

A Polish Boy In Palestine

By David Neunuebel

Very often I get asked, “What’s a nice Polish white boy like you doing in a conflict like this?” – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Let me explain. In 1997 I fell into this black hole called Palestine-Israel and now I can’t get out. It all started when I was in seventh grade.

My mother was Polish, grew up poor and was often treated badly, being called “Pollock” and any number of other pejoratives most of her life. This kind of treatment was very formative in the development of her moral compass.



David Neunuebel

She was always caring for others and treating them, especially those of color, with grace and dignity.

For most of my life my day-to-day contact was with white people, but when I went to Brentwood High School in St. Louis in 1961 I began to have daily contact with blacks. One day I brought my best friend *(Continued on Page 2.)*

David Neunuebel is founder, President and Director of Americans for a Just Peace in the Middle East (www.ajpme.org).

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About This Issue

Often I tell people that one of the pluses of my job is meeting ordinary individuals whose sense of fairness, or moral compass—or outrage—drives them to do rather extraordinary things. Over the years many such individuals have recounted their experiences—or epiphanies, as some call them—in the pages of *The Link*.

In this issue we are pleased to invite David Neunuebel to tell of his journey to the Middle East—and of his return journey home.

In his “ordinary” life David is co-founder and principal in Neunuebel Minor, a financial consulting and wealth management practice in Santa Barbara, CA. It is, however, what he does “in his spare time” that he writes about here.

Several of the people whom David cites as his mentors have also written for *The Link*. They include: Christian Peacemaker Teams (articles by Kathleen Kern and Jane Adas), Jeff Halper, and Ilan Pappé. Their feature articles can be found on our website at www.ameu.org.

Our book & video selections are found on pages 13-15. Page 13 lists our most recent books, page 14, books that are on sale at prices well below our regularly discounted prices, and page 15 our current videos.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director

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Steve home for lunch. The next day at school and in my neighborhood, I was called “nigger lover,” because Steve was black. When I told my mother, she said to invite Steve’s whole family to lunch next time.

Every summer my family traveled to Florida to visit my grandparents. Along the way we’d see signs that read, “White Only” drinking fountains and “White Only” restrooms, and “Colored Only” drinking fountains and “Colored Only” restrooms. I’d never seen this before, but I’d always drink out of the “Colored Only” drinking fountains and use the “Colored Only” restrooms.

When I got drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966 I made friends with a lot of black guys. One time, while in Texas, my friends and I went to a restaurant where my friends were refused service because they were black. I was stunned and angry. I wanted to do something but my friends said we should just walk away.

Another time, on a Texas beach during spring break, I watched dozens of white kids beat up four black kids, throwing full beer bottles down on their faces at point blank range, and setting their brand new car on fire.

All these experiences formed much of the basis of my perceptions of what I was to see years later in Palestine-Israel. The time was the late 1990s. A friend of mine, Dr. Richard Cahill, then Director of the Middle East Studies Program (MESP) for the Council of Christian Colleges based in Cairo, Egypt, asked me to assist him in taking his students to Palestine-Israel.

A few days after arriving in Cairo, I boarded a bus with Rick and 22 students and traveled through the Sinai Peninsula. When we came to the end of the Sinai and were about to enter Israel through the Rafah crossing at Gaza, Israeli soldiers instructed our driver to pull over and park. We got off the bus with our luggage. Suddenly our bus driver drove off, back into the Sinai, leaving us there alone. It was a little alarming since most of us thought this was the bus that would take us all the way.

Rick directed us into the checkpoint building and told us to say only the minimum of what was asked, and not to let the Israelis stamp a visa in our passports because later in the semester the students were going to Syria and Lebanon, which would not allow entry if they knew we had been in Israel. When we got through passport control, we gathered outside on the other side of the checkpoint. We were now busless in Gaza.

Rick made a call on his mobile phone and spoke with our new driver who had been detained at other checkpoints and was running late. Rick decided to use the time to give the students an exam. He handed out maps of the Middle East without any names of countries, cities, or landmarks. The goal was to name as many countries, capitals, rivers, mountain ranges, and other landmarks as possible before the bus arrived. It was a good exercise and something these kids knew a lot better than I did. It dawned on me that, like me, most Americans know very little about the Middle East.

The bus arrived and we began the long trip to Jerusalem. When we arrived at the Old City at Stephen's Gate we gathered our luggage and walked about 100 yards down the old stone street to the Austrian Hospice since our bus was not allowed into the Old City. After we checked in we met in a conference room where Rick gave us an overview of the next few weeks. It was an eclectic itinerary which had us going many places and meeting several people and

organizations.

A year later I made this same trip with Rick and his students and have returned every year since, once as a delegate with the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), and several times on my own.

Let me share some of the epiphanies on those trips that changed my life.

