



The Gaza Mono-Logues

Ashtar Theatre

2010

1. Ahmad El Ruzzi
Born 1993
Al Wehda Street

Before the war, I used to feel that Gaza was my second mother. Its ground was the warm chest I could lay on, and its sky was my dreams... without limits. The sea would wash away my worries. But today I feel it's an exile, I stopped feeling it's the city of my dreams.

In the war, the main electricity pole was hit by a huge rocket. All my uncles were at home with us and the electricity went out, but there was another line working, near to the house. I went to our neighbor and asked him for an extension so we could connect to the second line. Once we were connected, and our house was lit, he came to take the extension back. We had a huge fight.

In war, everyone thinks about themselves.

During the war, a lot of people had 20 bags of flour and never had a shortage of gas, whilst others didn't have a piece of bread... they were asking their neighbors for bread and they wouldn't give them any. Most people locked up their things under lock and key and decided not to give anything to anyone. But others were good and helpful.

Back to our topic. We didn't agree to return the connection to him even though it was his extension that we were using, and for the first time I realized how bad we can be. We were punished on the spot. The house next to ours was bombed and split in two pieces, and half of it fell on us. We left the connection and electricity and everything and ran away to my uncle's house next to the municipal park.

My uncle's house is close to a government building, and in the evening people started saying that building would be bombed, and if it was bombed, my uncle's house might disappear from existence! We sat there not knowing what to do or where to go. My Dad kept reassuring us: "Don't worry, don't be scared, nothing will happen." We stayed like that till midnight. We kept hearing rockets and explosions, and my Dad kept saying don't worry and don't be scared, but suddenly he said: "Follow me! We're going back home!" And he started shaking. All of us started shaking with him. My Mum started screaming and my uncle was in really bad shape. Anyway, all of us ran away in the middle of the night with my uncle's family.

We ran home... couldn't believe it when we got home. Till today I don't remember where we slept or how. The important thing was that we were away from that building. We found that our neighbor had taken the electricity connection, and we spent the night in darkness while his house was lit. I felt he was right to take his connection back.

After that my Dad got a connection complex... he bought 3 electric cables and 6 gas bottles, 2 electric pans, 20 neon lights, 20 packs of candles, 6 packs of cans, 10 packs of wires, 6 flashlights and 2 boxes

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

of batteries. We're living in war and we have to be careful till things get better.

I got a complex worse than all others. It's as though I was generous before the war, or maybe I didn't know the value of things, because I couldn't believe that there would be a day when I wouldn't find a drink of water or a piece of bread. But after the war I became super careful with everything and anything, I started barely sweetening my tea. And if I broke a loaf of bread, I wasn't allowed to finish it. I lost my appetite for food and I became really economical. My Dad says: "Ahmad always has his pocket money"... Of course, because I take it and save it in case there's another war!

I feel like I'm married with ten kids. I'm scared of life... of everything... of the smallest things... always worried. I feel that all of Gaza is sitting on moving sands. Any madness you can imagine can happen in a second in this place, and a lot of dreams may come true too. It's a strange city with no logic.

China is now a third of the world, and they all work but can barely make enough shoes and shirts for Gaza. Gaza consumes everything, and the world attacks it, but it keeps pretending nothing is wrong. Actually, Gaza is full of poverty, and there are people who pick their food from the garbage.

The tragedy is that things keep getting worse, and the biggest tragedy is that there's nothing to stop that happening.
Every pit has a bottom, except Gaza.

I dream of living one day in freedom, and I don't think that's a big dream, but it's hard to come true.

My dream is also to end the Palestinian division which is giving us schizophrenia.

I'm tired of thinking but I can't stop it. But we have to plea and God will provide, and to you folks, goodbye!

2. Ahmad Taha
Born 1996
Al Daraj

All my life I thought Gaza was the biggest and most beautiful city in the world. But once, I went with my Dad to Jaffa and came back with my head spinning. After that I felt that Gaza was the size of a needle hole and wasn't beautiful, and it keeps getting smaller and worse. No one can breathe, and on top of it all we're not allowed to travel.

Every time I walk the streets of Gaza I suffocate. Jaffa's picture won't leave my mind. I ask myself, where are we? We're so far from the rest of the world. That's why I'm always at the sea, because I feel it's not from Gaza. I keep writing my name on the sand and the waves come and erase it.

Before the war I wanted to be an electronics engineer, but since the war I hate going to school. I feel I won't be anything important in my life, and even if I will, so what? It's all the same in this city. Am I going to be the prettiest flower on a garbage heap?

When the bombing began, all the schools in Gaza went home, except us. The principal wouldn't let us leave. The kids freaked out and, in a second, they went out into the schoolyard. The weird thing is that I'm in the Zaytouneh school, the one near the Ministry of Passports which got hit first. With the first hit, a piece of a rocket flew onto the biggest tree in the school and sliced it in two like a sugar cane. As soon as we saw that, no-one stayed in school – students, teachers or the principal. We fled for our lives.

I thought the only martyr that I would see in the war is the tree. But as soon as I got home, there were four martyrs in our street, as though waiting for me to say goodbye to them. When I was done with that, three more martyrs from the same family in our street arrived... As soon as we buried them and returned, our neighbors' house, two houses down the street was bombed by the army and the house was wiped off the ground. Everyone died. I felt most sad for the little girls.

I felt the war was targeting me alone, out of all the people in Gaza. All day I'd been seeing martyrs.

In the Shifaa hospital I saw a sight that I will never forget. Hundreds of corpses one on top of the other. Their flesh, their blood, and their bones all melting on each other. You wouldn't know the woman from the man or even the child. Piles of flesh on the beds, and lots of people screaming and crying, not knowing where their kids are, their men or their women.

That night, I came home from hospital and was awake till morning from fear. I thought that it would only be that night that I couldn't sleep, but till today I see them in front of me and I can't sleep!

3. Ashraf A Sossi
Born 1994
Al Wehda Street

All the neighborhood kids loved him. He was calmer than a breeze, he would take his pocket money from my father and give it to me.

Everyone loved him. His friends came and he went with them to school. They went out running like butterflies, flying off the ground... like the world was created for them.

The Israeli planes were in the air. The sound of the helicopter was like a monster waiting to pounce on its prey.

A car of wanted men was driving along Yarmouk street, and the butterflies were near the car. The butterflies didn't know that this car would be the fire that would burn them.

A rocket fell on the car. My brother Tareq flew five meters off the ground. He flew higher than the car then came down walking; nothing was the matter with him. The ambulance came and took the corpses. People told him to get into the ambulance, but he told them: "Nothing is the matter with me," and he kept going to school.

100 meters later, he put his hand on his heart and fell down a martyr. I was in the street waiting for the school bus and my sister told me to go see what's going on. I did, but I didn't see Tareq and I went on to school.

