1

WHAT LIFE DO I LEAD?

My first problem is always introducing myself. If I call myself a Palestinian, people first equate me with terrorism. If I say I am an Arab, I am assumed to be a Muslim. If I say I come from Jerusalem, thinking that this might make things clearer for my fellow Christians, someone inevitably says, "Oh, you are Jewish! Shalom." When I point out that I am a Christian, the inevitable query is, "Oh, when did you become a Christian?" I give the only reply I can, "I am a Christian, because my ancestors were disciples of Christ. Arabs were the first Christians. They formed the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem."

Sometimes this is a shocking revelation for Western Christians who hadn't thought about the continuous history of Christianity in Palestine. I continue to press my point. "My maiden name is Mikhail [Arabic version of Michael]," I tell them. "My father's name is Ibrahim [Arabic version of Abraham]. My grandfather is Musa [Arabic form of Moses]. My brother's name is John. My uncles are Isaac, Jacob, Jad, and David, and my grandmother's name is Sarah."

So I am a Palestinian, a Palestinian woman, a Palestinian Christian woman, and I am also a Quaker and pacifist. Identity is always complex.

As a Palestinian, I am one of about nine million Palestinians both inside and outside Palestine, struggling for justice and freedom for our homeland. Half of our Palestinian people have been uprooted and forcibly

thrown out of their homes, some more than once, and the other half subjected to the rule of others in our own land. Yet, Palestinians are viewed primarily as "a problem" for many in Israel because they want the land without the people. From our standpoint, we are denied the right to self-determination and live under Israeli military occupation, which is the root cause of other forms of human rights violations against us. Many of my people have no guarantees of basic life necessities and no hope for the full development of their human potential. So as a people and as a nation, we are seeking equality, justice, and freedom.

As a Palestinian woman in a male-dominated culture there are other issues. I don't enjoy equality with my brothers. In my culture, as in many others, girls traditionally have not had equal opportunities for education and health care although this is beginning to change. On the whole, girls are supposed to serve and to conform. They are often looked down upon if they choose a life that is different from what society expects. There is always a double standard of judgment when it comes to boys and girls.

As an ordinary married woman with limited financial resources, I had to work outside the home for extra income. At the same time, however, I had to break my back to be a traditional homemaker so I would not lose credibility. And I volunteered, giving time to the YWCA and to other women's organizations so as to convince other women that it is possible to be involved in social issues, to convince other women that their voices count, and to convince them that volunteers are not only the affluent who can afford to volunteer and are bored staying home. As for my volunteer work in the church, people constantly asked, "Why would a woman, a layperson, a happily married young mother like me be involved with religion and churches?" Their presumption was that religion is either the work of men or the work of single, old, or widowed women who have no life of their own.

Not only am I a Palestinian and a woman, but I am also a Christian. My non-Christian neighbors turn to me, seeking an explanation to what is going on when the Bible is used to justify the dispossession of our people. Who are these Western Christian Zionists who come to supply Jewish claims to our land? And I feel responsible as a Christian to speak

out when other Christians abuse the Bible to justify the worship of the false gods and idols of today, to justify the submission of women, or to demonize non-Christian neighbors, whether Muslim or Jewish.

As a Christian living in the Holy Land, I have seen the whole spectrum of Christian churches firsthand. I have seen how different Western churches, interested in their so-called presence in the Holy Land, have divided us with their numerous denominations and made many Palestinian Christians somehow feel inferior, patronized, and alienated from our own culture and language. Loyalty is expected to a foreign religious leadership in Rome, England, Greece, Germany, or the United States.

