

Faisal: I belong to a generation which did not enjoy a childhood. I was born when the revolution of 1936 was petering out.

Rima: This is me with my mother and father, in Jaffa I think. We didn't know then that the world would go away.

This is when I was little. I was bragging then. When I was a young woman I arranged them. But now all is gone, gone...

Sharif: I and another child would walk daily from Arrabeh to Sakhnin, about 5 km each way. We carried our food, usually bread with olive oil.

First Homes

Faisal: Small and Big Al-Masmiyyeh were originally one village. The Alhouranis were one of many families in the village. Many antagonisms occurred among the families. The Alhourani family killed one person of an opposing family at a time undefined by people's memories, including my relatives. According to an old tradition the Houranis had to leave the village. They then moved to a nearby area, built homes, and stayed there even after reconciliation. This place was called Small Al-Masmiyyeh after the original village.

Rima: I was born in Jaffa in 1932. I don't know exactly how old I was when we moved to Al-Ramleh, so I don't remember Jaffa. I remember it because we used to go to my grandparents' house. My grandparents on my mother's side lived in Jaffa. My grandmother died early so I don't remember her, although I have photos with her. She used to love me and spoil me a lot because I was her daughter's eldest child.

After that we moved to Al-Ramleh. I have good memories there. I

remember our relationship with our cousins, and playing with them. After Al-Ramleh we were in a boarding school. I was seven when I returned to Birzeit. I went to a boarding school. On vacations we would go home, wherever my father would have moved.

We had relatives. The town was intimate and beautiful. I'll never forget the stairs. We used to go up and down the stairs. The town was pretty. The countryside was beautiful. When I returned to Safad after 1967, I started recalling things. I remember our house on a mountain and high stairs. I looked for those stairs, I didn't find them. Turns out, they were not high, but we were small and saw it that way.

Sharif: From the end of the 1936 revolution, I remember the Palestinians rebels. They'd wear some kind of pants called breeches with a kufiya and a headband. I remember in the square in front of the guesthouse, they were there, about 30-40 of them. One of them was chanting folkloric songs and they repeated after him. Later, I realized that he was Noah Ibrahim, the poet of the revolution. My uncle who lived next to us had a big guesthouse called Al-Zawyeh, the Corner. He was the town's chief. When the British came, they went to him, and when they left, the rebels came and also went to him. My uncle was smart. He befriended both.

Faisal: My father left our world when I was a baby so I do not remember him at all. I never found any photo of him either. I know what he looked like from my relatives' descriptions but nothing more. They told me he was one of the gifted persons in the village. He joined the Jihad [struggle] in the 1936 Revolution. I was told that he had injuries that led to his death.

Rima: My father was the college president. He supported my aunt. He cared a lot for education, especially girls' education. I remember he graduated with a major in physics from Beirut American University in 1914. I don't remember we ever had a lot of money. We put every penny in the school, until it became big and successful.

Sharif: My father was a secular man. He didn't believe in a lot of myths and folktales. He would say things that I, as a kid, would find strange, at that time, at that part of my life. My grandfather on my father's side was a land owner. He never worked. He considered working to be beneath him. We had some land. He gave it to others to plough and plant, and we got a share of the harvest.

Folk Songs:

We came to your house, dear ones,
Congratulations on your wedding
Please sing with us
Nicolas, you are so dear to us
The henna is ours
The clothes are from Jerusalem

Faisal: In the history of the village, my parents had a love story which was on every tongue. They were cousins. My grandfather were brothers. Their love story ended in marriage. Because my father passed away when I was a baby my mother had many suitors as was common in the villages. She was said to be very beautiful and had many proposals, but she refused them, using the argument that I was still too young. The first picture in my

memory as a four year old child was at my mother's second wedding. She was leaving me and crying.

Rima: My mother was from Jaffa. When she married my father, she married him because she appreciated him. She was 18 years younger than him. All her life, she sacrificed for Birzeit. She taught us a lot of things. The spirit of sacrifice was a high priority for her. This was what distinguished our family, sacrifice.

Faisal: The favourite games of the children in the villages at that time were wandering in the fields, looking for interesting insects, going to the village well and enjoying playing with the water and other things connected with it and teasing the guards, the manager and the women. A new game spread when the British came – let me say, spread in Palestine. It was football. In our village we had many football teams and since we had no real footballs we made, or our mothers made, balls of cloth or rubber, etc. and we would play with them. I remember liking to play football barefoot.

Rima: We played all kinds of games, like hide and seek, or we made rifles with olive wood. We had two teams, the red team and the blue and green team. My oldest cousin Kamal was the leader of the red team, Osama and Shafiq were leaders of green team. We, the little ones, were followers. I was with the green team, my sister Samia and my cousin Diana were with the red team.

