

The story of Heba Daoud

Gaza October 29, 2023

Honestly, I'm not really okay but I'll tell you everything that happened to me.

At first I was staying at my house. The house that my husband and I built together brick by brick, hand in hand. We were there but the tanks kept approaching. We lived behind Al-Shifa Hospital. The tanks got closer and closer, and we lived through a pitch-black night with bullets flying over our heads as we were sleeping.

We waited until the morning, then left our house to be with some of our relatives. You know, they say "it's better to die together..." So we stayed at my husband's family. We were all together in one house, but no place was safe. In fact, there is no single safe place in all of the Gaza Strip. Two days later, I learned that two missiles had hit our house. Thank God, the money can be compensated, but the important thing is that we were safe.

The next day, around 11:00 at night, they set up a firecracker in the area of my in-laws' house. We were all trembling with fear and everyone was hugging their children. My father-in-law was hugging his wife, and my husband was hugging me and our children, and we were sitting together and shaking as the rockets fell around us. The glass and ceiling above us began to crack, and eventually we were waiting for the missiles to stop. You could say there were at least 50 missiles. 50 missiles they fired at us and we were waiting our turn to die. In fact, we thought it was our turn, and every missile that fell was heading directly towards us! I completely broke down seeing the fire before my eyes, watching the glass fall and the walls crack. For at least half an hour death was in front of our eyes, plain death.

The bombing stopped, and we could no longer stay on the second floor, as water began to seep from the walls and ceiling, so we went down to the ground floor, to the space under the stairs. We stayed under the stairs for about two hours thinking the bombing might start again, but nothing happened. We thought that the bombing had stopped, and that the Israeli forces had finished their bombs, so we went out from under the stairs.

My father-in-law got up and prayed while my husband sat reading the Qur'an. When he finished he said: "Okay, we will get ready for bed. The women must go to sleep in the bedrooms, and we men will stay in the saloon." This was the third day in which we had no sleep and we could not even rest our bodies a little. I went to the bedroom at One in the morning, I laid my head down and slept with my daughter and son. I said to my husband: Stay next to me, please sleep next to me. So he slept next to me.

At three in the morning, my husband went out to sit with the other men, and his sister entered the room with me. I was woken up by a huge crash that shook the entire house - I wasn't expecting that. The house had been bombed and I found the whole place dusty; The children turned black with dust and I couldn't breathe. My husband's sister was next to me and she was crying, so I said to her: We will die as martyrs, my dear so why are you crying?

All she could say to me was, "My father, Heba, I want to die with my father." I looked at the door of the room but all I found was rubble and piles upon piles. I knew it was our house that had been hit by the bomb.

I climbed over the pile, into the saloon; There were no human features anywhere! In the living room the pile was on top of the men, on top of them all. There was no one there. There was no one raising their voice. There was no one living. I started looking for my husband and calling for him. I kept calling him but I couldn't hear his voice. I saw my father-in-law, he was still conscious; My husband's sister's husband was martyred, may God have mercy on him. He was also a doctor, like my father-in-law and my husband, but he was martyred and was bleeding. My father-in-law was still alive, so he moved his head, recited his testimony, smiled and died.

I kept looking for my husband but I couldn't find him. I honestly don't know how I managed it, I kept lifting bricks one by one; How I managed to raise them, I don't know. I continued lifting the bricks looking for him and finally I saw his head. I found the skin on his head had peeled off, meaning the outer layers of his skin were hanging off, and I couldn't understand anything, I really thought he was dead. I started screaming at him, calling his name, and lifting stones away from him with my hands. His legs were stuck between two huge boulders of rubble.

When I lifted the rock off him, he screamed in pain, and I realized that he was still alive. I continued to lift more and more stones off him, and found the skin on his head falling off and his ear also detaching; It was hanging on his head with a single piece. I kept taking him out and his uncle who lives next door came to help me carry him and we placed him on a piece of wood.

And at that time a miracle happened. Usually, when a house is bombed, communications services are completely cut off, but the service is still there so I can call my father, who is a doctor, and I also used my husband's phone because he is a doctor and knows many others. I started calling the doctors and telling them about the situation as I saw it and asking them what I could do. Honestly, all I can do is bandage his head. I was wearing my hijab, so I took it off and tied it around his head and then used the bandana to secure it. I tried with all my might to save his life.

My kids were fine, I went outside to check on them and then came back to my husband and everyone around me were kids, kids, kids. My nieces were under the rubble, and we started digging for them to get them out, but the rest were martyred. Nine martyrs in the house. Nine martyrs, nine. Among them is my niece, a 28-day-old baby. She was born during the war and died during the war; We obtained her death certificate before her birth certificate. While we were digging through the rubble, the bombing did not stop. I was digging and saw fire all around me; They still have no mercy on us. They kept bombing. After a while, when they stopped, we tried to call the ambulance, civil defense, and the Red Cross, but no one answered. No one answered us. And when we reached anyone they said: "We can't reach you. We can't reach you." Can you imagine? The bombing was at 3:30 in the morning and my husband was injured and needed to go to the hospital.