While I was in class, my uncles came and told me you will take 3 days off school. I didn't suspect anything; we got in the car... My uncle told the driver to turn off the news. Then I started getting suspicious because my uncle loves the news. We got home and there was a big crowd of people around. Before I went down, I saw my father sitting on the chair crying. It was the first time I saw my father cry and he was holding the picture of my brother Tareq. I asked him: "Dad, was my brother martyred?" He said: "God have mercy on his soul."

The ambulance brought him from the hospital... we all ran to him to say goodbye. He was sleeping like an angel, with the book that's he'd been carrying still in his hands.

My father refused to let us go with him to the cemetery, but I got in the car and went and said goodbye to him and read the Fatiha prayer on his grave... I kept going for 3 months every day to sit at his grave and talk to him.

At night I stare at his picture in the room, with: "The hero martyr – Tareq" written on it.

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

Since my brother was martyred I got used to sleeping in the bed alone.
We used to sleep one on top of the other, legs on top of heads,
sometimes it felt like all our limbs were jumbled together. But today I
have a bed by myself!

I'll never forget my brother.

4. Alaa Hajjaj
Born 1996
Al Shuja'iyeh/Al Montar

I feel like running, running, running in the streets till my headscarf flies in the sky and I fly after it...

Sometimes I feel like being totally crazy, but I can't... It's the first time I say things like this, maybe they're not the kind of things I say, or maybe they're the things that I can't express, or I'm scared to express...

Why do my parents treat me like this? I look at the girls my age, how they're living their lives, and I envy them, I wish I could be like them in their confidence and freedom.

I wish a ship would carry me to a distant island and throw me on its shore, far away from the world from everything, especially the war.

Speaking of the war, all the war was one pile and Mum was the other. I'll never understand why my Mum kept describing things to me that I'd already seen!

She and I were standing on the balcony; they bombed our neighbors' house and one of the neighbors died... We saw how the house was destroyed, and how the corpse flew onto the street, and you can imagine what happened to the family after that.

Did it end? No, it didn't.

Mum started telling me about how our neighbors' house was bombed, and how our neighbor flew from the house, like she was talking to someone who hadn't been standing with her! And on it went, stories from Mum all through the war, and I was the only listener.

We'd be sitting watching TV, and they would say there was bombing or destruction in some place. The report would be fifteen minutes long, but Mum's repeated report would be TWO HOURS... She'd talk about the report like I hadn't been with her. I started to doubt myself – had I been sitting with her or not? I swear I was there, I was really there, I was sitting next to her!

Anyway, thankfully Mum isn't with you otherwise she'd give you a headache with her stories.

5. Amanee A Shorafa
Born 1992
Al Remal

Gaza is a plane carrying people and traveling towards the unknown; landing neither in heaven nor in hell. No-one knows when it will land, and people may stay suspended like that for twice my lifetime.

All days here are the same; there's nothing new. The simplest thing is that dreams and wishes are hard to make true in Gaza, especially if they're like mine, to be an artist, singing and acting and playing music. In Gaza the only music is that of death, and dancing on wounds...

If I go abroad and study directing, how would society look at me? After I graduate, would the country be like now or worse? Everything for me is foggy and unclear, like people's faces on Friday at the Feras market. And like the day the war began...

The first hit was at the Ministry of Passports. My friend and I came out of an exam; it was the first day of the first term exams. We sat in front of the school gate talking and waiting for the rest of our friends so we'd go home together. Suddenly there was a series of explosions... I was in shock and felt that I was going to die. We ran away and I was really scared... I saw the women running and screaming and beating their faces... and I had no idea what was going on. I felt I couldn't stand on my legs, and the world started spinning... I fainted and stopped feeling anything. Then I woke up to my friend's voice shouting: "Amani for God's sake wake up!"

When I woke up I started crying, not knowing where to go or what to do. An older girl helped me and took me home. As soon as I arrived, my mother took me in her arms. I was very tired but at that moment I rested. I needed to fall into someone's arms. The hardest thing to feel is that your moment of death is near.

The war was a black ghost that covered Gaza's day and night. It imposed its hell on people, on the earth and sky and air that we breathe.

After the war I had a breakdown; a big, wild wave overtook my soul. I was thinking I wouldn't be able to come out from under it. But it was like a hand was extended to me through the theatre; a rubber ring that pulled me out from under the wave.

Today I feel a comfort that I haven't felt in a long time... and I hope I can always stay like this.

6. Amjad Abu Yasin
Born 1993
Ash Shati' Camp

A day before the war, Gaza for me was joy and happiness... trips and going to the sea... Life seemed to be happy... and I wasn't thinking about anything.

I had one dream, that Gaza would develop in art and sports. I felt that everything was fine except these two things but it turned out nothing was fine – no art, sports, health or safety, it's all the same.

Gaza stopped being the city of my dreams because my dream is to be an actor. Am I going to be an actor for twenty people in Gaza? And wait till the border opens?!

If it was in my hands, I would try as much as possible to reduce wars, death and violence. It's a shame for every drop of blood that falls on the ground. I hate the silence and the abnormal tolerance that people have; I wish all Gaza would wake up tomorrow and walk the streets shouting loudly: "Enouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh!!!!"

When the war started, we were playing football and the atmosphere was strange, the sky was red... Suddenly we heard the sound of a plane; I never heard a sound like that. We were all scared and lay on the ground waiting for death. After that we heard the sound of a loud explosion meters away from us. We started looking in each others' faces and silently saying goodbye.

Turned out the bombing wasn't meant for us... it was targeting a car of wanted men on the road above. But we kept lying down waiting for the second rocket, and all I could think of was my two older brothers who were with me, I was more afraid for them than for myself, and I think they also felt the same way.

I carried my sports shorts and ran away from the field. As I ran, I stepped on a piece of shrapnel. I took it out of my leg and went out onto the street and saw them. They were three martyrs, and you couldn't make out their features.

The first one's legs were on fire, he was looking at me and I at him. Among everyone there, he was warning me about something I didn't understand... it was then I knew he was warning me about a car coming fast towards us.

Then I knew the real meaning of death, and instead of being three martyrs they could have been four.

I was shocked at the scene. I stood there watching, and when I woke up after passing out, I ran home.

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

The war came and went and we're still living it. The victims are always the poor people who have nothing to do with anything. Even when there's an earthquake or a flood in any country, the victims are the poor people, as though there's a universal conspiracy against them.

After the war everyone started lying to everyone else... lies... cheating... dishonesty... deceitfulness.

For positions and interest, the leaders and powerful people commit slaughters and crimes without batting an eyelid or feeling any guilt... poor people get poorer and sick ones sicker.

I've lost trust in all mottos... the biggest speech from the biggest leader is bullshit, all speeches in the world don't warm up a cold person or someone sleeping in a tent after the war. The crisis is that the whole world is watching us, as though there's nothing going on, and they're still making speeches!

