents-in-law since our home, located on the upper floor, was in greater danger of being hit by missiles. My mother-in-law lives in a big house below ours. The windows of our house overlook the entrances to her house, which is located below the level of the main street. The area where we live is usually quiet, peaceful and beautiful.

I told my children to carry things like pajamas, some bread, canned food, and diapers for our three-year-old daughter. We put out all the lights in the house except one as a precaution against burglars. We locked the main door and closed the glass one and ran down the stairs to safety. We could see bullets and huge fireballs in the sky hurtling to the ground. In the distance, we could make out the lights of tanks as they moved slowly towards the city. There were tanks in several streets, and the shelling was coming from all directions. We arrived breathless, and fourteen-year-old Nana, twelve-year-old Vito, ten-year-old Nammor and little Nadeen were really afraid. We entered the house quickly, and my husband and his mother tried to calm them down, cautioning: "You must get used to these sounds since this may take days, even months. Let us all pray now that God protect us and keep us safe."

Since we were expecting an electrical failure, we decided to serve supper so that the kids could go to bed. Half an hour later, when it was completely dark, we looked from the door and saw that there was a total blackout, no electricity throughout the city. We understood that the Israeli army's first target was the electrical generator, leaving us without light or even a little heat.

The bombardment intensified and we were getting increasingly scared. The lights of the tanks were bright as they wound through the streets in long lines, and their disturbingly loud clanking could be heard for miles. Four hundred tanks were expected to enter the city from three different directions. We made some calls and received others to make sure that friends and relatives were okay. Now that there was no TV, we had no idea whatsoever was happening outside. Since we were declared a "closed military area" and the press was not allowed; no one else would know. We were alone.

We decided that one room was safer than the rest, so we spread blankets and sheets near the walls and prepared the children for bed. Nana, who had a clogged nose, couldn't sleep because she couldn't breathe freely, Vino was complaining of a headache and Nammor decided to sleep next to me, but little Nadeen was hyperactive with all the excitement, blissfully unaware of the danger surrounding us. She couldn't sleep and kept running and shouting, laughing and babbling about Israelis, bombs, shooting etc. My father-in-law, stating that if death came it would strike regardless of location, decided to sleep in his room in his own bed,

12:00 AM

It sounded like hell itself outside. Sleep was impossible. We all took many turns using the one bathroom. I myself used the toilet six times between 9 and 12. We had not expected a power failure immediately quite so early in the invasion and were really worried about the meat, chicken, vegetables and bread we had stored in the fridge.

2:00 AM

We put out the candles because of the smell, leaving a lamp next to the candle in case someone needed to get up. The room was stuffy due to the smoke. My husband, a heavy smoker, was smoking more than ever and the room had become quite stuffy. All the kids went to bed except Vino, who said she couldn't sleep because she thought that there would be an end for all this soon. She kept talking and asking questions: what might happen to us, and whether



The most frightening sight for any Palestinian is to see the gathering of tanks, fortified troop carriers and armored bulldozers, most supplied by the United States at little or no charge on the edge of their city. This group is preparing to enter Gaza August 7, 2004. On April 3, 2002, a similar group would have been stationed outside of Wafa's city of Nablus.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: The Palestinians do not have an army. They have never had an army. They fight against the fourth largest military in the world, a nuclear superpower equipped with 600 WMD's and the best America has to offer: tanks, gunships, missiles, bulldozers, and jets. They fight against massive armaments and the biological and chemical weapons frequently used on them with rocks, homemade bombs, the occasional smuggled rocket and other small arms. They've been doing this in one form or another since the first Massacres prior to statehood in 1948, which killed thousands and displaced 750,000, and through Israel's invasion of the West Bank, Gaza, Northern Egypt and the Golan Heights in 1967.

The West Bank is home to the largest single reserve of Natural Gas on the planet.; Israel continues to illegally siphon this off. The Palestinians get nothing. The terror levied on the Palestinian Christians and Muslims only occurs because the United States continues to fund and protect Israel, allowing it to continue its campaign of genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid unchecked and without accountability. The main reason this continues is because the average American has no idea what they are supporting, nor do they realize this conflict is why terrorism against Americans exists and will continue to exist. It is the root cause behind 9/11 and terrorism promoted by pharisaical leaders for reasons of self-interest: religious, political and economic.

Arabs don't hate Israelis because they are Jewish. And they don't hate America for its "freedom". Their anger is because of what Israel is doing to them, protected and supported by the US: dehumanizing, exterminating and starving them, treating them as the Nazis did the Jews during the 1930's and 1940's, making this nearly sixty year holocaust, that much more unfathomable and completely without logic.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF MOHAMMED OF RAFAH

we'd be killed or not. Finally, she got tired and fell asleep. My mother-in-law was also tired and struggling to keep her eyes open.

4:00 AM

The noises outside were terrifying and they sounded closer and closer. It was as if our house was being targeted. Everyone was asleep or half-asleep, jumpy and restless. My head felt hot and ready to explode. Although it was cold and rainy outside, I felt warm and my feet kept getting warmer. It was a long night.

THURSDAY APRIL 4, 2002

6:00 AM

Daylight was breaking. A bird was singing outside. However, shooting and explosions interrupted the song.

We understood that one of the targets was a nearby refugee camp. The same scenario was repeated: shooting, shelling, explosions, bombardments, shooting, shelling, explosions, and bombardments, on and on. We heard later that two people were killed and many injured. It was raining and soldiers were calling through the loudspeaker for a family in the camp to evacuate their house because it was going to be destroyed. The occupants were ordered to leave the house with their hands up and were given to the count of ten. That was all the time they were given: we could hear the soldier counting down: 10, 9, 8 and by the time he reached 1, the doors of hell suddenly opened. There was shelling from many directions, loud explosions, and the smell of dynamite and dust. Our friends called and told us that a three-story building had been completely destroyed within seconds. The occupants fled for their lives, leaving everything they owned behind them inside the house. These people became homeless in an instant, and had to take refuge with their neighbors.

In the afternoon, we discovered that we had little water left in our storage tank. We decided to use the water that we had collected and stored in containers of different sizes and shapes, including Coca-Cola bottles. We advised the children to economize and not waste water. We used a container for washing dishes and another in the bathroom to avoid using the faucet. We prepared sandwiches for supper in order not to use dishes and wash them. Every now and then someone would turn on the lights only to discover that the electricity was still cut off. The children were getting bored being cooped up inside the house. They couldn't watch TV and had to keep quiet so that we could hear what was happening outside. We remembered that we had kept batteries in readiness for such an emergency and could listen to the news over BBC radio. We heard that seven people had been killed and their bodies left on the streets of the old city of Nablus. The soldiers were bombing, shelling and destroying houses in an attempt to enter the old city, their second target.

It was another long night. The kitchen was located below the level of the street, only 5 meters from the cement wall that supported the street. Next to the kitchen was the room that we chose to sleep in. From the window we could see the red lights of two Apaches in the sky right above us. We thought that they were going to bombard our area. But no, the target was the old city: we counted six rockets coming from the Apaches aimed over there. The Apaches continued their mission throughout the night.

As I was lying in bed at about 3 a.m., I could see that it was extremely dark from the window to my left, although the moon was visible from the window right in front of me. The moon was half-hidden behind the clouds, as though it did not want to witness what was happening. Even the clouds were moving quickly. Aren't they tired of treading and revolving over our suffering? I

wondered if the same moon had witnessed our dark and cruel history over the years? Palestine has always been occupied, and we Palestinians have never enjoyed true freedom. All my life, I have dreamed of living in a free, independent state. I got married and had children and we are all still living in the longest dream on earth. Why is this happening to us? Why is man cruel? Why is nature cruel? Why is our history dark? Is it true that there is light after long darkness? When will we be able to see a flash of light? Preoccupied with such thoughts, I began to feel it was a crime even to think since my thoughts were constantly interrupted by shots and sounds from different directions frequencies and distances. It sounded like a gang of maniacs playing various kinds of harsh, unpleasant, noisy and crazy instruments.

FRIDAY APRIL 5, 2002

We prepared breakfast; sandwiches again. The house is surrounded by a small garden of 2X8 m² where my parents-in-law have planted some rose bushes and three or four shrubs. The kids took their sandwiches outside the house and into the little garden. We could hear the heavy, noisy movement of the tanks and military vehicles not very far away and could imagine what was happening. Bulldozers preceded the tanks, destroying everything in their path: cars, trees, streets, electric and telephone poles, water pipes, sewage pipes, the doors and walls of houses, even traffic lights and pavement. All these things had happened in Ramallah, and now they were being deliberately repeated in our city. The purpose was simply to destroy the infrastructure of the city. Actually a bulldozer was digging out the street, making a huge pile of sand and rocks in an attempt to block the street. There was water in the hole, which meant that the water pipes had been cut. It was a war against people, trees, rocks and everything. My son, watching the bulldozer, asked me, "Why are they doing this? Why are they destroying the street and the water pipes? Don't they know that there are people living here? We're not armed. Why are they doing this to us? We've done nothing to them"

We were supposed to heed the calls for Friday prayer, but because there was no electricity, we couldn't hear the loudspeakers. Most probably, though, no one dared leave their house and go to the mosque for the prayer. At about 2 o'clock, as we were having lunch, we heard and then saw two helicopter gunships fly overhead. They hovered in the sky for a while, then all of a sudden there was a huge explosion, then another and a third. Our house overlooks the camp, and we could see three houses there explode, and dust and smoke rise up to the sky. There were people screaming and shouting; they were probably injured but no one could reach them since even ambulances were forbidden by military order from evacuating the injured to a hospital.

It is good if people die on the spot after being bombed or shot, because if they are injured, they must either be lucky or left there to bleed to death. Three people died. We could see their bodies, carried by about ten people who walked quickly and buried them in the camp cemetery. Usually when people get killed in similar circumstances, their bodies are accompanied by hundreds of people to their final rest. Today few people participated because were afraid that the soldiers on top of the mountain overlooking the camp would take advantage of the situation and shoot at the crowds.

At about 4:00, the sounds of the tanks were getting closer and closer, and the soldiers began to shoot insanely. The tanks arrived on our street; there seemed to be two. We got scared and didn't know where to go or what to do. They were moving slowly and the shooting shattered the silence of our quiet neighborhood. We ran about the house dashing from room to room. When the shooting intensified we lay on the floor, but when the bullets were right above our house we dashed to the bathroom. I was carrying my little daughter who was crying while the other children surrounded us and clutched at us tightly. I didn't know why we chose the bathroom.

Perhaps due to its smaller size it seemed the safest place in the house. We stayed in the passage outside the bathroom for about fifteen to twenty minutes. The tanks moved away only to be replaced by a bulldozer noisily gutting our street. Only when they left and their sound faded in the distance, did we dare come out to investigate what had happened. There was a huge pile of sand and mud, and the tar of the street was churned up. What had happened -- and why? We had no answer.

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 2002

After breakfast, we decided to carry the water from our house downstairs since their water was running out. Everybody took part, and we used containers and buckets to carry the water. Now our house had little water left. My mother-in-law and I hand-washed underwear only and made the children wear the same clothes: a washing machine is useless with no water or electricity.

We found we were cut completely when we discovered that all telephones in the city were out of service. Even my sister-in-law, who lives in the other end of the city and was our window on what was happening there (since they have electricity and could watch TV) was without a phone.

We were isolated from the rest of the world, too. We couldn't even use our cellular phones because they could not be charged. At about lunchtime, we could hear another countdown for two or three families to leave their houses with their hands up. Then we saw dust and smoke in three areas in the camp, which meant that three houses were destroyed. My son asked me: "Why did they ask the people to leave with their hands up? I thought that once people evacuated their houses with their hands up, their houses would not be destroyed. I don't understand that". I had no answer and we soon learned that the same things were happening in other places in the city, especially the old part.

In the evening, the tanks came once more to our street. This time we didn't go to the bathroom; instead, we stayed in one of the rooms next to the walls. The tanks did the same heavy shooting with stun grenades, blasting the silence with deafening noise. We heard glass breaking and things being hit. From the window, we could see two huge tanks moving slowly along the street and disappearing behind a neighbor's house. Above us, an unmanned plane circled, turning our night, which had been somewhat quieter than the previous into another horrible, odd nightmare.

SUNDAY APRIL 7, 2002

This morning, we all had an unusual bath. We wet a towel and washed and rubbed our bodies, and consumed only a bucket of water. We had breakfast and listened to the news from the radio: the old city was being attacked heavily. About 30 people had been killed, and many injured were still lying on the streets. Ambulances again could not evacuate the injured. The bulldozers were destroying houses in Jenin camp, and people had been buried under the ruins of their homes.

My children, who have never seen war, didn't realize or refused to understand that what was happening was dangerous. They wanted to go out of the house to the street or visit their maternal



October 2002:
Bulldozer erasing another house in
a RAFAH neighborhood
PHOTO: MOHAMMED OF RAFAH



January 19 2003:
Destruction of a house in Rafah
by the IDF. No reason is given
and the attack happened without
warning the family in advance.
The Palestinians have few rights
under occupation.
PHOTO: MOHAMMED OF
RAFAH

grandmother, to go to school, to visit their friends and play with them, to look through the windows, to do things in a normal free way.

Nammor was full of questions, and ideas, bragging to his sisters that if only he had a gun he would go and shoot at the tanks. His older sister laughed, "What do you think your gun could do to a tank or a helicopter? It wouldn't scratch a thing". He listened with amazement about the power and strength of the Israeli military, and then asked her, "How come they have everything and we have nothing and they're attacking us in our houses?" "Well, I think they hate us", she answered him.

Around noon, another huge building was destroyed -- seven stories with 14 apartments and huge shops and stores for cars and furniture. This time, people in nearby houses were asked to stay away from windows and everyone was warned of a huge explosion in the southern part of the camp. There was the usual countdown and then a huge explosion destroyed the building, gigantic clouds of mixed white and very dark smoke filled the sky, and small pieces of stones and sand fell on the houses in our neighborhood. The cloud took a long time to disappear.