MY MENTORS

Allegra Pacheco. The first of several times I met Allegra Pacheco was with Rick and the students. She is a Jewish Israeli attorney who grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York. As she began to describe her work of defending Palestinians in Israeli courts and the situation on the ground in Israel and the Occupied Territories, I asked her, "How did a nice Jewish girl like you end up defending Palestinians?" She gave us a short tour of her growing up years in Brooklyn and how Leah Tsemel, a Jewish woman who became a lawyer and human rights activist, was her hero.

As Allegra learned more about Israel and the Palestinians, she felt she had to move to Israel to see for herself. She began to witness the brutal treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli army and police as well as the injustice embedded in Israeli law. She passed her Israeli bar exam and began defending Palestinians in Israeli courts. (An interesting side note is that a few years later she married one of the Palestinian prisoners she helped in court and they have two children, though her husband has remained in prison all this time and has barely seen his children.)



Allegra Pacheco

Allegra explained to us that there are two sets of laws, one for Jews and one for Palestinians. When a student asked, "Isn't Israel a democracy?" Allegra explained that Israel's Basic Law states that Israel is a "Jewish and democratic state" but that this does not mean equal rights for all its citizens. It amounts to "democracy for some, dispos-

session for others," she said. She pointed out that Israel does not have a constitution to determine who is (or is not) a citizen nor has it ever legally established its geographic borders. She said, "In any other place in the world, a country established for the benefit of only one ethnicity would be distasteful, but here, it's the norm." Israeli policy is guided by Zionist ideology, which deems that Israel will be a Jewish state. "When a government wants to establish a state based on only one ethnicity," she noted, "it never works for long."

In the Occupied Territories there is an entirely different set of laws from those within the Green Line. (The Green Line is the 1949 armistice line separating Israel from the West Bank.) Israel recently withdrew its fewer than 6,000 settlers from Gaza, where they had been living among 1.4 million Palestinians. In the West Bank—excluding East Jerusalem, which Israel illegally annexed in 1980, and where 200,000 settlers live—the Jewish state continues to add to the 250,000 settlers who live among 2.5 million Palestinians. Here the Civil Administration administers military law to Palestinians, while Jewish settlers are governed by Israeli law.

Allegra explained that in her opinion all the settlers and settlements are illegal according to international law, particularly the Geneva Conventions. When a student asked how Israel gets away with it, she said that Israelis and American supporters of Israel have worked hard to ensure that the United States supports and protects Israel under all circumstances, even when Israel violates international laws and commits human rights violations.

Allegra went on to explain one method Israel uses to steal land from Palestinians for Jewish-only neighborhoods and settlements: demolish Palestinian homes under the pretext that they lack building permits. The problem with this, she said, is that when most of the Palestinians built their homes there were no permits to be gotten since the Israeli government didn't even exist. But now, a Jew can move to Israel from New York or Los Angeles, instantly become an Israeli citizen with all rights and benefits, build a house near a Palestinian home that has been there for hundreds of years, and have the Palestinian home demolished to make room for this new Jewish-only house.

Allegra said that Jewish Israelis still have this idea of "preserving their privilege," and that Americans need to understand where their tax dollars are going in support of Israel. She added that if Americans didn't put up with racism in the United States, they shouldn't put up with it in Israel. She said it took South Africa a hundred years to bring down apartheid and it may take that long in Israel, too.

Bob Lang. Because I think it is important to understand the viewpoint of the settlers who occupy Palestinian land, I include Bob Lang. I met him with Rick and the students on my first visit to Palestine-Israel. He is an American Jew who lives in the all-Jewish settlement of Efrat just outside Jerusalem.

Bob spoke perfect "American" English and began telling us why he moved from America. As a Jew he wanted to "return" to the "land God gave the Jews" and to fulfill the Zionist dream of creating a Jewish state in the land of Israel. He told us how Jews had been persecuted throughout history and how Zionism, an ideology that Jews should gather together to create their own state for their own protection, got its beginning in 1897 with Theodore Hertzl at the first Zionist conference in Basel, Switzerland. After the Holocaust this ideology took on a new urgency and the Zionist leadership determined that Palestine, which embodied the ancient Holy Land for Jews, promised to Abraham by God, would be the place for the Jewish state.

He showed us maps to illustrate where Israel was within the Middle East. He said that little Israel is surrounded by larger hostile Arab states. Therefore Israel must defend itself. After the 1967 war this included expanding Jewish settlements throughout Judea and Samaria, a.k.a the West Bank, which is where Efrat is located.

