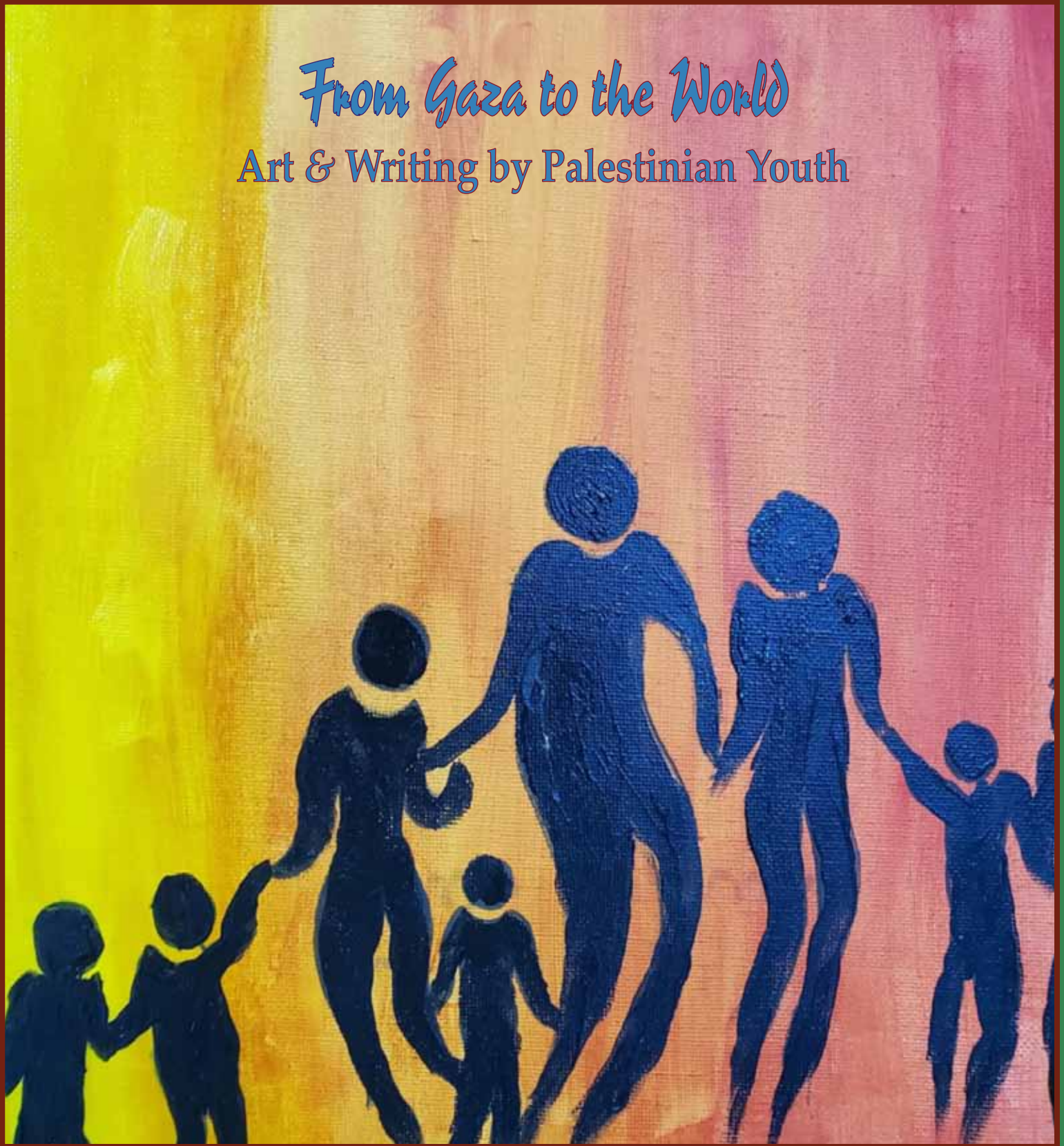


Skipping Stones

A Multicultural Literary Magazine

January 2025

From Gaza to the World
Art & Writing by Palestinian Youth



“Fleeing Burning Tents” Art by Sama Algharabli, age 13, from Gaza, Palestine

The Six Miles Art Project

Left: **“Man Sewing Fishing Net”** (2023)

By Ahmed Bakr, age 13 & Alaa Al-Ladah, age 17.

Both Ahmed Bakr and Alaa Al-Ladah are from Gaza City, now displaced to southern Gaza. Ahmed created these paintings in acrylic on canvas, with help from Alaa, before the current war. Ahmed, whose family are fishermen, was channeling his father and uncles in the paintings, which are part of a series called “The Six Miles Project.” The artists write, “The idea of this project is to portray the lives of the fishermen and the violations and attacks they face from the occupier, who... imposes strict regulations, depriving them of their right to peacefully practice their profession. The fishermen cannot go more than 6 miles out to sea, and if they come close, they may be killed, arrested or have their boat confiscated, turning their livelihood into a dangerous profession.”

Below: **“Six Miles”** (2023)

By Ahmed Bakr, age 13 & Alaa Al-Ladah, age 17.



About *Skipping Stones*:

Skipping Stones is a nonprofit children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity, and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. We explore stewardship of the ecological and social webs that nurture us. We offer a forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. *Skipping Stones* expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We invite you to send us your creative art and thought-provoking writing.

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Introducing the Issue

When we envisioned *Skipping Stones Magazine* 38 years ago, at an international peace conference in India, we wanted to provide an international forum for youth everywhere to share their experiences, their realities, and their visions and dreams! We believed having such an outlet to express their ideas and creativity would help bring a better understanding and harmony between people all over the world.

Please allow us to present to you this special Gaza feature that offers artistic and thoughtful creations rooted in the painful experiences of Gazan youth in recent years. We feel a sense of responsibility and an obligation to bring you these depictions of the reality of the war being waged in the Middle East.

War is not just bombs and soldiers but a thief to the well-being and the grace of our humanity. We do not focus on the politics but on the effects and consequences, especially for youth and children. As the late historian Howard Zinn said, "all wars are wars against children."

Our guest editors, Dvorah Kost and Lauren Marshall wish to express the honor that they feel in having this opportunity to work directly with young Gazans and of being in a position to bring their work to readers of all ages and all places via *Skipping Stones*, in support of a more peaceful world. And we express our sincere gratitude to all the contributors for the trust they have placed in this forum.

We would equally welcome creative expressions from Israeli children and youth for upcoming issues! Art, poetry and prose transcend (they always do) the politics and give a more deeply humane view into the profound need for peace.

May 2025 usher in peace and harmony to everyone!

—/Merna*, Lauren, D'vorah, and Arun

*Merna Ann Hecht, our project liaison for this issue, is a poet and teaching artist for Refugee and Immigrant Youth in South King County. She is a long-time *Skipping Stones* collaborator and contributor.

Please see the bios for D'vorah and Lauren on pages 5 & 6.

Skipping Stones is deeply indebted to D'vorah, Lauren, and Merna for their countless hours of pains-taking selfless volunteer work to bring this project to a completion. Three kudos to this trio of amazing educators!

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Peace in Palestine and Israel Issue

We also invite you to read our earlier online feature, published a year ago, “**Searching for Peace in Palestine and Israel**” on our website.

