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I grew up in a family with political opinions leanings towards the right and so, my personal views regarding the conflict during my early years were shaped accordingly - I believed that the occupied territories were ours, that the Arabs didn't really want peace but wanted to chase us out of Israel, and above all, I believed that the only option for us to survive was by being strong and aggressive in terms of military force.

I joined the army in 1987 and soon after I enrolled in the officers course. It was just before the first Intifada broke out. And soon, when the situation escalated, we were sent to the Gaza strip, to a refugee camp, called Dir el Balach. It was my first time in the occupied territories and the first time I encountered the realities of occupation face to face.

At nights, we raided Palestinian houses in the refugee camp in search of wanted people, turning the houses upside down and arresting people. I could not overlook the great distress and helplessness on the faces of the people and the great humiliation they felt when we entered their houses. I was especially shocked by the horrible conditions the Palestinians of the refugee camp lived in. During daytime, we used to impose curfews, install road blocks, chase and shoot suspects and so on. Later we were stationed in a Jewish-Israeli outpost in the middle of a densely populated Palestinian neighborhood with hardly any buffer zone. There was constant tension in the air on both sides and a feeling that we did not belong there. This firsthand encounter with the realities of occupation and its consequences served as a catalyst for a shift in my views. I realized that occupation is not only land but also and mainly people, and that our job at the end of the day was to deny the basic human rights of these people in order to maintain this occupation.

My second significant and influential encounter with the system of occupation happened a few years later. I was summoned to serve as a co-judge in a military court in Ramallah. At the time, these courts were presided over by two judges who were IDF officers with no legal training whatsoever and one true judicial officer. Very soon, I realized that I was expected to serve as a rubber stamp in a process of complete injustice. The chaos and time pressure in the courtroom were soaring. These were the days of the height of the first Intifada and dozens of Palestinian detainees were brought to the court one after the other. Most were not given any opportunity to present their cases and many were not brought to the court at all and their detention was prolonged in their absence. At one point, when I tried to intervene in the speedy systematic process, I was immediately silenced by the presiding judge who looked at me as though I was a trouble maker. I couldn't agree with this and at the noon recess, I went to talk to the senior officer who was in charge of this tribunal and I made it clear that I would refuse to take part in this process any longer, unless I was given the assumed authority. Sure enough, later that day, I was sent back to my home base.

Only years later did I decide to take a stand and act. The turning point was a meeting with Palestinian people organized by Combatants for Peace that I attended. This face-to-face meeting had this incredible effect of seeing the other side as human beings beyond the prejudice and stereotypes that I grew on. Soon after, I joined Combatants for Peace and have been active in the movement ever since.

I'm a patriot, I love Israel – that is precisely part of the reason why I am active. I know that the end of occupation, the freedom for the Palestinians, and the creation of an independent Palestinian state are not less vital for the survival of Israel than for the Palestinians.