The building had been visible from our house. Now it was gone, replaced by a huge pile of burning materials. Two helicopters were flying low and shelling the old city. Our ears were deaf with sounds of explosions and shooting and shelling. The houses were shaking; the windows, the doors, everything was moving. The children ran here and there when they heard the explosions. They screamed when they found themselves alone in one room.

In my mind's eye, I kept seeing a very strange bullfight. I could clearly see us as a weak, helpless group of people running away from a herd of wild bulls, huge, fierce, disoriented and stampeding in all directions. The bulls were trampling us with their heavy legs and goring us with their sharp horns. Some of the viewers in the international arena were watching silently, while the majority seemed amused by the scene and shouted, "Kill them! Crush them!" It seemed for them, this was a chance to end the never-ending story: the Israeli-Palestinian cause. Whenever I thought about it, I felt angry. What else do you feel when you are abandoned? The world no longer seemed a small village. I felt that Palestine was a very isolated and remote place. It was true that we were not allowed to contact the outside world, but that did not mean that those people could not try and extend help to us, or at least shed some light on our dark streets and houses. It was agonizing that the world community and people who claimed to love democracy were helpless and quiet and didn't condemn the Israelis for terrifying children and frightening their parents. Why this silence on the part of the world community? Was it thirst for blood? Wouldn't it be a better idea, far more civilized, to buy it from a decent blood bank instead? Such questions kept buzzing my head.

Things were getting dangerous. At 3 o'clock my father-in-law, 80-years old, got bored sitting inside the house and went out to the street. He had walked about 100 meters when snipers in a nearby house shot at him and he came back running. Neighbors told us that three nights ago the soldiers took over a house and asked the residents to leave. The snipers were shooting at anything that moved, and only one shot meant a person's life. Therefore, we could neither go outside nor



July 25, 2004

A medical worker helping a family escape when fire erupted in one of the neighbor's houses during Apache shelling,

PHOTO: MOHAMMED OF RAFAH

look from a window. Furthermore, the food was beginning to defrost and water was dripping and leaking from the fridge.

In the small garden that surrounds the house, my parents-in-law had planted some trees, roses and other plants. As I was sitting on the front step to the house, talking to Nammor, I noticed that the plants had begun to wither, and some of the flowers had fallen to the ground. I was saddened, and imagined our destiny if this water shortage continued. Nammor wanted to water the garden, but we couldn't allow him since we couldn't afford to waste any water. Not watering the garden, of course, meant that everything would dry up, and all signs of life around us would disappear. I loved that garden, and my husband and I took pictures under its trees on our wedding day. I also know that it meant a lot to my mother-in-law who enjoyed gardening as a favorite hobby. She used to water her plants every other day with great happiness and generosity. I remembered that she once told me that the plants, specially the roses, love water, just like people. Yes, water is life, and because of this we were selfish, and were after our survival and ignored nature not because we wanted to, but because those soldiers inside their tanks were destroying the pipes that supply our houses with water. These well-protected soldiers have nothing to lose: we are the losers and our lives are in great danger. Well, and let the plants wither; let spring die out for once, and let autumn prevail for a while: just let us survive.

At 10:30 my little daughter wanted to go to the bathroom. I quickly jumped to put the lights on, but then remembered that there was no power. My husband lit a candle using the lighter that he always kept in his pockets for emergency and lighting cigarettes. As he held Nadeen's hand and walked toward the bathroom, he shouted suddenly, and threw his slippers away from him. I could see something move next to the slippers. It was a big black scorpion. I quickly held Nadeen and moved away. All of a sudden, he snatched the slipper and hit the scorpion. It jumped and started to move quickly, and there was noise mingled with moving chairs and objects that forced everyone to wake up and share in the hunt that followed. I myself did not take part because I fear such insects and don't dare kill them. I carried a candle and followed all the commotion. My mother-in-law got a broom and handed it to my husband who smashed it against the floor in an attempt to kill the scorpion. Every movement that the scorpion made was followed by a scream, a shout or a jump on the part of the children. Nammor was standing on a chair encouraging his father to hit hard. The scorpion lost a leg and everybody cheered. Then there were two or three hits and there was silence. The scorpion didn't move. It was dead. We could see its blood and other fluids on the floor. I felt disgusted even to look at it after its death. Looking at it made my body shiver. I didn't even want to clean the floor. It was rude and selfish of me to let my mother-in-law do it, but I just could not. Nammor was still standing on the chair and felt relieved that the scorpion didn't fly. Thank God. No one knew what might have happened if the scorpion had stung anyone of us. Our first aid contains no antidote for poison. Nammor, who was once stung by a scorpion didn't want us to put out the candle and was frightened. I sent Nadeen to sleep with her father and made him sleep next to me in my bed. He was really scared, so hot and sweaty that his underwear was soaked with his perspiration. I calmed him down and told him at least three bedtime stories until he finally fell asleep. Outside, at least, it was a quiet night; the intensity of the shooting had decreased.

It was so dark outside. Oh, how deeply I now hated night and darkness: they were full of secrets and mysteries and made me feel weak and small, alone, isolated, unknowing and vulnerable. The thick darkness was like a huge ghost covering all the objects around me and wrapping my body in its horrible, huge rolling waves. It was so heavy over me that it hindered my movement and blocked my breath and left me immobile and barely alive, a cold pile of black ice. In the darkness, evil felt so powerful: it could stretch its ugly hands to me secretly, unseen. I felt so alone and at the same time so visible to the huge eyes of darkness and the ugly eyes of hi-tech

weapons and military machines that penetrate not only objects, but also bodies, hearts and brains. Darkness collaborates with the enemy, which might be using highly advanced satellites with cameras and microphones to record the beats of my heart, and take pictures of the thoughts in my brain. The enemy takes advantage of the night by using night vision equipment to watch my movements and count my breaths and vows. I would feel helpless and frightened facing such devices in broad daylight, but even more so at night.

At about 3 o'clock, there was a helicopter in the sky and the heavy movement of tanks in our street. They came closer and then stopped right opposite our house. I could hear my heart beats on the pillow right under my head. My husband woke up and I asked him to come to my bed. He knew from my quivering voice how frightened I was. I could feel my whole body tremble. My throat became very dry and my lips got drier and I wanted to use the bathroom. My husband held my hand and hugged me. Thank God that the kids were asleep and didn't see me in that horrible state of fear.

Then the tanks moved ahead, inching a little further down our street every five or ten minutes until morning broke. Sleep was impossible. No one knew what was going on. Never before had I felt so weak, so frightened and so small. It is terrifying when you can hear various sounds and voices but can't see their source or direction. This fear is difficult to describe because it is not specific; it could be felt but not expressed and is very different from a fear of scorpions.

It is a fear of something as huge as a beast that sees me but ignores my presence and wishes to crush me. It is a fear of the beast's limitless power and powerful limits. Fear is when I can hear my own heartbeats so distinctly and clearly that my head is about to explode and my heart is about to overflow. Fear is when my own eyes can't witness my death. When I am afraid, I can't reach with my hands, or blink with my eyes, or feel with my heart or move my parts. I only lie motionless in my bed waiting for nothing. My mouth gets dry because the saliva dries up on my tongue and throat. This fear did not evolve from nothing: a deep fear of what Israel might do to us has always been a part of my life.

It is a strange feeling of anticipation or looking for an end to that feeling. It is a feeling of being lonely in a crowded place. It is feeling helpless, hopeless and at a great loss. It is feeling the uselessness of being surrounded by loved ones. It is a feeling that the end is very close and may take place anytime. I felt very selfish when I unconsciously thought of nobody else because I was concentrating on the moment of the fear. Being preoccupied with thoughts of fear, I forgot all about my family. I was busy thinking of my own list of enemies that was increasing; darkness, time, insects, fear, weakness and of course soldiers. Time is meaningless; there is no after or before. There is only "now". When will this situation end? When will my fear end? We have been living under occupation for 50 years, and during these years we witnessed and suffered many cruel atrocities that took many forms: killing, imprisonment, destroying houses and trees, and collective punishment. Every house in Palestine has witnessed at least one of these cruel actions. Fear is death. Time is death.

MONDAY APRIL 8, 2002

My father-in-law went up the street to investigate and returned with news: the telephone cables and electricity poles had been cut and crushed by the tank last night, the tarmac was ruined by its heavy chains, and the wall around our neighbor's house had been damaged. The huge bulldozer was still working and widening the street for the tanks, digging, uprooting trees and carrying away everything in its path. The news on the radio said that the military occupation forces were

sending more tanks and reinforcement to the city. We believed that our street might be used in addition to the main one.

At breakfast, the kids were quiet. All looked sad, tired and depressed. They had no appetite for food and no appetite for play. They complained of lack of sleep and headaches. I felt that my head was about to explode, and that my ears ached from inside since I kept hearing that ugly noisy buzz of the unmanned spy plane and the sounds of the rockets coming from the Apache, and most frighteningly and shatteringly, the stun grenades.

The situation was so complicated for my children to comprehend. How could I explain what was going on when I felt so helpless and unable to understand it myself? Children at their age all over the world are interested in play, TV and video games. They like to watch action and war movies, but don't like to live the conditions of war. And television is an essential part of their life; to be prevented from watching TV is unjustifiable. To be prevented from acting and behaving as children is a crime, and getting children involved in real war is a crime. But how could we act normally, or hide what was happening just outside our house? How could we ignore all the shooting and bombing and behave as if nothing was going on? How could we lie to them that things were ok when we hardly thought so ourselves?

The kids wanted to busy themselves with something; I suggested chess. They played chess for some time followed by a game 'Chutes and Ladders'. They were making a lot of noise and were starting to get on our nerves, especially since we were trying to hear what was going on outside. I got angry and shouted at them to keep quiet. Nammor picked up the radio, started to switch channels and stopped at a popular song. He turned up the volume and I got angry again and yelled at him to turn it down. He said he was fed up with news and wanted to hear songs for a change, but I told him it wasn't appropriate to listen to music with all this tragedy going on around us.

"Well, then, let the soldiers know we don't care, no matter what they do to us."

"All these people, Nammor," I patiently tried to explain, though inside I felt as frustrated as he. "All of these people who've been killed, injured or evacuated from their homes, we should feel for them, show our sympathy even if we don't know them. That is the least we can do."

He did not seem convinced, but turned off the radio and pouted, "OK, I don't like the news. I can't listen to music. I can't go to play and I am bored. There's nothing to do. I want to go out and play with my friends".



Elderly Palestinian Man in Nablus June 2004



Elderly Jewish man Warsaw Ghetto. estimated 1941

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is one of the primary facilitators of this sixty-year holocaust by Israel in Palestine. It pretends to fight against racism in the US while funding and supporting it in Israel; it purposely targets people Jewish and Gentile who are trying to expose these war crimes, generally calling them anti-Semitic or self-hating. The irony being Arabs are Semitic people so people are labeled anti-Semitic for protesting anti-Semitism! If the ADL has its way, showing these two pictures side-by-side or even intimating Israel's policies parallel those of the Nazi Germany will be a hate crime in the United States. Truth is irrelevant. Even if pictures show, or facts and details substantiate it is true. The lesson? Truth never needs laws to protect it. This goes for Israel as well as the United States. Only lies, crimes and agendas require legislation to force their message or prevent discussion, investigation and debate.

His father, who had been listening quietly, now jumped in and yelled at him: “Do you want to get killed? Even if you're only lightly wounded, you'll die because there won't be any ambulances to get you to hospital.”

Nammor, afraid now asked tentatively, “I am a child, why would they kill me?”

To which his grandfather pointed out, “Don't forget that they shot at me and I am 80-years old. Their bullets won't distinguish between an old man and a child”.

“When things are over, you'll be able to go out to school and do whatever you want,” I tried to reassure him, murmuring to myself: “There has always been rain after long droughts.”

He got angry and shouted: “But when, when?”

My husband and I said simultaneously: “Only God knows!”

The way I felt towards my children was killing me. It was a mixture of sadness, pity and fear. I felt sorry for Nammor and his sisters, but then I felt sorry for every one of us. For almost one week, we had been completely isolated from the outside world and it was so boring. Anything at all could happen and we had almost no options. It was a state of insecurity, chaos and insanity. We stopped thinking about our work, or our kids' schools, or our future. What counts is today. Actually, what counts is what is happening at this specific moment. Are we going to survive? Are we going to lose a member of our family? Are we all going to die? So many questions crowded and collided inside my head.

As I was writing, my son came nearer and asked: “What are you writing, Mom?”

“It's nothing, just thoughts.” I replied.

Then with the curiosity and conviction often known only in childhood, he added decisively, “I know. It's your diary and you are writing about the secrets and the stories of your life.”

“Well,” I responded slowly. “It's the story of our life, which is not a secret. It is about what is happening to us; our thoughts and feelings, our actions and reactions.”

Nana, who was listening, smiled and asked: “Who's gonna read it, Mom?”

“I don't know,” I sighed. “Probably nobody”.

In my mind I wondered if anyone would be interested in reading it.

We went to bed early that night since it was relatively quiet between 9:00 and midnight. Periods of sleep were alternating with periods of restlessness. At about 2 am, we heard a tank come to our street. We could now tell a tank from a bulldozer, which has a distinctive siren that keeps on as long as its engine works. It wasn't a military vehicle, either, since they are lighter and faster than tanks. The tank was a large one, and moving slowly and its doors and windows were all moving. It was followed by another vehicle of some sort, and we could hear an Apache hovering nearby. The flashlights of the tanks moved eerily over the walls like sun chasing reflection through the prism of crystal. Soon the light stopped, perhaps to adjust to the curves of our narrow street. This told us the tank's width matched that of our street. The tank and the vehicle stopped right in

front of my house. There was noise in the street and we could hear heavy and strong hammering for a while. It sounded like blows on a metallic surface. We tried to look through the windows, but it was so dark nothing could be seen. Three loud explosions came from a distance and blended with the sounds of the hammering. The Apache flew away. I thought that the soldiers had been trying to force open some of the shops in an attempt to steal their contents since similar things had happened in Ramallah the previous week. The hammering went on for about an hour and then we heard a loud noise that sounded like the clatter of falling metal. We kept awake until morning, listening in terror and anticipation to more hammering and explosions.

