

**27 December, 2008**

I had a strong feeling that the Israelis would attack over the Christmas holidays. I know deep in my heart that the neither EU governments nor the USA will care much about responding. But I also know that the Israelis will calculate to commit their massacres when they have more time.

But I didn't imagine for a second it would be like this. At around 11 or 11:30 am, I felt like an earthquake hit Khan Younis with sounds I'd never, ever heard before -- not even when the Israeli occupation forces used sonic booms a few years ago. First thing that came to my heart was my mother, sisters and the kids at school and kindergarten. I was upstairs rushing to take a hot shower -- I'd been taking cold showers for over a week because it was not sunny enough to heat the water and we didn't have electricity in decent hours or decent power to heat enough water for my luxurious 5 minute shower!

I rushed down the steps, faster than the sounds I was hearing. Looked into my sister's eyes, looked into my mother's eyes and, in no time, I ran towards the steps into the garden to go get the kids from kindergarten and school... My nephew who is six-years-old had exams, so he was back early from school. The other two were at the door. It happened that our neighbor was in town, so he had brought them along with his own child.

The kids were scared and talking about the huge sound which they didn't understand. Wael, my 4-year-old nephew didn't understand a thing -- he didn't even know that Israel exists.

Now he knows. All of them do.

The whole family didn't know what to do, so we all gathered in the garden. Last time the Israelis attacked, our windows crashed in over our heads and some doors were broken. This time the shelling is stronger, so the best solution seems to be, to stay out in the open.

All of that and the noise of the bombing continues, there's smoke around us everywhere and the smell of shelling is back to pollute our life one more time.

I was trying for over an hour to call my brother and his family in Gaza city to know that he was safe. Landline and mobile lines were out of service!

After an hour we managed to get hold of one of them -- my nephew Azzam, who is working for the UN. He tells me that he's safe at one of the shelters in the UN compound in Gaza. It's the first time I hear that shelters even exist in Gaza!

After two hours, text messages started being delivered and we got responses from everyone that they are safe BUT ... everyone his/her own story of this manmade earthquake to tell.

Later, we discovered that the bombing happened at the same time in all of Gaza Strip. How lucky my family and I are because we are not among the scores of people killed in the first 5 minutes of the attack! We are *lucky*, we really are!!!

For the passed 20 days we haven't had cooking gas. Last month my cousin gave us his extra 6 kg to use. This morning, on Black Saturday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, 2008, we managed to get some cooking gas from the black market which I have been trying to avoid all my life. I filled my cousin's and our cylinders, paid four times the price, but I had no choice.

At 5 pm I felt it was safe to take the cooking gas cylinder to my cousin's house because the shelling had stopped. The house is only 5 minutes away from us by car. The kids insisted to come and they started to cry, so I took them with me. We drove in a loop around the house and entered the street from behind. But then I remembered that there was a police station there, so I thought it's better to take the other road. I reversed and took the other street to find in front of us an airplane shelling a car.

The kids see the flames and hear the sound. They're so scared. I tell them this is fireworks for the New Year.

We couldn't go back to the house because our neighbor's funeral was passing and the street was full of people and cars, so I decided to just go ahead. We gave the cylinder to my cousin and on our way back there was another huge explosion, this one at one of the police posts in the city.

We leave the fireworks behind and come home.

My mother tells us that the Israelis have just shelled Asda'a Media City, the new entertainment area at the ex-Israeli settlements, at the edge of Khan Younis. Arslan, my 5-year-old nephew, is furious. Arslan, like all other kids, likes this place because it has fish, a small zoo, a small playground and a restaurant. He cries and cries. I cannot promise him anything: "I'm sure we'll find another place that is more beautiful... "

We made sure to have the kids fall asleep among us first and then took them upstairs to their beds so they would somehow feel secure.

All night I couldn't sleep, hearing the shelling, calling friends and family to make sure they were ok, listening to the radio because there was no electricity to watch TV, and cursing myself for being so stupid as to take the kids out of the house!!! I don't know if I am insensitive, or the Israelis, or the world!!!! Isn't it wise to take kids out?... Of course, it is... But not in Gaza. Not at this time. Nor at other times...

### ***28 December, 2008***

In the morning, Wael wakes up and comes to me to show me his finger which is swollen: "Look, this is from the shelling and air strike!"

"When?" I ask.

"Last night when I was sleeping, they hit me."

"You lie," I say.

He smiles and says: "You lie too..."!!!

### **31 December, 2008**

Yesterday night I called my friend Wafa, who is living in Gaza City, in Tel Al-Hawa neighborhood, to check on her. She is fine and they are a *lucky* family, as she said. Because on Saturday when the first bombing of Gaza Strip started, she had all her doors and windows open since she was about to clean and rearrange her apartment. None of her windows or doors are broken, unlike all her neighbors, who are now seeking her apartment's refuge on the second floor.

Wafa told me that after 7 pm all the neighbors gather in her small apartment, men in one room and women in the other room. I could hear the crying of children and anxious noises coming through the phone line.

"Mira my daughter is the one who is scared," Wafa told me. "You remember her, right?"

"I thought if I take her out to see the reality of Gaza she might be less scared because we're all living same situation and I'm sure we're better off than others. So I took her for a walk around the neighborhood. I wish I hadn't!"