<https://www.skippingstones.org/wp/2023/12/23/peace-in-palestine/>

PS: Our digital content is always free to read and download for your reading pleasure!



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From D'vorah Kost, Guest Art Editor

I met Wejdan Diab, founder and director of Meera Kindergarten, in 2015, while serving on a medical delegation to Gaza. Wejdan, a Palestinian Muslim, mother of three grown children, and I, a Jewish American grandmother, bonded over our love of children and a shared passion for creativity. We have kept in close touch throughout the eight years of sporadic violence between Hamas and Israel. During that time, her sons became dentists and her daughter got married.

When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th, 2023, Wejdan's daughter Mira called, asking me to help her escape Gaza. She was seven months pregnant and feared that the stress would cause her to have a miscarriage. It took three months to arrange for her and her husband's departure to Egypt, not soon enough to save their baby. He was a full-term stillborn. In January 2024, I flew to Cairo, Egypt, to be with Mira, her husband and father, while continuing to help her mother and brothers evacuate Gaza.

Meanwhile Wejdan and her sons were still trapped in Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza, having been twice displaced from the north. There Wejdan encountered many children living in tents, who like her, had been forced to flee from their homes early in the war. Some had been pulled from the rubble of their bombed home. Some had lost one or both parents. Wejdan saw that they had nothing to play with. She gathered the children from their tents, bringing paints, canvases and easels, knowing that traumatized children need to express themselves, and painting encourages healing.

When Wejdan came to Cairo in late January 2024, I joined her in organizing painting and activity sessions for displaced children and youth from Gaza. Much of the art in this issue came out of our activities in Cairo. The young artists gave me their paintings to take to America so that the world could see them and know of their suffering and hopefully help them.

In September Wejdan was finally able to create her own children's center in Cairo, once again fulfilling her life's purpose of healing and enriching the lives of the Gazan children, and their parents. Painting continues as the most beloved activity at Meera Center.

Most, if not all, of the young artists...

...have lived through three or four wars, and have,

essentially, never felt safe;

...have never traveled outside of the Gaza Strip, 25 miles long, until this past year when they were driven to flee the worst war;

...have ancestors who were permanently displaced in 1948, from their homeland of Palestine, never allowed to return;

...have lost close family members to war;

...have seen too many horrific war injuries;

...have lost their homes and possessions to war;

...have no idea of where they will be living next month or a year or 3 years from now;

...are representative of millions of children AND adults;

...are overjoyed to know that their art is being seen by readers of *Skipping Stones Magazine*, and beyond;

...long for the world that they knew before October 7th, though it was far from easy. They loved their homes and land and lives and now they fear they will never be able to return.

Their art includes images of keys, eyes with tears, colors of red, white, green, and black, and hearts, symbolizing their longing for home, grief, pride in being Palestinian, and love of life.

—D'vorah Kost is a grandmother, retired social worker and peace activist, Yoga teacher, humanitarian, clown, mime, and dancer, living in Seattle, Washington. She has done relief work in Gaza before the war and has been three times to Cairo since January 2024, working to bring Palestinian families out of Gaza and help them resettle in Egypt.



Photo: D'vorah(R) and Wejdan(L) in Cairo, Egypt.

I visited Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and Jordan on a citizen diplomacy mission in 1991, during the Palestinian uprising known as the First Intifada. In Gaza, we photographed a family of 24 living in two tents atop a home destroyed for “security reasons.” I spent the night in a Palestinian home in Jabalia refugee camp, where each of four sons had been imprisoned by the Israeli army for their activism and the daughter, a nurse, had been shot in the foot. Our hosts urged us to share their stories. They were optimistic that if the world only knew of their suffering, peace and liberation would soon follow.

Thirty plus years later, the Palestinians tell their own stories to a receptive international audience, and yet the magnitude of death and destruction has only increased, exponentially. I wonder about the modest cement home, where the family washed dishes in an open-air courtyard and grew mint and sage. Is it still standing? I recall the bright-eyed children for whom I folded paper hats to bridge our language barrier? Have they survived the attacks on Jabalia? Now they would be grown, possibly with children of their own, and yet, a full generation later, their longing for freedom remains unfulfilled.

In recent years, I served on the board of the non-profit Palestine Charity Team (PCT), providing humanitarian aid to families in Rafah, Gaza. We aimed to help children not just survive but thrive. Among other projects, we sponsored Sing to Live in Peace, a children’s music program, and the Gaza Heartbeat, a creative writing workshop for older youth.

The stories in Part I of this collection come out of the Gaza Heartbeat. They were written in summer, 2023, before the current war. And yet,

the devastation they depict—of IDF military strikes, house demolitions, injury, and death—could be today’s news. In Gaza, house demolitions are not new. They are described in these stories, set in 2014, and I witnessed the rubble with my own eyes in 1991. It must take great fortitude to combat the sense of futility that whatever gets built will be destroyed.

The remaining literary works were written after Oct. 7, 2023, mostly by refugees whom D’vorah and I helped evacuate to Egypt. *Part II*, “Gaza Black Days,” describes the ongoing trauma of war, while *Part III*, “Dear God, Where Do We Go?” turns to focusing on the complexities and hardships of survival. Some of the surviving youth (not yet adults or barely adults) have journeyed alone to Egypt, leaving behind parents and younger siblings who remain in harm’s way. Their parents sanctioned their journey, assuring them that they were their family’s best hope for survival, and that it was important they bear witness and tell the truth about this war.

It may be naïve to think that truth will lead to action. In the three decades since I traveled to Gaza, the world has learned the extent of Palestinian suffering. And yet, USA-made bombs still land on schools, hospitals, homes, and U.N. shelters. Storytelling alone will not stop the slaughter. Nevertheless, with each tale told, a bridge is built between writer and reader, and it is no longer possible to dehumanize the other side.



Lauren (L) with D’vorah(R) at Seattle Folklife Festival, May 2024.

—Lauren Marshall is a Seattle playwright, director and teaching artist. Her play *Abraham’s Land* has been produced by Israeli and Palestinian teens at Seeds of Peace Camp in Maine and also professionally. A video of the play with Arabic captions was shown by PCT in six civic centers in Gaza in 2022. During the war, she has been working to evacuate young artists from Gaza and help them continue their educations abroad.

Dreamcatcher, by Amal Alkharaz, age 16 (2023)



Amal Alkharaz is from Rafah, Gaza. Amal's older brother Naser writes: "Amal wants to be an artist, but as we know that dream was born in Gaza so it's hard to believe that it will see the light." She is the third child in a family of six. After Israel invaded Rafah in May 2024, Amal and her family were forced to evacuate their home, which has been destroyed. They are now sharing a tent with their uncle's family.

Part I: The Gaza Heartbeat

The stories in part I of this collection were created before the devastating war between Hamas and Israel, which began on October 7, 2023. The stories were written for the Gaza Heartbeat, a creative writing program for youth in Rafah, Gaza, sponsored by Palestine Charity Team. They offer a glimpse of the rhythms (or “heartbeat”) of ordinary life. Although created in a period of relative calm, the stories Nour and Nine PM, recalling the war of 2014, reveal a state of perpetual conflict, where destruction could come from the air at any time. Where normalcy appears in these stories, as in The Doll, it is as fleeting as a stop at a traffic light.