PART 2: MY HOME, OCCUPIED

TUESDAY APRIL 9, 2002

At 6:00 am, my father-in-law went outside to look around and returned five minutes later surprised and afraid. During the night the noises we assumed to be looting, these noises in fact narrated the forcible opening of our doors, cutting of the iron bars guarding the windows and the invasion of our home. Soldiers now occupied my home.

Shocked we rushed outside and looked up. Soldiers stood above our heads, languishing from my bedroom windows, now with neither iron bars nor glass. We could see sandbags in one corner of the window and part of a machine gun in the other. Nammor's window also visible from where we were standing; it too had sandbags and a second machine gun. A gun in my child's room, this was something I never thought I'd see. We dare not look any further as the snipers now assumed their positions.

Our home, a large two story represented the culmination of seven years hard work. On the first floor a living room, kitchen, guest room, and a bathroom. Upstairs were three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a sitting room. On the roof, we had built a small laundry room and separate closet housing the furnace and other home utilities. From what we saw, upon first glance it appeared three soldiers now occupied our home, but we did not have time to confirm this. One noticed us looking at them and shouted menacingly, "Go home!"

Ironically, this order we could not follow. He was in our home! After a few seconds he opened fire with the machine gun. We rushed inside my in-law's home and closed the door.

I cried bitterly trying to comprehend the meaning of strangers, enemy soldiers inside my house. We spent seven long years building our home, our furniture all brand-new. My mind anguished over images of soldiers destroying all we worked so hard to achieve. Everything my husband and I built together, the physical notations of our lives, the security of home for our children now rested at the mercy of people who hated us, hated us without knowing us. I felt immobilized, couldn't eat and my throat ached when I tried to swallow aspirin. An hour later weak from worry, my whole body hot and physically aching from the stress and exhaustion, I curled up in bed attempting to sleep. Perhaps if I close my eyes... perhaps I can escape my thoughts and fears through sleep. But I could not sleep.

Time stood still. Throughout the day, tanks and armored personnel carriers prowled our residential neighborhood and once quiet street, destroying at will. Each arrival announced with heavy shooting, shouting and bombardment, the entrance to my home a turnstile of sorts, soldiers came and soldiers left. By now the children increasingly voiced frustration. We wouldn't let them open the door and watch. Tension and worry permeated the increasingly stale air of my in-law's home and in a vain attempt to find gratitude, my mother-in-law comforted her son, "Thank

God you weren't inside when they came. What really matters is that you and your family are all safe."

We knew she was right and tried to console ourselves. However, we were not wholly successful.

Over the news we heard that President Bush warned Israel for the third time to withdraw from the cities of the West Bank; Sharon as usual again refused. It had been one week since the invasion began and we were still under curfew, yet the toughest consol lived inside my heart. Our home was no longer ours. So close it was, I could seemingly reach out and touch it, yet I dare not even look up. My home now belonged to a group of very young men who moved around freely inside it and laughed with raucous joy while I could not even be safe watching them.

It was more than I could bear to think of them using our bathrooms, or opening my drawers and searching and messing with our clothes or personal items, or sleeping in our beds, or sitting in our chairs in their dirty uniforms and muddy boots, or using my kitchen and leaving it filthy. Total strangers, they have access to all the rooms, and keys to all the doors and drawers; they help themselves to all of our belongings, they see themselves in our mirrors and use our sheets and towels. Nothing is private. I imagine them looking into our photo albums or at our family pictures on the walls, and deeply resented that they now knew what each one of us looks like; could recognize us any time and any place, and we still didn't even know how many of them were up there. In a way, it was almost like being violated: our private lives and intimate secrets had been forcibly opened to strangers, and we were utterly helpless to do anything about it.

When we first built our house, we had been glad that it was high, sunny and airy, commanding a wonderful view. Now, I wished it had been underground or in a basement somewhere. Nana cried when her sister told her that the soldiers were sleeping in her bed and messing with her school bag and personal stuff. That night was a long one. Every 10 or 15 minutes, a tank or two followed by a vehicle would come, stop for a while and then leave.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 10, 2002

In the morning, Nammor and Nana took a quick look to see if the soldiers had left. They came back disappointed. Nammor saw a soldier looking through his binoculars in the direction of the camp (Jenin).

My mother-in-law told me that we were out of bread, which meant we had to make some. Since bread making is not in my repertoire, all I did was watch my mother-in-law mix the flour with water and turn it into dough, then help her cover it to keep it warm while rising. Half an hour later, we checked it and to our surprise it had not expanded. There was a pretty good reason, though: we had forgotten to add the yeast! We could ill afford to throw it out, so we decided to just continue and hope for the best. It took us another half an hour to cut the dough into round pieces and to make them flat. Half an hour later, we heated the oven and baked the first three loaves. Everyone was waiting for the bread; they all felt hungry and the aroma of fresh-baked bread drew them into the kitchen. To their disappointment, what emerged from the oven smelled like bread and tasted like bread but didn't look like bread. It didn't rise. It was flat and leveled. The kids complained mightily but we made them understand that their choice at this point was flat bread, or starvation.

Curfews are hard, suffocating like the feeling of a slow death. We were running out of water and food. I wished that we were living in a cave in the Stone Age, because then things like lighting fires, using candles, having a water shortage and other similar hardships would be more appropriate. We were doing our best to manage under these circumstances and getting somewhat

used to the difficulties surrounding us. The question was simply how long we could keep going. The telephone was out of service so we had no idea what was happening in our own neighborhood. Every now and then you could hear shooting, or explosions, or stun grenades thrown by the snipers in my house.

The news on the Israeli radio station claimed that the soldiers were shooting only in "self defense". But the soldiers in my house were shooting haphazardly and seemed almost moody, sometimes sending out one shot, and at other times raining down bullets and bombs. It was almost like maniacs or crazy people fighting and shooting at nothing. No one was firing at them. There were no armed men or terrorists in the streets shooting at them. There were no signs of war at all, since everyone was huddled inside their houses too frightened to look out the windows, much less walk in the streets. And we were sure that the soldiers were sure that there were no armed men in the area: the sounds of firing and shooting all belonged to them. Everybody including children could distinguish types of bullets such as 500m or 800m, missiles or stun grenades or tear-gas bombs.

The picture was clear: these soldiers were not only keeping us prisoners and hostages in our own homes, but we were also to be their human shields. The orders given to these soldiers were to kill, spread fear, frighten children, destroy homes and property, damage the infrastructure, and if armed men surrendered, to kill them. When a group of armed men surrendered in Ramallah, the Israeli soldiers executed them. The orders were to make the life of the civilians difficult by cutting electricity and water supply, telephones and even sewage pipes. Why? To force us to leave our country and become refugees in other countries? We are insecure even in our own houses. What worse things can await us? Even if we wanted to surrender, we weren't allowed to go out to the street. We could only hope to die with dignity in our own homes.

Today some water did flow from the faucet but we decided not to use it since it smelled very bad, contaminated with sewage from a broken underground pipe.

The soldiers were still in my house doing God knows what. We heard over the news that about 100 people had been killed in Nablus and a number of houses destroyed. There were tens of injured lying in the streets, and a number of homeless families in the camp and the old part of the city. The BBC also talked about how difficult the soldiers had made it for both ambulances and media to extend help or to cover the news. The Israeli government wanted to keep what was happening secret and hidden from the eyes of the "free world" and the lovers of democracy did not lift a finger to stop the massacre in Jenin. The two o'clock news carried a report about the very tragic situation in which 200 people there had been killed or buried alive when bulldozers destroyed their homes. The occupants of the camp were forced to leave and seek refuge in nearby villages. There was a horrible human disaster when children were separated from their families and didn't know what had happened to their parents. What was happening to us all was a horrible nightmare. Actually it was a horrible reality.

My father-in-law told us how the 1967 Israeli invasion that resulted in the occupation, had been different. This invasion was disastrous. My mother-in-law said that those who will survive this disaster will be the lucky ones while those who will die will be martyrs.

The past ten nights had been horrible; no one slept well. I was very depressed and begged God that this black cloud would soon disappear. It is unimaginable how isolated and lonely I felt. My parents, brothers and sisters were only half a kilometer away but I had no way to find out if they were still safe. I missed them horribly: if I were to die from a chance bullet from one of these crazy snipers, all I would ask is to see my parents first.

My father born in Jaffa was forced, like other Palestinians, to immigrate to Nablus, fleeing the armed terrorist gangs of Hagana and Shtern, abandoning all he owned in exchange for life. I would tell him that he was right, that history is repeating itself; although it is true today the Israelis have everything, tomorrow who knows what might happen. Life is a circle. Birds fly higher and higher and finally come back to earth again. The great British Empire that created the state of Israel came to an end shortly thereafter. That is life. You can never have everything all the time. I wonder about the reaction of powerless and tyrannized people when power becomes theirs; Jews were tortured and slaughtered during the Nazi regime, but what the Israelis are doing to us is a blind revenge, illogical and unjustifiable. We were not responsible for what happened to them, then or now, but what these soldiers are doing to us is creating nothing but hatred and the desire for yet more blind revenge. What harm was done to soldiers inside tanks by sewage pipes, trees or electricity poles? How could destroying houses, furniture and the infrastructure of a beautiful, ancient city be considered an act of self-defense? What are these well protected, heavily armed soldiers defending themselves against? The civilians are unarmed people, surrounded in their cities, and villages, living under extremely hard conditions, with curfews, closures, shortages of food and water. I still don't understand how things work. Why, for example, when the Israelis hurt, everyone hurts and the American government rushes to condemn Palestinians as a group, finding all of us guilty for the deeds of a single person -- but then when we hurt, in far greater numbers, no one seems to hear and everyone is blind. Why are we so deeply feared and hated, and why is our slow genocide permitted? I am not afraid of dying because of hunger. What terrifies me is the possibility of being crushed and dying because of oppression and tyranny. Feeling hopeless and helpless hurts. It hurts mentally and physically.

In the evening, my husband talked to the kids about the importance of economy in all aspects of our life: water, candles, even toilet paper. Yes, he taught them how to economize in using toilet paper! He told them to use small pieces: "If we run out of toilet paper, you'll have to use newspaper instead." I laughed and said, "It'll be shit on shit". The soldiers then fired two stun grenades that seemed to be in the garden, because there was a flash of lights in the house for seconds. Why? For fun I guess! Even with that excitement, though, time passed very slowly, and I wished I could go to my house, and get a book or a story from my bookcase. I noticed that the pair of pigeons that had been nesting in one of the small trees had left the nest because of the shooting. I felt badly because they were the only living things we could see from where we were staying. Then there was more shooting from different directions and different distances. Another long, restless, sleepless night had passed.

THURSDAY 11/4/2002



**"JEWISH ONLY" Road,
Bethlehem, Palestine
April 7th, 2003**



**"ARYAN ONLY" Street,
Lodz Ghetto
est. 1941**

Israeli apartheid surpasses past segregated racism in the United States with its Jewish only housing, walled ghettos, Jewish only resorts, Jewish only schools, Jewish only businesses and Jewish only highways, borrowing the lesson's straight out of the Nazi handbook for ethnic cleansing, genocide and humiliation.

And the only reason they can do this is because of American financing, American political and American military support. Without the USA, apartheid ends in Israel and Israel is forced to join the rest of humanity and learn to get along with its neighbors...without killing, humiliating and starving them.

The 6 o'clock BBC news said that Colin Powell was coming to the area. He was supposed to arrive earlier this week, but deliberately delayed his visit, thus giving the Israelis more time to continue their "mission" in our cities and camps. We heard that the Israelis called that mission "colorful voyage". We believed, though, that Colin Powell was carrying the magical touch. We thought that his visit would end our disaster and solve our complicated situation.

We heard over the news that the soldiers destroyed a dormitory for university students. The Israelis said: "Yes, we destroyed it, but no students were there. We destroyed it because it was used to launch activities against our soldiers."

"When will this end? We are fed up," the children kept asking.

"We have no answer," was our response. We really had no answer, but we still had to keep our nerves in front of our children. We needed to show courage and strong will. I felt horrible chagrin whenever I got angry with one of them, or showed ruffled feathers in any way. Maintaining calm was not easy, but we all tried.

For the first time since the incursion, our neighbors opened a window that overlooks a big yard and threw out a huge black bag of garbage. Actually, what we saw was hands throwing something then melting away. We did the same. The soldiers in my house noticed the sacks being thrown away, and opened fire immediately. Everybody went inside quickly. I don't know what would be considered more uncivilized: throwing garbage or opening fire at garbage throwers? There were no municipal facilities and no garbage men: maybe the soldiers wanted us to get rot inside our houses and get mixed up with all the rotten garbage?

My husband became a radio addict. He kept moving from room to room carrying the radio listening or searching for news. I kept asking myself the same question: why won't anybody listen to our side of the story? Why is it always our fault? Why won't anyone dare to tell Israel: "Enough, already!" Killing and destruction will only bring more killing and revenge. I believe that now there isn't a single Palestinian, alive, dead or unborn, who doesn't feel great hatred towards Israel for what it has done to us. If all violence were to end, I don't know whether people would have the desire for revenge or not. I don't know whether it would be justifiable or not. I don't know what is being expected of us at this point. Are we supposed to ask for a pardon? To apologize? To do something?