Sharif: I remember mostly hunting for birds. Sometimes I spent whole days, leaving in the early morning, because we used to hunt for birds. We felt that we knew which birds left early, where each kind of birds was. Life was not only in the house. It was in the countryside and the trees, all of it was part of home.

Faisal: I was enrolled in school before the minimum age. That was seven but I enrolled at six years of age. Palestinian pupils were required to wear a specific uniform of khaki shorts and shirts. As village children we were dressed in boy-style gowns. It was the first time I wore shorts. My

grandfather bought them for me and his children at school. They made us underwear. I saw heaven in that bag that my caregiver got from my grandfather to dress me in the next morning. I was too excited to sleep. At dawn, she surrendered to my nagging and got up and dressed me in the new outfit. I went to my grandfather. He used to pray and make coffee in the guest room of the house. I kissed his hand and ran to the lanes of the village to show off my fancy new clothes. I walked and walked and no one saw me. By chance, no one was outside. I missed the joy of showing off. Then I had the inevitable call of nature in the morning and I could not undo the buttons of the shorts so I wet my pants and was extremely embarrassed and ashamed. I returned home. They said that the underwear was similar to the shorts. So they decided to send me to the school without shorts. I was happy. You have the right to know that this was another scandal. In addition to my own scandal in the street I was sent back home from school in shame.

Rima: The school my aunt founded was a boarding school. We made friends from all over Palestine in Birzeit. We made friends from Haifa, Nazareth, and Gaza... Maybe Samia can share this with us.

Samia: There was a system, the same uniform, a meal time, the parents brought their kids every day at 4:00. We were happy. Nazareth girls brought cookies stuffed with dates. It was exceptional. Gaza girls brought spicy foods. It was a nice friendship and equality.

Sharif: We had finished the fifth grade. They were thinking of opening a sixth grade for the first time. There were three or four of us, and they brought us to teach the young children because they had no teachers. We taught the first and second grade for a month or two and then we lost hope of having a sixth grade because they had no teachers or facilities. Another boy and I started to walk

daily from Arrabeh to Sakhnin.

Faisal: At the time of the harvest children are the happiest ones in the village. We were happy for two reasons. The first was that we collected the wheat that fell from the harvesters and the second was the vendors who came and brought things, things that make children and adults happy. The things which interested the children were candy of different kinds and toys. We would trade handfuls of wheat for candy. In my memory I still remember the kind we called kaakaban, because of its colour. It was made of sugar.

Sharif: In 1948, the population was only 2,000. Now it is around 23,000. There is a big difference. It used to be very quiet, and you would see animals in the road: donkeys, horses, cows, and you would see farmers, old people sitting on the road leaning against the walls, going to plough land, carrying seeds and ploughing tools on a donkey. It was a beautiful countryside scene, and of course there were no cars.

Rima and Samia: Now we took the road from Ramallah to Birzeit. It was a dirt road when we were little. We used to take strolls on it, and go to Ramallah.

Samia: There wasn't a lot of transportation anyway. There was one bus that left Birzeit in the morning and returned at the end of day. It would reach Ramallah and Jerusalem. The only school car was driven by my Aunt Nabiha.

Rima: They would walk from Attara and the surrounding villages. I remember in winter they would arrive soaking wet from the rain. Still, they would come, take off their socks, and dry them. There was no heating or anything. They did this in very simple ways. There is Jalazon camp. Above it is the settlement, unfortunately. It

was one of our favorite places. We would take walks there, and pick flowers. I have a lot of photos. You could see the beautiful colorful flowers we used to pick from the Jalazon area.

Samia: My aunt would watch us from her room. The mulberry tree is visible from her room. Once, I was climbing the tree. She called: who's this on the tree, and I didn't respond. I climbed down very quickly so she didn't see me. My dress got torn. It got torn apart. I went directly to school. Usually we wore uniforms. It was a Friday or a Sunday. It was a day off. I took off the dress, hid it in the closet and no one knew anything.

Sharif: I got typhoid in the second grade. A lot of the children died from typhoid that year. I survived. I don't know how I escaped death. My grandmother lived in Acre, and I stayed with her maybe two or three months. But I was mostly unconscious. I don't remember anything. Of course I came back home weak. I could barely walk. At school, I came back to the second grade. There were wrestling challenges to see who would push the other to the ground. This put me in a difficult situation. I couldn't wrestle with the other kids who hadn't been sick.

Rima: We used to play "Here's the X". This playground was important. We used to play here. And here, behind the tree, was a stage. All the young men's parties were here. This building wasn't there. The people would sit here as audience. And the theatre was in the front. The choir would sit here. The piano teacher or the orchestra would be here. This yard was also a playground for us, as kids. As a family and a school playground.