7. Anas Abu Eitah
Born 1995
Ash Sheikh Radwan

Since I was a small kid I've dreamt of being a famous football player. I believed I would fulfill my dreams... but today there are a million obstacles in my path. Before, there were no playing fields for adults or even kids, then the siege came and made everything worse.

If I was the Prime Minister, I'd pay most attention to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. I would build playing fields everywhere, especially in schools, and I'd let the students play freely, not be kicked out by the school guard. I'd abolish all club fees and preserve all parks.

But dreams, security, hope and the future are all words that lose their meaning in a city that kills the smallest dream possible.

I was a goalkeeper, and my friend Mohammed kept telling me: "I'm going to get a goal," but I always stopped his goals.

On the 7th January 2009, a day in the war, I was sitting at the door of our house and it was foggy, and someone came to tell me your friend Mohammed was martyred; of course I didn't believe it. I went looking for my friend and I was really scared of the idea of death.

I got to the mosque, and saw the closest friend in my life Mohammed wrapped in the flag of Palestine and torn into pieces. I cried a lot, a lot, and I was sad because I couldn't hug or kiss him, and I started holding him. We took him to the cemetery and buried him, and I kept sitting there, telling him I loved him and I was really upset because he left me alone in this world.

As I was leaving the cemetery there was heavy bombing, I felt that the angel of death was following me and not leaving me alone, but thank God I'm still alive.

8. Ehab Elayan
Born 1994
Al Saftawi Street

From when I first became aware of the world, I've had limited thinking. Life for me was to be born, grow up, get married, have kids, work, raise them, feed them, educate them, marry them off and then die.

But after the war I found that life is much harder than that. It turned out that every small step we take has a million knots behind it.

I'm scared of not finding work when I grow up, because wherever I go, I see men sitting in front of their houses with nothing to do. It's what scares and saddens me the most. That's why kids in Gaza took responsibility and were denied their childhood since birth.

My mother always used to say: "Ehab is the best one of my kids," because I was always at home, never had any problems.

When the war started my father locked us up at home because of how scared he was for us. Two hours later I was bored. I went out to walk around our house. But this time the walk was different... I was afraid to walk near the cars in case they were bombed... and all the time I kept looking up at the sky, in case a plane would come and bomb me without me knowing. I was terrified even though the Saftawi district didn't see a lot of activity. I went back home running as though from something terrifying, and stayed at home till the war was over.

After the war my life changed a lot. My relationship with people and the neighbors improved. I became known to the men of the neighborhood, and started playing checkers with the old people. I started spending all my time outside the house, can't stay inside for a minute. And my mother stopped saying: "Ehab is the best one of my kids."

I discovered that I didn't exist before the war, but after the war, here I am – God protect me! – in the city, breathing its air, singing, dancing and crying with it, and life is rolling onwards...

9. Tamer Najem
Born 1993
Ash Sheikh Radwan

Gaza is a matchbox... and we're the matches inside it.

When the war started on Gaza, all the media was focused on us; Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyyah and all the satellite channels were focused on Gaza, and the occupation wouldn't leave us alone. The whole world became busy with Gaza and what's happening in it. Suddenly Al-Jazeera wrote "Breaking news: Death of Mohammed Al Hindi..." And it wasn't normal because that Mohammed, he's my uncle, my mother's brother. It was the first time I see the screaming move from live broadcast on TV to the house... Screaming and yelling and tears... all of it mixed up together, and it moved from our house to the street, and my Mum fainted. A while later the phone rang; it was my second uncle calling to tell us that Mohammed was martyred. He didn't know that the whole world knew the news. This television is awful... before a person is shot, as the bullet is on its way to his chest, the television has already broadcast the news.

But these days, all the channels are sitting idle... praying to God to send another war on Gaza, so they have work!

Anyway we all started crying bitterly for my uncle and remembering him and talking about him... We kept talking about him for a long time. Then it started getting less because death became normal in Gaza.

After the war I stopped caring whether I live or die. After what we saw in the war I don't care about anything. Because I think each day I live is the biggest bonus, and all the life I live after the war is extra because I could have died at any second.

You know, I'm sick of the city even though I love it, and I'm sick of the people too. Sometimes I feel that I know the million and a half who are in Gaza. There's nothing new; the same day is repeated every day. I feel like traveling, like changing scene and faces. As soon as I wake up every morning, I see the electricity pole in my face... I wish I'd wake up one day and not find it there... Each day Abu Ibrahim stands at the door of the supermarket, and Abed the bean seller is selling his beans and Abu El Abed is sitting at the door of his house, afraid that his house would run away... Um Ibrahim is standing with Um Hassan... I know the taxi drivers one by one, I know who takes you to the city and who goes to the beach... it's soul draining!

The only hour that's different in my life is the one when I come to theatre practice. It became my work and mission, I wait for it impatiently... Without the theatre I would have gone crazy. When I grow up I want to be a big actor. I've loved acting since I was a kid...

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

but any institution that I used to go to when I was a kid threw me out a few days later... but this time it's different.

10. Taima'a Okasha
Born 1997
At Tuffah

Macaroni, mujaddara, noodles and cans of all shapes and colors... made in Morocco, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Somalia... and the date of expiry doesn't matter.

In the war, all the streets were filled with empty cans. A lot of kids wounded their legs on the empty cans... The occupation was leading a war on us in the earth and sky, and we had declared a vicious war on food...

We used to eat 100 times a day, whenever we opened our eyes from 6 in the morning till the next day 6 in the morning we'd be eating. I thought only our house was like that, but when I asked they told me all Gaza went crazy for food.

I thought the state of war and the scenes of martyrs and destruction would affect people's appetite for food, but it seems that the state of fear, horror and worry makes people more hungry and they eat more. It could also be that the whole family was at our place, especially the girls. They competed on who could make tastier food. And my poor father couldn't keep up, carrying bags of food of all shapes and colors. The food we ate in twenty days of war was enough for a year. And the problem was, every time I said I don't want to eat, I ate more.

When I grow up, I want to be a journalist or a lawyer or a prime minister. A journalist so I could photograph the beauty and simplicity in Gaza because I love it, I love its salt, sand and air, and I can't imagine living anywhere else. A lawyer so I could defend all the deprived and mistreated people in this city because I don't like seeing anyone suffer in it. And I wish I could be the Prime Minister so I could force law and order on the city because that's where the solution begins...

11. Rawand Ja'rour
Born 1997
Al Daraj

“Relax, girls, don’t be scared – this is just the sound of aimless shooting.” That’s what our teacher said as soon as the bombing started. After a while her mobile phone rang and she spoke a few words only: “120 martyrs??!!” She smashed her mobile onto the floor and told us: “Go home, all of you.”