Human beings according to the three monotheistic religions are supposed to be equal, living in first world countries or third world countries. They all have hearts and feelings. They hurt when they lose lives and properties. I believe that not only government will seek revenge, but also individuals will retaliate if they lose their dignity. My house has been attacked and invaded, and I am not supposed to complain, to hurt or even to open my mouth. I am unable to defend my house. I can't protect my family. I don't know what is left for me. I guess I still have a strange instinct for survival, and my determination will help me.

I hadn't changed my blouse and pants since I left my house. When we came to my parent-in-law's house, we only took our pajamas with us. We hadn't taken a decent bath since then. Today we washed our bodies in the same way we did three days ago. We used a wet towel to rub our bodies. My sweat smelled and I hated that smell under my arms. My husband borrowed underwear from his father and changed his underwear only today. The kids wore the same underwear but inside out. Although I felt ashamed about the situation, deep inside I was glad that I was able to adapt myself to such a hard situation.

Whenever the tanks went into the street, the soldiers opened fire so as to frighten people. I guess they were telling us, “We are still here. Don’t you dare think of doing anything because we are here to get you.” But in the evening, a neighbor called to us over the fence and told us that the water was running. Everyone was happy. It was good news for us all. When we opened the faucet, the water that ran was smelly but clear. We decided to collect the first water that we received and use it for washing clothes. We joyfully hand-washed a huge pile of clothes, and then everybody had a bath. The first bath in 10 days! Then we hand-washed the clothes we took off, and then cleaned kitchen and the bathroom. I very much appreciated the blessings of technology: it was not easy to do without a washing machine. My right wrist hurt horribly when I tried to wring out the clothes, especially the bulky ones like jeans and big sweaters and I was burning with resentment for having to be in such a situation.

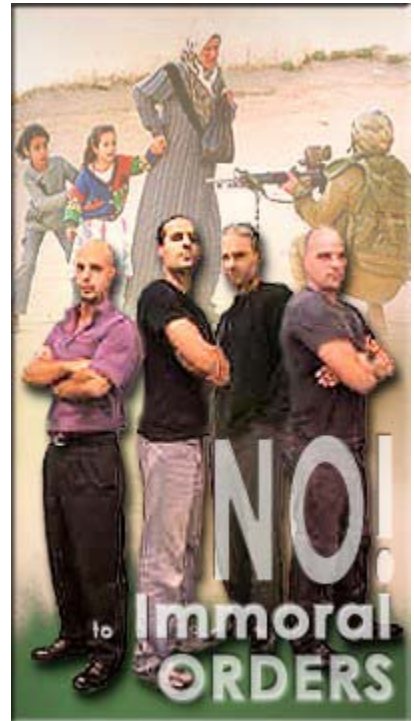
God, it was great to be clean. Water is life. We felt so happy that we didn’t think about lunch. We postponed it till supper, which was served earlier that night. Last night was quiet except for some noise here or there. We had a good night’s sleep for the first time since the incursion.

PART 3: FRUSTRATION

FRIDAY 12/4/2002

I woke up at 6 o’clock, looked up at my house and saw that the sand bags at the windows were not there. The machine guns weren’t there either. I told my husband that the soldiers might have left our house. In less than 2 minutes the whole family was awake. I opened the door and went out, and waited for my father-in-law who went up to the street in order to investigate. He came back and told us that the tank that had been parked in front of our gate day and night wasn’t there. I carried my little daughter who had followed me crying, and went with my father-in-law to inspect the stairs. There was no noise. No soldiers were on the stairs.

Fortifying my nerve I started up the stairs negotiating sand, garbage and a huge pile of wires. Upon reaching the landing, as I was about to climb the second flight of stairs a huge hand knocked against the glass door startling me. Behind it a man barked, “Where are you going? Go back!”



Many in Israel are objecting to the persecution Wafa and her family live, in some cases at great personal cost. 45% of Israeli citizens do not support the Occupation. The Soldiers of **COURAGE TO REFUSE** are one such group. Every two years they are called up to renew duty and these soldiers refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories because of the daily acts of dehumanization they are ordered to carry out. To date over 1000 Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Soldiers have refused to take part in these actions. Many spend a month in jail for their refusal.

My heart leaped into my throat, beating frantically broke as I felt my forehead break into a cold. I forgot I was holding my daughter, turning so quickly that I almost dropped her. I imagined that the soldiers would open and when I turned, I saw the rest of the kids behind me. I told them to go back quickly and we all ran down the stairs, making a lot of noise in our hurry. When we reached my parents-in-law's house, the soldiers shot two bullets skywards, and someone shouted in broken Arabic "Go home".

Terrified, we ran for the refuge of my in-laws house. The soldiers were still in my house.

We had breakfast and prepared bread, which came out exactly in the same way it did the first time. It did not rise. No one complained. At about lunchtime, we heard on the news that the curfew was to be lifted from 3-5 in the western side of the city only, which meant that we in the eastern side were still under curfew. The soldiers in my house poured water from our windows down to my parents-in-law's backyard. We didn't know why but thought perhaps they were trying to get rid of our water reserve, so that by the time they left we would have no water. I guess that they wanted to make it hard for us even after they left. Still, I just wanted them to leave even if it meant we'd have no water at all. I don't mind dying because of lack of water. What I can't bear is their stay in my house.

So many times, I wanted to go and tell these soldiers:

"Excuse me! I am the owner of this house. I left with my family before you came, seeking a safe place for my children. When we left, we took nothing with us. I need to go in and get some clothes, food, milk and diapers for my little girl. I am unarmed. Mr. Sharon told his people yesterday that he wasn't against civilians. He was only against terrorists. I am not a terrorist. I am a mother who is concerned about her children's safety and health and I love my house just like you love yours. If you don't want to let me go in, let me at least clean the stairs since they are full of sand, empty cans, wires and toilet paper. My stairs have never been so dirty. Let me just have a look inside. Does it look as dirty inside as outside? How long are you going to stay here?"



THE ABAAS'

THE HUMILIATION OF A FAMILY

Story and Photos
by [Mohammed from Rafah](#)

One of the issues the Courage to Refuse Soldiers address is the humiliation and terrorization of civilians as this picture shows. This is not an isolated incident.

Naji Abaas (in the ground above) 35 year old tailor and dressmaker husband and father of two led a quiet and frugal life, supporting his family of four on meager wages when possible. Often work was scarce. Though life under occupation is difficult, Naji, nor any member of his family ever engaged in any terrorist or political activities. They are just a family, trying to survive in the city of Beit Lahia.

Around seven o'clock one morning a group of Israeli soldiers arrived in tanks, parked outside, walked up to the house, smashing in the front door rather than knocking and entered the home. Naji, his wife and children were still in bed, the noise jettisoning them from their sleep. The faces of the soldiers were covered with make-up and paint, much like the war paint popular with native tribes. To the family, with faces obscured in such a way, they did not look human. Shocked and terrified, the family moved aside, filled with fear. Cont...

SATURDAY 13/4/2002

Yesterday, the children made me sneak a look at our stairs when we heard the soldiers sing and laugh loudly. We could see and count about twelve of them going up the stairs. It was so hard for me to imagine this number of enemy soldiers in my house. How did the house look from inside? So many questions kept crossing my mind. Where are they now: upstairs or downstairs? Where do they sleep? Are they using our beds, our sheets and blankets? How do they spend the 24 hours of the day? How do they manage their way during the night without electricity? Where have they placed their machine guns? Are they hiding tiny cameras and explosive objects in the children's bedrooms? Are they looking at our photo albums? Are they damaging our official documents, such as birth certificates? Why didn't we take our passports with us when we left? What things have they damaged so far?

The BBC news reported on the catastrophe in Jenin camp and how the bodies of dead civilians had been taken away by the Israeli soldiers in their tanks to be buried inside Israel. The reason behind this was to hide the size and the horror of their crime. Do the people outside our country know what is happening? Do they watch these things on T.V.? I doubt it.

I guess people are busy watching football and movies. I feel we are abandoned and neglected, and no one cares about what is happening to us I had always felt bad whenever I heard about disasters in the world. Although the only thing we could do was to feel sorry, at least there was something that we did. The whole world community is blind to our suffering, though. Even God is blind, or turning His back to what is happening! Israel is becoming a superpower, *(Actually Israel is a superpower possessing 600 WMD's and the 4th largest military in the world. Only the US, China and North Korea hold more power)*. After what has happened in Palestine, Israel is clearly capable of invading any country including America. America will then realize that the terrorists are not just in Palestine; they are also in Israel. Why is killing the occupying Israeli forces unjustifiable and is considered an act of terrorism while killing Palestinians is considered self-defense? What logic is there in interpreting killing in two

The soldiers shattered, broke and tore all the furniture and all of the belongings the family owned, shouting and screaming as they did. Nothing remained intact. Once all was destroyed, they commanded Naji to come with them handcuffing him, while another soldier assaulted his wife, forcing her head on the ground by digging his knee into her neck, all while verbally assaulting her with vile and derogatory comments. Naji's wife cried in pain and confusion, pleading with the soldiers as to why they were doing this to her family. Instead of an answer, the Israeli soldier smacked her head with the blunt end of his weapon.

The other soldiers continued to smash and destroy anything they could find. In the kitchen they found nothing but bread and tea in the cupboard, which they trashed while cynically joking about the poverty of the family, now made worse as the soldiers had destroyed what little the family had.

With the mother humiliated and subdued, the soldiers turned their attention to the children. One reached up and knocked the little girl Malak across her face. Immediately her mother screamed, "Why do you hit her? She is just a child!"

The soldier answered: "We hit her because she has brown eyes. We will take her with us, because she is our child, not yours and you have stolen her from us!"

After a pause, the soldier released the little girl, commanding Mrs. Abaas and her two children to stand in the corner of the room, adding if the family moved, the soldiers would kill them.

Then the soldiers left as quickly as they came. Mrs. Abaas and the children stayed in the corner for the next three hours, afraid the soldiers might return. Even when her neighbors arrived to check, Mrs. Abaas and the children could only cry. Nothing could be said.

Around 8 o'clock in the evening, Naji appeared, half of his clothes torn off and his face strewn with tears. Throughout his body serious injuries began making their presence known through bruises and cuts. Even his breathing labored after spending the day buried up to his chest in the ground.

"They (Israeli Soldiers) put me in a very narrow hole," he told his wife and neighbors. "And hit my head with iron balls repeatedly. I don't know any thing after they cover my eyes. One of the soldiers put his leg at my head, and put more and more sand on my head, I felt that they want to bury all my body; it was horrible. I ask them for help, but I didn't hear anything. After that, they left us and went back to their centers. I was afraid that they are still nearby and would shoot me when I leave the hole, and because I was so weak I could not move any more. Finally, a man helped me to get out of the hole." **SEE THE ORIGINAL STORY**

different ways? Why are their dead people holy, sacred and have blue blood in their veins, while our dead are dirty and their blood is rotten? As my son discussed with his sister how horrible war was, his sister corrected him, stating this is not war. War needs two equal parties with two armies that have planes, tanks and soldiers. Israel alone has all these things, while we have nothing and our rights of our lands and homes have been taken away from us". Then we heard the sound of



NAJI ABAAS' CHILDREN

breaking glass. We listened carefully and discovered that the soldiers in my house were smashing glasses, cups and plates against the wall in front of us. Some of the broken items were crystal glasses that I had received as a gift from my sister from Saudi Arabia. Others were tea and coffee cups. I myself had never used these items; now I watched as they were broken before my eyes. I felt bad as I imagined the amount of damage that might have been done inside the house. I prayed to God for an end to this. My husband then hoped that they wouldn't damage the furniture. No compensation was expected because we had no insurance, and even if we had, it wouldn't cover war. What right is there for anyone to invade the house of someone and use and destroy his own property? What reasons justify such actions?

My mother-in-law decided to clean the fridge after lunch. Everything in the fridge was rotten and smelled bad. We threw away all the vegetables and food and cleaned the fridge that stood in the kitchen corner as a neat empty box. By then, we had consumed all our reserve of fruit, vegetables, meat and frozen food. We were left with dried food such as rice, macaroni, lentils, beans and peas. We wondered what to prepare for lunch. We asked the neighbor for yogurt, and my father-in-law who was the bravest so far went to the backyard that overlooks a garden between the neighbors and us. The garden was open to the soldiers. As my father-in-law took the bottle of yogurt from the neighbor and turned back towards the door, the soldiers shouted at him "Go home". Then he told them that this was his home, but they kept saying, "Go home".

All of a sudden a bullet came out and shattered the stillness. We all rushed inside the house. My father-in-law threw himself to the ground and crawled his way into the house quickly. The soldiers then opened fire and we heard 3 bullets. My father-in-law came back with half the yogurt. We cooked yogurt and rice for lunch. The kids didn't like it. They ate tuna instead. I told them that they should expect innovations regarding food and cooking. My father-in-law could have been killed or injured, or he could have had a heart attack. Was his life worth the yogurt? I guess not. I guess he was a brave man who sacrificed himself. We all love him and respect him. In the afternoon, Nana told me that she was having her first period. We were expecting this, but due to our preoccupation with the situation we had forgotten all about it. As part of our preparations, I had bought her new panties and sanitary napkins. We remembered that all these things were left in our house and that we couldn't go and get them. Nana felt bad and cried. She was shy that her little feminine secret was no longer a secret, and that the family knew about it. I calmed her down, and asked my mother-in-law for a clean sheet that she didn't need. I cut the sheet into pieces and with a needle and thread I made her sanitary napkins out of cloth. I thought of using her little sister's diapers, but didn't, because then we would run out of them, and we would have a real problem. Although Nana was restless, she tried to accept things as they were. It was very hard for me to see her cry. I hope that she'll go over this normally. Nana is sensitive and cute. She tries to please me and help me all the time. I believe that she is older than her real age. It is true that Palestinian children are grownups and more mature than other children. I hope that by the time her next period comes, the soldiers would have left our house, and she'd be able to use decent diapers just like other girls of her age around the world.