It is often a struggle simply to affirm my own identity and that of my people, to affirm the presence of some twelve million Arab Christians in the Middle East. Everyone has an agenda that they bring to my identity as a Palestinian Christian. For liberal Christians, influenced by post-Holocaust theology and European history and guilt, I am simply not on their agenda as a Palestinian Christian. My voice strikes a discordant note in an already difficult dialogue between Christians and Jews. My very existence disturbs the balance. For fundamentalist Christians and Christian Zionists, I am among those who reject their view of history and the Bible. The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem is the most overt political supporter of Israel on the ground. It is pro-Israel politically but anti-Jewish theologically. As a Palestinian Christian, I am invisible in this rendering of things; I am completely absent from the theological picture of such Christians, but considered as part of the cursed who are standing in the way of the fulfilment of the prophecy of God.

Although we are the modern heirs of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem and despite our rich contribution to the Middle East, Palestinian Christians have become unknown, unacknowledged, and forgotten by much of the world. We are a highly educated community with deep historical roots, a community that is, unfortunately, diminishing every day as a result of political and economic pressures. Our future is uncertain; the pressures are enormous.

As a Quaker, I have to struggle on yet another front, for I am labeled as a “pacifist” and this is misinterpreted as being passive or submissive

or even accepting of the injustice we experience as victims of violence. It is not easy to be a pacifist when people see that violence seems to bring about change and nonviolence seems to permit our homeland and our rights to be given to others. It is not easy to explain nonviolence in a continually violent conflict, yet to me it seems the obvious and only path, and many Palestinians through the years have chosen it.

So this is the complexity of my identity: an Arab, a Palestinian, a Christian, a Quaker, a woman.

The Generations of War: Telling Our Stories

Storytelling makes the world stronger because stories reveal the complexity of our truth. By telling our stories, we resist the diminishing of the reality of our lives. We resist vague and generalized abstractions and we maintain the urgency and intensity of the concrete. And so I share with you something of my story in the hopes of revealing the complexity of our truth.

In the war of 1948, I was only eight years old. Yet I can remember the fear very clearly. I remember hiding in the basement in our home. I remember the refugees coming to Ramallah from the coastal plain of Palestine. I remember how my father and my older brother, hearing of the plight of refugees in the coastal plains, took a truck with water and bread and drove west to deliver supplies and to pick up women and children who were running away from the dangers of war but could not go on walking. Fifty of these people shared our house for a period of six weeks. Another one hundred camped under our pine trees. Our Friends Meeting House in Ramallah sheltered many more families until they found a way of settling somewhere else. I have lived most of my life next to a refugee camp. That war ended, but the plight of those refugees continues. A fourth generation of refugees has now been born in that camp.

As a girl, I went to the Friends School in Ramallah, a school that had been established by the Quakers for the education of girls. My older sister and brother were already in the United States attending college. Although I had been accepted to Bryn Mawr College and paid my

registration fees, I realized that the economic burden and the uprootedness was too much for my family to bear. After I graduated from school, I was engaged to be married to the man who had been the chemistry teacher in the Friends School, Fuad Zaru. He later became the principal of the school, and we lived on the school campus for many years until his death in 1987. My interest and joy in learning and my husband's encouragement helped me to pursue knowledge until this day.

By the time war broke out again in 1967, our oldest son was eight years old. His sister was five. We were hiding in a shelter, which was partially damaged, and our very lives were threatened at every moment. As the bombs fell, our shelter became more and more precarious. Then we moved to another shelter, which we shared with thirty children and adults. That night, two little girls died from an Israeli air raid. Overnight, we found ourselves under the dominance of an occupying power. To many, the evil of war is now considered preferable to the evil of military occupation and foreign domination. I remember, and now I understand, why my aunt from Nazareth wept when we rejoiced that the 1967 war had ended. She told us, "l have lived in Nazareth since 1948 and the war has not ended. What is coming will be worse."

Four of my seven grandchildren were born during the first intifada, which lasted from 1987 to 1991. One of them was six years old during the Gulf War in 1991. When I look back on these years, these decades, I wonder how much longer we have to live with the experiences of war that seem to go on from one generation to the next. I was a child when it all began. Now I am a grandmother. I have lived under Israeli military occupation for more than half of my life.