"When I saw what I saw, I got scared myself," Wafa explained. "I wanted to blindfold her eyes and run back home. I cursed myself for taking her out of the apartment. But I'd never imagined Gaza could become a ghost city in less than a day! If you see our neighborhood you will not recognize it."

Wafa added hysterically: "You know, Majeda, we are all fine. Really. Our only problem is that we don't get any electricity since the bombings on the first day. Since then I make the bread dough and send it to my neighbor in the building nearby to have it baked. They have a power generator, thank god!"

"To be honest, the bread, the cold, buildings and all of that are not the problem for us today," Wafa told me. "Our real problem is that we have this rocket which did not explode in front of the building."

"What rocket?"

"The F16 rocket. We called several people but no one can do anything about it, they are worried it will explode or the F16 will hit them if they go near it."

"You mean it's still in front of the building?!"

"No, not right in front now. The Civil Defense came and tied a rope around it and moved it up toward the road."

"They put some sand over it so no kids or others would get hurt."

### **4 January, 2009**

Yesterday was most awful day we ever lived, I think. My mother said even the 1967 War was not this bad. No electricity, very little water, freezing cold and most horrific was the cold accompanied by the live war orchestra.

Tanks bombing from the ground incursion, F16s bombing, the drone which keeps going around in circles all day and night non-stop, making this annoying sound as if there is a bee just at the edge of your ear. And added to all of this, the sound of shelling from the sea.

War melody, is what I want to call it.

Like this I can answer Wael's questions. He keeps asking: What is war? Why is war? Who started war? Why is war?

Maybe if I add the word melody, he'll ask about what a melody is...

Unfortunately, Wael doesn't ask about melody. Instead, he keeps asking: Why does the pilot want to kill the birds? Why does the pilot hate birds? Maybe he doesn't know that they have a life like us...

I'm shocked by his question: "Maybe he doesn't know that birds have a life."

I ask Wael to come inside because it's freezing cold outside. His birds are no longer in the sky. "Come let's play the Alaska game!"

"What is Alaska?"

"It's a new game we'll all play with grandmother. Each of us has her/his own blanket to cover all of the body from head to toe."

I don't know if we were trying to warm ourselves or trying to hide from all the bombing... Whatever it was, it felt better since there was no electricity and no birds in the sky comforting us.

"Ok, Wael, you are the head of the state of Alaska, and we are the people of Alaska. What do you order us to do?" I started the game...

"I order you to go to the shop and buy me an airplane, a cage and seeds," he said, sucking on his thumb.

"Why?" I ask. "You need to explain to me."

"I want to fly up, up, up -- till I reach god!  
I will bring all my birds,  
and put them in a cage.  
I'll fly again,  
and I'll catch the pilot.  
I will bring him here  
and give him the seeds to feed the birds."

I look at Wael as the bombing continues, he's quite anxious.

...And I thought the Alaska game could bring some kind of creative ideas to bring warmth to our bodies and some life under this bombardment.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a very smart idea. So I just obeyed my mother's order: we all got closer to each other and created a net of hugs that really brought warmth to our life and very little security.

We kept listening to the melody coming from outside and we started to count the bombs out loud; 1, 2, 3, ... 28, ... 32 .... The kids don't know how to continue counting after 50, so we stopped.

We have to keep the door and windows open because the shelling of the F16 can shatter the door and window panes. It happened before, in March 2008, when they hit the building in front of us. But then there was glass available in the market. This time there is nothing, which means we might spend the whole winter with no doors and panes for the windows. Let's be in control for a change and choose to open the windows and doors.

A very long 5 hours passes by and the situation is still the same. The only change we witness is an extra sound added to the orchestra: the sound of ambulances going up and down.

I ask the kids to sleep on the first floor with all of us. Wael refuses. He keeps saying: I'll sleep in my bed, because if I don't, the pilot will hit our apartment.

I try to convince him that if we are all together, then we'll feel warmer. He finally agrees. But then he keeps asking to go upstairs to check on his bed, his room, his toys, his schoolbag. In the end it seems safer to just let him stay in one place, so his family goes upstairs, even though it's colder and more dangerous.

After everyone went to sleep, the electricity came on. It had been almost 24 hours we'd spent without electricity. I tried to take full advantage of it. First thing: hot shower. But unfortunately, it didn't work because the current wasn't powerful enough to heat the water. So I sat at the computer, finished some work that needed to be done, wrote emails to friends and family outside Palestine to try and comfort them and assure them that we had survived one more day under this war on Gaza.

### ***5 January, 2008***

Just before going to bed Wael says: "Actually, I like war."

I ask why.

"Because I don't have to wash my face and hands. I don't have to wash my hands and face in this cold. And I don't have to go to kindergarten in the morning."

"But you won't be able to count the bombs... if you don't go to kindergarten, because you'll only be able to count until 50."

"I don't like to count bombs anyway," he answers and goes up the steps.

I feel how stupid I am to make this little boy count bombs. I'm so angry with myself.

Wael comes back and says: "I want to ask you: if a boy and his father are made out of iron, will the rocket affect them?"

"Yes," I answer.

"And if they are made out of wood?"

"Yes," I answer.

"And if they are made out of tree?"

Suddenly I recognize that I must say no, so he can sleep...