The curfew was still on in our area. Curfews are killing. When you are imprisoned inside your house and inside your city and inside your county, you wish you were in a real prison instead. There at least, you would receive food, water, electricity and company. My son and his little sister came to me quickly and asked me to go out with them. I did. They told me to listen carefully. I did. Then Nammor told me: "Isn't that music coming from Nadeen's teddy bear?" "Yes, it is". I told him. Nadeen who remembered her toys in our house started to cry as she recognized the sound. She wanted her toy. We tried to convince her that we couldn't go to our house to get her toy for her. But it was useless and she kept on crying. How would anyone convince a 3-year old child that she couldn't see or even touch her own toys because a stranger, an enemy, a soldier had been playing with her toy. It was hard to see her cry. After a while she slept with tears in her eyes. Nammor then remembered the candies and sweets that he had left in our house. He was dying for a chocolate bar.

At supper, we had tuna and white salted cheese. There wasn't enough bread. I don't believe that anybody was satisfied.

In the evening the B.B.C carried the news about foreign reporters including Israeli reporters who visited Nablus and Jenin and came back with horrible pictures and stories of the devastation, destruction and damage that had taken place in these cities. They also talked about hundreds of dead people and tens of rotten bodies in Jenin camp. However, the Israeli reporters said, "They saw nothing abnormal". Whom are these reporters trying to deceive: the Israelis, the Palestinians or the world? All, I guess. They can hide the facts today, but history will never forgive their crimes. Time and reproach will be their enemies. The truth will never be hidden.

The news also reported about the attempts of the Israelis to take the dead bodies away and to bury them in Israel in an attempt to cover-up their crime. This we were shocked to hear, that the killer, the invader, the attacker takes the bodies of his victims to his own land and bothers to bury them there. Why? I was so tired of thinking. That night my mind felt heavy though for once it remained relatively quiet, except for the occasional gunfire here and there.

SUNDAY 14/4/2002

Our first mission today was to make bread. We doubled the amount and divided the job among us: my mother-in-law made the dough, my father in law cut it into small



Top: a young Palestinian boy passes by a bakery the Israeli Military burned out in April 2002. This bakery had no connection to terrorism.

Bottom: a mother and daughter stand outside what is left of their home in April 2002 after Israeli Helicopters destroyed it with a missile. The family had no connection to terrorism. Photos courtesy of National Public Radio, America.

On **August 11, 2004** the IDF again invaded Nablus. For over a week now, families like Wafa's are reliving the horror this diary speaks of from two years ago. 17-year-old Salim Omar Al-Kousa was shot and killed by Israeli snipers, and 27 others were wounded in Nablus, including 4 children the first day.

The IDF has been carrying out house-to-house searches, entering and trashing hundreds of homes, as well as occupied dozens of houses over the last few days. One of those killed on Tuesday was 10 year old Khaled Al-Kutsa, who was shot in the Old City by IDF fire. The most recent news, confirmed by credible eyewitnesses on the scene, is that the IDF has rounded up all the men between the ages of 14 to 40 in the El-Ein Refugee Camp and is holding them in the UNRWA run school inside the camp.

NPR Report
on the April 2002 attack

balls, I rolled out the dough and my husband baked them. The whole process took about 3 hours. Our second innovation for lunch was grape leaves; stuffed “dawali”. In our yard, a grapevine still existed, holding onto its few green leaves. We collected the green leaves, added boiling water to them to soften them, and stuffed them with rice and onion. What was missing from dish was ground meat. The dish looked exactly the same as in normal situations but tasted different. The kids welcomed the idea and ate it. Our neighbor asked us for a recipe for her 6-month-old grandson who was suffering from diarrhea. My mother-in-law advised her to use starch and water (a folk remedy) since the medication that we had was in our house and we couldn’t get it.

At about 2 o’clock, a heavy vehicle lumbered onto our street. It sounded like a truck. We inspected the street, and yes, it was a huge water container that was distributing water to the houses that hadn’t received water supply. My father-in-law went up to the street. The street was muddy and full of water because the pipes that supply the houses on the other side of the street had been broken. One of the neighbors there had no water and tried to open the door to his house from inside but couldn’t because it seemed that a tank had backed into the frame of the door and damaged it. The neighbor who was shouting handed the buckets to the truck driver from over the wall that surrounded the house. Then the soldiers in my house shouted at the man and the other people who were looking from their windows since it was a golden chance for them to open their windows and breathe fresh air instead of the stale air inside their houses.

The curfew was still on. We were getting tired and haggard. The curfew is hard when people are stuck together continually in a small space. Tensions erupt under such circumstances. That was exactly what happened in one of the nearby houses where shouting and yelling were heard. It seemed that two teenage-boys were fighting and their parents were trying to calm them down.

The Israeli radio station said that the curfew would be lifted from 3-7. We hoped that this time the whole city from west to east would be included. We were waiting impatiently. Unfortunately, the curfew was lifted on the western side of the city only for 30 minutes. The soldiers were terrified to see the huge number of people out in the streets of the city, filled with anger at the size of destruction and sabotage, so the soldiers re-imposed the curfew. At about 3 o’clock, the military vehicle that supplies the soldiers with food arrived. The kids dared to look at what the soldiers were carrying: a huge box of fruit (apples, bananas and oranges) another big box of cans and containers, another of covered objects, plastic cups and plates, bottles of mineral water, bottles of Coca Cola and other kinds of soft drinks, and nylon sacks full of things.

Three soldiers were carrying all these things from the vehicle up to our house. Nammor then said, “They are lucky. They have Coca Cola”. Nammor is a Coca-Cola addict. All this food could feed many families that had been under curfew for two weeks now. On the street, and next to the tank, there was a huge pile of garbage sacks that was similar to the tank in size. The soldiers had been throwing these sacks from the windows of our house to the street. It seemed that all that these soldiers were doing was eating, drinking, having our home as shelter and leaving their garbage in our homes and streets. Their only duty was to disturb us and make our nights darker and our nightmares even worse. These soldiers were not threatened. They were relaxed and enjoying themselves in my house. It was like vacation for them, while for us it was hell. We were their victims and hostages. Their power came from frightening our children and old people. Their power came from using their American weapons that blow up our bodies and houses. In fact, these soldiers are cowards. The Israelis said that they had taken over the cities, purified the country of terrorists and that their mission was over. We admit that they are stronger, more powerful, and crueler. We admit the Israelis are capable of not only crushing us, but capable of wiping us off this earth in a short period of time. We admit all that. But why are their tanks in our streets? Why are their soldiers in our houses and their planes in our sky? Why are they still here?

Why don't they leave us and give us time to raise our heads a little, to breathe, to see the sun, to see God and let God see us. What are they afraid of? It seems that they are afraid of the Palestinian will and spirit, which they will neither touch nor scratch. We hurt, but we will never complain to America or the United Nations. It is humiliating to complain to human beings. Complaints should be sent to God only who is more powerful and stronger than human beings.

I wish there had been a toll free number to heaven so that I could call God directly and complain to him. Will this then be considered an act of terror in the eyes of those who fight terror? Then it'll be war against God. I am sure that God has always been there. God has been watching us and will never forget us. One day, fair and just God will be capable of helping us when he wishes and when time comes. I believe in God's will in ending oppression.

Today, it was hot. The clothes we were wearing were all heavy, because 10 days ago, it had been cold when we had left our house. We didn't think of taking light summer clothes. The kid's faces were red and sweaty and they had to wash their hands and faces every now and then.

We took our second bath since we received water, today. I usually use the hair dryer to dry and dress my hair. Because my hair dryer was in my house, and there was no electricity anyway, I tied up my hair in a ponytail. Nana and Veno laughed at me and said that I looked like a schoolgirl.

In the afternoon, the soldiers in my house went crazy and began throwing water from the windows of my house down on the yard of my parents-in-law. They threw 6-7 buckets of water. Why? We still have no answer.

At about 3 o'clock after midnight, we were awakened by the sound and noise coming from the soldiers in my house, who were singing very loud and beating and striking metallic objects. Of course they were singing in Hebrew. It sounded like a sad song. I thought they were bored and feeling lonely. Or maybe because they were not allowed to sleep or couldn't sleep, they were making it hard for us to sleep by disturbing us. They envy even our sleep. The singing went on for 2 hours. It seemed that two of them were taking part in the singing. Their voices were so loud, so distinct, so clear in the stillness of the night.

We couldn't go to bed. Nammor asked me about the meaning of the song. I told him that I didn't know Hebrew. Only then, I regretted the fact that I hadn't learned Hebrew. I believe that it is necessary for us to learn the language of our enemy.

MONDAY 15/4/2002

The first thing we did this morning was to look at the windows to check whether the soldiers had left or not. "They are still here". Nana told us in a low sad voice. "The curfew is still on" she added. We made bread for breakfast, which was served later than usual. My mother-in-law, who couldn't sleep last night, wanted to have an afternoon nap when suddenly heavy shooting awakened her. She was upset and tried to go back to sleep again but couldn't due to the intensity of shooting. She sat down for a while, walked to the kitchen and then back to the room. Being an active woman who was accustomed to daily housework, she found herself paralyzed and unable to carry out her daily routine. Finally, she decided to clean the house and furniture as a way of passing time, and of economizing on water. She didn't call for help, and spent at least 2 hours dusting the furniture, tables, chairs, drawers, carpets and floors. During these two hours, the shooting didn't cease. I busied myself with some needlework; I sewed the tear in Nana's pajamas and a button on Nammor's shirt. After that, I sat in the doorway on the floor for two hours. I sat there doing nothing, saying nothing and thinking of nothing, or maybe thinking of an answer to

one question that is not only difficult to ask but also difficult to answer: “What is happening and why?”

Our lunch was lentils and rice cooked together. Usually, we have this dish with salad or yogurt. Today, we served it without any of them.

When my father-in-law told me earlier in the day that he heard voices of women inside my house, I didn't believe him. But when my kids got me to sneak to a place from where I could see the soldiers going up the stairs carrying their daily food supply, I saw 3 women soldiers; a fat one, a short thin one and a tall thin one. They were carrying boxes and sacks along with two men soldiers. It seemed that the first mission for the soldiers in our house was to shoot every now and then specially at night in order to disturb and frighten us. The second one was to eat, sleep in our beds, use our blankets and sheets, mess with our personal things, have sex in our beds and to have these actions justified as self-defense. It was a five-star army in a five-star house.

Our neighbor told us that his neighbor had his car inside his garage, and could charge his mobile phone, so we sent our mobile phone to be charged. For the first time in 10 days, we could call relatives and make sure they were O.K. I called a friend of mine who lives in the same area where I live. She lives in a huge ten-story building with three flats on every floor. She cried bitterly when she described to me how the soldiers came at night and took over the whole building. They ordered all the families out of their flats who had to leave all their belongings behind and the doors open. They were not even allowed to take their money or personal documents or even milk and diapers for their kids. They left in their nightgowns and pajamas. They were all herded into a



The soldiers occupying Wafa's home stole her camera, so she's unable to provide photographs of the damage. However destroying Palestinian families and homes is not unusual.

first floor apartment. There were about 72 persons, including men, women, babies, children and pregnant women. They were ordered not to leave the flat or even open the door without the soldiers' permission. The soldiers, who were in and out all the flats, placed the snipers on the higher floors, and kept on shooting, day and night. She told me that they could hear the soldiers move on the stairs, shouting and yelling sometimes and shooting heavily at other times.

She also told me that they were terrified and the children kept on crying, which made their nights restless. They shared the food in the flats on the first floor when they ran out of food, after taking the soldiers' permission. The old men and women decided to spare their food for the children. It was unimaginable how 72 bodies, 72 souls, 72 breaths were all thrust into one flat of 2 rooms, a hall, a bathroom and a kitchen! They managed to call the Red Cross people who tried to help them but were forced to go back by the snipers who opened fire on them. The Red Cross crew tried again and again and finally gave up and left. She told me that as they ran out of food, the children began to shout and scream so loud than the soldiers were annoyed and kept banging on the door and yelling “Shut up”. She told me that only the previous day, an ambulance managed to reach them and extend help. They were given water, rice, oil and some flour. I told her that although it was hard for me to imagine such a horrible situation, I could understand how it felt when someone had to leave his own house and stay with a crowd in a small place. We shared the same problem. We talked for such a long time that the mobile phone went dead. God! What more could happen? What more was hidden for us? Should we thank God for at least being alive? What a life! It isn't fair. God is punishing us and rewarding the Israelis by giving them our lands, power and America's support. Have we done something wrong, something so heinous we deserve such humiliation, tyranny and a miserable life? Doesn't history and religion show that good guys

always win over bad guys? Are these ideas simply fairytales? There must be something wrong either in this rule or in those who formulated it.

Are we really bad guys? Are they really good guys? Why is life treating us this way? Will there be an end? When? How? How could fair and just God give somebody absolute power and authority to tyrannize and oppress somebody else? Such an act would contradict God's own work. Some people say: "It is a test. God is testing our patience, faith and will". They say that victory is ours when (if) we pass the test. I believe that this is a very difficult ordeal because the conditions around it are unfair and the bosses are wicked. However, God is greater and is the greatest. I still believe in God's fairness and justice. I still have hope and determination. I will never lose hope. Victory will be ours one day.

Today, we talked to our neighbor who complained that the baby's condition got worse. She said that she tried giving him 7-up® and this remedy seemed to work.

Last night was a hell of a night! At 12 o'clock, the soldiers began to shoot like crazy. The shooting lasted for 30 minutes. We got really scared. The kids were awake. At about 1 o'clock, Nammor told me that he had an upset stomach so I took him to the bathroom and stayed with him holding his hand since he was afraid of the shooting. Then I brought him back to his bed. Twenty or thirty minutes later, he told me that he still felt pain and he felt like vomiting, so I took him again to the bathroom. He threw up, stumbled in a daze and quietly went back to bed.