Nour by Nada Saady Alaloul, age 15, Rafah, Gaza (August, 2023)

On a pitch-dark night, with a dim light coming from a candle and cheap battery packs in a far spot in the refugee camps in Gaza, the fateful decision was made to change someone’s lifestyle.

My friend Nour sat in her bedroom, lonely. Nour was twelve years old, about to enter the preparatory stage, and she felt excited about that. She told herself: “I am a persistent girl. I won’t let obstacles stand in my way—my ambitions and dreams—and, God willing, I’m gonna work hard to get higher grades in my first year of prep school.”

She wanted to continue but a painful and deep voice interrupted her and said: “Our reality is full of trauma and wars, so I advise you, my dear, to stop raising your hopes, and just look truth in the eye. If you don’t, you’re gonna destroy yourself...”

That was her heart’s voice, but Nour suppressed the voice of her heart, and chose to listen to her mind, preferring to believe that she would create the perfect place for her thoughts away from imperfections and impurities.

She went to sleep and since that night, Nour has been trying and working for her goals. I saw her activity and her impressive energy and I used to admire her.

But then the war broke out in 2014 and I received a phone call. The young man told me without any introduction: “Nour is in the hospital...”

At that moment, I couldn’t hear anything. I was shocked. Didn’t they move from their dangerous house, which is close to the tunnels, to protect themselves in a safer place? What happened?!

but the war prevented me from meeting the ones I love and checking on those who were injured or missing. I felt my blood boiling, as I was unable to help. The bitter and cruel war ended nearly two weeks after receiving the news.

And finally, I was able to go to her house, which I barely recognized, after all the damage caused by the war. She welcomed me with a tired face. Oh, how pained I felt to see my friend in this condition, but how and what happened to her?!

This was the first question I asked, as absurd as it was, for I knew that it was the war, but I did not have enough vocabulary and words to tell her what I thought and felt.

Nour answered me in a broken and sad voice.

“Please, listen to my story to the end. We rented a house near Al-Najma area after I finished elementary school. As you know, my family is large, and we couldn’t feel comfortable at our old house anymore. And then the biggest catastrophe came... I was sitting outside the house, when the missile suddenly hit a place near our home. I witnessed shrapnel penetrating the body of my neighbor, who was on her way to buy some things

for her little daughter. Seeing the blood splattering like water rushing from a hose, that horrible and painful sight was like a shock to my mind, to the point where I don’t remember what happened after that.”

Nour began to cry, and I also couldn’t hold back my tears.



I desperately wanted to go to her, Free Palestine by Rimas Abu Abed, age 14, from Gaza.

However, she added:

“I was in a fog for those first few days. I used to go to the place of the horrible accident, and the death of that woman began to haunt me in my dreams. One day, I went with one of my relatives back to that place, telling her that I will never forget what happened no matter how time passes, But suddenly a piece of shrapnel penetrated me to make me fall and I howled in pain, pleading and crying for help. My relative left me with my pain and my screams and she didn’t care. After a short while, a girl passing by in the street came to help me and asked a young man to provide me first aid; otherwise I would have lost my toe on my left foot.

Unfortunately, we didn’t find any car to take me to the hospital, so my family came, my brother carried me on his back and we walked with our mother on foot, to find ourselves in front of Al-Najjar Hospital. It was full of injured and those affected by the war, so we sat on the stairs because there was no place for us, until one of the doctors came and told us that I had to have stitches and that there was no more anesthesia, so they stitched me without anesthesia. The pain was penetrating every inch of my body. The doctor couldn’t control me and he complained very much and asked my brother to sit on my feet to stop my movement, and my mother took off the pillowcase and put it in my mouth so that I wouldn’t raise my voice again in the hospital. And as you know, the war ended after two weeks, and we returned to the house that we barely knew from the destruction.”

Nour stopped speaking, it seemed she was waiting for me to reply, but my voice betrayed me, my tongue froze, and I couldn’t express my thoughts, my mind was filled with obsessions and terrifying ideas. How could an innocent child go through all these heinous incidents, and how would she continue her life in peace after that?!

Nour, who promised herself to change for the better and to persevere when she was in the most desperate state, had to wipe her slate clean and start again, but there is nothing to erase the dark memories. Yes, the war has ended. A year, two years, ten years may pass, but the painful scars will not disappear.

NOUR means “The light.”

But the war extinguished all hope and light in Nour’s life, and darkness overshadowed her heart.

But how absurd it is, I am talking about someone’s wound, about her loss of hope and life, and how I support her with all my strength to regain her light again, but I’m the wounded person who lost her soul first, and I can’t get out of the dark shell of my thoughts.

I met up with Nour two days ago. Nour was filled with light again, and she became the person who she aspires to be. For me, I still hold Nour’s pain, fear, and my own wound.

This is what the war leaves behind in everyone’s heart in Gaza.

Nour and I are in pain... But it’s really the pain of every child here in Gaza.

