

The Link

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An Interview With Ellen Nassab

Ellen Nassab lives in Orange County, California, with her husband, John, and her two children, John, Jr., and Joyce. Ellen is a nurse at Orange County's St. Joseph's Hospital, where she has managed the Department of Obstetrics for the past 14 years. Her brother, Alex Odeh, was murdered in 1985 by terrorists who placed explosives inside his Santa Ana office.

This interview was conducted on February 18 at the Nassab home by Hisham Ahmed, professor of political science at Florida International University.

John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director

[Ellen Nassab, 50, died of cancer on June 9, 1989. — ED.]

Hisham Ahmed: Would you first describe your own life.

Ellen Nassab: My maiden name was Odeh, of course. I married a gentleman by the name of John Nassab, who was born and raised in Haifa. I have two children. A daughter, 22, going to college, who wants to become a teacher, and a son, 16, going to the High School of the Arts in Orange County. He hopes to become a performer on Broadway.

I came to the United States after I got married in 1965. Prior to that my home was in Jifna, a town about 14 miles north of Jerusalem in the

Ramallah district in Palestine, which is now under occupation by the Israelis. The portion of Palestine that I came from was referred to as the West Bank. After the 1967 war took place, my family was under occupation. At that time Alex was studying in Cairo and he automatically became disconnected from the rest of the family.

Q: What was Alex studying?

A: He was studying business and political science at Cairo University. Alex was in his junior year. I left Palestine in September and shortly after that Alex went to Egypt to finish his last years of college.

Q: September 1965?

A: Right. Then, because of the war, Alex had no way of connecting with anyone from the family, except for myself. I was then living in Boston

with my family and he and I constantly wrote to each other. I did what I could for him to finish his schooling. Unfortunately when he finished college, he was not able to go home and be with his family.

Q: He couldn't go back—because of the war?

A: No. The borders were closed and no Palestinian was allowed to go back and reside with his family. So he was forced to go to Amman. He lived there for several years; I think about seven or eight years. In the meantime, I continued to encourage him and kept hoping for things to change. But in terms of the occupation from the West Bank and Gaza, things did not change, of course. At the time, I encouraged Alex to come to the United States.



Ellen Nassab



Alex Odeh

Q: That was more or less in 1974, would you say?

A: It was in 1972.

Q: What did he do when he first came to the United States?

A: By the time he came, I had already sponsored another sister to come here. She, too, was going to a school of nursing in Jerusalem which was closed because of the disruptions and the war. So he and my sister found an apartment and lived here. Initially, his intention of coming to the States was to pursue his education.

Q: Did he live in Boston?

A: No, my family and I moved from Boston to southern California in 1967, and then we moved to Orange County in 1969. At the time Alex was in Amman, we were here in southern California. He and my sister lived together in an apartment in Orange County and he started to look for work, so that he could finance his education. He took different jobs and applied to California State, at Fullerton, for a master's degree in political science and was able to finish that successfully. Just before he graduated, he went back to visit the family, after he was able to get a travel document. While he was there, he met his wife and they got married. They returned to Orange County.

After Alex was through with his master's degree, his goal was to work for peace and reconciliation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and to start working with different communities in order to clarify the issue of the Palestinians in the minds of the Americans. He brought films, scheduled speakers, sponsored events, with the help of other students, of course, and some of us in the family and the community. Eventually, he took the job with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) which was very much his bag of goodies. He really wanted to stop discrimination against the Arabs.

Q: When did he start working with the ADC?

A: I think he started in 1982. Eventually he became the western regional coordinator of ADC in all of southern California. When the athletes were

here from the Middle East (for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics), he had events for the Arab athletes. He organized a lot of functions which brought representatives of the Arab world together. He was always mobilizing the Arab community to promote better understanding and more cohesiveness among all the Arab nations.

Q: So his goal was two-fold, in a sense. On the one hand, to try to establish reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis, and on the other hand, to try to create cohesiveness among Arabs in general.

A: Definitely. And to promote the image of the Arab. After the ADC was established, he became aware to a greater degree of the amount of discrimination against the Arabs. It seemed that there was a lot of slander on TV and in the media against Arabs. There was definitely a need for us American Arabs to stand up and speak for ourselves.

Q: How did the Arab community react to Alex's efforts?

A: Well, it was really marvelous. To this day I remember the time when representatives of the Arab nations were together at the head table at the Ambassador Hotel. I remember a speaker at that function, Jack Shaheen, the man who wrote the book *The TV Arab*. The idea was to make all the Arab countries aware of the discrimination against Arabs.

What I'm saying is that Alex had a mixture of ambitions. He worked for the Palestinian cause. He had a great desire to bring about a better understanding among all of the Arab peoples. He definitely tried to provide Americans with a more accurate image of the Arab. For example, Americans equate Arabs with terrorists, even though they should know that as a group of people we probably have the least amount of terrorism.

Q: How did the American public in general react to Alex's efforts in Los Angeles?

A: Alex had a very soft way about him. He was gentle, kind and skilled—a diplomat. He worked with the Human Relations Commission, both

in Orange County and in Los Angeles. He met with the mayor of Los Angeles and with the mayors of different cities in Orange County, inviting them to various events. It was a subtle way of bringing them to our arena, to convey that we are really civilized and educated people, and that we offer the community a lot. We are physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers and consultants—all types of educated people. We do carry a lot of responsibility in the United States. We are not a community which costs the government a lot of money, because we are self-sufficient.

By bringing a prominent person in the community to an event, he gave that person an opportunity to meet Arabs in a setting that was nicely put together. At times, for example, he brought UCLA musicians who played Arabic music. There was a very positive response from the American community.

Q: As the sister of Alex Odeh, you have an insider's view of Alex's personality. You said he was kind, gentle and a diplomat, and, indeed, I have heard from several other people who knew him that these were qualities of his. Could you, as his sister, give us an idea about Alex's personality which we on the outside might not be able to gather?