During the beginning of the first intifada my oldest son Saleem's wedding was scheduled for February 7, 1988. Two days before the wedding we learned that the seventh would be a day of mourning because of the many Palestinians who had been killed. So on the fifth our family sat together with the family of Saleem's fiancé Carol and decided to have the wedding at our home that very evening. We had four hours to get things ready, from 4:00 P,M, to 8:00 P,M, that day. The small wedding at home with only about a hundred people attending turned out to be beautiful. Landrum Bolling, a longtime Quaker peace activist, presided

over the ceremony. In Palestine, even a wedding cannot be planned as scheduled!

When my daughter got engaged during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, we had to cancel the reception and any festive celebrations in solidarity with our people. When I learned with great joy that I was going to be a grandmother, I kept my fears to myself. Many women aborted from tear-gas bombs, and my children and I were worried.

My neighbors and even my family often ask me why I keep working for peace and justice against seemingly hopeless odds. The only thing I can say is that this is my faith, a practical, everyday faith. One of the posters in our home in Ramallah reads, "True Godliness doesn't turn people out of this world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavors to mend it." How true these words are to me, for I learned through my life and through spiritual struggle that my faith is a practical faith. It is what helps me to endure year after year. It is what helps me try to love all women and men, even those who violate my dignity and human worth. It is such a challenge, and it is my lifelong work.

In the days before he died, my husband gathered the family together three times and said, "I am very proud of Jean's work and accomplishments. I want you to support her in going on with the path that she has chosen." My husband, my father, and my brother were three men in my life who encouraged me in my struggle on many fronts. Unfortunately, none of them is alive today, but they left me legacies that encouraged me to go on even in the darkest moments. My mother has also been a great support by helping me when my hands were full. She has taken care of my children, helped out when I traveled to different parts of the world, and encouraged me when I was tired and anxious.

For forty years, I have been walking that edge where the spiritual meets the political. For me, the two have always been integrated. My spirituality is rooted in the human dignity and human rights of all people, and the sacredness of Mother Earth. I feel compelled to work for a world in which human freedom and dignity can flourish. Spirituality can bring life and vibrancy and imagination to my struggle, but of course I recognize that the mixture of religion and politics can also fuel

the most extreme and violent acts and lead to systems of self-righteous repression.

Many activists mistrust religion and spirituality, sometimes for good reason. But each of us finds ourselves engaged in the work for peace and justice because something is sacred to us—so sacred that it means more than convenience or comfort. It might be God, or the Spirit, or the sacredness of life or belief in freedom. Whatever it is, it can nurture us.

Many people want religion, but they want it in its place apart from their business, their politics, their luxuries and conveniences. My own experience is that religion cannot be lived except with one's whole everyday life, and what cannot be humanly lived is not religion. Religion involves commitment and relationship, and relationship is action and engagement in the real issues of life. But there is no relationship without love, only waste, strife, madness, and destruction. Love makes it necessary to find the way of truth, understanding, justice, and peace. My kind of religion is a very active, highly political, often controversial, and sometimes very dangerous form of engagement in active nonviolence for the transformation of our world.

Teaching

For eighteen years, my husband was principal of the Friends School in Ramallah and I was a teacher of fourth- and fifth-grade boys and high school girls. The Friends School was our home and our life. For me, teaching was a way of doing something constructive in a situation in which military force seemed to have determined the status quo and peaceful settlement seemed a hopeless dream.

I developed an ethics curriculum for my classes of Muslim and Christian students and a home economics class. My challenge was great and my job was not easy. Through my classes, I learned more about my own values and myself. I tried to bring Christians and Muslims closer by building a new community of relationship with each other, transcending differences of ideology, class, and faith.

Most of the students in our school have Arabic names, and many of those are names of prophets, famous leaders, values, or virtues. By

learning about our own names and namesake, students can see how close the different religious traditions and values are to each other and can clarify in their own lives if they want to live by these values.