As soon as we went out into the yard, we saw our parents, some of them in pajamas, some in their under shirts and some barefoot... We were very scared. My two sisters and I kept waiting for Dad, but he was really late... so we decided to go home by ourselves even though it’s a long way.

On the way I saw something for the very first time: a martyr being carried on a coffin wrapped in the flag of Palestine, with banners around him and people crying, but the weird thing is that the funeral barely had thirty people in it. Funerals of martyrs usually have thousands! Then I felt that there was really some big catastrophe going on in the country.

I got scared for Dad, I didn’t want him to come get us because I was scared he’d be hit by a rocket. I was also scared of dying and I didn’t want to die now, because it would be a catastrophe if I died and no-one came to my funeral!

I started running home and people were running around us like it was Doomsday. No-one knew where they were going because the sound of rockets didn’t stop. Every few seconds a rocket would fall and shake the ground.

I felt that the streets were not the same streets, nor were the people the same people; Strange sights, sounds, and smells.

After the war a lot of things changed inside me. I started hating going to the bathroom. From the second I go in, I can’t wait to come running out. Because all the time in the war I was afraid they’d hit a rocket on our house when I am in the bathroom. In there, one would be in great focus and you know the rest...

I also started hating the morning line at school. When the war started I was in the line, that’s why today I feel that the minutes in the line are hours of fear and worry. All school for me is one pile and the line is another...

I started having terrifying dreams. All night I have a conflict within myself, between desire to sleep and fear of nightmares... Sleep became a monster hiding behind my eyelids. I stay like that till morning; I

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

don't know when I slept and when I woke up.

I want to become an actress, and this is a hard dream to fulfill in Gaza especially for girls... I tell myself it's a shame for people in Gaza to be deprived of my talent because I could become an important actress... but if they don't want me, to hell with them, I'll go to any country and act there!

Gazans are deprived of everything, anyway – it doesn't stop at theatre. Sometimes I think, people in Gaza can barely find food; how are they going to go to the theatre?

You know? I wish I could live in a civil, democratic society with peace, and twenty cinemas, and keep watching movies and flying in my imagination and dreaming.

12. Reem Afana
Born 1996
Al Saftawi Street

When I was young I used to feel that I was the happiest child in the world, but the more I grow and my mind grows, the more my worry grows, because I start to understand things that I did not. I started to know the meaning of a deprived child.

The thing that upsets me and makes me cry the most are children's tears – all children in the world regardless of their nationality, religion or color. When I grow up I want to be a pediatrician, and that's the hope that gives me a big push in life. Even though I'm fed up, bored and sad, because Gaza doesn't have life any more...

Yesterday I was sitting in school and I heard the sound of planes. I got really scared, I wanted to run away from school. I felt I was going to die because I remembered the war. The scenes of war won't leave my mind.

On the third day of the war my family was sitting together, talking about what was happening in the war, and my grandmother was reassuring us so we wouldn't be scared. We were actually calmed, even though the sound of rockets didn't stop, but my grandmother's warm voice was calming us.

The phone rang... The lines never caught in the war... so when we heard the sound of the phone we were happy...

-Hello?

-Yes?

-This is the Israeli Defense Army. You have five minutes to clear the house, it's for your own benefit, we have warned you.

I couldn't stand on my legs any more. Everyone in the house started yelling... My grandmother was the first one to run away! It was the first time I'd seen her going so fast. My dad held me and my sisters and told us not to be scared.

He was pulling me to leave, but I was going to die if I didn't take my teddy bear with me. I felt that I would betray him if I left him under the bombing. I escaped from Dad's hands and ran to my bear, took him in my arms and left.

We all got far away from the house... and sat down to wait for the five minutes.

They were the longest five minutes in history... they became ten... we felt like they were years that passed.

I was in a whirlwind. Thoughts and dreams were thrashing about in my

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

head and the world was spinning. I felt that the dream of being a doctor was very, very far away.

I held the bear and remembered myself when I was small, how I was always laughing.

I want to go back to being small, and stay small, I don't want to grow up.

But the only thing that comforted me was the love of people who didn't leave us for one moment. Gaza is full of love.

13. Reema El Sadi
Born 1995
Ash Sheikh Radwan

I was nine years old when we returned from the Emirates. It was the first time I visit Gaza. The car was moving along the street and I was looking out from the window. I didn't like anything in the city. When we stood at a traffic light, a lot of kids came to the car begging, selling gum and biscuits. Then I hated myself and wanted to go back to the Emirates.

Since then I have lived in Gaza and will not leave it even if they give me a choice between it and Paris... because I discovered that the love inside it is enough for the whole world, and that places are in their people not in their buildings or views.

Mum always talked to me about Gaza when we were in the Emirates. I liked it before I saw it but once I lived in it I liked it more. It has details that Mum didn't see. But it's such a pity... all it needs is safety to be the most beautiful city in the world.

In the war, the Taqwa mosque and the Nour mosque were bombed, and after that the house of Abu El Qare'e. And the Abu El Qare'e house is our topic. They're our neighbors, and the Israeli secret services threatened them with bombing. People told us to live on the bottom floor; it's safer, so when they bomb the Abu El Qare'e house it won't hit us.

We went down to the first floor and waited for the army to bomb Abu El Qare'e's house... But they bombed the Nour mosque instead. All its windows, doors and stones flew on us while we were in the apartment. I was very injured; all the doors fell on my head. Of course there was screaming and the house was in a total mess.

The next day we had a family meeting and decided to go back to the upper flat. And we did, we moved to the top floor. But this time they hit the Taqwa mosque. All the glass and stones flew on us in the top floor... so we decided to go down to the bottom floor because it's safer. And we sat and waited for the army to bomb the Abu El Qare'e house, and that night they really did.

They threw the first rocket then the second but it didn't explode... And if they threw another rocket and hit the one which didn't explode, the whole neighborhood would have been wiped out... and people would have said: "Here WAS Abu El Qare'e's neighborhood."

14. Sami El Jerjawi
Born 1994
At Tuffah

The hour that I hate most in the day is 12 noon. Every time the exams start I feel that the war will start again. I can't answer any of the exam questions, and thoughts keep floating around in my head till I'm sick of them... I ask myself, is what's happening to me normal, or am I sick?

People say the sea of Gaza washes all pains but my pain is bigger than the sea. Because the last time I was at the sea, I was with my friend; we swam, played and had fun... But now I can't go to the sea anymore.

The Talateeni street is near the petrol station, and petrol was dear to people and expensive – it was a big deal to have a liter of petrol, there was a war going on, and people were afraid to buy anything. My Dad sent me to buy petrol. After I bought it, I went to the house of my friend Zaki who lives near the station. I was missing him a lot, and hadn't seen him for more than ten days.