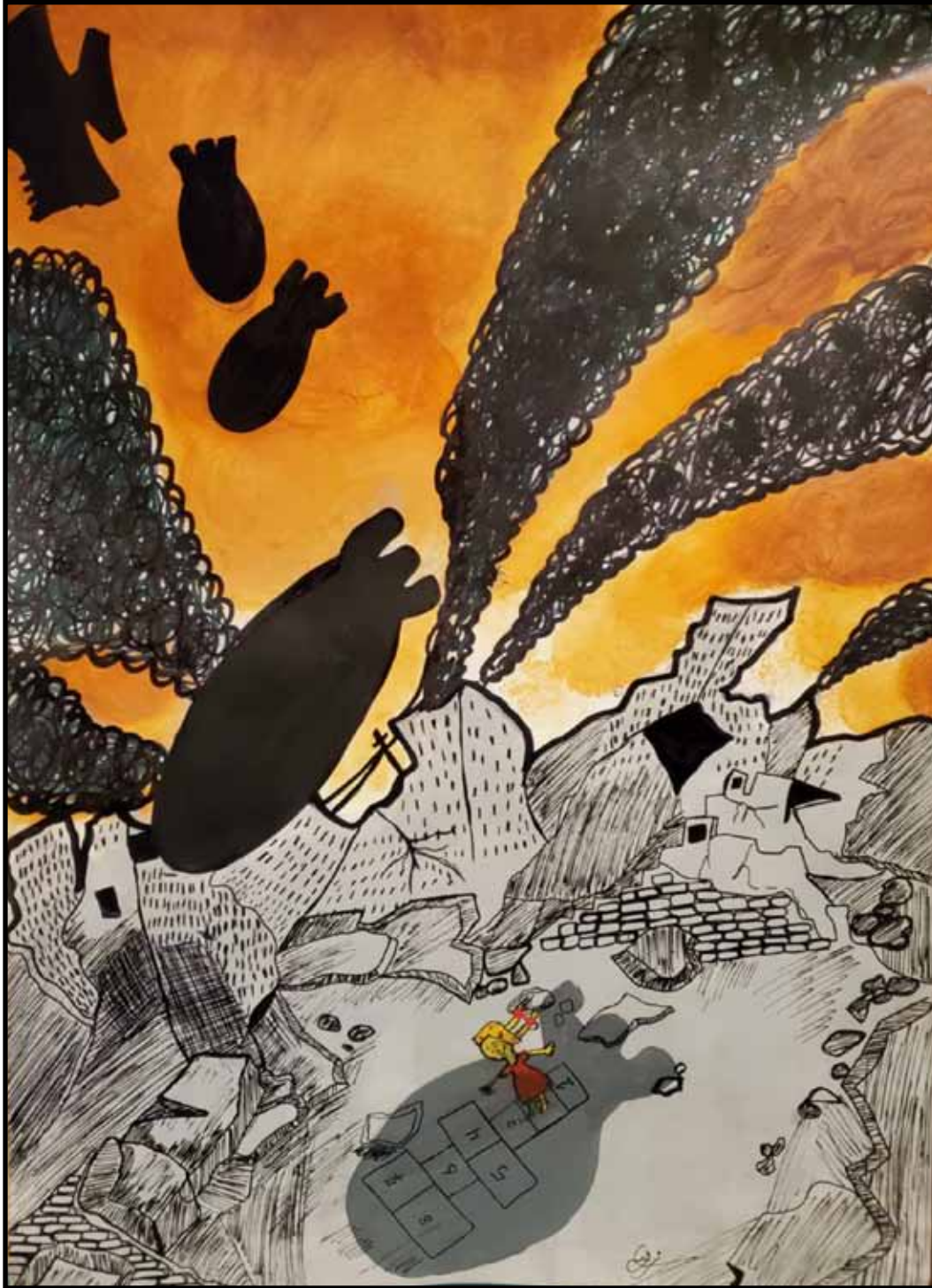
About the Author



Nada, now 17, is a remarkable girl from Gaza, now living with relatives in Cairo, Egypt. She has a positive outlook despite all that has happened to her! Nada was evacuated from Gaza to Egypt in early May, 2024,

just days before Israel invaded Rafah and closed the border. Unfortunately, her parents and three younger siblings, who were on the evacuation list, remain stranded in Gaza, displaced from their home, which has since been destroyed. Nada, like all of Gaza’s children, missed an entire year of school as the result of the war. During this time, she read books, wrote stories and poems, practiced English, taught herself Spanish, took a business course in Cairo, and volunteered for Palestine Charity Team. Now she is completing her 11th and 12th grade years together in one year online, while applying to colleges abroad. Also see two poems by Nada on pages 17 & 19.

Hopscotch by Zaina Diab, age 22



Zaina Adnan Abdullah Diab, from Gaza City, graduated from the Faculty of Medical Optics at the Islamic University, ranked third in the class. She writes: "I love my specialization and studies very much, and I love patients and children. I volunteered at the government eye hospital when I was in my second year because I wanted to be closer to patients. Before the war, I was happy helping children see the world more clearly, I thought it was a beautiful world. Now,

without any glasses, they see it as a brutal world.

My dreams have completely changed. Every one of us, young and old, is looking for a source of livelihood. I am now settled in Egypt, studying my last semester and training at an eye center, and I am trying with all my might to love life and strive for us to live. My family is now the most precious thing I have. My only wish is for the war to end and for me to return to my homeland." Please see page 23 for more artwork.



From Gaza to the World

"My name is Emy, I was born during the 2014 war. My mother used to tell me that we were displaced when I was three months old, and I lived the worst months of my life with the bombing of homes and the children of Gaza now dying of hunger and being displaced from place to place. My future and their future were ruined. I left our home, my toys, my friends, my clothes and my school. We were forcibly displaced, and now we are evacuated to Egypt..."

"I would tell the children of the world that I am one of the survivors of the ugly war if someone listens to me and feels that there is a simple right to live in safety. I believe that Gaza is a country of peace and we love life."

Emy Abu Asaker, age 10 (R) with sister Lareen (L). They now live in Cairo.



9 P.M. by Fairuz Ramzy Birika, from Gaza (2023)

Amidst the darkness of the night and the obscurity of the city, a plastic second hand strikes the hour, igniting the melodies of time and playing a music I despise. It wasn't just nine o'clock; I was watching the minutes of the sunset hours until the clock struck nine with its soft-sounding whisper invoking deeply buried memories. But which ninth hour am I speaking about?

On ordinary nights in the city of noise, where quietness had become a rare commodity and a whirlwind of thoughts spun in my mind, I pondered how to halt the clock's hands. When I was a little girl, the ticking of the clock signaled the beginning of a new adventure with my mom, who compelled me and my siblings to go to bed precisely at 9:00 PM, even if we didn't want to sleep. We did it anyway, succumbing to the pressure. To this day, in that time of night on the pitch-black nights, when we cross the threshold of nine o'clock, the gateway to hate and rebellion opens in our hearts. Then I find myself in a strange world filled with mystery. How can the clock's hands achieve this? How can I be so affected by a plastic scorpion that I could so easily toss aside?

The same scene, over, and over again. It just keeps happening, accompanied by waves of panic that led me running to my mom, to talk about events in the real world: Wars everywhere, flames in the windows, and the wailing of barefoot women in the streets piercing our hearts. One night, the same scene I imagined at the stroke of nine in my mind became our reality.

Since the time of the attack, I have found myself in the heart of a fierce battle. But I can say that I have bravely overcome my fears and hatred for the hour "Nine." I felt like a fighter on the battlefield. At the time of the attack, I wasn't yet ten years old, according to my confused memory.

Nine wasn't just a time; it held a mysterious power to shape moments and memories. Minutes of exploring the mysterious land left many questions: How could that cursed hour reflect our destiny? How could the wall clock cause such internal tumult?

Then I realized that the ninth hour wasn't merely a time that needed to pass. It might have been a gateway to many things; without it, I wouldn't be doing what I do.

—Fairuz is from Rafah, Gaza. She wrote this story for the Gaza Heartbeat Project.



"Free Palestine"

By Ahmed Abu Abed, age 13, from Al-Maghazi refugee camp in Gaza, now lives in Cairo.

Ahmed is the second of four children in a Gazan Bedouin family who escaped to Cairo after 6 months in the war. They had lived on a farm with an olive orchard in Al-Maghazi camp, which has been bombed too many times, and many friends and family members have been killed. Ahmed and his family worry daily about the grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins they have left behind. Ahmed is very good at math and science and skillfully kicking a ball around the living room. "I will be a soccer player," he grins, "and an engineer. I like to take things apart to see how they work, and then put them back together. I'm good at making something from what people throw away. I've made more than 100 kites for family



and friends to fly in the countryside. Kites of all sizes, many from used plastic bags. What I miss now is my bicycle. I loved my bicycle but the Israeli tanks moved in and broke it, along with my father's car. I was so sad, because I was starting to learn bicycle tricks."

Small details have always attracted me. While I was on my way to the university, the car stopped at a traffic light. I took my phone out of the bag and started going through my photos. I came across a picture of me when I was ten years old and holding my doll. My father and my mother were beside me in that picture.