Once when I went to class, the students were shouting, “PLO! Israel No!” I could not stop them because I value freedom of expression if we are to solve problems. But I was afraid that if they went on, the Israeli soldiers would throw tear-gas bombs or arrest them. They were only in fourth and fifth grade, and I cared for their safety. So I went over and wrote “PLO” on the blackboard. There was dead silence. They knew that few teachers would have the courage to write this. It was illegal then for Palestinians to mention the PLO, to use the Palestinian flag, or even use the colors of the flag. I asked, “Do you know what the letters really stand for?” “No,” they replied. Then I explained what the verb *liberate* really means. I asked them to write down five things from which they would like to liberate themselves, our country, and our world. I learned a lot through them and we all learned about the different types of captivities that we experience. We are all captives—either because of our choices or our ignorance, or the choices and ignorance of others. We are all in need of liberation.

In my classes with these boys, I also tried to introduce the issue of gender roles. From them, I learned how they saw the status of their mothers. I asked each boy to draw a picture of something or someone that represents continuous, steady, faithful work. Two-thirds of them drew the pictures of their mothers. What can we do to change the fact that women actually do so much of the constant work? “By helping more,” they volunteered. But they added that they met lots of opposition from fathers and aunts at home if they helped their mothers out. That is not their duty, they would be told. One boy actually cried when he told us, “I didn’t help my mother, because my aunt cursed me and scolded my mother. What shall I do?” I had to think for a few minutes and I knew I was starting a domestic revolution. I asked the boy, “What is more shameful—to help your mother or to see her suffering under her load of work?” We then looked at the ways mothers are spoken of in the Qur’an and in the Bible.

With my eleventh- and twelfth-grade home economics students, I always started out in my course by asking them to write a paper on how they will make responsible decisions when they plan meals, buy clothes, or run a household. This legitimized a whole set of questions about what it means to live responsibly—in relation to oneself, one's family, and the wider Palestinian community. What we buy and eat is important. Starting our meals from scratch is not only healthier and cheaper, but by buying local products, we help the simple farmer to stay on the land and not move to the city. We avoid the problems of waste or preservatives in processed foods. We avoid using products made by Israel, which are highly taxed. We cannot pray for peace and pay for war. The same is true with clothes. Why buy ready-made clothes when we have wonderful dressmakers, when we have women who knit at home for a living? We have to support them. All this may not bring about overnight change, but it empowered my students. It gave them a sense of worth and dignity. Their lives and choices count and so do the lives and choices of other women.

How do I teach a culture of nonviolent action? First, I raise critical and decisive consciousness—consciousness of the value of justice over against injustice, peace over against warfare, humane institutions over against dehumanizing institutions. I try to make it very clear that we are working against evil and not against people. Human well-being is our ultimate goal, and we should be ready to say what we think is the truth and be ready to pay the price.

The biggest obstacle to personal growth and to working for peace is feeling powerless or hopeless. The most important thing I could impart in my classes, then, was a sense of empowerment, a sense of competence to make decisions about how we want to live, and a sense of optimism about the future. While we do not know what the future holds, we do know that we hold the future in our hands. Affirmation is a future-oriented strategy. I affirm what is good and beautiful in our culture, our values, our food, our family relations, our arts, and our embroidery. I use affirmation instead of negativity, even though there is so much that I reject. This gave my students more self-esteem and made it easier for

them to see the good in others, including those with whom we are in conflict.

My students now know that to violate is not only to use force but to treat others who are sacred children of God as nothing. No matter how we are treated, we must not treat anyone else as nothing or less worthy than ourselves. It is not easy for us to learn to think of the sacredness of life and human dignity when our dignity and worth is rarely recognized. But through the hurt, the pain, and the wounds we must try to realize our power and become real agents of change. Real change is not simply transferring power from one group to the other, but changing the relationship between us. It might be a dream but it is my human right to dream and to work towards the reality of this dream.

