

Back to Mas'ha

2010?

Munira and Hanni and 5 of their 6 children, whom I wrote about last year, still live in the prison Israel created to surround their home when they refused to leave the land they had labored so hard for after losing their home to “al Nakba” – the Catastrophe – the creation of a Jewish state in the land of Palestine. Three sets of security fences surround their home on 3 sides, and directly in front of their home an 8 meter high concrete wall separate them from even a view of the rest of their village, Mas'ha.

When we arrive at the illegally built set of fences and walls we see 3 sheep and a lamb at the fence, as though they are waiting for someone to let them out. Perhaps they are. If so, they are waiting in vain. They will not graze the pasture lands as will most sheep. They will not know the mountain ranges where other sheep in Palestine are herded to in the early morning hours by the young boys of the families. They are in prison too.

Munira's nine year old son comes to meet us at the gate where fences meet the wall, and uses the single key Munira was able to secure after a 2 year struggle, to give us entry to what is left of the family's land. It is very little. Perhaps a quarter of an acre. Certainly not enough to sustain a family whose lifeblood is agriculture and animal husbandry. Not enough at all.

Munira greets the six of us, one by one, with the traditional ahlan'wa 'sahlan- welcome, my home is your home. An English speaking Palestinian from Women for Life has come with us to visit Munira and act as an interpreter. Four of our group have never met Munira and they are still trying to fathom the wall and fences and barb wire that surround this home. But I have been here 3 times and I am trying to fathom why the wall and fences and barb wire still surround this home, when for 7 years internationals have been coming and taking pictures writing stories to tell their people at home, and the world continues to remain silent.

We all climb the metal stairs that lead to the house and are seated on the worn but comfortable furniture of the sitting room. I ask after the family's health as we are offered steaming cups of tea. Everyone is fine, I am told. Except... Munira has a heart problem. A blockage. She is taking medicine for it.

And “How is Hanni?”

“He is OK; he is praying to God”

And, “the children?”

“They are OK. A daughter is going to University!”

“What is she studying?”

“Interior Decoration”

I look around the sparse room, devoid of any decoration except for a needle point tapestry that Munira made a long time ago. I think how natural for her daughter to want to learn how to make a room beautiful.

Hanni comes out of a room and silently walks past us with his head down. Yeah, he is OK. Everything about this kind man screams of the most serious depression, but he is OK. After all, he has lost everything he was ever worked for in his life, except his family and this small prison

home... so he is OK. Depression is quite normal. He can't work. He isn't healthy enough. Munira's has a blockage in her heart. Hanni's heart is broken.

I worry that our visit has put a strain on the family. I can't imagine my home being put in a cage, let alone then foreigners from around the world coming to "visit" to "get the story" and "tell the world" when nothing changes for this family. But Munira welcomes the company. Her family and friends on the other side of that damned gate don't like to come. They are creeped out by the soldiers and the settlers and the wall and the fences. Who can blame them?

Munira says internationals rarely come anymore. So she is indeed glad for the company.

Since I was here last year Munira has started making soap to sell. We are eager to buy some and her son brings out a box of small bars of olive oil soap. We all choose a couple of bars and ask how much? Ten shekels. Walla! (Oh my God!) That is twice the price of Nablus soap and these bars are very little. I take another. It is the very least I can do.