As he kept referring to Israel's small, defenseless size, I asked him, "Doesn't Israel have nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and have the largest, best equipped military in the Middle East?" Bob concurred and re-emphasized the necessity of all this because Israel is surrounded by such large, hostile Arab states. I said that when I was in grade school we had maps with all the states in the United States in their proper geographic size, but we also had different maps sizing the states on, say, cotton production or orange production. These maps would show

Mississippi larger than Alaska because it produced significantly more cotton and that Alaska would be the size of Delaware. So I asked Lang, "If we sized Israel based on its nuclear weapons and military capability it wouldn't be small at all. In fact, it would be the largest state in the area by a huge margin and dwarf these Arab states, not in land mass but in what really counted, wouldn't it? Or if we sized Israel by its economy and per capita income, again, it would be the largest state in the area." Bob responded that the reality was that Israel is a very small state surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors who want to destroy it so Israel must do all it can to defend itself.

Jessica Montell. Jessica Montell is the Director of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territory, on the web at www.btselem.org. Her work is to monitor, document, and report human rights abuses and violations of international law in the Occupied Territories. She told us how difficult it is for Palestinians to get around, not only from the West Bank to, say, Tel Aviv, but as the Israelis set up more and more blockades and checkpoints, even within the West Bank. Palestinians can't even go from Ramallah to Birzeit, which is a mere ten miles away, without having to go through several checkpoints, which might take several hours. Sometimes they can't get through at all. As a result Palestinians can't get to their jobs, go to school or get to a hospital. She reported that there are several cases of women being unable to get to a hospital to have a baby, and that an alarming number of women are forced to give birth at checkpoints; sometimes the baby dies, in a few cases even the mother has died.

She told us of one young girl, written up in one of B'Tselem's reports, who had to get dialysis treatment at a hospital that was only a few miles from her home. But because of the checkpoints and blockades she had to make a three-hour trip on potholed back roads. Then she had to do

the whole thing over again to return home. This was her life in trying to get proper medical treatment. Jessica added that Palestinian ambulance drivers are often shot at by the Israeli army, and sometimes killed, even *after* they've been given approval by the army for safe travel.

Jessica said she and every other Israeli never experience this kind of living and go about their daily lives virtually unaffected by any of this.

Then Jessica told us about water, and how Israel has strategically placed several important settlements in the West Bank on the water aquifers in order to control them, leaving Palestinians little access to water. (These are the "established neighborhoods" President Bush has assured Ariel Sharon Israel will be able to keep in any peace settlement.)

But the work of B'tselem is also critical of Palestinian violence. She said she can't understand how someone could blow himself up and that these acts were clearly terrorist acts and in violation of international law. She pointed out that Israel has a legal right to defend itself and its citizens, but added that many of the methods Israel uses, collective punishment, extrajudicial assassinations, and bombing entire neighborhoods, are clearly violations of international humanitarian provisions.

Christian Peacemaker Teams.

To get to Hebron from Jerusalem I had to take several taxis, each taking me only up to the next blockade or, if a checkpoint, as far as the color of its license plate would allow. At each blockade I'd get out, go over a mound of dirt and boulders with other Palestinians to get into another taxi on the other side. Then that taxi would take me as far as it could go. On and on this would go until I finally got to Hebron. During all this up and down, in and out, I'd noted a

highway a couple hundred yards away with cars and trucks driving at highway speeds with no trouble. That road, it was explained, was what is called a bypass road and it is for Jews only. So traveling the Pal-



Jessica Montell

estinian way amounted to taking three hours and five taxis to make a 20-minute trip.

Upon the signing of the Hebron Agreement, in January 1997, Hebron was divided into two parts: H-1, an area of some 11 square miles (80% of the city) with 115,000 Palestinians, was handed over to complete Palestinian control. H-2, in which 35,000 Palestinians and 500 settlers live, remained under Israeli security control. H-1, however, can still be, and often is controlled by the Israelis if they want to shut it down, so Palestinians have only a "a mirage of control."

Settlers in Hebron mostly live in the settlement of Kiryat Arba and most are followers of the radical Rabbi Meir Kahane, the founder of the Kach Party, a racist group that the Israelis and U.S. consider a Jewish terrorist group.

One follower of Kahane, Brooklyn-born physician Baruch Goldstein, on February 25th 1994, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, decided to actuate the Zionist dream of annihilating the Arab existence in Palestine by entering the Ibrahimi Mosque, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and, turning his automatic weapon on the Muslim worshippers, killing 29 and wounding over 100 of them, before other Palestinians killed him. The Jewish settlers placed an inscription on his gravesite that reads:

Here lies the saint, Dr. Baruch Kappel Goldstein, blessed be the memory of the righteous and holy man, may the Lord avenge his blood, who devoted his soul to the Jews, Jewish religion and Jewish land. His hands are innocent and his heart is pure. He was killed as a martyr of God on the 14th of Adar, Purim, in the year 5754 (1994).

I had met the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) on two occasions with Rick and the student groups and eventually joined a CPT delegation. CPT is a group from the Mennonite/Quaker tradition of non-violence whose motto is "Getting in the Way" of violence and injustice.