Faisal: My grandfather's second wife raised me. I grew up with her until we were expelled from our village. She was my first stepmother. My grandmother on my mother's side was a distinguished woman. I write a lot about her in my book "Pathways of Exile". She owned a herd of goats like all village families. She had a special goat which was her favourite. It had

light-coloured fur. My grandmother drank milk or ate yogurt or cheese only from that goat.

Rima: At school, my aunt was the principal. She was in charge of everything. My aunt Aneeseh taught the little children, and my aunt Mary taught them dancing. She was in charge of the house and was very strict.

Since the school closed before May in 1948, the issue really touched us. We found ourselves with our school closed, where we used to gather and play advanced sports activities and held sports competitions. We were personally affected by the general circumstances. As much as they explained it to us, and as much as we understood. I remember I understood pretty much. We were the children of the village who no longer had a school. We created a brigade, we imitated the mujahideen brigades who were there. I even was a **writer in the Kuttab**. We were more organized than them. At school we knew how to stand in line, to the right, to the left. We carried plastic guns.

Rima: Our political awareness wasn't the same. We didn't know people had parties. We had a patriotic sense, and moral values. My father used to say that the public interest comes before the personal. The homeland, then the village, then the family then your own interest. He always had priorities.

Faisal: The Zionist attacks began again in late 1947 after the partition resolution. The inhabitants of the villages which were in danger and those which were distant from the Zionist locations began to search for weapons. This search raised the price of weapons in Palestine immensely. A secondhand rifle sold on the black market reached the price of a bride's dowry. Our village could collect away from the strict control of the British 30 rifles as far as I can remember.

Sharif: Before the Jews entered the village, I mostly remember that

they had occupied Nazareth, Tiberias and several places south of Arrabeh and Sakhnin in the Batuf plain. Israeli tanks came from Wadi Rummaneh. There were around five or six armed guards standing on the edge of the mountain separating the village from the Batuf plain. They saw them and sent a crier to announce that they were here. The residents of the village gathered together. The whole village had about 20 or 30 weapons.

Faisa: There was an agreement in the village to send a delegation to Egypt to buy weapons. This delegation was away for a long time and returned without any weapons because the Egyptian army had entered and were stationed at the borders in Rafah and Gaza surroundings. They entered and reach Asdud, so when the men from our village came back with the weapons they were confiscated.

Rima: Before the Nakba, they divided Jerusalem into Zone A and Zone B. The last place we lived in Jerusalem, we could not go home without a Zone A card. This was between 1946 and 1948.

Sharif: We kids stayed at the edge of town. We interacted with the battle as if we were part of it, although we could not see the Arabs or the Jews, we only heard the sounds. They had a system; every night, three or four would **patrol**. I remember my father, my older brother and my relatives when they decided to buy a rifle. They bought a short French rifle. My brother used to carry it and stand guard.

Faisal: In Big Al-Masmeyeh there had been a brigade since 1936. It was distinguished because it had a remarkable leader. For the record his name

was Abdullah Muhanna “Abu Jihad”. The most important battle the brigade fought along with small brigades from seven other villages was in a military camp evacuated by the British Army. Abu Jihad had a plan to surprise and take over the camp with a raid and it succeeded. But they did not have any professional combat fighters. At the time of the harvest most of the Mujahideen had left. A unit of the Army of Salvation founded by the Arab League came to join the battle. The Mujahideen had seized three tanks and many of the camps possessions. The unit of the Arab army took the tanks and returned to their own camp. The Hagana forces then took over the camp with minimum losses because there was no one to defend the camp.

Sharif: I remember the Rescue Army soldiers going to collect food and animals to ride. From that day on, when people want to describe something as pathetic, they say: like the Rescue Army. It was especially funny was that they collected the donkeys of the village, and two or three would ride the same donkey. So the description became famous; pathetic like the Rescue Army.

Rima: In 1947, I finished school and went to Beirut. It was the last time I went to Al-Naqoura. The one who lived the Nakba events was my sister Samia.

Samia: The biggest group of refugees to Birzeit was from Lod and Ramleh when they were forced out under threat of being shot. They robbed them of their possessions. They tell us incredible stories! We were at school and saw thousands of people coming into town.

Faisal: We received the first group of those who were expelled from their village. If I remember well it was in April 1948. The Zionist armed forces

took over the village of Salameh near Yaffa, which was later destroyed. A group of the inhabitants of this village came to our village. I do not know why they chose our village. This group resided in the house of one of my uncles.