I got to his house and I was in a hurry because my Dad wanted me to return quickly with the petrol. I went inside their house without knocking the door. His mum considers me like her son and me too. I said hello to her and to my friend, hugged him and kissed him, said hello to his brothers and quickly left.

When there were 20 meters between me and their house... I heard the loud sound of a plane and after that the sound of a rocket falling on my friend's house. People started screaming that the house was bombed. I couldn't believe it! I looked back at my friend's house and saw fire and smoke coming out of it; I'd never seen anything like that.

I went back running to our house. When I got there my dad told me your friend died. No he didn't... Everyone started telling me your friend Zaki died, and I didn't believe them. That's why I didn't go to the funeral or the hospital or the cemetery because Zaki did not die.

I always talk to him at night, well not exactly to him – to his photo. I'm very upset with him because he doesn't come visit me and I also stopped visiting him at home. I'm sure he's not dead and for sure there will come a day when we meet... Then I'll blame him, because I miss him so much.

I have another friend living in Russia, he always tells me about Russia and the freedom and safety that he lives in... I feel that I'm not living, I start wishing that I would dive in the sea and keep diving and diving till I come out and find myself in Russia.

15. Sujoud Abu Hussein
Born 1995
Ash Sheikh Radwan

What I love most in Gaza is people's kindness and simplicity, and what I hate most is the political party fanaticism. Sometimes I feel that there's a contradiction between all this love and kindness that people have, and this evil that controls the surface. If it was in my hands, I'd solve the problem of the Palestinian division tomorrow.

In the war, they assassinated a big Hamas leader. All the media in the world covered the incident. But the whole world was in one valley and we were in the other. Because Mody and Sallouma, my young brothers, and Dad had gone to our land that's next to the Hamas leader... We called them a thousand times, and as usual the Jawwal mobile lines wouldn't go through, which stressed us out even more.

Mum started pacing the balcony like a small bird from whom they've taken her children. She imagined that the balcony would somehow rescue Mody and Sallouma and Dad. I was really stressed, I started crying and I went down to my aunt. My aunt started soothing me... she lied to me and told me that she had called them and spoken to them. I knew that she had not talked to them but she was holding me and crying, and I was crying too. When I went up to our house I saw that Mum was still pacing the balcony.

I forgot to tell you that Mody and Sallouma are 5 and 7 years old... They used to sleep in my arms, and my soul was connected to them. I felt at the time that my soul was going to escape and I would die.

And honestly, only then, I felt that there was a war on Gaza, because I was busy with the computer all the time and that day was the first time I lived the war.

An hour later, there was knocking on the door of our house and Dad came back with Mody and Sallouma. As much as I loved them, this was the first time I felt how much they were really dear to me, how much I couldn't bear to be parted from them. I put them on my lap and kissed them like it was the first time I'd held them. And Mum stopped pacing the balcony, and it was the first time I felt that she loved Dad like this.

After the war I started thinking, why are we like that, out of the whole world?

They took our land and threw us out of our homes... And because we are defending ourselves, all this happens to us?

There's no water... no electricity... no phones... no petrol... What are we to the world, aren't we human?

16. Suha Al Mamlouk
Born 1995
At Tuffah

Every day Gaza changes, that's why my dreams always change. And each time I make a step forward, I go 100 back.

In the first hit of the war I was going home from school and didn't know the road... Suddenly a man stood in front of me and asked me: "Where's your house?" I told him and he took me home. I went down to the house quickly and asked my Dad: "Why didn't you come get me?"

My mum said: "It's **normal**, dear, go study."
I told her: "There are no exams; the war started."

In the afternoon they hit the government building near us. My mum said: "It's **normal**, we are used to what is happening to us."

We went running to the neighbors, each one looking out for himself. After minutes, the neighbors' relatives started coming and the house became packed with more than a hundred people in it, but still things stayed **normal** for my mother.

In the morning Dad went to buy bread and stood in line for six hours, coming home with one pack of bread. Each of us got half a loaf. And still my mum said **normal**.

In the evening my parents decided to go to the hospital and visit the injured, and I went with them. In the hospital we saw many corpses; they were four on each bed, under and on top of each other. Only then my mother said: "**This is not normal.**"

The war isn't over, the war is big, and my fear is to grow up with it. I'm always scared of a new war. If a balloon bursts I'm scared... if a car hits a strong brake I jump twenty meters... and if a small kid yells I start yelling with him. I stay up all night waiting for a new dawn... but each morning that comes does not differ from the one that passed.

17. Ali Al Hassany
Born 1995
Al Saftawi Street

The thing I love most in Gaza is that it's not like the other countries. Other countries have lots of problems, famine, siege, division, occupation, bombing, destruction and death, but we have none of these issues... That's why I love Gaza a lot. Especially that the sewage and the streets are clean and people love one another, prices are cheap, everyone is happy and the fish are healthy and do not swim in sewage. And that I definitely will not die of hunger, poverty, or a heart attack that half my relatives died from... because of so much "happiness".

I want to tell you a big secret that I'm holding in my chest and hesitating to say since I started speaking... the secret is: I, my dear folks, am the reason for the war on Gaza. You might be surprised as to why : because I never had a dream that didn't come true! One night before the war, I dreamed that the war started and our house was bombed, and I was the only survivor. The next day at 11:25 the air strikes began on Gaza.

The first shock I got in the war was when the strongest teacher in school – the Math teacher – hid under his desk in fear from the first second. I thought, if the strongest teacher hides under the desk... what do we do? A lot of kids peed themselves. I started screaming and everyone started screaming with me. I was screaming for our house that I was sure was destroyed and for my family that I was sure was martyred.

I went out running in the street, wanting to rush home to my family, but I waited for two hours for a car to take me, and in the end I went home walking. All the way I was imagining our house destroyed and my family dead. I got home and found nothing was the matter, and my family were taking down the windows so they wouldn't break from the air pressure.

But till today I'm scared they will bomb our house. That's why – and you can ask my mum – I sleep with three mattresses under me, so that when there's bombing, the mattresses will absorb the hits and nothing will happen to me. I hate dreaming but dreams are not in our control.

I think that "Ali" (that's me) before the war is different from "Ali" after the war, who is a new person that I'm trying to discover. Before the war I didn't understand anything about politics. I didn't know the Head of State from the Prime Minister. I never listened to news, but today I became a political analyst. Al-Jazeera This Morning, Midday, This Evening, Harvest of the Day, Harvest of the Week... I started following all these programs and discussing them. I started feeling that politics and news are very important in our life, because they are what kills us and what gives us life. And also because I want to be the first

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

to know if there's going to be another war.

18. Fateema Abu Hashem
Born 1996
Al Jalaa' Street

When I talk to Palestinian kids in Europe I feel sorry for them, and I don't wish to be like them, because they're in Diaspora. They plant their dreams in a land that's not theirs. Dreams grow with the people and the country.