When I was a CPT delegate our team bought groceries in H-1 before we went to the CPT apartment in H-2. To go from H-1 to H-2 we had to go through a fenced-off Israeli checkpoint. Walking from H-1 to H-2 was weird because the noise and hustle and bustle of Palestinians shopping, shouting and honking in H-1 dropped like a rock to near dead silence in H-2. There were no people on the streets of H-2 except for Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers. All the Palestinians were under curfew and could not leave their homes for any reason. The curfew had been going on for several weeks with only brief trips allowed out of the house to get food and provisions.

It was Shabbat, Saturday, the Jewish day of worship, when we entered H-2. Dozens of observant Jews on the streets, but no Palestinians. As we carried our bags of goods and supplies through the crowd of settlers, a teenage Jewish boy tried to slap my cameras from my hand. When he was unsuccessful he kicked me as I passed. I quickly turned to protect myself but he backed away and we were allowed to pass. I was told later that the kid was representative of most of the Jewish young people who live in Hebron, many of whom carry American-made M-16 rifles.

Once in the CPT apartment, there was a frantic phone call from a Palestinian farmer saying that Jewish settlers were destroying his crops and tearing out his irrigation pipes. One of the full-time CPT members asked if anyone wanted to go along to help protect the farmer in the nearby valley. I grabbed a second camera and we were off. That night I filmed a group of settler kids setting fire to tires and the farmer's land and rampaging through his farm, tearing out the irrigation pipes. When the Israeli army arrived they did nothing. In fact, the settler kids made fun of them and ran them ragged. The CPT member said if these kids had been Palestinians, most of them would have been shot or beaten or both.

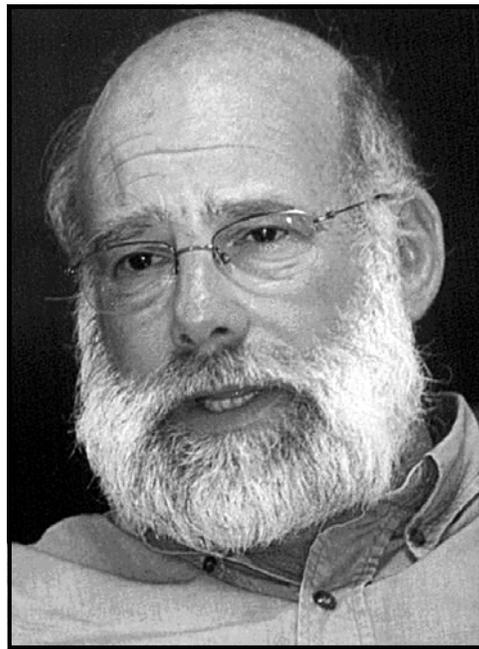
The entire time in Hebron with CPT was pretty much like this. Emergency calls from Palestinians for assistance, CPT responding. You might think CPT doesn't accomplish much, but simply being present, intervening in situations and speaking with settlers, Israeli soldiers, and Palestinians in a gentle voice often calms things down. But of course, some-

times not. Several times CPT members have been beaten so severely by settlers that they required hospitalization. Still the Palestinians of Hebron are grateful they are there.

Jeff Halper. Dr. Jeff Halper lives in a modest house in West Jerusalem. He is an American Jew from Minnesota and has been a Professor of Anthropology at Ben Gurion University in the Negev for 20 years. He is currently the coordinator for the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, on the web at www.icahd.org. ICAHD is an organization made up of Israelis and Palestinians who try to prevent the Israeli government from confiscating Palestinian land and demolishing their homes.

In a meeting with Jeff, someone asked why so many Palestinian homes have been demolished. Jeff pointed out that Palestinian homes are destroyed to make room for Jewish-only settlements in the Occupied Territories or to control the Arab population within Israel. In East Jerusalem, for example, the Israeli government's confiscation policy is designed to annex all the area around Jerusalem in order to render it impossible for a future Palestinian state to have any claim to Jerusalem.

Jeff said the pretext of "security" is always used to justify the expropriation of land and the demolition of homes. When a settlement is established in the Occupied Territory, a by-pass road must also be built in order to provide a travel route for the settlers to go to and from Israel. This means that a corridor of hundreds of yards on each side of the by-pass road must be established for "security purposes", which means that even more Palestinian land is expropriated and homes demolished to make room for this wide swath of highway. Needless to say, these roads are for Jews only.



Jeff Halper

Jeff explained that a legal justification for these homes being demolished is that Palestinians have no permits to build. He said, "It is the official policy of the Civil Administration not to give permits to Palestinians."

Jeff mentioned that over 100,000 houses have been built for Jews in the Occupied Territories while none have been built for Palestinians. And, when it comes to water, Israeli settlers get as much water as they want, and often have green lawns and even swimming pools, while Palestinians get one tenth as much water as settlers and pay twice as much for it. He said it is not uncommon to be in a Palestinian village starving for water and look over the fence into a settlement and see kids playing in swimming pools.