Traveling

My ecumenical and international involvement requires that I travel—mostly to countries in Europe and to the United States. When I worked with the World Council of Churches, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, or the World YWCA, I needed to travel to attend meetings. But for me, even in this age of highways and jets, traveling has always been an ordeal.

Since 1967, every time I needed to go to Amman, Jordan, for one reason or another, I had to cross the King Hussein Bridge on the River Jordan. It is the one bridge that West Bank Palestinians are permitted by the state of Israel to use to exit our country. Crossing this bridge is not like crossing American bridges in your cars, just waiting to pay the tolls. For us, it is leaving occupied Palestine, which requires securing military permits, paying expensive fees, and being thoroughly checked—our papers, our identity cards and our passports, our bodies—often without any respect for our human dignity.

It should take less than one hour to reach the bridge from Ramallah. In the past few years, however, it has taken five to six hours just to reach the bridge, since we are not permitted to travel on the highways that Israeli settlers use, but have to use secondary roads with dozens of checkpoints, detours, and roadblocks. It takes at least thirteen hours in

total to cross the border itself and subsequently arrive in Amman. I can fly from Amman to New York in the same amount of time!

It is hard to describe the heavy tolls we have paid at this bridge—our health, our separation from loved ones, our anxieties both about leaving and hoping to return. They have checked our bodies, our shoes, and our belongings piece by piece. Throughout the last nearly forty years, Israel claimed that these severe measures were for security. I always wondered whether, through all their devices, they could check the hearts and minds of the Palestinians? Could they see how we felt? Could they notice our pain? Or is this not part of the security check? Or part of building bridges with neighbors whose lives are entwined with their own?

Looking at the people around me during the long waiting hours at the checkpoint or in the bus listening to their conversations, I hear individual stories of pain, of families being torn apart, of despair and suffering, longing and hope. The tolls we all pay are many. Traveling under occupation drains our lives, impairs our health, adds to our financial burden, and increases our separation anxieties, as neither leaving nor returning is ever guaranteed.

Often as I wait with the others I feel like shouting to the Israeli authorities, "We ourselves, we tell you, are sacred human beings. Why do you treat us this way?" Or sometimes I feel like repeating the words of Psalm 22:1-2, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer; and by night but, find no rest."

It is not surprising that when I arrive at my destination, I am often exhausted by the ordeal of traveling. Organizers ask me for my travel expenses in the United States. I can submit the cost of an airline ticket, but can I put a price on the pain, the humiliation, the fatigue, and the anxiety?

This is not a personal issue. This is a structural issue that is part of a much wider problem—the systematic attempt to inhibit the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, which is a basic human right, through countless barriers, checkpoints, ditches,

and fences. It is part of the systematic attempt to fragment our people and batter our souls.

Leaving Palestine

Palestinians would not leave if they could stay, but many Palestinians have no choice but to leave their country. Let me tell you about my own family and, more generally, about the people of Ramallah, a town settled some four hundred years ago by seven Arab Christian families.

My maiden name is Mikhail [Michael] and both my grandfathers are from Ramallah. The seven family clans who originally inhabited Ramallah are all Christian. Today, there are more Ramallah people in the United States and other countries than in Ramallah. My six aunts and three uncles on my father's side along with their spouses, children, and grandchildren all live in Florida. Some I have met and others I have never met.

On my mother's side, from three aunts and four uncles, only six of their children remain in Ramallah; many of their children and grandchildren have emigrated. My grandmother is from Lydda where the Tel Aviv airport now stands. All her relatives came to Ramallah as refugees in 1948. Some are still in Ramallah but others have had to move several times before they found a permanent refuge.