A: I am the oldest of the nine children in the family. Alex was number five, so I witnessed his birth and the events of his life. Even when he was in school he was always on the quiet side and a thinker. He always first listened and took in what was being said and then responded, a quality that I myself sometimes wish I had. In family affairs, when things were not going very well, Alex always had a way about him. When he became well-known to the media, his interviews were really very effective because he listened to the reporters and gave answers that were clear and easy for Americans to understand. Because of his ability to listen to people, I think people, in turn, listened to him.

Q: So his perceptiveness and his receptivity, in a way, led his audience to be attentive.

A: That's for sure. In fact, this was clear even in his last interview, done the night before he was killed, which he did not have the opportunity to see. I remember my husband telling me that Alex had done a fantastic job. Of course, he got better over the years. When he started to speak to the American people, he had a little difficulty in speaking without hesitation, because English isn't his native language. He learned English in Cairo and before that in high school. But as time went on, he really became very eloquent and he came to be understood by Americans.

Q: What happened the morning after his last interview?

A: As I remember it, the morning of the day Alex was killed, my husband and I were having coffee and we were to attend the funeral of a friend of ours. I wasn't working that day and my husband told me about the excellent interview Alex had given. I clearly remember picking up the phone and calling his home, just to tell him that he had given an excellent interview and that I was very proud of him. His wife told me he had just left. So I called the [ADC] office and I heard a recorded message by his secretary, Hind Baki, in the answering machine. I remember leaving a message: "Good morning, Hind and Alex! I just want to wish you a good day and, Alex, I want to tell you that I am very proud of you. I heard you had an excellent interview." After that we got ready and went to the funeral.

On the way back from the church, while we were tuning to the KFWB news station, we heard that the ADC office on 17th Street in Santa Ana had been bombed. Right away my response was, "Alex is hurt!" My husband said, "Ellen, you're crazy!" In the morning when John told me he had done an excellent interview, my first response had been, "I hope they don't hurt him." I don't know why I said that.

Q: You said that?

A: I said that, and again in the car I told John, "Alex is hurt!" I dashed in the house and called St. Joseph's, the hospital where I worked. It's the largest private hospital in the county. They told me, "No, he wasn't brought here, but he was taken to Western Med[ical]," another hospital that has a trauma center. I called Western Medical and they told me, yes, he was there, but that they could not give me any information and that his brother was there also and was already waiting in the emergency room. So my husband and I dashed over there. We found out that he was in surgery and we prayed hard that he would come out of surgery. But, unfortunately, it wasn't too long before the doctors told us that he didn't make it.

Q: What was your first reaction?

A: I was devastated. My reaction was: "This is real terror." I really started to wish and ask that the media be there, because I wanted right away to let the American public know that it is the Palestinians who are frustrated because they have lost their homes and lost everything. Also, it isn't 10,000 miles away that terror exists. There is terror right here in our own backyard.

Q: Was anybody from the media there?

A: There were some newspaper reporters and they took our picture, when I looked horrible, and took some quotations from us to put in the local papers. Channel 4 was at my brother's house, when we came over to try to find my other sister. We couldn't even find Alex's wife. Apparently she had gone to the office and they wouldn't let her anywhere near the office. Friends saw her and took her to Western Medical at that point. But we entered my other brother's house, Sami's house. The media was there and my sister jumped up—she was with the children—to ask what was going on. I said Alex was gone. She collapsed. The camera was on her, which I didn't like at all. At that point I said to the reporters that Alex's death was a real loss, because it was the loss of a peaceful man who was working for

peace and for what was beneficial to the United States, the Palestinians, the Israelis and the rest of the world.

Q: Was there enough media coverage?

A: No. There was locally, in some sense, but I even told the local stations how disappointed we were in the coverage, because in his interview Alex had made it clear that he does not support terrorism. He denounced terrorism very clearly. Rather than putting on that statement, they merely stated that Alex had considered the PLO not responsible for the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, and, that in fact, Arafat should be praised for his role in trying to rescue the passengers. Of course, that was a true statement. There was nothing wrong with it. I did tell the Channel 7 reporter, because that station did the interview, I said, "Why couldn't you have put some of the different things he said in denouncing terrorism, condemning terrorism? Why did you have to put just the one statement which, in the minds of the Americans, makes him a terrorist?"

Q: How did the reporter react?

A: It was in a lecture hall. We were listening to some speakers, which included myself. There were two or three family members of different victims of terrorism. The reporter was just astounded. At the time, we were all very numb. To this day I think part of the reason I have cancer is because there was so much I wanted to do immediately after Alex died.

With the media, with the public, I took a back seat. For one thing, we didn't want too many people involved. We wanted to give his wife some respect and allow her to be in the front light. Sami was also our spokesperson. Yet, as the sister who sponsored him to come to this country, who saw his birth, saw him grow, supported his schooling, I felt that I had so much I needed to do that I didn't get done.

Q: How old was Alex when he was murdered?

A: Alex was murdered in October 1985. He was born on April 4, 1944, so he was 41 years old.

Q: How are his widow and children doing now?

A: The Arab community rose to the occasion. They were able to put together enough funds to provide Norma [Alex's widow] and the three girls with financial support. We as a family stay close, but, unfortunately, nothing takes the place of Alex. The three girls are doing OK, and the mother is terrific. She's a wonderful mother. They don't have Alex, so they have to cope with the good and the bad, sometimes alone. In a sense, no matter how much we support them, we're not there with them 24 hours.

Q: Before we leave the subject of Alex's murder, I would like to ask you to comment on what the media should have done.

A: I wish that the media had focused on the horrible fact that this murder took place right in our backyard. When a murder takes place 6,000 or 7,000 miles away, they make such a big issue out of it here in the States. Then somebody gets killed with explosives that rip half of his body and it does not get the respect or the coverage or the attention that it deserves. To me this is important.

Q: Is it now known who exactly was behind Alex's murder?