I started reminiscing about my childhood. My father would always bring me toys and sweets when he came home. When I felt afraid, I would sneak into his room at night and sleep between him and my mother. One day, he brought me a beautiful doll and told me this doll would be with me so that I would not feel afraid when he was not there. That doll never left my side. One day, we went to the City of Games, but when it was time to leave, my doll was lost and I couldn't find it. I cried a lot and we kept searching for it. Yet, we couldn't find it. I was very sad when we returned home. I did not eat for three days and wouldn't leave my room. On the fourth day, my father surprised me with another doll that looked like my doll. I quickly walked over to my mother with a big smile on my face and I said, "Look, my father found my doll." She carried me and kissed me on the cheek, telling me, "You are a good girl." Then my father said let's take a photo to always remember this special day.

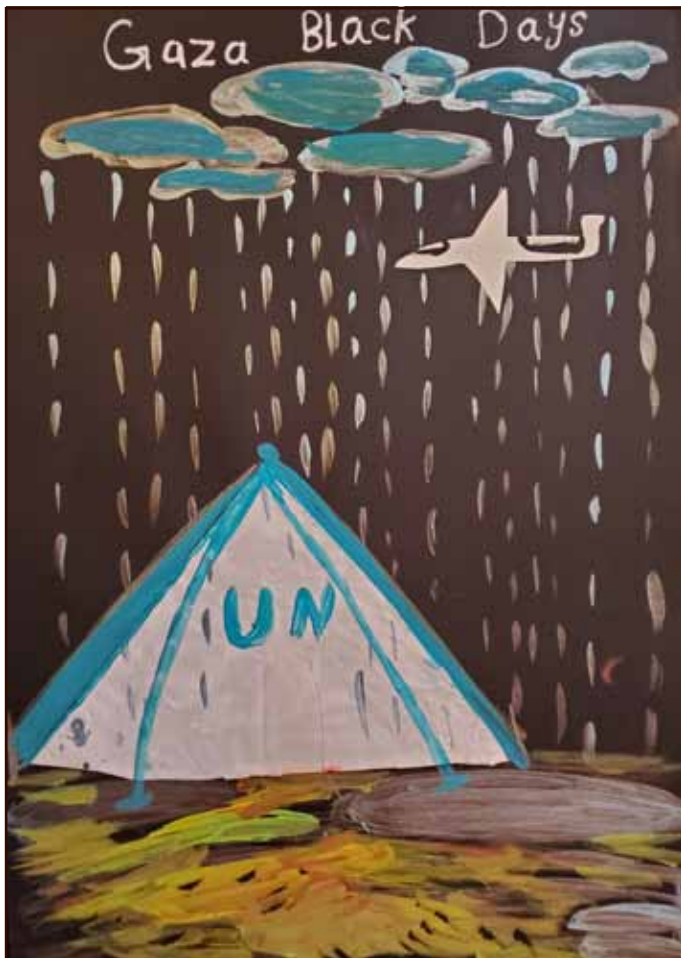
After that, the car moved, and I turned off my phone, and watched the people passing by with smiles on their faces.

Bayan, from Gaza, writes, "I am 22 years old. I was born into a family that loves education and supports it. I am studying English Literature, Education Department, at Al-Quds Open University. I have taken a number of courses to develop my English language skills, including a translation course and a course on how to write reports in English."



Part II: Gaza Black Days

These works were created in response to the war. The visual works were made under the guidance of Wejdan Diab, by displaced children and young adults, who were forced to evacuate their homes in north and central Gaza. Areen's drawing of her home in flames was created in Gaza, but most of the remaining works were created in Egypt, after the refugees were no longer in physical danger and could start to process their emotions through art and poetry. The colors of smoke and fire-grey, black and red-figure prominently in the artwork, and life resembles death in the writing. But the very act of writing or painting exemplifies the human spirit that no bombs can destroy.



Art by Wejdan Diab, from Gaza, now in Cairo, Egypt.

Wejdan called the series “Gaza Black Days,” as that is the color of the sky and smoke and destruction, in every sense. Wejdan has started the Meera Center for Skills Development in Cairo for Palestinian children displaced by the war. Please see page 5 for a photo of Wejdan.

A Page Torn Out of a Notebook

Besides a family home, nothing can bring up feelings of the past like a school building. In Gaza, there are no schools left. If you have not been to Gaza, and you see the current devastation, it seems like rows and rows of crushed buildings. What if your heart was connected to one of those buildings and your heart still held the experience, but the building is no longer standing? Does it change the experience? Or does it change you?

The Arab college was where I received my BA in Business. I met people there who thought and felt like me. I had experiences that shaped me as a man. I had people to look up to and people to help. It was the place I stepped off from when I went to Egypt to work on my MBA, and now I am in Egypt again, working on my PhD.

My life today feels like it is a page torn out of a notebook. When I try to go back in time, I try to turn the page, but the book has been destroyed. I am left standing in a crater of loss, holding onto one page, one single page.

The one page is the few weeks I taught there when I returned to Gaza, before the bombings started. I was happy teaching there, my colleagues were my former teachers. Even the book I was teaching from was the same. I was getting to know my students and the atmosphere was charged with possibilities, with opportunities.

When I see the photos of the bombed-out school, it is not the building that is lost, it is my memory that now includes the loss of those memories. With that loss of memory comes anger, deep anger at all that has been ruined by a force out of control. There is nothing to return to, nothing to embrace. My experience has been fragmented in time and taken me out of my time.

—Allaeldin Abu Asaker, age 30, from Rafah, Gaza.



Allaeldin (“Alaa”) has an MBA from Mansoura University and is a Marketing Specialist, focusing on online marketing and business development tools. He is the founding director of Palestine Charity Team, a nonprofit providing humanitarian services in southern Gaza. He taught at the Arab College of Applied Science before it was bombed.

Reema's Story by Sama Algharabli, age 13

We were sitting in our home, happy with our lives, with our family around us. Suddenly, there was intense bombing. My late father, may he rest in peace, feared for us and took us down to the basement of our home. We played with our cousins, entertaining ourselves, unaware of what awaited us. They brought us food, and we ate happily. Then the aggression against us intensified, terrifying us immensely. Suddenly...the place went dark around me, and I couldn't find anyone beside me.

I started screaming and shouting, calling out, but no one responded. I called for my siblings; they too started screaming in fear and pain.

At that moment, I understood what had happened and tried to free myself. I managed to get my leg out so they would know I was still alive. I called my cousins to do the same so they could notice us. I heard my phone ringing and by God's grace, Aunt Maryam was able to answer it. The anxious caller was my distant uncle, and in a panic we told him a sentence I will never forget: "Hello...help us; we're trapped under the rubble."

Men came and tried to save as many of my siblings as they could. They managed to pull me out with difficulty, and I saw my brother and cousin with me in the ambulance, covered in dust and blood. We went to the hospital, received treatment, fluids, and care for our wounds. I saw scenes in the hospital that I will never be able to erase from my mind. I kept asking about my mother, father, sister, uncle and his wife, but no one

would answer us. Thankfully, we were able to leave the hospital, but I wasn't in good condition. We were broken, with no idea of what awaited us.

We went to stay with our relatives for three days; they were very generous, may God bless them. Afterward, we went to our grandmother's house, and oh, that meeting was filled with tears, hugs, cries and shock.

—Sama Algharabli, age 13, from Gaza City, now lives in Cairo, Egypt. Also see her art, **"Fleeing Burning Tents"** on the front cover.