At about 2 o'clock we heard two big explosions and an Apache helicopter flying low nearby. In the distance sounds of tanks and military vehicles moving in the main streets permeated the night. It was difficult to distinguish whether they were leaving or coming into the city; without warning the soldiers began shooting again. Nadeen who was asleep jumped and curled herself up next to me and buried her little body into mine. Nammor extended his arm over his little sister searching for my hand, which he held tightly. What a night! What was happening outside? We couldn't tell.



Nothing is left untouched. The soldiers defecate, urinate and ejaculate throughout the homes, destroying, furniture, carpets, artwork and memories while piling up garbage, munitions and pornography. These are civilians who've done nothing wrong except be born Arab and practice either Christianity or Islam.



These photographs were taken August 6th, 2004 documenting the destruction by Israeli soldiers of another civilian's home in Nablus. Photos courtesy of [KONSTANTIN KILIBARDA](#), Nablus, Palestine

PART 4: PICKING UP THE PIECES

TUESDAY 16/4/2002

We woke up this morning to a knock at the door, frightened it might be soldiers. The man knocking identified himself. It was our neighbor. My mother-in-law opened the door and asked him immediately: "How did you get here?" He told us that he believed that the soldiers had left our house because at about 3 o'clock last night he saw the soldiers come down the stairs and enter the tank and leave, shooting heavily. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Pictures of soldiers inside my house kept passing my brain. I walked forward and backward in disbelief. I felt hypnotized. My legs dragged me to the door. I was moving slowly and heavily. I wanted to go

quickly to have a look at the windows of my house, but hesitated. I couldn't hear any of the sounds or voices around me. I didn't recognize the faces that passed me. I didn't know whether to be happy or not. What shall I do?

I awoke up from my thoughts at the voice of my mother-in-law suggesting, "Let us go and see". We all rushed to our house. We were impatient. Our neighbor was right; they had left. I was the last to arrive at the front door, which was broken. To my surprise the guestroom was empty of furniture. There wasn't a single item; the chairs, the sofas, the carpets, tables, corner and even the pictures on the wall were all gone. There was nothing but the curtains. I was shocked. Why did they empty the guest room? Why did they need the space? I moved to the living room and was out of my mind to see a huge pile of furniture in one corner of the hall. All the furniture of the two rooms was heaped in a pile of wood, metals, glass, mirrors and other things. The carpets four were rolled and placed on top of the pile. "What was this? It was crazy.



In this picture, (courtesy of the ISM) a Palestinian woman looks in horror at the Israeli Missile shot through her home in 2003. Fortunately her family escaped unharmed. 91% of Israeli Attacks on Palestinians are attacks on civilians, not terrorists. The object is to make living in Palestine so difficult, the Christians and Muslims will leave.

This ethnic cleansing is heavily supported and funded by groups including the Christian Coalition, The 700 Club and the Anti-Defamation League via US taxpayer money, political clout and munitions.

As you can see, this has very little to do with "fighting terrorism" and everything to do with creating the situations that cause it. The United States is directly responsible. If you want to know why the Arab world is angry at the United States, Wafa's story provides many reasons.

I entered my kitchen, my kingdom. There was an awful smell coming from the fridge. As I opened it, I felt it was like opening sewage pipes. Worms wiggled everywhere, on the meat, the eggs, the fruits and vegetables. Everything was rotten, and changed its size, shape and color, and turned into thick watery objects. I couldn't stand the smell, and decided to go to the bathroom. As I turned I was surprised to see the crowd of neighbors who arrived to see what had happened to my house. Overwhelmed by what I discovered, I failed to notice their presence around me. I didn't distinguish their faces, nor did I figure out their speech. My body was there but my mind was missing.

I went into the bathroom, which was dirty and stinking. It seems they had defecated on the floor instead of using the toilet. My mother-in-law has always been proud of my clean home specially the kitchen and toilets. Then I went upstairs. The steps were dirty and full of sand, spots of different kinds, sizes and colors, cigarette butts, empty cans and plastic bags, and used toilet paper. The real mess was in my bedroom where the snipers spent their days and nights. The room was upside down. There were no beds. There were piles of blankets, sheets, and clothes on the floor. The walls were all covered with my brand new blankets that I kept in the storeroom. The blankets were nailed on the walls. The room was darker and there was a thick acrid smell that was strange. The drawers were all open and most of them were empty. There was a pile of towels and underwear. The curtains were in two piles on the floor also. A chest of drawers that belonged to the girls' room was in my room with empty drawers.

It was unbelievable. The soldiers have used my house for their own purposes, which were unacceptable and illogical what so ever.

But why did they sabotage its contents before they left? Weren't they supposed to be thankful for us for using it? Weren't they supposed to be grateful for not being hit or injured? They have treated us as their enemies. But who is the real enemy? Who is crueller? Whose heart dwells in darkness?

The girls' room was not in any better shape. Two beds were placed, one on top of the other, with their mattresses, blankets and sheets removed. I remembered that I saw the sheets down stairs among the furniture. I noticed parts of our beds placed on top on the third bed. The floor was also dirty. The furniture in the living room was piled in one corner. Next to the wall we discovered the remaining pieces of our beds. The color of the carpet had changed and become darker due to the sand, garbage, toilet paper and food stains and other stuff. Nammor's room was also messy and the floor full of sand since it seemed to have been used the snipers at the window that over looks the street. The bathroom was awful, and in the bath tub there was a pile of towels, clothes and the shower curtain.

Every single item was displaced. Nothing was in its usual place. Nothing escaped damage. I cannot remember the number of times I went in and out the rooms in utter amazement. One time, I noticed a magazine full of pictures of naked women between the books on the girls' desk. I quickly threw it into the garbage before the girls could see it. Another time, I inspected my bathroom where in the bath tub I found a pile of towels, dust mops, mattresses all soaked in water. To my amazement, my underwear was mixed up with this assortment of things. The smell was awful. There were cigarette butts all over the place; some were even put out on the carpet and on the floor mats. The books in the bookshelves were scattered all over the place. I found a Shakespeare play in the drawer under the sink. Children's storybooks and toys were on the floor in all the rooms. A small heater was dismantled and damaged.

In one of the drawers in my bedroom I noticed that the wristwatches that belonged to my husband and me were stolen. There were five watches, whose empty boxes were left in the drawer. Four bottles of perfume were also missing: Brute, Jacomo, Rumba and Addidas, only the empty boxes gave testament to the contents once contained. Our watches and the perfumes taken were all new and not used, given to us as birthday presents from relatives and friends. We chose not to use them due to the fact that they were dear, saving them for special occasions.

What made me really disgusted was the used toilet paper that was everywhere: in the hall, on the chairs and sofas, under the beds and even on the T.V set. The attic door was opened, and all the blankets including the new ones that had still been in their plastic bags were used, and were left with stains, spots of dirt, food and other stuff. On my way upstairs to the roof, I noticed that the laundry, the clean and the dirty, was messed with and was thrown on the steps and on the floor of the roof. The amount of the sand that was scattered in the house was amazing. Sand was everywhere; even on the sofas. The best way to describe what had happened and as it seemed to me was that there had been a battle inside the house.

I moved from room to room in a daze. I became speechless and didn't know whether to cry, shout, or laugh! All I could think of was the size of damage and the amount of time and effort that would be needed to fix everything and get back to normal. I thought of the amount of water needed to hand-wash the blankets, sheets, clothes and carpets since there was no electricity. I did



Talal Abu Lebda and his family of seven, (pictured) are one family who lost everything when Israel crushed their home in Rafah., Tala's sister was killed by an Israeli mortar shell aimed at her house. His family escaped with their lives but little else. For the Abu Leda's story, [CLICK HERE](#)

**PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF
MOHAMMED OF RAFAH, COLLEGE
STUDENT, PEACE ACTIVIST JOURNALIST
& EXCEPTIONAL PHOTO JOURNALIST**

nothing because I didn't know how or where to start. Our neighbors left as shooting resumed nearby. We went down to my mother-in-law's house, where we had macaroni for lunch. After lunch, I had the courage to go up to my house.

The British say that an Englishman's home is his castle, and I say that there is nothing like my home. I heaped up a huge pile of clothes, another of blankets and a third of sheets and bed covers. The piles were of the size of a room. Everybody helped, and we started with the kitchen. Cleaning the fridge was the sickening part. I felt like vomiting more than once. The smell was so unbelievably awful. The fridge has been without electricity for almost two weeks. We emptied the contents in nylon bags and my husband decided to burn them in the street along with the garbage that the soldiers left behind. We spent nearly a day cleaning the first floor, the kitchen, living room, guestroom and the bathroom, replacing what we could to its normal place. My husband and a neighbor cleaned the outside stairs, and by the time we were done, it got dark. We all went down to my parents'-in-law. We left the door open since it was broken and couldn't be closed. I didn't feel like eating since I was very tired. I slept like a log. At about 1 o'clock, we heard the ugly sound of the tank approaching our street. My husband and I literally jumped out of our beds. We were all ears as we listened. The tank kept on going and it didn't stop by our house. I felt relaxed and went back to bed.



Young Palestinian boy sitting on what is left of his home after the Israeli army destroyed it to make room for a wall being built on land they do not own. Israel pays no reparations and insurance will not cover what is considered an "act of war." The families are left broke, homeless and without recourse.

WEDNESDAY 17/4/2002

Today was a very busy day of washing, cleaning and laundry work. I only hand-washed the towels, bed sheets, pillowcases and 5 blankets since our water reserve was low. I threw away the 3 towels that were soaked in the bathtub since they were disgusting even to look at. I used Dettol, chlorine, and detergents with the water. It took us till 1 o'clock. When we were done, I was exhausted and my back pained me, and my hands were red, itchy and with small cuts and wounds some of which bled. My nails that used to be long were cut to the edge, and my fingertips hurt. I heard voices in the street, and it seemed that the people dared go out to the street after the soldiers had left our house.

The people cleaned the street and used the water that was spouting out of the damaged pipes. The curfew was still on, and the people talked and complained about the soul-destroying situation. Then shooting was heard nearby, which forced the people to disperse quickly. The street became empty again and the voices disappeared.

1 Israeli home has been destroyed by Palestinians and 2,202 Palestinian homes have been completely destroyed by Israel (14,436** partially destroyed) since September 29, 2000 in its home demolition campaign. **An additional 16,638 Palestinian homes** have been destroyed or seriously damaged by Israeli shelling. Such destruction has affected over **96,100 Palestinians** (out of the 3.3 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza).

I had a careful look at myself in the mirror and was shocked to see that I looked 10 years older. My complexion seemed darker and my hair was threaded with strands of white. I told myself I needed a dye. I weighed myself on the bathroom scales and found out that I had lost 5 kilos. At least that was one dream fulfilled!

Although the children were dying to sleep in their own beds, they told me that they kept imagining soldiers hiding everywhere in the house, and that there was a strange, thick acrid smell that they described as "the smell of

soldiers". They felt disgusted and refused to sleep in their house and went down to their grandparents' house.

At about 4 o'clock, two vehicles came to the street, one to restore the electricity supply and the other for the water. The men were wearing orange jackets as an indicator that they were service men. No sooner had they begun to inspect the source of the damage when a tank from the opposite direction moved in and opened fire on them. Bewildered and afraid, the men went to their vehicles and left quickly.

Our lunch today was again macaroni. Nana and Veno liked it while Nammor ate tuna instead. We decided to sleep in my parents'-in-law's house to give more time for the laundry to dry. My house doesn't look my house. It is alien and strange. Our enemy had used it. I must get used to it. I know it needs time. I must do my best for the sake of my children. I must work hard to get it back to normal. The experience that we went through was very hard and painful. I'll be more pain filled if we can't go over it. I'll try hard to get back to normal; I'll cook delicious meals for my family in my kitchen. I will store food in the fridge that still smells. I'll enjoy drinking the morning coffee with my husband. I'll invite and receive guests in my house again. When I feel sick, I'll relax in my own bed. I'll read the newspaper and use my computer. I hope that all these things will be normal again for my family. Only then, my house will be friendly and sweet. My mother-in-law told me that our neighbor was crying when she told her that her grandson's condition was deteriorating simply because it was impossible to convey him to hospital, either by ambulance or on foot. She cursed the life we were leading, because the baby could die.

THURSDAY 18/4/2002

This morning, the electricity and water service men came again to our street. They said that they used a short cut to avoid the soldiers and tanks. We understood that the electricity had been reconnected to some areas. It took them two hours to connect the electricity and fix the water pipes. Finally, for the first time in two weeks, we had electricity. I washed 3 piles of clothes in the washing machine and four carpets on the roof. We used sweeps and brooms of different sizes and lengths. We left the other three carpets till next day. I used the vacuum to clean the floor mat filled to capacity with sand. Even clean they looked sad, marked by the holes created from cigarette butts. Again I found toilet paper and empty cans under the beds. I even found some of my underwear under Nammor's bed. In the girls' chest of drawers, I found some of my panties, nightgowns, socks, and lingerie, while a huge pile of their clothes was in my wardrobe. The cordless phone was missing.



The father of 4 year old Momen Abu Rahamah injured during an Israeli raid by Apaches, carrying him to the hospital, Rafah, July 30, 2004.

For every Israeli child that dies in this conflict, 20 Palestinian children have been killed since 1987. The disparity is even greater when comparing casualties. Israeli children do not have to dodge missiles, tanks, bombs shaped like toys so they will pick them up, nerve gas and other chemical weapons or jet fighters and attack helicopters. In Palestine, these are everyday occurrences, courtesy of the Red, White and Blue.