I love life, love to play, and love people... I wish I could be the President of Palestine for one day, so I can enrich love and peace between people, end the hatred and spite in their hearts and end the internal division. This would be my first presidential decision... But unfortunately I'm not the President and that's why there was a war.

The war opened up with bombing like rain... We came running out of school in fear... and found the whole world running in the streets. People were looking for their sons, and sisters, and mothers... Everyone was running with their heads raised to the sky. Honestly, they looked strange. I saw one of them from a distance wearing pyjamas, barefoot and running. When I first saw her I didn't recognize her, but when I got close to her - wow, that's my uncle's wife, the chic one who doesn't leave the house without looking top-notch. Then I was sure the war had started.

It's been more than a year since we've been talking about the war; we lived it and continue to live it each day in detail. Because the TV, the phone and the doorbell are all things that remind me of the war and I don't like them. You know! I even threw away my mobile. And I'm most scared of being alone. I think: What would I do if a war starts and I'm alone, who will protect me? And when I'm with the family I start to think how I would protect them.

I had a big dream; to become an actress, but this dream started shrinking slowly, because people in my country don't look at an actress in a positive way, even though acting is important and allows me to relay the picture of the suffering of my country and society to the world. I have a second dream if the first doesn't work out - to be a journalist, and the third dream is to make a family that I love and who love me. The fourth is for us to be free and for the flag of Palestine to fly freely, and the fifth is to see people happy, without death, destruction, deprivation or war, and the sixth and last is for me to finish this monologue and come down from the stage...

19. Fateema Atallah
Born 1996
Ash Sheikh Radwan

Gaza's fish ran away... but people were not able to. They opened the sewage into the sea, and if the sea could talk it would tell them: "Shame on you for what you are doing to Gaza and me." Instead of music and acting schools, Gaza became a school for shooting and murder.

I'm very scared by nature, I'm scared of cockroaches and birds, and I worry day and night...

The first day of the war, all the girls went home except me. I was the last one to leave school. I was sitting there, shaking, couldn't stand on my legs... Finally I felt that if I don't help myself, no-one would... I gathered my courage and stood up, shaking, and walked like a tree in the wind, all of me trembling. People were walking near me but no-one felt me. The sounds of rockets got louder and the horror in my heart grew deeper.

Usually, the distance from school to my house is half an hour, but that day I got home in fifteen minutes because of my fear. It was the time I was the most scared in my life... Every second I thought I would die. It was the first time I feel this terrible loneliness, even though the streets were full of people.

I got home and stood at the window. A rocket fell near our house and I flew off the ground and landed on my back. For the whole war, I couldn't stand at the windows. I started sleeping in an inner room that doesn't have a single window.

I think I'm still scared till today... but I pretend not to be.

20. Muhammad El Omrani
Born 1995
Al Shuja'iyeh/Al Montar

Gaza, the warm arms, and the fire of hell. Horror, fear, death and destruction but this time our area was “safe”. Every time the occupation attacks they hit us first, but it looks like this time they got bored of our area and wanted to make some change, so we got lucky.

I used to spend the whole day sitting on a chair watching people running away from their houses towards the borders, carrying their belongings, sons and daughters and going west. Some of them were carrying their kids on their shoulders, their mothers on their backs... Where they were going, you don't know, till all of Gaza got squeezed into one area. Then the distance became tighter, and they started running away from the mosque, and it got tighter and tighter till they got to our house. I said to my father: “What? Is it our turn now? But where are we going to go?” My dad insisted that we stay at home, and said: “A person who leaves his house loses his dignity...” I said to myself: “Kid, stay put, you're not better than others, and whatever happens, happens.”

All day I would busy myself with food, and sometimes we'd go fill water with my cousins from the pipes in the street, it was about 1000 meters away from the house. We used to take the donkey cart of Sabri, him and his brother used to come with us to help. All the way he would tell us about his heroic acts and his horse and how he would go to the wilderness and hunt birds with the slingshot. I never carried a slingshot – it's scary. But the stories were nice, and in those days, entertaining, despite our fear. We used to talk so as to lessen our fear from being in the streets.

When daytime was over and night came we would say: “The night has come with its worries.” We couldn't even sleep, I used to sleep for 15 minutes and wake up for 3 hours, how can you sleep with the bombing going on?! And we're lying in bed waiting for our fate. Sometimes I'd look at the sky from the edge of the window, and find the world sooooooo red with fire and smoke everywhere, and I'd ask myself: why is the whole world at rest and we're living an inferno?

21. Muhammad Qasem
Born 1995
Al Saftawi Street

My grandmother and I were home alone. She was telling me stories about the days of our country, funny stories and sad ones, but she never told me a complete story because she always had to go to the bathroom half way through. My grandma spends half her time in the room and the other half in the bathroom.

My parents came back at 10:30 at night and went to sleep straight away. I couldn't sleep; I was lying on my bed awake, writing my homework. Suddenly, I heard the noise of a distant explosion. I went to my parents' room and took the radio to hear the news. I woke my father up and told him: "I heard the sound of a strong explosion." He said: "Be quiet and go to bed, it's just aimless shooting."

Anyway I went back to bed, and the electricity was out. Suddenly! There was a huge explosion that shook my world, I pulled my blanket and covered my face and something fell on me. I raised the blanket off me with all my strength and it was the frame of the window that had fallen on me. The blanket was full of glass, and our entire house was full of black smoke... It was the day they hit the workers' union, right next to our house.

But that's not the point. The point is the stupid things that happened and which I can't find an explanation for. First, the world was on fire and we all felt we would die, but my grandmother was looking for her false teeth – she was afraid that when she died, people would find out she had no teeth... like they don't know already! Second, the house was full of smoke but my father lit a cigarette and smoked... as if we needed more smoke! Third, my uncle called to make sure we were OK, and my father told him that we're all fine, thank God, but that all the windows of the house were broken except one. My uncle told him to break it, and my father did!

And I don't know why I'm telling this story, all I know is that we're living in a cage... a prison... like an encaged bird, who wants to come out but he's besieged. Kids are dying in front of their mothers' eyes, hearts are crying for them and screaming in the loudest voice, but no-one hears. No-one's heart softens and no-one seems to care!

22. Mahmud Abu Shaa'ban
Born 1996
Al Remal

You're going to call me crazy, nuts, cuckoo, go ahead... I don't care, it doesn't matter to me anymore... In truth, what's happening with me is not normal. I mean, losing trust in my friends is normal; lots of people have lost trust in others... But what's driving me crazy is that I've lost my trust in shop windows and cars, in police stations and suspicious areas. In my personal philosophy, all of Gaza is a suspicious area. To make a long story short, everything that was hit in the war, I'm scared of going near today.