I asked Jeff how other Israelis feel about all this and he said most Israelis just want what he called "industrial peace," peace that will keep the Palestinians "quiet" and "over there" so they, the Israelis, can go about their day-to-day business. The basic operational model that Israel has for the Palestinians is that of a prison and that Palestinians need to shut up, know their place, remain in their cells and not forget who the guards are. If they forget their place or get "uppity" they will be put down harshly.

Ilan Pappé. Dr. Ilan Pappé is Senior Lecturer of Political Science at Haifa University, and the head of the Emil Touma Institute for Palestinian Studies in Israel. Born in 1954 to a German Jewish family in Haifa, at the age of eighteen he began military service in the Israeli army, which introduced him to other groups and to the host of social problems facing Israeli society. In the 1970s, at Hebrew University as an undergraduate in the department of Middle Eastern History, he was exposed to the plight of the Palestinians in Israel. It was then that he found his love for history and formed his belief that the present cannot be understood and the future changed without first trying to decipher its historical dimensions.

It was clear to him that this could not be done freely inside Israel, especially if its own history was to be the subject matter. So he went to Oxford in 1984 as a PhD student. His thesis was on the 1948 war in

Palestine. He wrote about the Zionist intentions to ethnically cleanse Palestine of the indigenous population.

His extensive research brought him face to face with declassified Jewish archives of the period. He discovered things that he'd never heard or known before, things that contradicted the official Zionist narrative he'd been taught as a child.

As Pappé discussed his work with me in his office at Haifa University, he pointed out several Zionist myths. The first myth he spoke of was what he called the myth of David and Goliath. This is the myth that the Jews (Zionists) were a small, weak, defenseless, poorly numbered and poorly armed group defending themselves against the massive, overpowering, well armed, Arab hordes. Winning the war made Israelis Invincible Supermen. "Even Hollywood portrays the Israelis as heroic and the Arabs as dirty cowards, an example of which is the movie *Exodus*," he said. He pulled out maps of that period which showed large, thick arrows from the Arab side and small, thin arrows from the Israeli side which were meant to suggest the size and strength of the competing armies, thus feeding the propaganda that the Jews were small and defenseless.

The truth is that the Jews had the upper hand from the beginning, financially, militarily and politically. The Jewish leadership knew exactly the balance of power and that they had the advantage. This was partly due to agreements they made with Jordan, the strongest Arab military at the time, not to attack in specified areas. This substantially reduced any Arab threat, although the Jordan army did fight when the Zionists reneged on their promise not to invade areas around Jerusalem.

Pappé states, "For us, as Israelis, this was very important, because it was not just a question of whether we were superhuman or not, because there

was a very normal explanation as to why we won the war, which had nothing to do with our being David and the Arabs being Goliath. The real myth was that Israel was supposedly on the eve of a second holocaust or extermination. It was not. Jewish leaders produced an atmosphere of fear to raise the commitment from others. But they knew that such a threat did not exist."

Selling this myth to America was also very important as we can observe today in the overwhelming bias the U.S. government shows toward Israel and against Arabs and Palestinians. It also shows up in the level of political intimidation, if not political extortion, of anyone in Congress who might speak out in favor of Palestinian human rights.



Ilan Pappé

The second myth he spoke of was that the Arab leadership told the Palestinians to leave their homes because the war was coming. "This is the official Israeli narrative taught in schools," Pappé said, and is considered the primary reason Palestinians left their homes and became permanent refugees. "This is not true," he said, "they were forced from their homes, driven away by the invading Jewish army." In the special archives in London, British documents of every radio transmission from 1936

through the 1948 war reveal *no proof* of any such messages transmitted by the Arabs. Pappé says, "It was Israeli propaganda, a myth to cleanse the Jewish conscience of any responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem."

Pappé stated that, on March 10, 1948, the Jewish leadership decided that the new Jewish State would take over 80 percent of Palestine even though a minority of Jews lived where over 900,000 Palestinians also lived. This decision was made *before* the 1948 war. He said there was a specific decision to "ethnically cleanse Palestine of Palestinians." The vast majority of Arabs were expelled by force. People

who had lived there for thousands of year were expelled. Five hundred villages were destroyed along with eleven towns making 700,000 people refugees. Houses were looted and destroyed, careers were stopped.

The Zionists who were responsible for this, according to Pappé, were David Ben Gurion, Moshe Dayan, and “Mr. Transfer” himself, a name even the Jewish leadership used to describe Yosef Weitz. Weitz was responsible for the transfer of Palestinians and the settlement of their land with Jews. Before the war Weitz looked at all the fertile land and determined which part he wanted for the Jewish Agency, and created transfer committees in each region to deal with how to execute the transfer. The Zionists used intimidation and scare tactics, trucks to transfer people, and even massacres.

Pappé pointed out that there was more than one massacre committed by the Zionists. The massacre at Deir Yassin is the only one the Israeli government has ever admitted to, but “to suggest that there was only one massacre is ridiculous,” he said, “There were dozens of massacres.”