A: In the summer of 1986 the FBI came to my house and met with all of us, to assure us that they would not drop the case, that they would pursue it. The latest information appeared last summer in the *L.A. Times*, which reported that an American Jew, who belongs to the extreme Jewish Defense League [JDL] and who now resides in Israel, was behind the murder, with some other people, of course. His wife, Rochelle Manning, was arrested in Los Angeles. Israel has not extradited the man. He did live here and his wife is here in the States. The last I heard was that she was not allowed out on bail. It is almost clear that an extreme Jewish group was behind the murder.

We believe that it was not just the result of the last interview. It had to have been fabricated long before. The group that planned it was just waiting for the right opportunity. The minute



Alex with his daughters

Alex praised the PLO and Arafat, the group thought they had a license to go ahead and blow him up. They could not, between 11 P.M., when the interview was on TV, and the next morning, have thought of a way of blowing Alex up.

Q: As yet, there is no specific information about the status of this Jewish extremist who has not been extradited?

A: He is still residing in an Israeli settlement near Hebron. This is what we know at this time. He is also responsible, with some other people of this group, for the killing of other people [in the U.S.] who were not Arabs. Still, Israel is not extraditing him back to the States. So he cannot be on trial. Our wound is still not healed. It will not heal, even after the trial is over. Even if we know someone is convicted, for us the loss is eternal.

Q: Do you think the government here is making serious efforts to carry out the extradition?

A: I really can't tell you how much effort they're putting into it. We were very impressed with the judge who was working on the case after the arrest of Rochelle Manning. He wasn't accepting any poor excuse. But how much pressure is being put on Israel to extradite the man is debatable. I feel that the U.S. could have pressured Israel to extradite Mr.

Manning. How many times have people been extradited from here? Our Ziad Abu Ein was extradited from here not too long ago for alleged acts committed before he came to the States. So, here in the States, we bow to Israel. Unfortunately, the Israelis don't reciprocate, and that hurts.

Q: What led you to become politically active?

A: When we were in Boston, my husband was very involved with the activities of the Arab community. In fact, he was president of the American-Arab Association in Boston. I did not really become too involved, because I was new in the States, I needed to establish myself professionally, and we had a baby. Therefore, I did not expend a lot of energy being a leader or initiating activities on behalf of the Palestinians. Of course, when the opportunity presented itself, I always was very assertive, but I did not go out into the community to spread the word about the Palestinians, because I was too involved with my family and with my job.

But after Alex came and became involved in political matters, I definitely became very involved, but not to the extent that I personally feel I got myself involved after Alex died. To me, his message and his mission needed to be fulfilled. The fact that he was taken in such a drastic way af-

ected me to the extent that I channeled anger and frustration into peace work. I started to seek opportunities to meet people of different walks of life in order to speak about Palestinians and their plight. I also sought out Jewish Americans who are also working for peace.

After Alex's death, and actually before the 40 days [of mourning] were over, I was invited by a Presbyterian minister to speak at a church in Long Beach. There I met a Jewish woman whose name is Sarah Jacobus. With her was an Israeli woman who is a peace activist. At that point in time I wasn't too chatty. I was in mourning; I wasn't up to talking very much. But I spoke on behalf of the Palestinians. Sarah called shortly after, and then she came to the memorial service commemorating the 40th day of Alex's death. She came on behalf of the New Jewish Agenda. That really made an impression on me, that a Jewish woman would come to my brother's memorial, knowing that Alex had been killed by an extreme Jewish group.

After that, I got a phone call from Sarah, asking if I, as a Palestinian, would be interested in forming a group of Jewish and Palestinian women to dialogue on peace. That group became fairly successful. It started with just four or five of us. There are now about twelve-fourteen of us. We meet every month. We were able to put on a teach-in, a whole afternoon at Los Angeles City College, against the occupation. Both Sarah and I have been invited as a twosome, Jewish and Palestinian women, to speak on behalf of the Palestinians who are under occupation. Most of the members of the group have gone to the occupied territories and have brought back live memories of what is happening there, and have not been afraid to speak in different communities about what they witnessed.

Q: What is the group called?

A: It's a long name! The Southern California Palestinian and Jewish Women in Dialogue. I missed a few meetings because of my hospitalization, but I hope to go to the meeting this month.

Through the efforts of people in Orange County here, we were able to form the Cousins Club of Orange County. I will send you a copy of the article which appeared in the *L.A. Times* on October 11, 1988, the third anniversary of Alex's death. The article was based on an interview with myself and other members of the Cousins Club. It focused a lot on me and Alex, but it is the result of what we as Palestinians, who loved Alex, felt he would have liked to see happening: people making clear that Jews and Palestinians can work together for the peace process.

The group in Orange County is very active. An action item comes out of almost every meeting. The latest I was involved in proposed writing to the President and Congress, objecting to the removal of the ban on [giving Israel] the cluster bombs. As Jews and Palestinians together, we sign letters and send them to our representatives in government in order to object to the infliction of harm on the Palestinian people.

Q: How would you evaluate these groups?

A: Well, these are groups of Jewish Americans, and some Israeli citizens, who are interested in seeing an end to the occupation. They recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, dignity, pride, independence, and to selection of their own representatives.

Q: How viable are these groups, do you think?

A: Very viable. We hold regular monthly meetings; we generate action items out of each meeting; we go out and speak together as witnesses. Imagine seeing a Jewish American and a Palestinian speaking on behalf of the Palestinians under occupation.

Q: Are there other organizations that you are affiliated with, in addition to the Cousins Club?

A: Lots of Palestinian groups. I'm involved with the Union of Palestinian Women, of course ADC, NAAA, the Palestine Aid Society. I worked to organize the national convention for the Palestine Aid Society. I introduced [former U.S. Congressman] Pete McCloskey and I emceed

Abdeen Jabara one night, and the event in Arabic the following night. At that point in time my legs were hurting, but I thought it was just being tired. I support all Arab functions. I try to be present at every event, and try to be on the board or work behind the scenes in order to make the event successful.