I don't know how to walk down the street, I'd be walking on the right and get scared, then I'd move to the left, but I'd be scared... so I'd go back to the right... and stay in that whirlwind... Where am I supposed to walk – in the middle of the street?!

See, on the first day of the war I was in my brother's shop that sells computers and mobile phone accessories... a medal fell on the floor and my brother told me to hang it up. Suddenly, while hanging it up, I heard the sound of rockets, and the glass fell on me and injured me. I was scared. I wasn't scared for myself but for my brother. He was also injured.

He was worried about our family. He told me: "Go up to the house and make sure they're OK."

I went up the stairs and I wasn't scared. I made sure they were alright, and they were all fine, thank God.

I walked up the street to find out where the explosion happened. We heard a lot of explosions. Gaza became like a black night because of the smoke. But still I wasn't scared.

I forgot to tell you that my brother had a cup of tea in the first explosion, which fell from his hand and broke.

Do you think it was because of fear???

23. Mahmud Bala'wi
Born 1995
Ash Shati' Camp

I want to write the most beautiful words about Gaza but I can't. I can't not see the poverty, siege and famine, especially when all Gaza city flooded into Al-Areesh and emptied it from all goods in two hours. I can't not see the deprivation in every house, the fear and the sickness.

What do you want me to say about Gaza? From when I became aware of it, I was sad about everything inside it. Especially the kids and even the adults, youth, women, girls, animals, stones and trees, everything in it is crying... I'm looking for nice words to say and I can't find them.

The sea is the only thing that helps me dream. When I stand on the shore I can imagine Cyprus, travel to Paris, fly to Rome, all while standing in the same spot. I go around the whole world and in the end I land on my bed in our house, in the middle of the refugee camp. I go back to the reality of Gaza, the dirty market, overflowing sewage, the carts, and what's on top of the carts, the suffocating smell, and the silent people who can't speak.

When I look at the clock and it's 11:55 I start shaking and my heart beats faster, I feel that the war started again. Not only the clock scares me – everything that flies does, even the flies. I can't tell anyone about my fear so they don't call me a wimp or a sissy. I'm most scared for my older brothers. When a fly lands on any of them, I feel it's going to kill him, I start shouting and I run away from the place. That's why I'm now escaping outside the house all the time, because of the many flies.

24. Mahmud El Turk
Born 1994
Al Jalaa' Street

Before the war I was a child... But after the war I discovered I'm not a child any more, and that Gaza, unlike all cities of the world, doesn't have children in it.

When the war started I was playing in the neighborhood and I found all the neighbors running away. I asked what's going on? They told me: "The Israeli army told the neighbors that they will bomb their house." I went running home to tell my parents. In less than a minute we ran away from the house. We took nothing except the gas cooker, because it's more expensive than gold in Gaza.

I felt then that I'd never go back home.

We went to my grandfather's house. The next day, the Israeli intelligence called my grandfather's house and told them they would bomb it. We ran out and went to my other grandfather, the father of my mother. There were five other families there, all my aunts. My cousins and I became good friends; we'd stay up all night and talk about the war. I was tired and scared and wanted to go home and sleep on my bed and pillow.

Three days later, they bombed our neighbors' house. After the bombing, all the inhabitants of the neighborhood returned to their houses. And I went back to my room... but I couldn't sleep any more.

I've been wanting to travel for a long time. I have an uncle in Canada who always sends me video tapes of him with his family in Canada's parks, sea, shops... and in the background of the pictures are Canadian girls... like I need that. It's like he's taunting me?! I started dreaming of Canada day and night... That's why I now like acting... I tell myself maybe it will work out with me and I'll become an actor and travel to Canada! And become a Canadian, marry a Canadian and have little Canadian children. What language do they speak in Canada?? Never mind, I'll learn Canadian, and anyway I don't care – they won't know I'm an Arab in Canada, since I'm sooo blond and blue-eyed.

25. Mahmud Afana
Born 1995
Al Saftawi Street

If you want to call me a coward, do so... Because after the war, I don't answer any kid who swears at me or even hits me. I'm just sad, I leave him and walk away. Before the war I wasn't like that – the flying bird would avoid me. Why did this happen to me? Because honestly, after I saw so many kids dying in the war, I started to feel that all of us are going to die, it's just a bit delayed. I said to myself: "Kid, you're a lot bigger than that." I started to feel that I was a hundred years old.

The war ended on the ground but it's still there in my head. I want to be like any child in this world... not in the world, at least in Jerusalem. When I chat to my cousins, who are living in Jerusalem, on the net, I feel that they are living their childhood and they don't think like me at all. I'm scared to tell them what I'm thinking, so they don't think I'm weird. I pretend to be listening to them and I lie to them. They didn't live what we lived in the war.

My family, and that of my uncle and grandfather, all went to live at my uncle Anan's place because it was far away from the war and it was a safe area, or so we thought.

The next day, there was bombing on the street next to my uncle's house, and the wall behind the house collapsed.

The third day, my uncle, at whose house we were staying, went to buy *foul* [beans] and falafel for breakfast. When he returned, he parked the car at the door of his house, and before he went down from the car, a rocket fell on him. The upper half of his body fell on the asphalt, and when the ambulance came they took out the lower half from the car. The paramedics went and collected the upper half in a plastic bag and they took him to hospital... Everyone started wailing and screaming... and my mother started asking God to bring him back safe.

I don't know, was she lying to herself or to us?? Of course my uncle didn't come back and he won't come back safe.

26. Mahmud Najem
Born 1994
Ash Sheikh Radwan

For the first time the streets of Gaza were clean, there wasn't a paper or a cardboard. People were collecting the paper from the streets to use it for baking, because the electricity was disconnected. My mum didn't want to bake and she asked me to bring bread from the oven. The queue at the oven stretched from Gaza to the West Bank. People would line up for 8 hours to get to their turn and take half a pack of bread.

In seconds, a Palestinian rocket launcher was erected in the area and in less than one second the Israeli planes started bombing it. People began running in all directions and the ambulances came. People started falling dead... others were injured. I was in shock, and people in the street started telling me thank God you're safe.

Anyway I went back home without the loaf of bread. And My mum yelled at me... but till today, she doesn't know why I didn't bring the bread.

27. Heba Daoud
Born 1995
The Harbor

When I was five years old, we went to Tiberias one day... It was a very beautiful city like a paradise... As we were going home on the bus, someone called the driver and told him not to take the Jerusalem road because Sharon had entered the Al Aqsa mosque. Only then, I realized that Tiberias is not ours.

I'm in the Rimal school near the Ministry of Passports, which was first hit by the war. All the Ministry flew into the school! All the girls started crying except me, I was laughing, and till today I don't know why I was laughing.

When I went home and turned the TV on, I saw all the buildings around our school destroyed, with corpses lying next to each other. I saw our school but I didn't see myself on TV and I thanked God. I hope there won't come a day when I'm on TV, because we don't get anything from it except death.