The third myth he spoke of is one that suggests that the Israelis extended their hand in peace and the Arabs refused. The truth, according to Pappé’s research, is the exact opposite. The Arab side offered to reach a compromise with Israel based on U.N. guidelines and international law to divide the land into two states, to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and to internationalize Jerusalem. Even United States President Truman supported this Arab position and found it to be quite reasonable. In fact, the United States government exerted some pressure on Israel to accept the deal. But Israel refused. From his research Pappé concludes: “The Arabs offered to negotiate a peace and the Israelis rejected it.”

TELLING OTHERS WHAT I SAW AND LEARNED

On each of those trips with the students, one of the things they always asked was, “Does anybody know this is going on?” Each time I returned from Palestine-Israel I felt a strong obligation to tell about these new realities I’d discovered. I found myself as incensed about the injustices Israel perpetrates on

the Palestinians as I was by the injustices white people perpetrated on blacks in America.

I began to write letters-to-the-editor about the water inequities, collective punishment of Palestinians, the expropriation of land and demolition of homes to make room for Jewish-only settlements and by-pass roads, and extrajudicial assassinations. While some of my letters were published in my local newspaper, many were not.

After a while I began to buy ad space to tell what I felt needed to be told. (You can see several of the ads we’ve created on our website: www.ajpme.org under “Flyers”). As I began to buy my message into the public arena with these ads, I started receiving positive inquiries from people in my community. I was, indeed, getting a message across and, for the most part, being well received. People wanted to know who we were, could they help, could they join. The problem was, there was nothing to join. I was it. Just a guy who went, heard, saw and needed to tell about it. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “A time comes when silence is betrayal.” I was doing a small thing and people were responding. But advertising is an expensive sport. I needed to find a better way.

“**Beyond the Mirage.**” One of the most important things that happened in America during the Civil Rights movement was when Americans saw, on black and white TV, the brutal treatment of blacks by whites. Blacks were beaten with clubs by white cops, devastated by water hoses, and attacked by dogs. There was something wrong with America and most Americans didn’t like what they saw. Many would say, “This isn’t us, this isn’t who we are as Americans, this isn’t who we want to be,” and the Civil Rights movement came into full swing. So I bought a digital video camera. I filmed each trip to Palestine-Israel and every interview in order to make a documentary to show the American people a view of Israel that is generally unavailable to them.

I finished my first documentary, “Beyond The Mirage: The Face of the Occupation,” in June 2002, just in time to attend the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee convention in Washington, DC. I purchased a booth to display my ads and flyers, photos and other materials, and showed the documentary on a 36-inch TV by our booth. As the

documentary ran over and over, people came by to watch it and ask about it. I'd taken two hundred copies of the documentary and returned home with none. It was very validating and encouraging.

It was at this conference that I first met John Mahoney, Director of AMEU. He asked if he could get some copies to sell through AMEU, which he has done ever since. He's been an enormous encouragement to me and my work.

Americans for a Just Peace in the Middle East. As I continued to receive positive feedback from more and more people in my community, I became curious as to just how many people felt as I did. I thought maybe I could organize and make something out of our shared ideas and values. So I decided to contact all the people who'd responded and see if they'd show up at a meeting at our community library. I expected ten people. More than 50 showed up.

As I presented who I was and what I was trying to do it became evident that a more formal organization ought to be created. My feeling was we should become an official 501(c)3 nonprofit. This way we would be a legitimate California corporation and donations would be tax-deductible. The next step was what to call ourselves. We spent a lot of time throwing around different ideas until we settled on Americans for a Just Peace in the Middle East (AJPME).

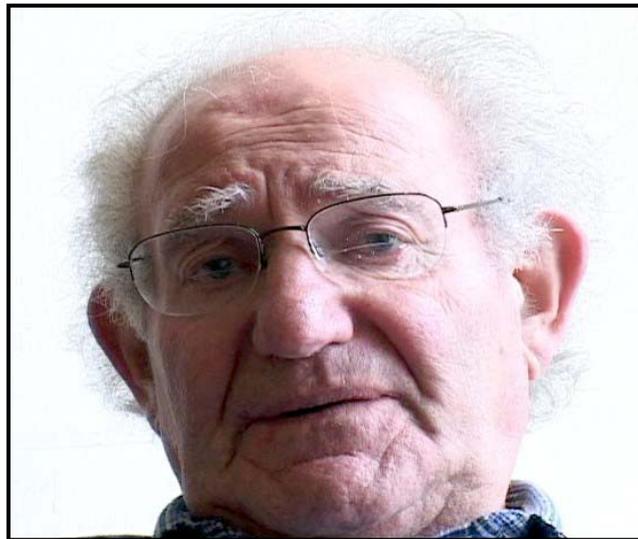
The next day I contacted some attorney friends in Washington, DC and over the next several months they worked on incorporating us in California and preparing the application to the IRS for nonprofit status. In November 2002 we were granted 501(c)3 nonprofit status and have been operational as such ever since.