Q: Are you involved in any way with the Middle East Fellowship in Los Angeles?

A: Yes, I am, definitely. They are a wonderful group of Americans and non-Americans who have been in the Middle East, or have sympathy for the people of the Middle East. I believe that they do great things. It's unfortunate that their meetings are not anywhere near Orange County, but I have become close friends with Darrel Meyers [Chairman of the Middle East Fellowship of Southern California.] The Palestine Human Rights Campaign is also another charitable organization. I feel that those are Americans who allowed us to reach them, and who allowed us to make ourselves known and understood, and that they have done a whole lot. Middle East Fellowship members are also in that category. They have lived in the Arab world, or they have somehow gotten to know Arabs, and they really genuinely and sincerely work in order to promote peace and understanding of the Arab people.

Q: You seem to be very active in political and religious peace organizations. You alluded to the effect that the murder of Alex had on you. You mentioned that your entire perspective was changed. You also said that your health was greatly affected.

A: After Alex was murdered, it must have been close to two weeks that I did not sleep, that I did not eat. I only had water and coffee for that length of time, and, naturally, I feel that my immune system was at rock bottom. When the first cancer tumor appeared, it must have been somewhere in my body that did not bother me. When they diagnosed my cancer, they found that I had a malignancy in my liver and there's a tumor behind my stomach.

I feel personally that the worst time of my life was when Alex was killed. I had sponsored him to come to this country to work and pursue his education. I witnessed him successfully achieve the goals that all of us Palestinians wanted to see happen. He spoke on behalf of the Palestinians as a group of people whose rights had been usurped, and he made it clear to Americans that the Arab people in general are a very kind, caring and loving people, just like the rest of the world. Having him go the way he went, just getting blown up one morning when he was going to work, leaving behind three daughters and a wife, and all of us who loved him, blew my mind.

My first day of admission in the hospital was October 27 [1988], so it was exactly three years after Alex's death when I had the first symptom of anything. I was diagnosed on November 1 and was told that my cancer is not curable.

I decided not to take chemo. And the feedback I get is that it was the wisest decision, because the chemo that is offered after the first one I tried is very potent and I only had a 10 percent chance of maybe adding three to four miserable months to my life.

The hard part is that I have family in Palestine that I would love to see, but I don't think that with the present state of affairs over there and with my present state of health, I can really endure the trip.

Q: Do you have close relatives in Palestine?

A: Oh, yes. My brother and his family live at home with my father and my sister. I have a brother in Nazareth, and several aunts, uncles and cousins. I am just devastated over not being able to go and visit them. I couldn't even connect with my father over the phone, because the West Bank telephone lines were jammed for almost a year. You couldn't get through.

Q: Are you still involved in writing letters to the editor and articles?

A: Oh, definitely! That is the top priority for me. In fact, even after I was sick, I must have solicited signa-

tures for 150 or more petitions that were sent to me by the AAI, the American-Arab Institute, the office of James Zogby. They sent copies to George Bush and James Baker. I also went around to two big rallies here, with the help of some people. Then, too, I had to prepare a big stack of information to send to the White House and Congress.

Q: So you still seem to be on top of things.

A: Well, I'd better be. There is nothing but complete silence that will stop me from working for the Palestinians. I'm really delighted to say that I work with people who give me a lot of charge, people from the Middle East Fellowship, people from the Cousins Club, the ADC, the NAAA. Lots of people have come to see me and we spend wonderful evenings talking about what's going on in the community, what else we can do and how we can do it.

Q: An interesting thing comes to mind. You mentioned to me, prior to this interview, that yesterday you received some soil from Palestine.

A: My friend Vicki Tamoush sent me a little black silk case containing soil that was brought over from Palestine. I wasn't aware that she had seen me lay the soil, which Alex had brought to me, on his grave. The idea occurred to me the night before the funeral that Alex would have very much wanted to be buried in Palestine, and the only thing I could give him was the soil he brought me when he went over.

Q: So he brought it for you?

A: He brought a little bottle for each one of us. When he went over, there were three of us here already, and he brought three little bottles of soil from our land. He said, "This is so you won't forget your land." I always had it sitting on my dresser with my cologne and perfume, as a precious gift.

The night before the funeral, I told my husband I wanted him to be the only one to know that I was going to take this bottle of soil in my purse and ask the priest to allow me to sprinkle it on his grave.

I asked the priest if, before concluding the service, he could give me a minute. I don't know where I got the courage, but I was able to explain to the people that Alex brought this to me from our homeland, and because he had to be buried in the United States, and because his casket was draped with the Palestinian and American flags, I was going to sprinkle this bottle of soil on his grave so that he would be buried under Palestinian and American soil.

Apparently, Vicki saw me do that. I wasn't aware who was there and who wasn't.

Q: Because of the shock.

A: That's right. Vicki did me a favor and returned some of that soil. It was just very moving to have received it yesterday. I'm going to treasure it. I really appreciate Vicki's thoughtfulness. It means a lot to me; it's part of my home.

Q: Does it make you feel closer to Palestine?

A: Well, it's good to have any part of Palestine. It feels like we can touch the soil and we can hold all of Palestine in our heart. It is a tangible way of saying, "This is my land." In the absence of the ability to be there physically, it definitely brings me a small portion of Palestine. Of course, I would love to go there, but that remains to be seen. That's all up to God's plan.

Q: You also seem to have very strong religious convictions. How has your religious faith influenced your life?

A: I think that my faith has helped me pull through, to tell you the truth. All of us need faith. It doesn't have to be one kind of faith or another—Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, or what have you. I think that faith is a big part, should be a big part, of everyone's life. I was brought up in a very religious home. The fact that I had the privilege, as a Christian, of living with friends who were Muslims gave me a broader outlook on religions of the Middle East. I was always delighted to learn more and understand more about Islam and Judaism, since they are, along with

Christianity, the three religions that started in the Middle East, and are closely connected to Palestine.