After the war, I started knowing what people are thinking even before they speak. And feeling from the look in their eyes what they want. I also started knowing things that I or someone of my age should not know. I became braver and started knowing how to speak properly, and my trust in people grew. Turns out the war had benefits, would anyone believe that? After the war, I'm stronger and going to the future with more confident steps.

28. Wi'am El Dieri
Born 1997
Es Sabra

What I love most in Gaza is Barcelona Park. I used to go there three times a week. I would spend the whole day on the swings, laughing and playing with my friends. But during the war, the occupation bulldozed it and destroyed it. I went to visit the place and started crying. I remembered where I used to play and where the swings were, and my laughter with my friends.

I want to be a lawyer so I can defend the people that have been victimized... and you won't find more of them than in the empire of Gaza, because I feel that Gaza is 100 countries and a million and a half presidents.

The tanks got to our house at five in the morning. Mum started gathering things from the house, and everything turned upside down in a few seconds. Everyone started yelling and carrying what they could and we went out running in the streets, not knowing where to go.

My grandmother said: "You can only go to the schools." And Oh schools, Oh schools, our school is more beautiful than all schools! 100 of us used to sleep in one class. From the first night, I got into a fight with another girl about a quarter of a meter, and who was going to sleep in it. And I don't know how we slept, on top of each other... like a mountain of old, discarded, forgotten clothes.

Three days later we went back to the house and the neighborhood, but a lot of things had changed. The neighborhood wasn't the same and the people weren't the same either. The biggest change in me is that I became a gossip. Honestly, I can't hold my tongue. Our theatre trainer told me that this is normal in Gaza, all Gaza gossips about each other, but the difference between me and the people in Gaza is that they don't admit that they are gossiping! While I admit, in my full mental capacities, that I am a gossip...

Sometimes, I find no-one to gossip about so I gossip about myself...

29. Yasmeen Ja'rour
Born 1996
Al Daraj

Our future in Gaza is obscure and unknown... Like a calm volcano that can erupt at any second... As if we're on a boat without a captain in the midst of a raging sea... we go right and left... and no-one knows where to lean.

I hear that in other countries, childhood is sacred, and children live their lives without problems and fear... but Gaza's children are forgotten and outside the picture... They're the ones who feel the injustice the most, because society treats them like they're not kids. When it wants, it makes them adults and when it wants, it returns them to being children, and most people deal with them like they're only bodies, not minds. When I see a child peddling in the street or working in a shop, I imagine how the children of the world are playing, resting and feeling safe. Honestly, my heart breaks for them and sometimes I cry.

Gaza has no tenderness and no childhood, a boy is born a man here and a girl is born a bride.

Dad before the war was a lot more tender with me, I wish he would take me in his arms like before... But God help him, he's probably worried too. Because in the war, we lost 5 donums of land in a second. The field that's 60 years old was hit by a rocket from the Israeli army which burned all the oranges in it. My father, my brother and myself, could have also died by that rocket, because we were close to the window. If Dad hadn't thrown me on the ground all the shrapnel would have hit me.

After the war I visited Rafah Crossing, and saw the flags of Palestine and Egypt next to each other, yet separated by a wire. I felt the difference between the two flags and that this wire is the border of this biiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiig prison that we live in. I felt how stupid and unjust is the world, and I felt like breaking all borders and ending all differences between races and religions, so that everyone in the world would be brothers. My dream became to live in a safe country even in a small village, in a distant island at the end of the world.

30. Yasmeen Abu Amer
Born 1996
Al Shuja'iyyeh

I want to be a specialist in the science of metaphysics (what is behind nature). You know why? Because I think that Gaza itself is behind nature, and I got so much from my presence here in Gaza that I'd like to transfer my skill to others.

The Shuja'iyyeh camp is always the center of events. Each time the occupation wants to invade Gaza, they pass by our house. When the war began, people left their houses thinking that the Shuja'iyyeh would be hit. It's normal in this case to leave our house.

Everyone was calling my dad to convince him to leave the house – my brothers from Algeria, my uncles from the States, my uncles from Ankara, the whole world was begging my dad and he wouldn't budge, refusing to leave the Shuja'iyyeh. 3 days with my mum having packed the house stuff, and we're in suspended travel mode... We want to go to my sister's house because it's safer there. After we were exhausted from talking, he agreed and said: "You go and I'll follow."

How can we go and leave him? My mum was smart, she left the bread at home, and you know how dear bread was in the war. As soon as we got to my sister's house, she called him and said: "Salman, we forgot the bread, bring it for us." And Salman fell in the trap and brought the bread and we wouldn't let him leave.

The next morning we woke up to a phosphorous bomb that fumed the street. We all started crying... our tears falling because of the phosphorous. The bomb was easier on us than Dad's taunting. He said: "I told you let's stay home, it's better for us – there's no place like home," and on it went. What added fuel to the fire is that the mosque and house next to my sister's house were destroyed in the bombing, and you can imagine what my dad did to us. He wanted to take us back home immediately. No sooner had he finished his words than we were told that the house next to ours in Shuja'iyyeh was bombed and the front of our house ripped off. Then, for the first time, all of us looked at Dad.

We stayed at my sister's place. It became clear to us that wherever we were in Gaza, in the war we were not safe.

After the war I started to always dress in a very clean and tidy way, so that if I die I would die a nice death. But it would be the biggest problem if I was hit by a rocket because I'd become 100 pieces and I'd like to die in one piece.

Wow, Gaza and Gaza's dreams... Our dream has become to die a good death, not live a good life!

Translated from Arabic (Palestine) by Fida Jiryis

31. Yasmeen Katbeh
Born 1996
Ash Sheikh Radwan

When the war started, my mum, my brothers and sisters and I were in Russia, which made me always worried about Dad. We wanted to leave Russia and return to Gaza among our family to live the events with them. As soon as the war ended and the crossings opened, we returned to Gaza, and from then till today we've been hearing stories of the war.

I couldn't sleep in Russia because of my worry about Dad. Before the war, when the mobile used to ring and it would be from Gaza, we'd be happy and race to answer it. But in the war, every time the mobile rang from Gaza, any number whether we knew it or not, we'd say: "Dear God..." and start looking at each other to see who will answer.

After the war, a lot of things changed in me. I started seeing things differently. I began to like the city, life became more beautiful and so did I. My friends changed, and I made older and more mature ones. I became very outspoken and brave even in front of Dad, and I could face anyone. Mum and I became friends, a lot of times we stay up at night and talk about everything.

In the future if I grow up, and in Gaza it's an achievement to grow up, because death is standing at your doorstep, I want to be a children's caretaker and defend their rights; because I feel that the children of Palestine are born as old people, a kid can be 6 years old and yet supporting a family.