I put my hand on his heart and tried to heal him, and I tried to do everything I could for him because no one could come for us, no one. Any ambulance that tried to come to us, they [the Israelis] would shoot them.

No one was able to enter the Abu Hasira Street area. I sat next to my husband until nine or ten in the morning, and when they bombed the house, they paraded in the street. I mean, I was above the ruins of our house with my husband, but we were looking at the street. I saw my neighbor's house, so I started talking to them and asked them what they were planning to do and where they were going, so we could do the same thing as them.

He gave me his phone number, and in fact, I saw two missiles fall and our neighbor's house, and it collapsed as they were leaving. Even though they were raising white flags, and even though they were leaving to stay with their relatives, the missiles fell on them and they were martyred. I couldn't bare it. I didn't know if we should go or if we should stay or what we should do. We tried to reach out to the world, to anyone who could make appeals on our behalf, but we couldn't do anything. The Red Cross told us that ambulances could not come; If they send ambulances, the Israelis will bomb them. They couldn't do anything. I'm telling you, the only people alive with me are, my husband Ibrahim, his uncle, all of us women, Ibrahim's old mother, and other girls my age. We could not pick him up to move him to a safe place in the house because the ceiling of the upper floor collapsed on the ceiling of the lower floor.

We just sat down with him and I kept making sure he could answer me; I would wake him up every now and then and say, "Stay alive, stay alive," and he would mumble something so I would know he was still alive.

At 4:30 p.m. the strikes were still continuing and a missile fell on the ceiling above us; It was about to collapse on us again! I went to everyone who was with us in the house and said that we needed to move my husband, so we carried him very carefully, fearing that something might happen to his spine because he was under the rubble. We carried him, you can't even understand how carefully, he was floundering, poor thing, but I just had to save him from the ceiling which could fall on us at any moment. We went and sat in the house next to ours, which had also been bombed but was in better condition. We sat during a very dark night, one of the darkest nights of my life, literally. We turned off all the lights and all our phones so that the occupation soldiers would not see that we were there and that we were still alive. Just so we can get to the morning because I told my family we could put out a call for help; We talked to everyone we know about submitting an appeal, and God bless this Jaafari teacher, who submitted a public appeal that received 18 million views, and after his appeal, I received some attention - God bless Al Jazeera as well - because my father-in-law was a well-known doctor and was martyred, Dr. Hamama, so it drew the attention of Al Jazeera: "Some attention to the Al-Nakhal family, which had many wounded women and children."

At 9:00 am, the IDF called us and told me to leave the house immediately. On our street there were 25 families. 25 families like us were trapped and injured, but we were the only house they called and told us we needed to leave immediately. They said: "Leave the house immediately or we will bomb you. We will bomb the house".

So I said to the soldier: Well, I also want to leave, but my husband is injured, and I need a stretcher to go to the hospital. I can't hold him. "I can't carry him in the street. Everything is rubble and stones. How can I carry my husband"? He answered me: "Figure it out, I won't bring you anything. "Okay, okay," I answered, "but tell the Red Cross that you asked us to leave." He said: "Let the Red Cross help you, I will bomb immediately." He repeated: "I will bomb, get out immediately".

So we started running like crazy, you know, just crazy. I told my husband that we needed to leave and he said, "Everyone, go and leave me here. Enough, don't put yourselves in danger for me. Save your lives." So I told to him, "By God, I will not leave you. I want to die next to you. I will not leave without you." We all said that we would not leave him, but rather we would stay by his side. We won't leave until he leaves with us.

We carried him on a plastic chair. I do not know how! But we found an office chair in the rubble that could still be pushed, so we put him on that chair and pushed him. We pushed him between our street and Al-Shifa Hospital Street, among the rubble. We reached about halfway, and I don't know how, but a second miracle happened. Suddenly I saw someone carrying a white flag, and a young man with a stretcher running towards us. Who sent him, I don't know. Where he came from, I don't know. But I know he came for us.

We put Ibrahim on the stretcher and ran to Al Shifa Hospital and thank God, thank God, they were able to put stitches in his head and reattach and sew up his ear. They found out that he had three fractures in his rib cage after the tests, and therefore he had oxygen in his lungs. Finally, they gave him a chest tube to help absorb oxygen.

I saw death, I saw death. My husband is suffering from severe psychological trauma. Really severe psychological trauma. When he woke up, he didn't remember me, he didn't remember our children, he didn't remember anyone. His father was martyred. His brother was martyred and cut in half. His brother-in-law, who was his closest friend and who studied medicine with him at the University of Yemen, everyone who loved him was martyred. He could not bear what happened and went into severe psychological shock. He was trying to escape from reality. When he didn't remember me, nor our children; I collapsed, I had a complete nervous breakdown. God only knows how I stood by him at that point.