Sama paints with keen concentration to really capture the textured thickness of the smoke of bombs and gray sky. The words in her artwork say, "My eyes remember nothing but black and gray." Two uncles and their wives and three cousins died under the rubble of their bombed home in October, 2023. Eight cousins were pulled

from the rubble, injured but alive, and suddenly orphaned. These cousins, along with Sama, her brother, parents and grandmother made it into Cairo where she helps care for her younger cousins. She misses all that was left behind, and mostly an uncle who strongly supported her wish to be a doctor.

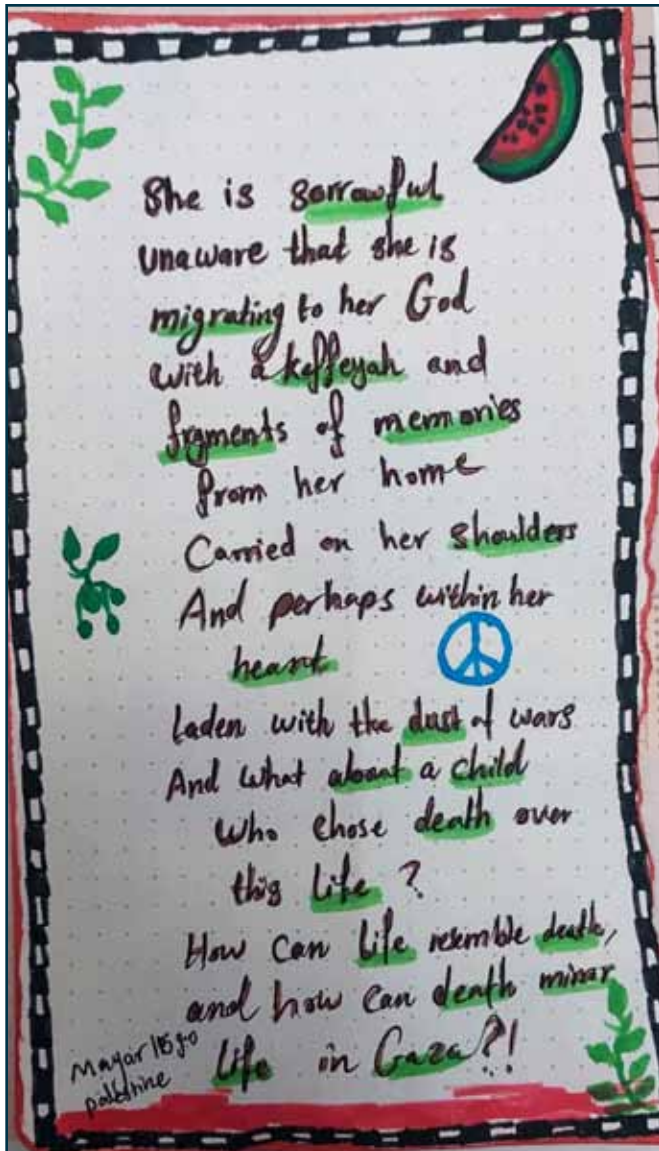


"Black & Gray" by Sama Algharabli, age 13, from Gaza. Photo (R): Wejdan with Suileman, Sama's orphaned cousin.



Exhausted!

By Mayar Alaloul, age 15



Hand-written poem by Mayar Alaloul, age 15, from Rafah, Gaza. She is Nada's sister. Mayar, her other siblings and parents are stranded in Gaza. They hope to join Nada in Cairo, Egypt, if the border reopens. She writes, "I am Mayar Alaloul, the child who lost the innocence of her childhood. Now, at 15 years old, I reflect on a life where, since the day I was born, I have never experienced a single day of peace, despite being the child who dreamed of peace the most. This is my reality, and I find no better way to express myself than through writing. Whenever I pick up my pen, it writes of nothing but wars. I hope to write about peace one day."

Photo (R): Mayar in the midst of destroyed buildings.

We had a Beautiful Home

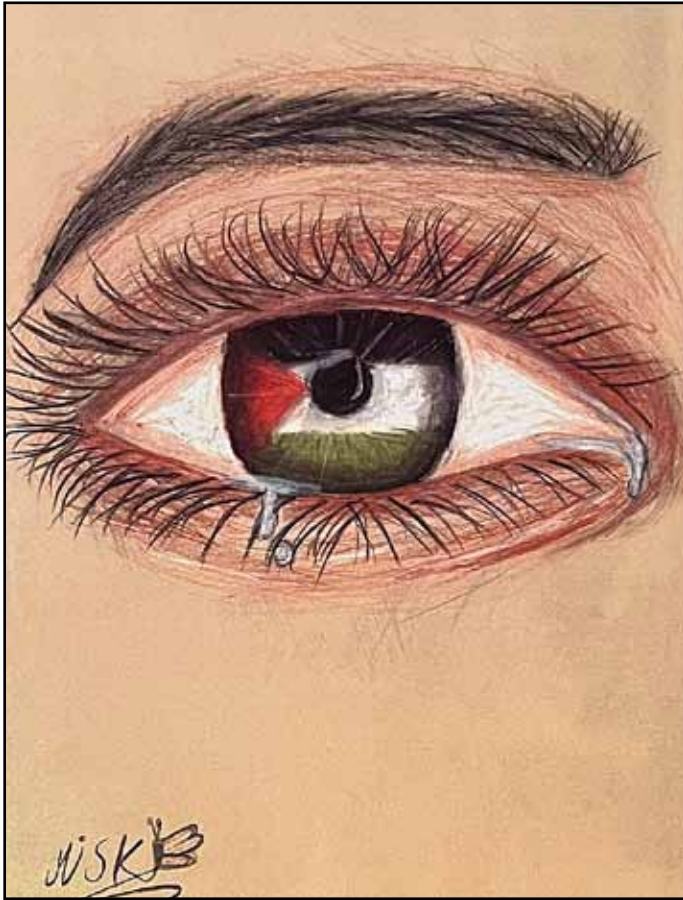
By Areen Abu Oun, age 10



Areen Abu Oun, of Gaza City, made this painting of her home in flames while she was sheltering in Rafah, southern Gaza. The Arabic words translate to: "My family had a beautiful home. In it, we were warm and happy. Israel destroyed our home." See also art on p. 21.



Art by Misk Timraz



“Eye of Gaza”



“Exterior: Rockets”



“Interior: Shattered Windows”



Misk Timraz, age 14, is from Gaza City, now living in Cairo with her family after enduring two months of war. The painting “Interior” is a self-portrait in her bedroom. She holds her ears against the incessant thundering of bombs and buzzing of drones. “Our windows shattered when the neighbor’s house exploded. It was terrifying.” Her family had to run back out from the border the first time they tried to cross in October, as Israel was about to bomb it. They managed to cross in November. She deeply misses everything they had to leave behind, especially their cat. Misk hopes to become a famous artist someday. Making art brings her fulfillment. Seeing people be moved by her art brings her joy.

Waiting, by Nada Saady Alaloul, age 16 (May, 2024)

Lots of people
Lots of bags
Lots of bugs
Lots of everything
You shouldn't see
As a human being
In that iron place
Looks like a prison
Sitting with my lonely self
Nobody to talk to
Nothing to do here
With so many people
Waiting
Maybe...
For nothing.
But it's just the beginning,
And I'm afraid not to reach the end.
It seems there is no end here.
We just start and stop
And stay in the same place,
Waiting and trying to do our best
But we don't know what's next.