As a Christian—I'm a Catholic—I felt that my faith helped me pull through during my deepest grief, because without believing in a God that is loving and caring, I do not think I could have pulled through Alex's murder.

It also made me commit even more to my church. For a year after Alex died, I offered to take Holy Communion to the sick and elderly in their homes, which was in a way a service to God over and above what I normally did before. It was one way of serving God. Even though our tragedy was very great, I was certain that somehow God would not abandon us.

Q: How does your faith affect your feeling about your illness now?

A: Once I learned my chemotherapy was not working, I decided to rely on the grace of God. All I want is for me to be on this earth longer to serve God and to serve the Palestinian community and to see that there is peace before I die, and that the Palestinians have their own homeland and their own self-determination and independence. But my faith is really what is keeping me going.

Q: Are other members of your family active in politics, in addition to Alex and you?

A: Oh, yes. Sami has been exhausted, I think, the last three years. He can't even keep up with the many requests he has had to appear with different people to speak and to debate. He really was very, very drained immediately after Alex died, because he was the family spokesman. But he also continued to be involved in debates. He has two engagements this very month: he is going to be speaking at a synagogue as a Palestinian, and he is also going to debate a minister on the radio who writes horrible letters in the *L.A. Times*. He has had live radio and TV interviews. The same night that the United States agreed to open a dialogue with the PLO, Sami was in Los Angeles talking with a progressive editor of an Israeli magazine. He also had a live inter-

view on TV about the U.S. agreeing to speak with the PLO. He is often approached to make appearances.

Q: What about your immediate family, your husband? Are they also politically involved?

A: My husband is very involved and he always goes with me to functions. He was so delighted to go with me to the peace rally in December and carry the Palestinian flag. He was just elated to have done that. Because of my drive in the last few years to really make an effort to be in public and speak on behalf of the Palestinians, I think that maybe I've gotten a little bit ahead of him. My husband was always very involved, even before I married him. He was forced out of Haifa when he was 18. He never got over that.

Q: How do your children feel about your active involvement in the Palestinian cause?

A: Both of my children introduce themselves as Palestinians when the opportunity presents itself. They are both very American. They were born and brought up here, but still they know and realize they're Palestinians. They come with us to different functions. They support us. They were very understanding whenever I had to leave them, to travel outside the city, for example, to participate in conferences. Had it not been for their understanding of why this is important to me, I'm sure they wouldn't have appreciated it at all.

Q: Would you describe your professional career?

A: I'm a registered nurse. I started my training in 1954 and graduated in 1957 from the Jordan School of Nursing in Amman. It was an American-established school of nursing. I was given a scholarship to study at Syracuse University. I came to the States in September 1959 and spent a year at Syracuse University, training to become an instructor. I went back and was an instructor at the Jordan School of Nursing for four years. I eventually took on a job with the United Nations World Health Organization [WHO]. It was a research project on Vitamin A deficiency,

which very much affected many people in the refugee camps. I worked with a physician from Egypt on the WHO project, doing research and feeding children who, due to not having enough Vitamin A, ended up being blind. It was a very interesting job. I cried many tears over those children. It was devastating to see those beautiful children, who, because of the lack of nutritious food, ended up losing their eyesight.

I married my husband in 1965. We had met in 1960 in the United States. We corresponded for five years. In August 1965, he came over and we got married in Ramallah. After that, he went back to Boston and I then followed. When I came to Boston, I was able to get my license to practice nursing in Boston. Since then I've been able to obtain my license in California. I have been working in the same hospital for over 19 years. Since 1975, I've been manager of the Department of Obstetrics. Just this month I was nominated for the Dignity of Persons Award. The people who nominated me feel I have clearly displayed respect for people of all kinds, types and positions in the work place. It was a very touching and moving time for me to receive the letter, saying that colleagues and noncolleagues, different people in the hospital, had nominated me for the award.

Q: I'm sure you deserve it.

A: Thank you. At this time, I'm a nurse manager. I manage a maternity ward. I enjoy my job. I work hard at it. I just went back to work half-time to try and see what I can do.

Q: Let's shift, now, and talk about the Middle East region as a whole. What do you think of the Middle East events in the last few months, for example, King Hussein's disengagement?

A: Well, I don't know if I want to comment very much on that. It was a good move, I think, for the Palestinians, because that gave them an independent entity. Unfortunately, I don't know if it gave the message to the Americans that King Hussein is no longer involved with the Palestinians, that the Palestinians are capable of managing their own affairs.

I was beginning to get a little tired of hearing about the efforts of [former Secretary of State George] Shultz running to talk to King Hussein about the fate of the Palestinians. To me he was beating around the bush and talking to the wrong people. So for me, the news of King Hussein giving up the West Bank made it clear to me that this is the opportunity for the Palestinians to say, "Well, now we rule our own selves; we are independent from Hussein. So you need to talk to us."

Q: Do you think this result was produced primarily by the intifadah?

A: I'm sure that it was. The uprising certainly helped make lots of people understand that the Palestinians are capable of forming their own independent state. They are not incapable, lame people who need to have someone be in charge of them. They chose the Palestine Liberation Organization to be their official representative.

Q: What do you think of the PLO's acceptance of U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338?

A: I have to say that we need to start some place. I mean we need to be initiating some sort of activity, to prove we really mean what we say. I feel that it was a good move on the part of the PLO. It should have left no room for discussion as to whether they mean it or not. Unfortunately, it was not taken at face value. But I feel it was a fantastic giant step toward peace by recognizing the State of Israel and by accepting the status of Israel as a country. But we are also saying that we do need our own country and we do need to be independent and we do want to live in peace.

Q: Will that contribute, do you think, to the Palestinian cause? Will it produce some positive outcomes?

