

## Combatants for Peace Personal Story



**Khdair Najjar** lives in the village of Yitma, near Nablus. He is one of the founders of the Tel Aviv - Nablus group of Combatants for Peace and currently serves as the Palestinian coordinator of the group.

I come from a merchant family from the village of Yitma, near Nablus. We are 11 siblings - 5 boys and 6 girls. I am the firstborn son. The first experience I had with the occupation was when I was thirteen years old, in 1975. I was arrested by the military on my way to school. At that young age I knew nothing of occupation, of Israel, or of Palestine. I was accused of throwing stones at soldiers. The investigation lasted 3 days and included beatings and humiliation so that I would have to confess. My hands were tied over my head, a bag was put over my head and I was stretched forcefully. No food was given nor was I allowed to go to the bathroom for 3 days. Afterwards we were sent to a prison cell where I met older and more experienced inmates and they told me of the occupation and of Palestine. After 18 days in prison I was released and I started to take an interest in politics. I listened to the PLO radio station "Al Asefa" in Beirut and through it I started to become active in the PLO.

When I went back to school I started, together with my friends from school, to act against the occupation by throwing stones and burning tires. So it continued, until I finished high school and went to university in Amman, Jordan, to study communications.

In 1983 the Lebanon War began. We, as young Palestinians, decided to recruit ourselves and go fight in Beirut. At the Syrian-Jordanian border we were stopped for a few hours and told dismissively that no combatants were needed. "Who are you?" they told us; "You have no combat experience, go home!"

In 1983, after my freshman year, I came home to Yitma on vacation. After a few days the military arrived and arrested my brother and me. We were accused of having fought in Lebanon. I was investigated for 3 months (I was 21); my brother stayed in prison for five and a half years. Because of the investigations I was not allowed to return to Jordan and so could not continue my studies. This made me hate the occupation and Israel even more (we saw no difference between the two; Israel for us equaled soldiers, the military, and the occupation).

So, I went to college in Nablus for two years, studying business management. At this time (circa 1984), there were many problems with the soldiers in Nablus. There were many events, which we knew about through the PLO radio - Land Day, Naqba day, Nachsa day, Dir Yassin day, Kafr Qasim day, etc. On the radio they would say that these are memorial days, days of grief, and called to the people to go demonstrate and close their businesses. When the military would kill someone in the West Bank or Gaza, a strike would be declared and the businesses would be closed for 3 days. So it went on until the first Intifada at the end of 1987.

The first Intifada was the People's Intifada, everyone took part. The youth's activities turned from a symbolic resistance (i.e. closing stores) to throwing stones, molotov cocktails, burning tires, blocking roads. During the day the Palestinians ruled the streets and during the night the military did, enforcing curfews and arresting people.

In 1990, during the peak of the Intifada, the world started listening to us, and started to acknowledge our rights. From 1987 to 1992, I was arrested for investigations 3 times. One time, which I will never forget, I was stopped at a blockade while driving an ice cream truck. Ice cream must be sold during two hours or it will melt. The investigator advised me to confess very quickly so that I could sell the ice cream. I told him to forget about the ice cream.. I was arrested and my brothers took the ice cream out and towed the car. This was the only investigation in which I felt that the investigators became psychologists, for they asked more about my opinions than about what I had done. This time, the torture was not physical

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but psychological - rotten food, not allowing me to see my family. The arrests lasted for a minimum of 18 days to a maximum of 30. The investigator told me that there would never be peace, because there were none to make peace except terrorists. I replied that if I were Israeli I would have already brought peace, since an agreement does not come through violence and wars but through politics.

Through all these many experiences, I started to discover that the right way to achieve liberty was through non-violent action.

Afterwards, the Oslo agreements were signed, we thought that the occupation was about to end and that we would be free. This dream blew up in our face, and then the second Intifada began. I was 40 years old then, with the experience of violent resistance to the occupation behind me, and I understood that the best and shortest way to end the occupation was through non-violent resistance. The intolerable difficulties of curfews, lock downs, closing of businesses and blockades at the entrance to every village, did not decrease our motivation to continue protesting the occupation non-violently. In 2008 I was one of the founders of the Tel Aviv-Nablus group of Combatants for Peace. Afterwards I became the Palestinian coordinator of the group. I joined the group because there was a great similarity between the two sides.