"Imagine... ." On a return trip to Palestine-Israel in 2003, I was waiting for a taxi in the lobby of my hotel with my translator. We were going to Ra-

mallah to see Yassir Arafat and then on to Birzeit University to interview students about the rigors of getting an education. In the lobby, I overheard an older couple who were also waiting for their taxi. Their conversation revealed that they were in agreement with many of my concerns regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, so I went over to talk with them. The man, in his eighties, was an Auschwitz survivor and, as we chatted, it became clear he was very critical of Israeli policies against the Palestinians. I asked him if I could interview him. He agreed but said it would have to be another time since their taxi had just arrived.

The next day, I approached him in the hotel garden café and asked again about an interview on camera. He said he would be happy to be interviewed. I ran to my room, got my camera equipment, found a quiet place in the hotel, put a microphone on him and interviewed him for an hour.

His name is Hajo Meyer. He is a Jew who lives in The Netherlands and is part of a Jewish group that works to show the world that Israeli policies toward the Palestinians are unjust and need to change. The



Hajo Meyer

interview resulted in my second documentary, "Imagine...," which focuses on the state of Palestinian education under Israeli occupation. Meyer introduces the video by noting that one of the things he learned in Auschwitz was that you can kill people without gas chambers by denying young people access to education. He explains: "One of the most important things for any conscious living being is to develop his or her own potential. If you deny young people access to education, you rob their future. If you have no future you have no life. If you have not developed yourself to the full, you are at least handicapped, and although you may still walk around, you are dead."

The documentary notes that during the first Inti-

fada, Israel made it effectively illegal for Palestinians to pursue their education. Students were arrested for attending underground classes in people's homes and community centers, and even for carrying their books in public. Today over 250,000 Palestinian students under Israeli occupation cannot go to school because of the wall Israel has illegally put up in the northern part of the West Bank. Elsewhere, Palestinians are confronted with checkpoints and roadblocks all over the West Bank that make it extremely difficult to attend classes on a daily basis.

The vigorous Mr. Meyer concludes the documentary with these words: "When the Nazis gassed the Jews the world was silent. Now, the world is silent while the Jews or the Israelis harass, humiliate, and steal away land from the Palestinians. And the world is silent. And I want to awake the world."

"Imagine...," which runs for 15 minutes, and is particularly good for campus groups and seminars, is also available through AMEU.

FINAL THOUGHTS

On Facing Opposition. As I began to move beyond letters-to-the-editor to paid advertisements to get my message across, I occasionally got hate mail and hate phone calls. I was becoming known to the community, in good ways and in threatening ways.

As things moved toward organizing AJPME, the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred. That night a call was left on our voice mail stating, "You have blood on your hands. You better watch out for the FBI. We're going to get you."

The attacks on the World Trade Center were unsettling enough, but to get a call like this was of deep concern. I immediately called the police and gave them the access code to our voice mail service. They listened to the message, called me back and said, "You better call the FBI." I immediately called the local FBI. The next morning, about 4:00 a.m., I got another call from the same caller who said pretty much the same thing and asked if I'd had any contact from the FBI. I told him, "Yes, in fact I've called the FBI and had them listen to your voice mail." He hung up and I never heard from him again.

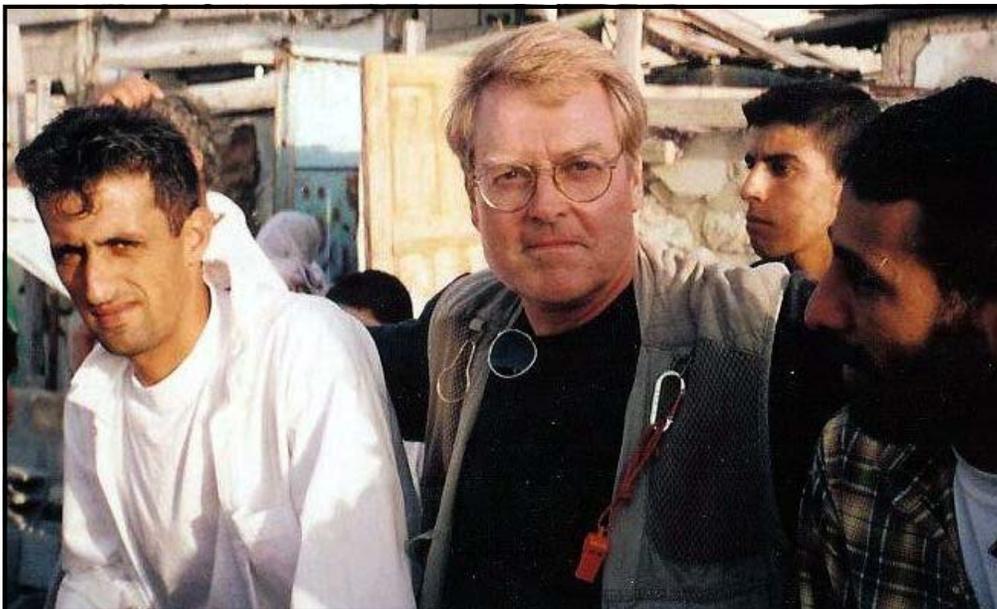
A few days later a local FBI agent called me. We

