

1. *Excerpts from letters of Mervet Akram Sha'ban (Palestinian girl) to Galit Fink (Israeli girl). In If You Could Be My Friend. New York: Orchard Books, 1992.*

*Aug. 22, 1988, pp. 16-17:*

For eight and a half months our schools have been closed by the Israeli authorities. We had to give back all our books. In the beginning I was happy. Now I am bored. I am tired of playing hopscotch and jumping rope...Now I realize how important it is to learn.

*Oct. 30, 1988, pp. 21-23:*

Dear Galit,

You're right when you say that war is better when it's only a game.

In Dheisheh [refugee camp] our favorite game is called "the Arabs and the soldiers," the only game I still play once in a while. We split up into two teams. The boys are the soldiers, and the girls and the little ones are the Arabs. The Arabs pretend to be demonstrators and the soldiers hit us. The Arabs run to hide where they can and some are caught. Some collapse because they pretend to be wounded. When I play this game with Mohammed, my [other] brothers, and the children in the neighborhood, I am always the doctor. I run to take care of the wounded with old rags and a bottle of water. Obviously, it is always the Arabs who win in the end....

But I also know about the real demonstrations. They happen often in Dheisheh. Everyone throws stones. The young people make fun of the soldiers, scream, and scrawl graffiti such as "With our soul and our blood we will avenge our martyrs." As soon as the soldiers come near, we have to escape as quickly as possible. I'm afraid that Mohammed will be arrested one day; he always has pockets full of stones. You asked me what I think of the Israelis. For me, they are like other people. They are free and they have things we don't have.

I don't like the Jews because they took our country and they mistreat Arabs. But I don't know any Israelis other than the soldiers.

Here, no one will stop throwing stones as long as there are soldiers. Especially since the intifada. They make our lives difficult with arrests, wounded people, and deaths. They throw tear gas, shoot bullets, and destroy our homes.

Not ours, luckily. They have only blown up our hot-water heater. Even so, our family is always worried.

*Jan. 1, 1989, pp. 27-28:*

I promised to tell you the story of my family. My grandparents lived in a village near Hebron. They told me that they napped on the lawn, grew their own vegetables, and made their own clothes. The village was called Zakariya, but it doesn't exist anymore. In 1948 the Palestinians had to leave their land because they were driven out by the Jews. Dheisheh was a barren hillside and they settled there with other refugees. In the beginning they didn't have a house or water or shelter. UNRWA gave them tents to sleep in. When it rained the streets were flooded and filled with mud. In the winter the babies screamed from the cold, and the wind sometimes carried away the tents. My grandmother had to walk more than a mile to get firewood and water. The water

container had to last a week for the whole family. They cooked the food they received from UNRWA on a campfire because that was all they had....

After 1950 they started to build small houses. They had one room for households of five or less and two rooms for bigger families. After fifteen years my parents were able to build a big three-room house with a kitchen, running water, and electricity.

*Feb. 22, 1989:*

I swear to you that the soldiers here are horrible. They treat us badly and beat us like donkeys. One day, in the school courtyard, a little boy lost his eye when he was hit with a rubber bullet. I fainted. I will never be able to forget this....

Since the intifada, they built a very high barricade to stop us from throwing stones on the cars in the road. The army has closed all the entrances to the camp except for one. It is right near our school, but it's not the one closest to our house. I have to walk twice as far. When there are heavy rains, like we've had recently, the big hill that leads to the house is transformed into a mud slide.

Another big problem at Dheisheh is the sewers. The camp is so overpopulated that the dirty water overflows and runs in the gutter all day long.

*2. Excerpt from an account by Mona, an 11-year-old Palestinian girl, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. pp. 45—48.*

Where I live is not far from this school, but I have to leave my house at five-thirty in the morning to get through the checkpoint in time to get to school. Even then, I am often late. I don't like getting out of bed when it is still dark, especially in the winter. I know I'll have to spend a long time waiting at the checkpoints, and it makes me want to stay in bed and not bother to go to school....

There isn't even a bathroom. I don't drink anything before I leave home, in case I get stuck at a checkpoint and have to go to the bathroom. That's happened to me before. It's awful. Even without that, my feet get sore from standing and I get bored, bored, bored....The soldiers don't care that we are people. They think we are goats who don't mind standing around. But even goats get grass to chew. We get nothing....