A: It should. The unfortunate part is that the Government of Israel is not opening its ears to anything. My feeling is that the United States Government must take a firmer stand. It must tell Shamir and his government to take notice, and it must tell them that they cannot go on with their arrogance. The fact of the matter is that the PLO did all that it could do right at

this point. We said that we recognize Israel and that we want to talk peace. Why Israel does not seem to want to change its position is beyond me. I am really hopeful that, within Israel, the peace movement for ending the occupation is going to continue to grow. Unfortunately, it takes a lot of time, but I feel that eventually the Government of Israel will have to bow to the pressures of its own people. My hope is that the new government in the U.S.—George Bush and Baker and Sununu—hopefully, will have a little different outlook on the whole situation and will really put more effort into trying to bring the Israel Government to realize that the Palestinians are people, too, and that the Israelis cannot have their cake and eat it.

The uprising has proven that the Palestinians are a determined people. The killing, the breaking of bones, the detentions, the camps, the jails, the deportations, did not affect the Palestinians. They are determined, brave people. They want to be independent. I feel that the PLO did a fantastic job of reconciliation, or offering reconciliation. The ball is in the Israelis' court.

Q: What is your opinion of the United States' dialogue with the PLO now?

A: More important than the dialogue between the PLO and the Americans is that the American Government realizes that it needs to really put the pressure on Israel to recognize the PLO just like the PLO has recognized Israel. The time has come when all of us here should work on pressuring our representatives in government, because it is for the benefit of the U.S.A. that they stop this pouring of money into destruction—of two peoples!

Q: Would you like to comment on the November 1988 Israeli and American elections?

A: What can I say? As far as the Israeli election is concerned, I don't know that there was a winning situation for us as Palestinians. I feel that there was a no-win situation. It is unfortunate that things are going from bad to worse. I just listened for five hours to Fred Brauer, a member of the Middle East Fellowship, who

recently came back from the occupied territories and who told us about the horrible things that are taking place.

Q: About what?

A: Well, the bullets that they shoot. He had a sample of one. He was telling us what one physician at Maqassed Hospital in Jerusalem said: The thing that Americans need to understand is that when a person, a Palestinian, is killed and dies, it is a terrible situation. At least they bury the dead, they mourn the dead and they kind of get over it a little at a time. But when they deform a person, when the bullet goes through the brain and leaves a vegetable, when it goes through the spinal cord and leaves the person paralyzed, that individual is going to be a burden on that family forever and ever. So the injured have more bad effects on the people of Palestine than the people who are killed and buried.

We always focus on how many are killed, but we never realize that those that are injured don't just have a scab on the knee. They have been injured very deeply: either their lung collapsed, or their kidney was punctured, or their brain was shot, or their spinal cord was paralyzed. These are the people that are going to be a burden and require medical help, physical help and emotional help for the rest of their lives.

Q: In light of these developments, Ellen, what do you see happening in the future of the Middle East?

A: The future depends a lot on what every one of us is willing to put forth in terms of time and effort to effect a change. Unfortunately, 20 percent of the people do 100 percent of the work and 80 percent of the people do nothing. A lot of the change is going to have to come from the U.S. Government, by pressuring Israel into recognizing the Palestinians and into thinking in terms of sitting around a conference table. As far as Israel is concerned, my hope is that the peace movement and the groups that are now beginning to rebel against work—the reserivists not wanting to go to the occupied territories [Yesh Gvul], some of their own military men who are objecting to

what's happening, the physicians who are now objecting to the unethical treatment of the injured—all these things are going to add up to the point where the government of Shamir is not going to have an out. They're going to have to start listening to their own people. Otherwise, they're going to be destroyed from within.

I feel that there is hope for peace. I feel that now is the time for us as American Palestinians to really put the pressure on our American Government to get actively involved in the peace process in the Middle East.

Q: If one were to ask you what values should be maintained by your children and by your children's generation, what would you say?

A: Well, first of all, I want them to always remember that their ancestors came from Palestine. They are Palestinian Americans and I would want them to continue to remember that, and not be embarrassed to admit it. I definitely don't want them to forget that they have to be proud of their heritage.

Q: If I would ask about American Arabs in general, what would be the most important activity that the American Arabs should be involved in, to promote the cause of peace in the Middle East. If I were to ask you about joining an organization, where would you rate that, in terms of importance?

A: I think that there are many opportunities for American Arabs to become involved. The important thing to realize is that they must get involved. They need to become involved in the American electoral process, as well. They need to understand who their representatives are and what they want from their representatives. As far as joining organizations, it really is not important which organization they choose to join. They can join any of the organizations, but they need to come out of their cubbyholes and work. They need to admit that they are American Arabs; they need to be proud of it. They need to consistently read newspapers and read between the lines and respond and keep at it. Not give up.

Q: What about writing letters?

A: Definitely. Letters to the editor, letters to their representatives, to their congressmen, to their senators, the White House, emphasizing over and over the wrong, and trying to make the wrong become a right. They must recognize that their individual efforts are needed, that everyone has a duty to perform, and that one person cannot work for the whole neighborhood, or the whole community. This is where we've failed. We tend to take the easy way out and bury our heads in the sand and let other people do the work. It is vital for us American Arabs to really rise and get out of our shells and present ourselves to the world as we really are. We must not be ashamed of who we are, and we must continue to present ourselves to officials, letting them know who we are and what we stand for.

Q: What about demonstrations?

A: There is a place for that as well. There is a time and place for everything. There is something going on that is not right sometimes. For example, at the last meeting I attended of our Palestinian-Jewish dialogue group before I got sick, I proposed that we try to make an appearance in front of the Israeli Consulate, protesting the occupation and commemorating the uprising on December 9. Fortunately, I was well enough to be there myself, but we were not able to see the consul. I was told there was no way that he would even allow us in the building. So we dressed in black. There were about 70 women. We carried signs and had a silent vigil in front of the Israeli Consulate. Now to me, that was very meaningful, because we were passing out literature saying what we were doing.

We had two rallies. One celebrating the proclamation of the State of Palestine, and after that, one on December 9, commemorating one year of the uprising.

Q: What could you say to American Arabs, so that they will become more visible on the political scene?