I have three sisters and one brother. My brother Hanna (or John) and my older sister Joyce left Ramallah to study in the United States in the early 1950s. My brother was unable to come home. The State of Israel did not allow any Palestinians who were outside the country during a census taken immediately after the 1967 war to have residency rights, nor the right to return to their homeland. Nevertheless, from the diaspora, my brother devoted his life to the struggle of the Palestinian people. After leaving the United States, he lived in Jordan and then moved to Lebanon. Since 1976, now some thirty years, he has been among the disappeared. My oldest sister was not able to come back to visit for seventeen years. She left our home in Ramallah when I was a young girl of twelve years old, and when she saw me again, I was married with three children.

My younger sister married a man from Ramallah who immigrated with his family to the United States, and she left with him. My youngest sister had to go with her family to Jordan for economic reasons because her husband found work in Amman. They settled there. Eventually, my mother left her home in Ramallah because she was unable to get adequate health care and nursing services here. I am the only one left in Ramallah. For a time, I had my three children, their spouses, and grandchildren. But my sons also could not find work here. My youngest son could not attend college here when Birzeit University was closed. Only my daughter remains, and now her son and daughter have left for Jordan to go to college.

While there are sometimes signs of hope for those of us left behind, we constantly suffer not only the hard conditions of everyday life under occupation, but the isolation and deprivation that comes from having our families separated from us. And, of course, we worry about our own future and the future of our children.

Once I made the trip to the bridge and crossed into Jordan to be with my mother for two weeks. The only thing she asked me to carry with me this time from her home in Ramallah was a phrase of Arabic poetry that is framed in her bedroom. It reads, "I will have patience and persevere until patience knows that I am persevering in things that are even more bitter and thorny than patience itself." Patience in Arabic is *sabir,* the same name for the cactus plant whose thick leaves are full of bitter water and thorns.

More than half of the Palestinian population of Ramallah had to leave for many reasons—economic, educational, health and general well-being. Those who left are called by different names: refugees, internally displaced, asylum seekers, deportees, and economic migrants. We should remember, however, that all those who are compelled by severe political, economic, and social conditions to leave their land and culture, regardless of the labels given to them by others, are uprooted people. They have been forced to leave their land and culture because of persecution, war, violence, and the violation of human and community rights.

The deliberate displacement of the Palestinians by Israel as a matter of policy continues today through the confiscation and expropriation of our land, natural resources, and water; through the demolition of villages and houses; through the imposition of closures and embargoes on food and medicine; through restrictions on our movement; and through making it almost impossible to run a business or earn a living. Direct and structural violence directed at persons, communities, and the entire Palestinian population, are gradually destroying our social fabric, economic infrastructure, and natural environment. We experience permanent unemployment, increased marginalization, and exclusion.

Israel justifies these forms of violence in the name of "security" for a narrow ethnic and religiously based Israeli nationalism. But surely security needs are mutual. For those uprooted from their communities, the loss of human dignity is an overpowering consequence of displacement. My uprooted family members speak about their many losses: of family, friends, and community; of familiar spiritual, religious, and cultural structures that nurture and define their basic human identity; of social status, property, employment, and economic resources. And, of course, security.

An Ecumenical Perspective

One of the best things that happened to me as a young woman was attending the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 as a Quaker delegate. Never had I encountered such a wide range of Christians from so many parts of the world, involved in the struggles of the world. In the years after Nairobi, I became more and more involved in the work of the World Council of Churches, eventually serving on its Central Committee and on its commission on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. All this gave me new insight into issues of religious difference, both among Christians and among people of other faiths.

My background as a Palestinian Christian inclined me naturally toward ecumenical work. Let me explain why. My two grandfathers were brothers. Their family name is Mikhail, a Christian name, and, with the rest of their brothers and sisters, they were members of the Orthodox

Church. In the late eighteenth century, many missionary movements came to Palestine. As I have said, each church, for one reason or another, wanted a "presence" in the Holy Land. Most of them built new churches and served the people who joined their churches including, in many cases, by building schools and hospitals.