talked about the call which he also listened to. He asked about AJPME and said he wanted to meet with me. He came to Santa Barbara where we spent a few hours talking about the incidents. He took lots of notes. I gave him our AJPME brochures and literature. He was very nice and understanding. He also seemed interested in the work of AJPME. As we finished the meeting he said he would contact me later about coming to their office to discuss all this with an FBI Middle East expert. He gave me his card and told me to call him any time.

Several months later he called and asked me to come to Ventura to meet with the Middle East expert. About a week later I went down for this meeting. I met first with my agent and his associates in a small conference room. A few moments later another man entered the room, introduced himself, said he was an agent specializing in the Middle East and gave me his card. I gave him the whole story about how I got involved in the Middle East, specifically Palestine-Israel, and how I started AJPME. I gave him our materials and brochures and gave each person in the room a DVD of our documentary, "Beyond the Mirage: The Face of the Occupation." They were all very interested. We finished the interview in a couple hours; I left and have never heard from them since.

On Security and Freedom. It seems to me that the rhetoric of this whole thing, that Israel needs security and the Palestinians need to be free, is backwards. I think it's the other way around. The Palestinians need security and Israel needs freedom, freedom from Zionism. As Jeff Halper puts it, to attempt to create a state for Jews only, especially with such a large indigenous Palestinian population present, is, "in the modern sense, ethnic cleansing." You cannot do it and still call yourself a democracy.

I realize that it is often not the "accepted wisdom" of many Americans whom I meet. I encourage them to look at the videos and to read many excellent books on the subject. But, most of all, I urge them to go, as I did, and see the situation with their own eyes. As Rachel Corrie wrote in one of her last e-mails home to her parents before an Israeli soldier killed her with a Caterpillar bulldozer, "No amount of reading, attendance at conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me



Link author David Neunuebel stops to chat with Palestinians during a filming visit to Gaza.

for the reality of the situation here. You just can't imagine it unless you see it."

This conflict must stop. The whole world is at risk. But it will not stop unless there is a just peace. If the Israelis, in their quest for security, feel it is necessary to build a wall around themselves, fine. But they should build it on the Green Line and not throughout the West Bank, further destroying Palestinian lives and reducing them to living in bantustans, rendering a two-state solution impossible. In a world that has recently seen the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, to build a wall in the name of security is antithetical to modern reason and is unjust in the way it is preceding.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Perez once stated, "You can't expect 100 percent security unless you give the other people 100 percent freedom. Israel's future security depends more on a just peace for Palestinians than on borders marked by barbed wire and fortifications." There is a better way.

Miroslav Volf, Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity school and a Croatian who survived his own country's conflicts with the Serbs, in his book "Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness & Reconciliation," states, "When we are looking at each other through the sights of our guns we see only the rightness of our own cause.

We think more about how to increase our own power than to enlarge our thinking; we strive to eliminate others from our world, not to grant them space within ourselves." We all must enlarge our thinking to bring a just peace in the Middle East.

To me justice looks like this. It is based on the fact that all people are created in the image of God and that God loves all the little children of the world, no matter what color their skin or how old they are. It is also based on the fact that all people are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain

inalienable rights which means liberty and justice for all, not just some.

So, if white people can eat at that restaurant, then black people can too. If white people can live in that neighborhood, then black people can too. If white people can go to that school, then black people can too. If Jewish people can eat at that restaurant, then Palestinians can too. If Jewish people can drive on that road, then Palestinians can too. If Jewish people can live in that neighborhood, than Palestinians can too. And if Jewish people have the right of return, then Palestinians do too. ■

Corrections

Final editing changes by John Cooley did not make it into his issue "The Israeli Factor," v. 38, #4. We note them here:

Pg. 2, line 11: "push the Bushites into war" should read "influencing the Bushites strongly toward war".

Pg. 7, rt. col., line 21: "the Baath's unsuccessful, C.I.A.-assisted one" should read "the Baath's earlier C.I.A.-assisted one".

Pg. 9, rt. col. line 14: This sentence should follow "into the game." "Two Iraqi tank divisions helped to halt Israel's counter-offensive in Syria toward Damascus."

In the printed version of this *Link*, pages 13 to 15 carry a partial list of the books and videos available from AMEU. The entire catalog of books and videos is available on this website.

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