Israeli propoganda has done a first rate job in convincing Americans, Palestinians are not human, that they are nothing like us and they are so backward, we could never relate. In reality, they are just like us and here's a little fact you'll rarely hear: Per capita, there are more Phd's in Palestine than any other place on the planet, including Israel. Not only are they just like us, they value education and despite horrendous circumstances, they still excel. These are very smart, hearty and determined people.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY
OF MOHAMMED OF RAFAH

It was very difficult for me to rub and clean the floor cover since my hands were sore. Anyway, I was finally done with the kids' bedrooms and I left my bedroom till the next day. People said that the curfew would be lifted on all parts of the city from 1-6. The Israelis told the Red Cross staff who spread the news. It was true since there was an exodus of tanks, withdrawing to the outer parts of the city. The tanks surrounded the city. At 1 o'clock, people went out in an attempt to buy food and other things. I didn't prepare lunch, and we decided to go and visit my parents. At 2 o'clock, we drove to their house with great difficulty since the streets and roads were dug up. There were piles of soil, pools of sewage water, rocks and uprooted trees. The air was full of dust from the churned up tarmac. The visibility was poor as if there had been a dust storm or a sandstorm over the city. On the sides of the streets, there were piles of garbage sacks and the smell was awful. We decided to visit my parents first then go for a "tour" in the old city where the battles had taken place. Our meeting with my father and mother was like a meeting in a dream. We hugged, kissed and held hands for a long time. My mother thanked God for having the chance to be alive and to see me. There were tears in my fathers' eyes as he hugged and kissed my children.



August 18, 2004

Israeli soldiers open fire on unarmed demonstrators protesting the apartheid wall's construction. Internationals intervene protecting the Palestinian Demonstrators
Photo: ISM

My mother had prepared lunch, so we ate together. Their situation had been no better than ours. Although the electricity had been cut off for 4 days only in their area, they had consumed most of their supply of meat, vegetables and fruit in the fridge. Today, she cooked the last chicken. I thought that the children would fight over the meat, but to my surprise, they said they were still disgusted with memories of the rotten maggot-covered meat in our fridge. They kept remembering the worms that came out of it. They didn't touch the chicken. I stayed with my parents while my husband went to the market. There were no vegetables, no fruit and no meat in the market. We had expected this since the city had been under such a prolonged curfew and siege, that no goods had entered from nearby cities and villages. What people were buying however were rice, flour, oil, powdered milk and potatoes. My husband came back with milk, potatoes and candles. He couldn't find bread, which meant we had to make our own bread.

At about 4, we said goodbye and left my parents' house, and headed towards the old city. On the main street, signs of war could be seen: houses with broken glass, shops with broken doors, damaged walls, cars and vehicles that were either burnt or crushed by the huge tanks, streets that were dug up, electricity and telephone poles lying on the streets. People were walking speechless, dazed as zombies. As we reached the city center, the destruction was obvious. Some of our favorite shops no longer existed, and new "roads" had been forced open between houses leading to the old sector of the city. Four schools were hit and the one that I had attended during my girlhood was severely shelled. Shops, stores, offices and a pharmacy were also hit. Inside the old city, the destruction was greater: Very old and historical places, such as three Turkish baths that were renovated recently, three soap factories that produced the famous traditional Nablusi soap, two factories for making sesame seeds and tahini, places, which were supposed to be 500 years old, were all severely hit. Even the oldest and biggest mosque lay completely destroyed. Another mosque still stood though badly damaged. Some houses were reduced to piles of rubble, iron bars and furniture. The smell was awful. It was the smell of destruction, death, rotten garbage and dynamite. We felt sad. The children, who couldn't understand what was happening, were shocked and speechless. I cried and wished that we really had been terrorists, outlaws or even criminals, so that we would deserve all this.

We went back home before 6 o'clock, and everybody else was home before the curfew was imposed again. The kids did not want to sleep in our house and they went to their grandparents' house. My husband and I decided to sleep in our house since there were so many things to do. I spent hours arranging and putting things to order. I put back the bed covers and sheets that I had washed, which now to me, smelled more familiar. However, there was still that acrid, thick, ugly "soldiers' smell" all over the place. It was a mixture of sweat, bad breath, cigarettes and a kind of unpleasant odor. As I was looking into my drawers, I saw a bunch of my underwear squeezed together. There was a white dry stuff on them. The smell was not strange. It seemed that the soldiers had been using my underwear to masturbate, I felt disgusted and threw away all the items in that drawer, and put the items in the other drawers in the washing machine.

I was feeling tired and decided to take a shower. It was my first decent shower in more than two weeks. I combed my hair and used the hair dryer. For the first time in two weeks, I put some lipstick on, but then, wiped it off for I thought that it was not appropriate. We placed the beds on the floor and covered them with the sheets and blankets that I had washed. Before I put off the light I asked my husband whether he had closed the door. He smiled and said: "What door?" I remembered then that the door couldn't be locked. I did what Veno told me to do, pushing the door closed and securing it with pile of plastic chairs. Veno had said, "If someone tries to open the door from outside, then they will have to push it. The chairs will fall over, thus making enough noise to wake you up." It was a good idea, I thought. We were not afraid of thieves, because even thieves wouldn't dare wander in curfews. We were afraid the soldiers would come back.

As I went to bed, my husband got closer and hugged me very tightly. I needed that hug. When he got closer and wanted to kiss me, we unconsciously parted and jumped as we heard shooting. The shooting was so intense and distinct that we thought it was in our street. We feared that the soldiers would come back to our house. We looked from the window and saw nothing in the street. As we listened, we could hear the tanks and military vehicles move into the city on the main streets. These were the same ones that had left before the curfew was lifted, and now they were back. The shooting lasted for over 30 minutes. We could hear the echo of the shooting. Then, each one of us turned his back to the other and tried to sleep. We both lost interest and the desire to resume our normal life as wife and husband.



American made Israeli Gunship firing on neighborhoods in April 2002. Photo courtesy of the Nablus Municipality

FRIDAY 19/4/2002

Today was a busy day. I cleaned the furniture. I was surprised to find salt on the sofas. I still don't understand why someone would spray salt on the sofas. I cleaned the chairs and the walls, which the soldiers had been hitting with their hands making them dirty. There were food spots and even marks of snot. I wore gloves as some areas were really dirty and needed scrubbing. Nammor was collecting bullets from the house. He collected around 15, most of them were spent, and the others were not. He intended to show them to his friends when the curfew was over.

We had fried potatoes for lunch. I prepared a huge amount since it was the main dish, not the starter. We listened to the B.B.C news about the possibility of an Israeli withdrawal from Nablus on Sunday 22nd. The withdrawal would be from the center of the city to the surrounding areas of the city. However, it was not to be a permanent withdrawal but only conditional. The soldiers

might return anytime. The curfew was to be imposed for another two days. Veno told me that she kept imagining that the soldiers had left explosives in hidden places in their bedroom, and that a soldier might be hiding somewhere in the house, and that they might have left cameras and microphones in secret places. That was an adequate excuse to convince her brother and sisters not to sleep in their house. This time, only the little one stayed with us and the others went to their grandparents' house. We kept on searching for news from one station to another and finally went to bed at around 12. Before going to bed, my husband had asked me about his shaving razor that he had found its empty box. I told him that it had been stolen.

SATURDAY 20/4/2002



Israeli Tanks roaming through Nablus in April 2002. Photo courtesy of the Nablus Municipality

It was 8 o'clock when Nadeen who was sleeping between her father and me pushed me gently and whispered in my ear that the tank was back. I jumped from my bed and went to the window. She was right. There was a loud sound of heavy vehicles on the street. Then, a huge tank, a bulldozer and another military vehicle stopped right in front our home. My heart began to beat quickly and my husband woke up at the noise. We were afraid that they were coming back to our house. I began to sweat and I could smell my sweat, which was ugly. I prayed to God to make them go blind and not to see our house.

Then the vehicles advanced slowly along the street and after about 10 or 15 meters they stopped again. The soldiers (about 15) were on the street. It was strange since it was the first time that I saw soldiers out of their tanks in the street. We didn't know what was happening. The soldiers walked around the curve of the street and disappeared. There were three soldiers

left to guard the vehicles. After 10 minutes, they came back and the vehicles started to turn back. It took the huge tank and the bulldozer a long time to reverse due to their huge size. Then they moved past our house and disappeared. It turned out that the soldiers decided to turn back because the mud and water that were coming out the main water pipes that the bulldozer broke and damaged two weeks ago had virtually formed a lake. We felt relaxed.

My day was busy. I used the washing machine 5 times, one after the other, washing blankets and clothes. It was cold and rainy, so I decided to leave the carpets on the roof to get soaked with rainwater. The children were busy watching T.V at their grandparents' house, which gave me time to do lots of things without having them around. As I was arranging and putting things to order, I found things that I had been looking for. For example, I found a bed sheet on the top of my wardrobe, a towel on top of the bookcase, the computer mouse in one of the pockets of a jacket, a copy of our holy book, the Qu'ran, torn to pieces in the attic, a tea cup inside one of the drawers among socks, two cooking pots burnt and placed under the sink.

I made bread and my husband baked it. For lunch, we had dried beans cooked with tomato sauce. For a change, the kids welcomed the food. In the afternoon I tried to take a nap, then woke up, very bored and depressed. I gathered the computer pieces since all the parts; the hard disk, the keyboard, the screen, the two speakers were separated and placed in different places. I switched on the computer but it didn't work. There was something wrong.

On T.V the news, was all about the massacre and the horrible humanitarian situation in Jenin; people were still digging under the ruins of their houses looking for the dead bodies of their beloved ones. About 350 were slaughtered, we heard. There were also similar reports on Nablus

and painful pictures of the funerals of the dead, whose bodies were badly decomposed. A brave Israeli woman talked about how horribly the Israeli government had acted in Jenin by preventing humanitarian aid and the Red Cross rescue operations from doing their duty. "What our government was hiding in Jenin was criminal and unjust", she added. She also criticized her government for saying that when there was an earthquake in Turkey, in less than five hours, it was the first to send food, tents, medical aid and trained dogs to search for people still alive under the ruins. Why did we do it in Turkey and not in Jenin, which was less than one hour away from Israel? I believe that the Israeli government is clever. At the same time that they are very cruel and mean to the Palestinians, they try to give a beautiful and bright picture of the Israelis by extending help to other people in crisis.

In the evening, there was heavy shooting somewhere. My husband told me that he felt very sad and depressed. He went to bed but couldn't sleep. He kept on smoking incessantly. I managed to convince the kids to sleep in their beds. They were reluctant, but then agreed. I told them that the sheets were clean, and I gave them clean blankets. They wanted the lights on all through the night. After we spread our beds on the floor in our room, Nammor pulled his bed and pushed it next to our beds. He was afraid to sleep in his room, so we let him sleep in our room. At about 2 o'clock after midnight, there was heavy shooting and the kids woke up and came rushing to our room. We calmed them down and all 6 of us shared 3 beds. The rest of the night was difficult due to lack of space, sleeplessness and worry.

SUNDAY 21/4/2002

We woke up at voices of people in the street who were talking about the proposed withdrawal. We learned the shooting of last night was part of the withdrawal, a farewell card and reminder. We all knew what it meant: "Till we meet again, we leave you in hell". I believe that this incursion into our cities and houses is not the last one and will never be. As long as we live, the Israelis will continue their atrocities and oppression against us.

People came out on the street cautiously, fearing that the soldiers and tanks might not have left the city completely. People were recovering slowly as if from a terrible coma. A coma that was so strange to explain, of a known cause but an unknown remedy. The Israelis said that the withdrawal was from the center of the city to the outer parts of the city. It was true because we could see the tanks move on the highway between the city and the surrounding villages. I believed that the withdrawal constituted a façade, staged to convince the world that they have left the cities and villages in order to deflect the anger of the world community. They could come back any time.

My husband went to the city to his office and I started my day with housework and cleaning. I still feel that my home is different. I feel as if I have moved to the same home twice. The first time was when we moved in after we finished building the house, and the second time was after the soldiers left it. About midday, I received a call on my mobile phone since we still did not have telephone services. It was from my friend who lives in the western part of the city. The last time we called was the day before the incursion. She told me that their building, which overlooks the center of the city, was taken over by the soldiers who ordered the residents to go to the first floor.

They were 37 persons in the first floor, and they had to share the food, water and the candles in that flat. When they ran out of water, they asked the soldiers to permit them to go to the upper floors to get water from their houses. On the first day the soldiers refused, but after they pleaded, they allowed two persons she and another woman to pass accompanied by two soldiers, guns at ready. She said that although they were terrified, they decided to go and get two buckets of water. The soldiers asked them what they were doing. My friend who could speak English had to keep a

running commentary on her actions like: “Now, I’m going to the kitchen to get containers”, “Now, I am looking for some bread and milk”, “now we are done, and we want to go back.”

Forever seeking the positive she commented on a single grain of good coming out of this nightmare. The Israelis forced the neighbors to meet each other thus reinforcing relations among them and forging a stronger community. They were no longer strangers. She showed high spirits, great courage and determination to survive despite all the hardships that had overtaken them. I felt glad to talk to her.

My husband managed to buy a chicken, and for the first time in 3 weeks, we had chicken for lunch. At lunch Nana asked whether things would be normal again; and when the schools would reopen. Vino then said that the most important thing was to have our home back to normal again. However, everything was in its place, except our bedroom, which was still a mess. I wished that the soldiers hadn’t broken the camera so that I could have taken pictures of the house and kept them as a record, because I was sure nobody would believe us otherwise. Why would anyone



A man's home about to be destroyed by an American supplied bulldozer. In many cases the drivers will not even allow the family to take what they can carry, or leave the building before they begin demolishing it. Usually there is no warning.

Wafa's family is fortunate in that their house was left standing. Nearly 15,000 Palestinian families have had their homes crushed by Israel. These are not terrorists or relatives of terrorists. Where the Nazi's evicted Jews from their homes, the Israelis often bury Christians and Muslims alive, usually the elderly or infirmed with massive US supplied Caterpillar bulldozers.

family's valuable objects and mess with our private life? What logic is there behind all these things? Who will care about my children's mental health after all what had happened? Who is responsible for making such suffering continue? Who is to be blamed for threatening my family's life?