The Society of Friends, called the Quakers, had a different interest. They did not build a church. The first thing they did was to start a school for girls in Ramallah at the request of our community. Many decades later, they built a meetinghouse and a boy's school. When people applied to become members, thinking that they would benefit from a Friends education, they were most often refused. Quakers were not interested in gaining new members. They saw us all as Christians to start with and did not want simply to rearrange Christians into different denominations.

My grandfather on my mother's side lost his wife at a very early age, leaving him with four girls and four boys. He remarried soon after. He was a well–to-do man and decided to give more freedom to his children to compensate for the loss of their mother. My mother asked to go to the Friends School because that is where her friends were going. My aunts chose to go to St. Joseph's Catholic School and two of them joined the Order of St. Joseph and became nuns. My mother was eventually married under the care of the Society of Friends. Two of my four uncles joined the Anglican School in Jerusalem and, on marriage, shifted to the Anglican tradition. One remained Orthodox. The fourth married an American Baptist missionary and joined the Baptists. So, you see, my entire family is ecumenical—a large household that is an example of Christian diversity. But ours, like most grassroots diversity within Christianity, is not theological but situational. When we meet together, we have most things in common, even though our separate churches have given us different experiences.

My family is an example of most of the Christians in Palestine. I dare say that very few of us were converted from other faiths. Most of us were just rearranged. And in some cases, that rearrangement did lead to estrangement from one another. Our divisions have sometimes distorted

the very message of Christ. Our challenge, as churches and as Christians, is to turn again to the one living God.

Over the years, I have also had the privilege of welcoming into my home in Ramallah people from many different churches and countries. I went out of my way as a Palestinian woman to share hospitality, and to offer my time and my understanding of our situation. At times it was exhausting. My children and husband used to tell me that I should put a sign on our front door: "Christian Information Center." And when I would take two aspirins after hours of painful dialogue, once again reviewing the history and hardships of our situation as Palestinians, my children would tease me that maybe I should have offered aspirin to my guests along with the tea and cookies. My children were wonderful for my humility and sense of perspective!

These personal encounters in my home were truly world expanding. But sometimes they were taxing too. I recall one American guest who, after staying in our home, exclaimed with surprise how clean it was, implicitly revealing her expectation that a Palestinian home would not be clean. Another couple from Kansas who were sharing a meal in my home after 1967 and the beginning of the military occupation turned to me immediately after we said grace and asked, "How do you feel now after the Israelis liberated the rest of their homeland?" I nearly choked! I put on the best smile I could manage and said, "What? Which homeland? Whose homeland?" And they thought I had prepared that elaborate meal in celebration!

My late husband was the principal of the Friends Boys School in Ramallah during a very critical time from 1968 to 1986. In the early '80s there was a great deal of tension in the West Bank due to Israeli car-bomb attacks against three of our mayors. One bomb attack injured the legs of the mayor of Ramallah. The mayor of Nablus lost both of his legs due to another bombing. The mayor of Al-Bireh was late that day. When he heard of what happened to the others, he consequently asked soldiers to check his car and garage. The Israeli Druze soldier who dismantled the third bomb unfortunately lost his eyesight. There were widespread demonstrations, and a curfew was imposed.

One evening in the midst of all this tragedy, we received a phone call from an American Quaker; he was very concerned. An American teacher in the school had reported to him that some of our students had thrown stones at Israeli soldiers. He asked me, "How do we respond to our constituency? Why do students at the school use violence?" I answered him and said, "How should I respond to you as a Christian pacifist when you say nothing about the recent violence of Israelis or about the structural violence from which we are suffering on a daily basis?" And then I continued, "We need prophets of justice rather than the prophets of judgment!" It made me see how much the discourse about violence is controlled by the powerful. When our students throw stones, it is violence. When the Israeli soldiers brandish their weapons, it is law and order. When young Palestinians commit acts of desperate violence against the occupation, it is called terrorism. When Israelis commit acts of desperate and indefensible violence, it is called security.