A: There is power in numbers. If a senator or congressman receives 3,000 letters from his district, from the

people who elect him, because he did not support an issue, or a letter of compliments because he did, he will definitely take notice of those people.

I would really like to tell all American Arabs one special thing. They need to be proud that they are American Arabs, not to be ashamed of it. Every one of them has an important place in the community. They don't have to be educated; they don't have to have doctorate degrees. Every person has his or her own value in letter-writing, signing petitions, protesting, and making visible his or her objection of or approval of certain policies. They really need to start recognizing the fact that it is their duty to be part and parcel of what the American-Arab community is working for.

How can we get them to do that? I know that in my lifetime I have stimulated a few people who now have become even more involved than I am. But for those of us who are really involved, it takes a lot of effort to try to activate those who are hibernating in their homes.

Q: So it is the responsibility of those who are active to increase activism and dynamism.

A: They need a stimulus. They need someone to instigate them, to take them in their charge. Like we did during the elections. If they don't want to go and vote, you bring them in your car, make sure they go in the booth and that they vote, so they can make a difference.

Q: In conclusion, Ellen, is there something that you would like to say to the Palestinians in general?

A: I want all Palestinians to have hope that we are going to have our Palestinian state. But in order for our hopes and dreams to come alive, we need to all work together, hold hands and make a chain of human power, involve ourselves in what is important for us as Americans, or as Palestinian Americans, living here. We should make the American Government aware of our needs and our rights. We should let the politicians know that they can help our people become independent, by using the power of the U.S. Government to pressure the Israeli Government.

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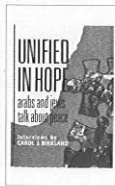


Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987, 263 pp., cloth. This carefully researched book exposes Israel as arms dealer and military trainer of the world's most brutal and reactionary regimes. List: \$18.95; AMEU: \$11.75.



James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988, 520 pp., cloth. Comprehensive analysis by a leading authority on Iran of flawed U.S. policy towards Iran from the 1940's to the Iran-Contra scandal and the U.S. naval action in the Persian Gulf. List: \$25.00; AMEU: \$16.75.

Carol J. Birkland, *Unified in Hope: Arabs and Jews Talk About Peace*, New York: Friendship Press, 1988, 160 pp., paperback. Nine Israeli Jews and ten Palestinian Arabs speak with disarming frankness of their fears and hopes for the future. List: \$8.95; AMEU: \$7.25.



Inea Bushnaq, *Arab Folktales*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, 386 pp., paperback. This lively collection of 130 folktales provides an intimate introduction to Arab attitudes about life and living. List: \$11.95; AMEU: \$7.75.

□ Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1984, 224 pp., paperback. A Palestinian priest known for his humanitarian works in the Galilee tells the story of his search for conciliation between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis. Father Chacour, whose village was deliberately destroyed by the Israeli army on Christmas Day, 1951, speaks of the concerns of Palestinian Christians as they struggle for the survival of their community in Israel. List: \$6.95; AMEU: \$4.95.



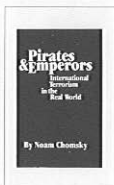
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□ Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, Boston: South End Press, 1983, 481 pp., paperback. Chomsky argues that the "special relationship" be-

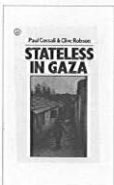
tween Israel and the United States has led to a disastrous U.S. foreign policy. List: \$11.00; AMEU: \$8.25.

□ Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors: International Terrorism in the Real World*, Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1986, 174 pp., paperback. An incisive study of the deceptions and double standards to which U.S. and Israeli officials and the media routinely resort in discussing the issue of terrorism. Includes a sharp critique of U.S. policy in the Mideast. List: \$8.95; AMEU: \$4.75.

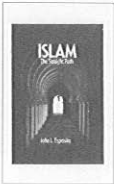
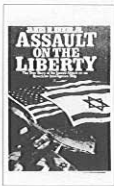


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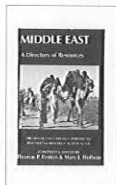
□ James Ennes, Jr., *Assault on the Liberty*, New York: Random House, 1979, 299 pp., cloth. The author was an officer on the bridge during the prolonged and brutal attack on the USS Liberty by Israeli planes and torpedo boats in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Thirty-four American crewmen were killed, 171 wounded. \$2.95 special. List: \$14.95; AMEU: \$2.95.



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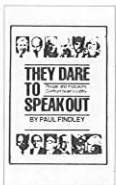
□ Thomas Fenton and Mary Heffron, *Middle East: A Directory of Resources*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, 144 pp., paperback. Annotated entries on organizations, audiovisual materials, and

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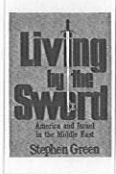


□ Elizabeth W. Fernea and Basima Q. Bezirgan, eds., *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1984, 452 pp., paperback. This classic collection of autobiographical and biographical sketches, spanning 13 centuries, is a superb introduction to the diversity of experience of Muslim women and the commonality of many of their concerns. List: \$12.50; AMEU: \$8.25.

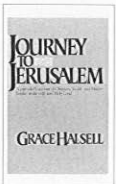
□ Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out*, Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1985, 362 pp., paperback. The former eleven-term Congressman from Illinois discusses how Americans are victimized for opposing the Israel lobby. List: \$8.95; AMEU: \$6.25.



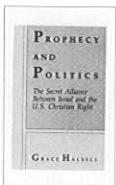
□ Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987, 277 pages, paperback. Noted Israeli scholar reconstructs the actual events behind the official myths about Israel's founding. List: \$8.95; AMEU: \$6.50.



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□ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel's Fateful Hour*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988, 256 pp., cloth. Former Chief of Israeli Military Intelligence's well-argued warning to Israel that this is its last chance to save itself from "national suicide." A pragmatist, Harkabi examines every angle of the present Palestinian-Israeli conflict to conclude that the pro-Israeli demands should be "negotiate with the PLO" and "withdraw from the Occupied Territories." List: \$22.50; AMEU: \$13.95.