I just want to go to school. I don't want to blow anything up. The soldiers don't see me as a child. They see me as an enemy. I don't like them, but I'm not their enemy. I just want to go to school....

My father works as a taxi driver. He can only drive people up to the checkpoint, then they have to walk across and find another taxi on the other side. When there is a curfew on, he can't drive at all, and I can't come to school. When there are a lot of curfews, or they go on for a long time, my father can't work. Then my parents argue about money, because there isn't much of it in the house.

Soldiers scare me more than anything else. Guns and soldiers. You don't have to be a bad person to get shot by them. Mostly, it is good people who get shot. You should have to do something bad to get shot, but here, everybody gets shot.

The fighting is between the innocent Palestinians, who have nothing, and the Israelis, who have everything. I wish all the Israelis would leave my country. I don't

know any Israeli children, and I don't want to, because they have the same beliefs as their parents. They believe that I am not as good as they are....

When there is peace, we will be very happy, and we will be able to go anywhere we want to in our land, without having to cross a checkpoint or explain ourselves to a foreign soldier. I don't know how or when this peace will come. I can't really imagine it.

3. *Excerpt from an account by Mahmood, an 11-year-old Palestinian boy, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. p.49.*

There are lots of soldiers where I live. When the soldiers see crowds of Palestinians, they shoot their guns and they drop gas on people. The gas makes my throat hurt and my eyes water up like I'm crying. The gas makes me vomit. When they drop gas on us, I can see a lot of people throwing up. The gas smells bad, too. It doesn't matter if I am outside or inside, because the gas comes into the house. You can't keep it out. It is like air.

They drop gas on us so they can watch us cough and throw up. The soldiers all have gas masks, and they all laugh at us when we're throwing up....

I don't know any Israeli children. I don't want to know any. They hate me, and I hate them.

4. *Excerpt from an account by Wafa, a 12-year-old Palestinian girl, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. pp. 90—95.*

I was eight the first time my house was demolished. It was night time. My family and I were in the living room together.

Someone pounded on the door. My father opened it. There were soldiers on the other side who said, "This is not your house anymore. This is our house now."

My father said, "You are wrong. This is still my house, and I'm not going to give it to you." He shoved at the soldiers, trying to push them back outside, but there were too many of them. They hit my father on the head with their guns. He fell to the floor, and they kicked him and dragged him outside and put him under arrest....

Then the soldiers started breaking things. They fired tear gas into the house. My brothers and sisters and I couldn't breathe and had to run out into the night. The soldiers had gas masks on....

The soldiers dragged out everybody who was left in the house. I saw a soldier kick my little sister, who had tripped and fallen to the ground. He was yelling at her to get up or the bulldozer would run over her and crush her. I tried to get to her, but a soldier hit me with his M16 and pushed me to the ground.

Everybody had to get out of the house. I stood and watched as the soldiers drove the giant bulldozer into my house and destroyed it. Everything inside it was destroyed, too.

My father has lots of Israeli friends. He called them, and many Israelis came to help us rebuild our house. Before they came, I thought all Israelis were our enemies. When so many came to help us, I had to change my mind. The soldiers weren't mean to us because they are Israelis. They were mean to us because it's their job, and they enjoy it....

I have good memories of my house. In my bedroom there were beds and cupboards for books, toys, dolls, puzzles, games – all the normal things that children have....

We rebuilt our house with the help of our Israeli and Palestinian friends. Just when we had it completed, the bulldozers came and destroyed it.

Hundreds of volunteers came to rebuild it a third time. Again the soldiers waited until the house was finished and we were ready to move in. I was very excited, because I could live in our real house again after a long time, but they destroyed it again. It is still destroyed....

I see soldiers all the time. They are everywhere. They make me afraid because I don't know what they'll do to me, or when they'll do it. They keep my town under curfew. They won't let me do the things I need to do to grow up.

Under curfew, you have to stay in the house. If you go out of the house you will be killed. Even the women. Even the children. The Israelis will shoot anybody. They don't care if you are doing anything bad or not....

My mother hasn't been well for a long time. She stopped talking. She got very, very sad each time our house was destroyed, until she was too sad to talk. I miss hearing her voice even more than I miss our house....

My three wishes? I want all the Israelis who are trying to take our land to be killed. I want to be a success in my studies. This will make the Israelis nervous. They don't want us to study, and they often close our schools. And I want to build a home the soldiers can't destroy, and live in it with my family.