Each Family's Tragedy

Finally, let me tell you a little more about my own family's tragedy. In 1976, my older and only brother, Hanna Mikhail, disappeared in the war in Lebanon and is still missing more than thirty years later. Hanna was a graduate of Haverford College and held a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He was a poet, a writer, and a political scientist. He lectured at Princeton and was an assistant professor at the University of Washington in Seattle. He was member of the international Russell Tribunal. When the 1967 war left us in a newly occupied West Bank, however, Hanna wanted to return home to be with his people. But he was denied entry to Palestine, his own home, because he was not counted by Israel as one of the residents of the occupied lands immediately following the war. Meanwhile, any Jewish person from any part of the world could live and settle in Palestine according to the law of the "right of return." But Hanna, who had been born and raised here, had no right to return.

With no possibility of returning home Hanna abandoned his secure future as a scholar and adopted the uncertainties and dangers of being a volunteer in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as part of

his people's struggle for their rights and freedom. His simplicity of life, his idealism, and his commitment to struggle for self-determination was admired by all. The young people called him a prophet. One wrote that he "represented the best of the once free-wheeling Palestinian revolution."[1] Later, with the beginning of the Lebanese War in 1976, he became among the disappeared. I agonized with my parents about the uncertainty of my brother's situation. I appealed to many organizations to help; I tried to explore all options and to knock on all doors to see if we could find out where he was or what had happened to him.

At this time, we had a houseguest, a notable American pacifist, whom I thought would help me apply to Amnesty International to seek information. He exclaimed: "Your brother worked with the PLO, a terrorist organization, and it is against my principles to do anything for people who choose the path of violence." The self-righteous detachment of this so-called pacifist distressed me so profoundly at the time that I knew I had to reexamine my whole understanding of the vocation of being a peacemaker. In one act of judgment, my brother had been labeled and classified and then had lost his basic rights as a human being. This man did not seem to understand the utter cruelty of his judgmental attitude. He did not seem to comprehend that my brother was never allowed to come back to his home and his parents, because he was out of the country during the 1967 war, while any Jew under the "right of return" law could come and live in our land. He did not seem to think that the dispossession of Palestinians, the confiscation of our land, and the subsequent occupation of our land was itself a form of violence.

I wished only to locate my brother and to know if his basic human rights were being met. Alas, I was told that my brother was connected to the PLO—a so-called violent terrorist organization. That seemed to be all anyone needed to know. So it was with many in the pacifist churches. Rather than being helpful, they were judgmental. Did they worry about my brother's basic right to life, to liberty, and to security? Apparently not. Did they insist that my brother should not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment no matter what his affiliation? Apparently not.

The famous scholar Edward Said described my brother, Hanna Mikhail, as a man who lived and died retaining his "Quaker modesty and plainness." Said added that "He believed in human liberation, decent co-existence between Arabs and Jews, social and economic justice for men and women." Said goes on to describe my brother Hanna as a distinguished role model, a man who did not debase himself or his people. Why? Because he lived his ideals and died for them.[2]

Let this personal and painful story about my brother not distract us from the wider tragedy. There is not one of today's nine million Palestinians, many of whom live somewhere in forced exile, who has not felt the pain of personal tragedy. There are so many stories. Each one is overwhelming for someone. But every story must become part of an ocean of truth that will help the world understand what is happening in my part of the Middle East.

A Japanese poet once wrote: "The world grows stronger as each story is told." And yet, most of the world ignores these stories, the stories of countless people, and instead records the history of wars and ideas. The day's top stories from the authoritative voice of the television newscaster on CNN never include the simple stories of hundreds of Palestinians waiting collectively thousands of hours just to cross the bridge to Amman, or the stories of the families of who have been dispossessed of their land, or the stories of the families who wait in anguish for the imprisoned or disappeared. We want the truth to be simple, but every time we insist on such a simplistic portrayal we diminish truth and deprive ourselves of the richness of each human story.