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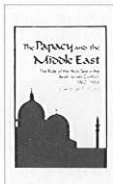


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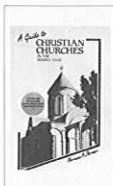
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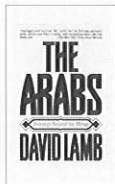
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□ Alfred Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II: What Price Peace?*, New Brunswick, NJ: North American, 1982, 904 pp., paperback. Covers the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the time of Herzl to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Research involved is monumental. Contains most information of which most Americans are unaware. List: \$9.95; AMEU: \$6.95.



□ W. Thomas Mallison and Sally V. Mallison, *The Palestine Problem in International Law and World Order*, Harlow, England: Longman, 1986, 564 pp., cloth. This monumental study of international law analyzes Zionist political-legal objectives, the partition of Palestine, the legal status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and Palestinian rights. List: \$49.50; AMEU: \$46.50.



□ Sami Musallam, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: Its Function and Structure*, Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1988, 70 pp., paperback. Most up-to-date

handbook on this complex "government-in-exile." Includes an organizational chart. List: \$6.95; AMEU: \$5.25.



□ Donald Neff, *Warriors Against Israel: How Israel Won the Battle to Become America's Ally*, Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1988, 371 pp., cloth. Suspenseful history of the 1973 war by *Time's* former bureau chief in Jerusalem. Concludes acclaimed trilogy on the U.S. role in Israel's three major wars. List: \$19.95; AMEU: \$12.25.



□ Lee O'Brien, *American Jewish Organizations and Israel*, Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1986, 238 pp., paperback. This study profiles major Jewish establishment organizations in the United States, delineates their organizational structure and political agenda, and assesses the content and impact of their Israeli support work. List: \$12.95; AMEU: \$7.95.



□ Gregory Orfalea, *Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab Americans*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988, 354 pp., cloth. Author, searching for his own past, traces a century of Arab-American history in the U.S. Over one hundred Arab Americans reflect on their ethnicity and collective roots. List: \$22.50; AMEU: \$13.25.

□ Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle over Lebanon*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987, 431 pp., paperback. Vivid account of the searing tragedy of Lebanon by a journalist who lived in Lebanon and Syria from 1962-1986. Focus is on the history of Lebanese and Palestinian actions over the past 11 years, including the involvement of Israel, Syria and the U.S. List: \$12.00; AMEU: \$8.50.



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□ Cheryl Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest: A Critical Examination*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986, 446 pp., paperback. A professor of International Studies argues that the U.S.-Israeli partnership has severely damaged U.S. national interests in the Mideast over the years. Now in paperback. List: \$11.95; AMEU: \$8.95.

□ Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victims*, New York: Verso, 1988, 296 pp., paperback. Eleven essays by Said, Hitchens, Chomsky, Khalidi and others show that spurious academic efforts and denial of the truth by Western governments and media have thwarted Palestinians' claims to a homeland and existence as a people. List: \$13.95; AMEU: \$9.25.



□ Ralph Schoenmann, *The Hidden History of Zionism*, Santa Barbara, CA: Veritas Press, 1988, 150 pp., paperback. A shocking expose of Zionism from its inception through the uprising, presented

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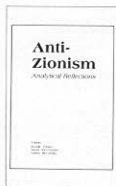
□ Jerome M. Segal, *Creating the Palestinian State: A Strategy for Peace*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989, 192 pp., paperback. Exciting unorthodox peace plan put forward by an American Jewish academic and president of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Political Action Committee. The P.N.C. has already begun to act along the lines of Segal's binational plan. List: \$9.95; AMEU: \$6.75.



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□ David Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987, 596 pp., paperback. This winner of a 1987 Pulitzer Prize explores the subjective bases of hostility and possible coexistence between Jews and Arabs living under Israeli control. List: \$8.95; AMEU: \$6.50.

□ Tekiner, Abed-Rabbo, Mezvinsky, eds., *Anti-Zionism: Analytical Reflections*, Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1988, 358 pp., cloth. Exciting selection of essays on topical issues: Christian Zionism in the USA; the "Who is a Jew?" controversy in Israel; the legal aspects of closing the PLO offices; Israel and South Africa; American peace efforts in the Mideast; and others. Authors include: Elmer Berger, Israel Shahak, Naseer Aruri. List: \$19.95; AMEU: \$11.75.



□ Izzat Tannous, M.D., *The Palestinians: Eyewitness History of Palestine under British Mandate*, New York: I.G.T. Company, 1988, 800 pages, 260 illustrations, 15 maps, cloth. Origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Memoirs of the tumultuous years 1876-1949 by a Palestinian diplomat and intellectual who participated in the making of history. List: \$45.00; AMEU: \$22.25.

□ Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, 304 pp., cloth. A former reporter for *Time* magazine, Tivnan has thoroughly researched the history of the Zionist lobby in preparing this lively and cogent attack on AIPAC. He argues that, by dominating U.S. Jewish opinion as well as general American debate on the Middle East issues, AIPAC has damaged prospects for an Arab-Israeli peace. \$2.95 special. List: \$19.95; AMEU: \$2.95.

□ Milton Viorst, *Sands of Sorrow: Israel's Journey from Independence*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987, 328 pp., cloth. A liberal supporter of Israel describes how Israel turned its back on peace, preferring to dominate its Arab neighbors and become a spearhead of U.S. interests in the Mideast. List: \$18.95; AMEU: \$12.25.

□ Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*, New York: Touchstone, 1986, 336 pp., paperback. Useful introduction to the recent political resurgence of militant Islam in the Middle East by a well-known journalist. List: \$7.95; AMEU: \$5.95.

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- The Fourth Annual Bethlehem Association Convention will be held at the San Francisco Airport Marriott, August 11-16, 1989. For information, call 415-664-5241; for hotel reservations, call toll free 1-800-228-9290.
- The Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America will be held at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto, Canada, November 15-18, 1989. For information and registration, write: MESA, Dept. of Oriental Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, or call 602-262-5850.