I feel that we Palestinians are endangered species just like the whales, the elephants or even snails. However, there is one difference between them and us: these animals are treated as "more human" by animal lovers than us. I've once seen a person cry when the whales decided to come out of the sea and commit suicide! I doubt of this person would ever cry when he sees an Israeli missile blow up the brain or the body of a Palestinian child. What really hurts is this double standard in human feelings. Although I've seen so many pictures of Palestinians being killed in the most brutal and bizarre way, I always burst into tears when the same pictures are repeated. I have always felt a strange pain inside me, a silent killing pain. It hurts when someone is forced to see different crimes in which the killer and victim are always the same. The repeated acts of

believe us anyway? We got no sympathy even when the pictures of destruction and humiliation were on T.V., and were taken by their own reporters, not by our cameras? The world had turned its backs and closed its eyes to the dead bodies on T.V screens and those buried under the ruins in Jenin. The incursion was justified as self-defense. People in the world didn't dare or didn't want to believe what they were seeing. They were made to believe that everything was part of “fighting terror”. The world was upside down. The values have changed. The principles of ethics were vanishing. Power, wealth and sophisticated military technology were the order of the day. What ruled the world was not God in heaven, but Bush and Sharon on earth.

My family and I have been living peacefully for years; we have never practiced terror or torture against anyone. We have seen war on T.V, and have suffered the atrocities of the Israeli occupation, what justification is there in the world for the Israeli soldiers to attach my house, take hold of it for over 2 weeks, damage its furniture, steal my

killing, blood and pieces of dead bodies are not only suffocating me, but also paralyzing my brain.

Sometimes I reach a point where I feel I should surrender and confess defeat. I sometimes feel that my life is worthless and that I am completely incapable of working, achieving and producing. I sometimes feel that my life is worthless and that I am completely incapable of working, achieving and producing. It is self-torturing when someone incapable of being a productive person because there is no clear aim of his life, when fearful thoughts of the possibility of getting killed, whether intentionally or accidentally, or having a member of my family killed or injured, or having my house hit by an Apache missile, cross my mind, I lose interest in the smallest things around me. I can lose appetite, and the desire to do my duties as a mother, a wife and as a person who wishes to live a normal life, I always thank God for not only being alive, but also for keeping my sanity. I wish to be able to overcome the pressure and stress that I'm having. What keeps my sanity is the fact that I'm not the only person who has been facing these hardships; all the Palestinians including children, women, men and old people have been facing the same situation and are under the same pressures.

I believe that what had happened was not war against terror. It was terror in itself. Otherwise, how could taking my house by force be justified as fighting terror? I was not even consulted or asked for the keys. I wasn't abroad. I was staying at my parent-in-law's house next door. None of the soldiers who broke into my house apologized for what they did to my house as civilized people would do in such situations. How could destroying my furniture and tearing up the kids' textbooks and the holy Qu'ran be considered as fighting terror? Who would justify stealing my kids' life savings and other valuable items as fighting terror? Who can explain to me that the magazines of naked women that the soldiers left in my kids' bedrooms were ways of fighting terror? How could using and messing with my underwear be considered an act of fighting terror? Shouldn't such actions be considered as an attack on people's personal life, customs, religions and cultural beliefs? Aren't such actions immoral and against all acceptable rules of principles and behavior in the eyes of the "civilized West"?

The so-called "war against terror" is nothing but a big lie. Is it justifiable to stop war by launching another war against civilians? What is terror? What is the definition of terrorism? According to the Macmillan dictionary: to terrorize means "to fill someone with terror by threats or acts of violence to obtain political demands". One can find the same definition in Oxford and Webster. The definitions are one, but the interpretation is various. When the Israelis hurt, it is considered terrorism on our part, but when the Palestinians hurt and suffer, everyone rushes to condemn the Palestinians, calling them the terrorists. This obvious bias and double standard behavior creates nothing but feelings of hatred, oppression and unfairness.

What hurts even worse is the behavior of the Western press, who use two groups or sets of words in their reports. When they are talking about the Palestinians, they use words like "oppressive, butchers and terrorists", but when they refer to Israelis, they use "dedicated, idealistic and democratic". What hurts is their blindness, bias and unwillingness to understand the truth, which is that Palestinians are people living under a brutal occupation and are trying to have their independence, their own state, and use their own land. The Israelis have been working on changing such truth; they have been trying to convince the whole world that it is exactly the opposite. They always try to create a picture of themselves as the victims, and the Palestinians as occupiers who are preventing from living peacefully. I believe that those who believe the Israeli version of the truth are blind, or liars, who will never be forgiven by history and humanity.

My husband came home late and his clothes were dirty. He told me that he helped the people who came to the streets of the city and began to clean and wash the shops and streets. The children helped in clearing the rocks and stones left after the shelling.

MONDAY 22/4/2002

Today, in the city work such as cleaning and clearing waste and rubble continued side by side with work such as construction, rebuilding and repairing. People whose houses had been destroyed began to remove the rubble away. Shop owners whose shops or stores had been broken into, set out to fix what could be fixed and to clear the mess and ruins. Garbage men were collecting tons of garbage and dirt from the streets of the city. There were over 200 houses that had been taken over by the soldiers during the incursion and witnessed damage more or less like that done in my house. The city center was empty of consumers and buyers and most of the shops were closed.

As I was walking with Nana and Veno along the streets, we talked to the people we knew, and listened to their stories about what had happened to them or their neighbors.

A family of seven members was killed under the ruins of their house, which was shelled, by the Apache helicopter killing the man, his two sisters, his wife and his three children. The whole family died leaving two children alive to face an unknown dark future.

A man was shot dead and his body was left in the streets of the city for days, and by the time the curfew was lifted, the rats had eaten parts of his body.

Thirteen bodies that were temporarily buried in the garden of one of the houses were exhumed and reburied in the graveyard. The municipality workers began to fix and restore water and electricity services to the houses and shops.

It was during night when a British woman, who was married to a Palestinian, was about to deliver. Her husband who carries his British passport went to the street with his hands up waving his British passport and a white cloth. The soldiers ordered him to go home. He told them that his wife needed an ambulance to be taken to hospital. Again he was ordered to go home. Then they told him to go and search for a doctor in the neighborhood. He was given a special candle so that other soldiers wouldn't shoot at him since he was given permission. One of the neighbors gave him the address of a doctor at the other end of the street. The doctor was afraid and refused to go with him because the soldiers had fired on a man and injured him the day before. He added that he didn't trust the soldiers. Then he told the man to go back



Bottom: Israeli Settler protected by the Israeli Army armed with a chainsaw. His purpose is to destroy the olive groves held for generations by the Palestinians. This act alone is a war crime under International Law and this man looks like he might be American or Australian, making his racism and active participation in ethnic cleansing that much more detestable.

Center: another Israeli settler threatening to shoot an unarmed Palestinian woman working on her land and attending her family's groves.

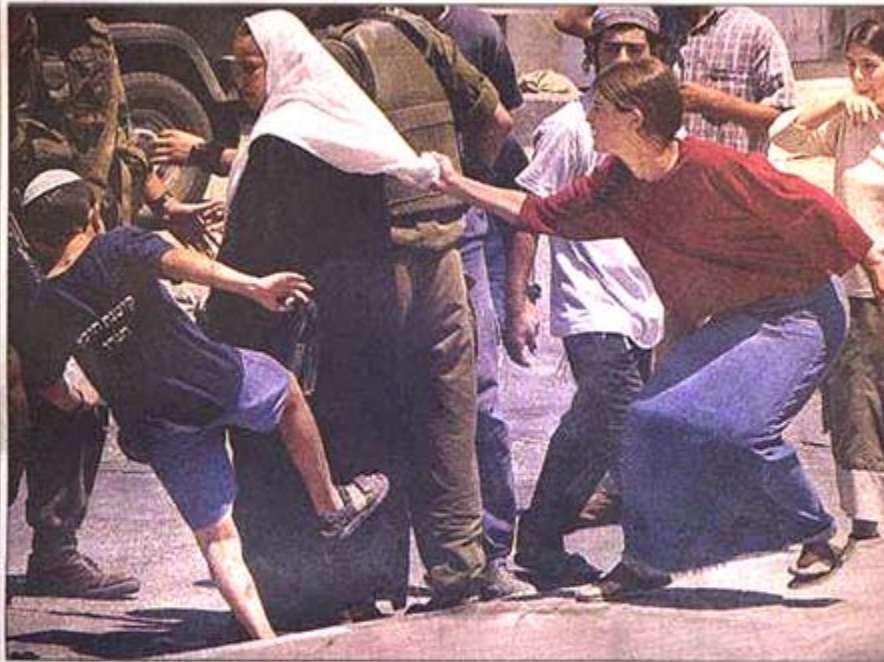
Top: This same settler threatening to stone another Palestinian woman on her land

COMMON MISCONCEPTION:
Under International Law, every single Israeli settler is a squatter and a criminal. These people are not hearty pioneers striking out against all odds. They are not noble. They are not righteous, rather they take pride in killing men, women and children with impunity while regularly terrorizing those around them.

and bring his wife with him. The man agreed and went back and brought his wife. The doctor spent the whole night and delivered the woman by candlelight. In the morning, three people were in the street; the father carrying his baby and the wife carrying the white cloth and her British passport, which proved useless in this most critical of situations. When the curfew was lifted, the doctor met the husband and told him that he had spent the rest of the night without candles because they had consumed all the candles the night that his wife gave birth. "It was a romantic delivery," said the doctor, "and your baby came from darkness to face another horrible darkness during daylight", he continued.

The Ministry of Education ordered the reopening of schools the next day, and that the students whose schools had been damaged be distributed among other schools. Sixth graders and up were expected to resume school on Tuesday 24th, while the rest were to resume the following day, Wednesday 25th. I told my husband that night: "Don't you think that it is a bit too soon for schools?" He answered with determination: "We are people who look for life and reality, not illusion and mirage. It is a wise decision."

Israeli extremists take revenge on Palestinians



Hatred in the market: Samar Abdul-Shafti, 36, a Palestinian mother of two, was kicked by an Israeli boy as an Israeli girl tried to rip off her Islamic headscarf last month in the divided West Bank city of Hebron.

Vigilantes take up arms, vow to expel 'Muslim filth'

Picture worth a thousand words, like a scene out of Schindler's List, only the victims have graduated to the victimizers. This story from the Associated Press in 2002 speaking to the extremism of the settlers, including their children who are brought up in this hate. It is not uncommon for the settlers to refer to all non-Jews as vermin, inhuman and filth, just as the Nazi's once referred to them. These sentiments are the norm with the settlers, not an exception and form the foundation of US funded, supported and defended Israeli policy, policies directly against everything Americans believe. The following are samples of hundreds of examples of hate speech, racism and policy quotes originating from Israel we have on file:

"We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population."

Israel Koenig, --"The Koenig Memorandum"

We are people who were born to live for a while, die slowly only to come out of near death and live again. We are as immortal as our cause. Personally speaking, I am a person with a weak heart. I believe that what gave me the strength to survive was my great belief in God. I used to recite verses from Qu'ran every night thanking God that we were safe and alive. It became such a

habit that when shooting and bombing intensified, my lips would start automatically to move to recite verses. It was unconscious, and simultaneous with the level of fear.

Apparently, things were on their way to becoming normal. However, I still felt that things were not normal. My kids were discussing the idea of buying a big deep freeze for storing food that runs on batteries in case of future incursions, and electricity failures.

A friend of us told us that his father-in-law had died during the incursion, and it was a natural death. His family didn't know what to do with the body, which they kept in one of the rooms and closed the door waiting for things to get better. There was no fan and no ice to help preserve the body. The body stayed three days and it began to smell. The family then decided to bury the body under the only piece of ground that they had, which was the entrance to their house. Their neighbors helped them in digging the grave and the body was laid in its final resting place. When his wife and son cried over such end to their father and grandfather, they were told that he was lucky to find someone to carry and bury him, and that they might not find someone to treat them similarly under such horrible situations. What was agonizing was that anyone entering the house would have to step on the grave. "He was a good man, and deserved a more decent burial." His wife said. "His other sons and daughters didn't have the chance to see him for the last time. It was cruel," she added.

Our neighbor told my mother-in-law that her grandson's condition was better after they took him to hospital. She told her that a woman she knew was about to give birth. The ambulance driver couldn't reach the village where they lived because he was forbidden entry. The pregnant woman was taken to the clinic in the village where the doctor decided to operate on her since she was carrying twins and normal delivery was difficult. The twins, two girls, were premature and needed an incubator. They called and even begged the soldiers to let them take the babies to hospital in the city. The rejection resulted in the death of the two babies. I guessed that our neighbor who was crying when she asked us for some remedy for diarrhea was afraid of such end for her own grandson.

My kids prepared for school and Nammor discovered that some pages of his history book were torn out. I tried hard to make the house look as normal as before. I still felt that it wasn't normal. My kids said that they kept on smelling that strange smell: "the soldiers' smell."

WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO MORE?

If you'd like to be able to do something about this inhumanity, the apartheid and terror the Palestinian population endures daily under Israeli oppression, the best action you can take is to **WRITE, PHONE OR FAX YOUR SENATORS, CONGRESSMEN, GOVERNORS AND THE PRESIDENT**. These policies are directly against everything America stands for. They are unconstitutional. Israel cannot continue to do these war crimes and crimes against humanity without US support politically, financially and morally.

Also check out the organizations fighting for human rights, an end to apartheid and the fascism of Zionism. Christian, Jewish, Muslim and non-denominational groups dedicated to ending this nightmare can be found at this link:

<http://www.couplescompany.com/Features/WAFA/11.asp>