Salam’s Birthday

Salam or Salloum, Salloum is the nick name for my son’s daughter Salam. She is two years old and is fair and she has green eyes like foreign child. It is very, very rare for her to cry. She loves everyone, and everyone loves her. Her name is Salam, and she truly represents her name because she is always calm.

I am displaced in a house with 80 people, including many children of different ages, from two months old and above. More than twenty children and the place is very spacious.

The important thing is that Salloum never cried before the war. Now, every night she wakes up screaming at the top of her voice, twice or three times a night. We all wake up in the middle of the night to her screaming; some expressing their sadness others cursing the Zionists, while one reading the Qur’an on her head, and another trying to give her some water to drink, one said: “tomorrow we must see a sheikh, for maybe a genie is haunting her. Her mother said: ”the girl started waking up terrified every night, after they bombed our neighbors Al-Na’asan’s. Salloum was sleeping in her bed, and at the moment of the bombing, her body flew off the bed for more than a meter and she fell back on her bed and screamed with a terrifying scream and kept screaming since.

Her screaming has become an infection. When Salloum wakes up and screams, all the children start screaming with her at the same time. Since we are supposed to be an educated family, who worked a lot on psychological relief after every war with the children in schools, we do know that everything that is happening with her, is because of the war. Sometimes when we did not sleep for even a minute throughout the night, when she starts to scream we wish to scream with her.

Today was Salloum's birthday. All the children in the place knew that today was Salloum's birthday. They gathered in the morning and decided to give her the best birthday. They brought two stones, put them on top of each other, and put a piece of wood on top of the two stones. Then they started getting clay and made a cake out of the clay. Salloum stood between them and they started singing “Happy Birthday to You Salloum.” My wife and I were preparing a cup of tea on a small clay oven, with palm leaf smoke filling our chests before our eyes, and watching the children with all the pain in the world, saying: May God make their days better than ours. The children started circling the cake, until they reached the moment when they blew out the imaginary candles on the clay, together with Salloum. After that, the children presented gifts from things they found in the yard of the house. One of them was carrying an old bowl that he gave to her as a candy box. Another carried a piece of wood as if it were a bouquet of roses. A third carried a torn piece of cloth filled with mud as if it were the finest clothing. Salloum received the gifts and put them aside, everyone kissed her, and her heart and eyes were filled with happiness.

Her father was watching from afar, so he decided to make her a real cake, no matter how much it took to make it and no matter how much efforts it will take. But where would he get the needed materials to make the cake?! He went to the market to buy eggs, flour, and vanilla that had been missing for some time. The important thing is that he went through Deir al-Balah, street by street, until he returned with the cake supplies.

Because we are displaced and we do not have any kitchen utensils, neither a blender nor anything else needed to make the cake, he went to a neighboring house who bake bread. He asked them to bake the cake and they agreed. He returned with The Cake at sunset, carrying it proudly as if he had obtained a doctorate. We went back to gather the children, brought a real table, placed the cake and some cookies on it, sang to her with the children, and it was time to cut the cake, which was consumed in a flash. Salloum went back to sleep in her bed and started screaming in fear. We woke up and tried to calm her down, to no avail. Salloum, the quiet angel, does not rest at night.

Happy Birthday, my beloved granddaughter. I wish you a long life.

12/20/2023

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