We're not sure if our turn will come or not.
They treat us in every way
Except as humans
Now I have mixed feelings
Maybe yes
And maybe not.

Maybe something else
Maybe I'm feeling too far away from my heart
To understand,
Now it's just my empty heart
Empty mind
And waiting...

Taking photos
Holding things
Ready to leave this prison
Saying goodbyes
Feeling the moments of love
When we start knowing
The value of our lovers,
The moments when we start missing them
Before they leave us.



Evacuating Gaza, by Allaeldin Abu Asaker (2024).

*Alaa took this photo of his niece when the bus
dropped her off in Cairo, Egypt.*

Hearing
Laughter here
Crying there
Seeing
Hugging here
Leaving there...

More people come and come
Feeling I'm suffocating
Needing more oxygen
I look at them
But nobody looks at me
I sit here for hours and hours
I write many notes on my phone
I make many fairy tales in my head
I buy snacks
I complain too much
But
My turn still doesn't come
So I try to live the moment
As them.

Maybe.
I give it some love.
But it doesn't work.

Mama goes here & there
Under that tree
Beside the street
Telling me
"Don't worry,
Everything is going to be alright,"
And I'm telling my mind
stop overthinking
Listen to my mom...

I see a story,
A story of a strong woman struggling,
Struggling alone by herself,
Maybe more than I am.
She's just like me,
Waiting
My poem ends here,
But my journey torn from my homeland
Begins.

*—Nada wrote this poem while waiting at the Rafah
Border Crossing for entry to Egypt. See page 9 for her bio.*

Part III: Dear God, Where Can We Go?

These works reflect on the experience of refugees who left Gaza for Egypt. They express a myriad of emotions: hope for the future, uncertainty for what lies ahead, grief for what has been lost, guilt at being a survivor, and a longing to return to their beloved land, and the lives and loved ones they left behind.



Dear God, Where Can We Go?

Art by Sama Juda, age 12, from Gaza, now in Cairo, Egypt. The Arabic words in the painting say, “Yah Rab, wayn nrookh?” which means: “Dear God where can we go?”



“My Family in Paradise” by Reema Algharabli, age 9, from Gaza, now in Cairo. This recent drawing by Reema names her father, mother, and two sisters who did not survive the bombing of their home. She shows them as she imagines them now being together and happy in paradise. Three siblings and four cousins did survive, as described by her older cousin Sama in Reema’s Story on p. 14.



Photo: (from L to R) Aunt Maysa and cousins Suleiman, Sama, Reema, Mostafa and Sarah. Along with 11 others of the Algharabli family who survived, they now live together as one large family. Those who perished live on in the memory of a child’s heart and drawing.

Between Gaza and Me *By Nada Saady Alaloul, age 17 (August, 2024).*

Between all of these
Cold bodies,
Tired faces,
Busy minds
Lost people
There is Nada *como yo*
Between black and white there's me
Between sun and moon, there's a scream
Between hell and heaven, there're my people under the rubble
Between death and life, there's a missile
Between war and peace, there's a border
Between freedom and shackles, there's the whole world
Between tanks & planes, there's my family
Between my family & me, there's an endless cry
Between my happiness & sadness, there's the news of my city
Between the present and the past, there's a genocide.
Between death here, and death there
There's a huge price
I have one heart with
Two separated souls
And I'm a ghost
And I'm completely alone.

I was at home
Now I'm missing my home
Suddenly
I lost my home
I was here and there
But Suddenly

I'm nowhere
My home was bombed
My friend was killed
My sister was scared
And my dad was missed
And all I'm doing here
Is just avoiding to be the
Favorite dish for my sadness
Cuz actually I'm a liar
A big liar
I'm drowning in heavy clouds of sadness
Afraid to confirm
That my happiness is sad
To be with me
My happiness is scared
To be bombed with me
My happiness fooled me

But at least I know
That I couldn't know
That I'm not happy
Without my sadness
I couldn't realize
That I want balance
Between black and white
Between my happiness and sadness
To stop being gray
Without my sadness.

So now
I'm under a sky that
Doesn't target its people
I walk towards the sun but I'll never be burned
Cuz my soul has been burned once
Before when I left Gaza
Alone

What about you, dear human?
Can you bring me the warmth of the sun?
Not the one over my head
Nor the Egyptian sun which
Burns my bones like
The missiles do against
The tents of my friends
I want the warmth of my family
I'm a ghost and
I'm completely alone

I'm blue, drowning in a
Gray ocean of the fog
Gray, the favorite color of the death
in my city
The color that I used to see
Whenever I roam in my ghost city
The color that I used to feel
Whenever the measure between
Death and me is just a path

I have one heart
With two separated souls
I'm a ghost and I'm completely alone
I'm here and there
And suddenly
I'm nowhere
Como Nada como Yo.

Photo: Nada in Cairo, Egypt.





Bakr Khader and Naser Alkharaz Playing Music in Gaza (2023).

Their Music Brings Hope and Joy

Bakr Khader, age 31, is a child social worker, music therapist and composer from Rafah. He and Naser Alkharaz led Palestine Charity Team's Sing to Live in Peace project to create original songs with kids in Rafah in 2022-23. During the war he visited tents and hospitals in Rafah to cheer up injured and orphaned children with music. Bakr and Naser created the following song with displaced children from Gaza living in Cairo. This was part of a song exchange project with children in Seattle's Middle East Peace Camp.

My Soul Cloud (Song lyric in Arabic):

في هواء هذا الكون تراني
جرمٌ صغير لكني أعاني
ماذا لو كانت روحي غيمةً
مع كل ريح في السماء تراني
ماذا لو كان الصوت يخرج من قلبي بلا خوف أرفع يداي وأتلوا دعائي والعالم
يسمع من ورائي

أنا لست صمتاً إنني صوتاً عالي
!إنني السلام إذا دعوت إلهي
حطم قيودي وأجعل منها وردةً
مع كل ريح عطرها شفائي
رب السلام منك السلام اجعل عبادك في وئام نحن الكرام ، نحن العظام ،
ماضون من أجل السلام

My Soul Cloud (lyric translation)

In the air of this universe you see me.
A small body, but I suffer.
What if my soul was a cloud?
With every wind in the sky you see me.
What if the voice came out of my heart without fear?
I raise my hands and say my prayer and the
World hears me.

I am not silence, I am a loud voice.
I am at peace if I call upon my God.
Break my chains and make them a rose.
With every wind its fragrance heals me.
Of Lord of peace, from you peace.
Make your servants in harmony.
We are the honorable, we are the great.
We move forward for peace.



Bakr Khader (R) visited tents and hospitals to cheer up injured and orphaned Gazan children with his music.



Bakr with his baby daughter Ayla, born in Cairo, May 2024.

Mysterious Things *by Naser Alkharaz, age 20*

Dreams from the past dance slow,
In the darkest nights, they start to grow,
Stepping on the road, a little bit torn,
Finding a place where dreams are born.

And the winds whisper softly a melody untold,
In the silence, I feel it, the warmth and the cold.

I'm drifting on a tide that pulls me far away,
Leaving behind echoes that will always stay,
With every line, there's a drop, there's a fall,
In the rhythm of life, I'm learning it all.