Two days later - we spent about two days in the hospital, two or three days, I don't remember exactly - then the order came to evacuate Al-Shifa Hospital immediately. I started crying; What do I do with my husband when the occupation orders me to leave Al-Shifa Hospital to Salah al-Din in the south? Twelve kilometers away, we had to go on foot, and they wanted us to go immediately. I started crying, what should I do with my husband? But something told me I could do it, I could go. We got a wheelchair for my husband after about two hours of searching at the hospital so we could push him, thank God we found one.

But we have gone from death to death. Truly we were going from death to death. From Al-Shifa Hospital, we went to the courtyard, towards what they [the Israelis] called the safe corridor. But they lied, they are liars.

We arrived at their checkpoint on Salah al-Din Road. We had my poor four-year-old daughter with us. I didn't have any food. I was carrying my five-month-old son, carrying the bag on my back and pushing my husband. My shoulders were very swollen. When we arrived at the Israeli checkpoint, they left us there waiting from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m., and did not allow anyone to pass. This is how they treat us. It was forbidden to sit, they forced us to stand and raise our hands. They arrested 10 random guys, and they were just saying, "You, come on!" "You.. Come!" Finally, at 4 p.m., they didn't let anyone in. They told everyone: "Go." Where to go? How should we go? They said: We don't know. Find out for yourself. Come on, go!" And whoever refused to leave, they would shoot him with tank dust, and shoot behind people as they fled.

We were displaced and returned to the north again, where they were bombing all the time. Night fell and we were trying to find a place to go and trying to run while they were bombing around us. There was a school on Olive Street, which was known to be a dangerous area. People were taking shelter at the school, when they saw us they said, "Come here!" They took us to school and it was one of the worst nights of my life. At school, we didn't have anything, and it was very cold. We sat in a classroom with no mats, no pillows, no blankets, nothing. We sat in the freezing cold on the tiles, and we sat on the tiles with our children all night, and all the time there was a ring of fire around the school and shrapnel was flying towards us. We were terrified all night, and at seven in the morning there was an exchange of gunfire. Shooting at the school door. We looked out the window and saw tanks parked at the school door, so we started running. Everyone was running and they were bombing behind us. We were running and they were bombing behind us. So we went back to Gaza area again and it was one of the worst days of my life ever.

We now arrived at an area where some of my brother-in-law's relatives were. We just needed to find the four walls that would shelter us temporarily. My house was destroyed, my father-in-law's house was destroyed.

After the truce, my family returned to their home and found it unrecognizable. Phosphorus shells everywhere, completely collapsed and everything disappeared. It was not livable. My brothers' homes were all destroyed one by one. My sister's house collapsed on them, and she, her husband, and their children came out from under the rubble, God protected them. They are also displaced. We are all displaced.

I saw death before my eyes. I have seen death. I have seen death with my own eyes. I can't get out of this state I'm in. I'm trying to strengthen myself; I try to look like I'm okay in front of them [my family] but inside, I'm completely broken. I'm completely shattered internally. I don't know how I could bear all this? How did we get through the rubble, the school, and everything after that. In the house where I live, there was bombing in the distance. I saw the explosion but it wasn't like that... I wasn't as scared as I was when it happened near me. But I remember everything I went through. I remember the ring of fire, I remember the walls

falling, I remember everything that happened as if it was happening again. I started hugging my mother and said, "Mom, I can't bear to see everything I saw, happen again. I don't want to see it again. Enough, I can't!" Now we are staying in this house temporarily. When the war ends or after, we don't know where we will go or where we will live!

After the truce, I went out into the street. The streets are terrifying, it's a desert, a desert. Literally desert. I went to my house to get anything I could find, any piece of cloth or anything. And I just cried for my house. I tried to find anything, anything at all. The house has become completely uninhabitable since the missiles fell. Thank God we weren't there!

Thank God my husband is getting better little by little. His health is starting to improve, but the stitches need time before they can be taken out, and his muscles - because he was buried under a lot of rubble - his muscles still need time to improve. His psychological shock is improving, but it requires patience. They told me that it takes at least two months, and that God willing, it will be better than before, only with time. The severe psychological trauma he experienced takes time.

And now I have told you everything I endured, so that you can expose these dogs [the Israelis]. You can spread our voices and communicate everything we've been through. Thank God, I saw everything. We lost our loved ones, we lost our home, we lost our money, and we lost everything except praise be to God, praise be to God, praise be to God, I am fine, my husband is fine, and my children are fine. May God have mercy on the soul of my father-in-law, my brother-in-law, and my sister-in-law. May God have mercy on the soul of Khaled, my sister-in-law's husband, and may God have mercy on the souls of the children we lost. Thank God, my children and I are fine. Thank God for my husband. God willing, he will recover. God willing, my Lord will make us better than we were before.