Fading light of the day, and the stars begin to show,
In the space between, I see the unknown,
Touches in the sand, washed by the sea,
Mysterious things, waiting for me.

There's a fire that burns, deep inside my soul,
A whisper of the past, and a voice that calls,
I carry it with me, through the dark and the bright,
A piece of the night, a spark of the light.

I'm drifting on a tide that pulls me far away,
Leaving behind echoes that will always stay,
With every line, there's a drop, there's a fall,
In the rhythm of life, I'm learning it all.

In the quiet moments, when the world feels still,
I'll hold the echoes, I know I will.
Through the highs and the lows,
The near and the far,
Mysterious things, written on stars.

—Naser, from Rafah, Gaza, wrote these lines as he prepared to leave Cairo to study music in Seattle. Naser is the older brother of Amal, whose art is shown in this issue. He coached young writers for the Gaza Heartbeat project, which resulted in several of the stories being published here. He was majoring in English at Al Aqsa University in Khan Yunis, but his university closed due to heavy damage soon after the war broke out on. Naser evacuated to Egypt during the war and is now studying music at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. He is an aspiring rapper and songwriter. Photo(right): Naser arrives in Seattle and is received by Lauren at the airport.



“Butterfly”

By Areen Abu Oun,
age 10, from Gaza.

Areen is the youngest of four children. They arrived in Cairo after 5 months of displacement within Gaza. She adores life, her family, dancing and drawing, and dreams of being an artist (see p.15). The war has been brutal, and her hopes were broken beneath

the wreckage of all she owned. Still, she finds that drawing brings her some relief from the pain of loss and memories of places she will never see again. “In Cairo, I drew the butterfly, because here, at least I feel safe, and can maybe hope again.”



We Will Be Patient *by Rimas Abu Abed, age 14.*

O Land of my ancestors
My pride and my splendor
And a thorn in the throats of the enemies.

O rare pearl

Two thieves compete for your prize
O conflict whose struggle does not end
Until the Most Merciful permits.

Despite the wars, despite the wars
We are not defeated.

O Palestine, mother of steadfastness
Despite the genocide, despite the genocide
Greet Gaza and tell of it.

You have lost your mosques, your churches and your monuments,
Your streets and houses and schools.
Your sons are bleeding,
Your people are orphaned, displaced, abandoned and slaughtered,
But be patient, for patience is only an hour, and is the hour far away?
You die from bombing and we die from oppression

But we will be patient, for patience is the path of relief.

We will be patient, we will be patient, we will be patient

To see that life has returned to you and that the smile has returned to the lips of your children.

We will be patient to see Al-Aqsa Mosque free
And its minarets cracking with the remembrance of God.

We will be patient to see the bells ringing in the Church of the Resurrection on Sunday mornings.

We will be patient and our prayers filled with longing to see our homes again.

We will be patient until you are secure and we may enjoy your flag waving over your country
and enjoy your sunset in the ports of Jaffa and Haifa
And taste your oranges.

We will be patient to see you, Jericho, the oldest city in the world,
and smell the world's saltiest sea and healing clay,
and wander the alleys of Jerusalem.

We will eat from the steadfastness of Jenin and wash Nablus with its soap
And see the sun of your freedom that never sets.

O Gaza, most beautiful of countries
You remain immortalized in the heart.

I will never forget you.

You are near, O Land of my ancestors, and so far away.

But we will be patient.



Art by Rimas Abu Abed, age 14.

Photo (below): Rimas, with art supplies she received from Seattle, Washington friends.



—Rimas Abu Abed, age 14, is the older sister of Ahmed from Al-Maghazi Camp, now living in Cairo. “We are Bedouin people from Be’ersheva, but my grandparents had to flee to Gaza in 1948, when the Israeli Defense Forces occupied Be’ersheva. My grandfather settled on an olive orchard. We all harvested the olives and made olive oil. We had other fruit trees and vegetables and were happy. The farm was completely destroyed in this war. We are subjugated to annihilation, through death, injury, displacement. Memories of war stick in our imagination and affects us even to this moment, especially when we hear the news of on-going attacks.” Rimas wants to educate people with her drawings, and also show the depth of her pain. She does find relief when she draws, studies, and chants the Qur’an. She hopes to be a doctor. Rimas says, “I need to help the people of my country.”



“Woman with a Key to her Home”

Art by Zaina Adnan Abdullah Diab, age 22, from Gaza, now living in Cairo, Egypt. See more about her on page 10.

Photo (R): Zaina in Cairo.

Many families still hold the keys to their homes from 1948, and now some also hold keys to their homes in Gaza.



More About the Contributors

The following organizations and cultural projects are mentioned in this collection. We encourage you to check them out and offer support where your heart is inclined.

Meera Center for Skills Development in Cairo offers learning and enrichment activities for Gazan refugees. From 2011–23, Wejdan Diab directed the award-winning Meera Kindergarten in Gaza City. She now offers a nurturing space in Cairo, where children can learn, play and heal from the trauma of the war. Donate here to support Meera Center.

Palestine Charity Team (PCT) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization providing humanitarian aid to families in Rafah, Gaza. PCT sponsored Sing to Live in Peace, a children's music program, and the Gaza Heartbeat, a creative writing workshop for older youth. Currently, PCT is focusing on getting food aid into southern Gaza and setting up portable classrooms and activities for children. Donate to PCT. More original music by Bakr Khader is available on YouTube.

Sobhi Qouta, from Gaza City, is an art teacher for students of all ages. IDF airstrikes destroyed his studio and all its art, including the student paintings featured in this issue. To help Sobhi rebuild his studio, please contact Fred Rogers.

Abraham's Land, a musical play, by guest editor Lauren Goldman Marshall, is set in Israel and Gaza during the First Intifada. A video of the 2021 professional production was shown by PCT in Gaza and is available on YouTube.

You can read the Special Issue on Palestine and Israel, published online by Skipping Stones.

Additional Resources

There is a wealth of charitable organizations serving Palestinians. Here are some of our favorite organizations you may not have heard of:

A Land for All envisions a binational solution (two states, one homeland) with Jewish majority and Palestinian majority regions, freedom of movement and right of return for all.

The Humanity Project: The Maal Foundation serves a wide variety of needs of Gazan refugees in Cairo, including financial support, medical care, psychological and educational support.

The Leonard Education Organization (LE.O) supports under-resourced Palestinian students with higher educational opportunities. Donate to LE.O or to the special fund for Gazan medical students in Egypt, or the In the Wings scholarship for a student from Gaza to study in the arts.

Middle East Children's Alliance protects the health, lives, and rights of kids in the Middle East.

Interlink Publishing offers a wide selection of books on Palestine.

International Board on Books for Young People – Palestine Section and Gaza Libraries project

Tomorrow's Women empowers Palestinian and Israeli women to make peaceful change.

Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) – Palestine supports Palestinian-led, nonviolent, grassroots resistance against the Israeli occupation.

ANAR is an important project for traumatized children living in the West Bank.

The Liberation Syllabus for Educators by the progressive Jewish organization If Not Now lists books, poetry, films, art, and music for students of all ages to engage with the reality of the occupation.

Standing Together is a progressive grassroots movement mobilizing Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel against the occupation for peace, equality and social justice.