Sharif: I remember well the names of those who they put up a big resistance. They talked a lot about them in the radio. They used to say: the heroes of Salameh, near Yaffa, and Tireh, near Haifa. I still remember that these two villages resisted. They had heroic stories. Loubieh too fought a lot. We knew, we followed the news. It was like cancer. It spread gradually in the area.

Faisal: The children from Salameh who came with these families were our age. In my memory I still keep the impression that they were different from children. Perhaps it is too much to say they were broken but even when they played with us something was not normal in their behaviour, in their responses.

Sharif: The village residents were not able to help the others, because they, too, were waiting for their turn to be forced out. I remember that the residents of Safouria, especially the women, went from home to home asking for food. It was the women who saved the families and the children. They accepted the degradation, they bent with the storm. The women were resilient. For the men, it was much more difficult.

Samia: They sat under the trees in July. The school opened its doors. So did the church and the mosque. All the town received this group. I remember their expressions. It was very sad.

Faisal: I had decided to fast during Ramadan [the month of fasting]. I completed the first full day fasting. In the family they considered this

coming from a child of nine years of age something important. Thus, I became the centre of (celebration) everyone's attention and celebration. I fasted the second day. At the Iftar meal the guard of my grandfather's farm came and gave him a paper. My grandfather, who did not find his reading glasses, gave the paper to my uncle. He read it and I was listening. It was a warning from the Hagana. They had come to the farm with a list of demands which were repeated in every Palestinian city or village they raided. This is what I remember of the demands, which I later learned in detail.

First, handing over the Mujahideen of the village to the Israeli Army; second, handing over the weapons; third, pledging that the village inhabitants would abide by the laws of the State of Israel. In the minds of our people at that time handing over the Mujahideen would mean that they would be executed. Even if they were to accept the other demands, which were actually unacceptable according to the level of people's conscience at that time. I believe these demands would be unacceptable even now. No villager would ever hand over his children or...or...or.

Samia: We were living in Jerusalem then. My parents came, but they didn't come under threats like the others who followed. Because the school... my father felt it needed him, he had quit his job. He came with my mother before the increase of harassments in Jerusalem. After that, a lot of Jerusalem residents left after the massacre in Deir Yassin. The Jewish mobs came in trucks threatening people, telling them to leave immediately. Leave your houses. Leave your houses or face the fate of Deir Yassin. This scared a lot of people. Two of my aunts and one aunt on my father's side were in Jerusalem and left as a result; we all gathered in Birzeit.

Sharif: This opening between the mountains is called Al-Khanouq. Behind it is Al-Batouf plains. When the Jews entered in 1948, they came from this opening. Nazareth, Kufur Kanna and Safouria had

been occupied for a while. The guards from the village and the Rescue Army were **standing there, on the horizon. They were guarding to prevent the Jews from entering from this side, but they came from here.** They didn't come along the valley. They came here, at the town entrance, and went down to the town. This was the entrance for when they entered Arrabeh, and they entered from the other side; from Mi'ar, from Acre, and they entered Sakhnin. The Sheikhs of the area went to meet them in Mi'ar and they surrendered the villages.

What the logic behind surrendering was, I did not know, and I still do not know. I think first, that Israel had two routes, one along the shore, and one from Tiberias and Al-Houleh. The two sides met at the Lebanese border, circling the area. The people heard that the road was closed. It was especially frightening that they woke up to find the Rescue Army had retreated, was gone. This was one. Also, the people were now aware. They had previously thought that when they left, they would come back in a few days. This was in August or September, I think. People had been forced out since the beginning of 1948, or late 1947. The people were now fully aware that when they left, they would not come back. They became convinced that they should surrender. A lot of them thought they would die. But they decided to die in their own homes.

Faisal: An urgent meeting was held for the Village National Committee. The National Committees were elected committees all over Palestine to be responsible for the defense of villages and cities. Our committee decided that the children, women, elderly and the unarmed should leave the houses of the village immediately and stay in the fields among the plants until the battle was over. We went to the fields which were already partly harvested. We only took with us what was needed for the Suhour [Ramadan meal taken before dawn] by decision of the committee. My grandmother, who had then taken the place of my mother, used to drink milk and eat cheese only from her favourite, light-coloured goat. She took it with her, to milk it and have her coffee before dawn. In my memory I cannot measure the time we spent in the fields but it was still very dark. Suddenly, flames burst from the village. This scene is still engraved in my memory. I can see it

even now: my village burning, my place of birth with fire and flames burning it.

Samia: When the refugees came, my aunt asked the people working in the kitchen to bring all they could help with to relieve the hunger and thirst these refugees endured while walking from Al-Ramleh and Al-Lid.

Sharif: Al-Shouli was a Jewish cow merchant. I remember him. I don't remember the face, but I remember the person a little bit. He would tour the villages, buying and selling cows. In 1948, when the Israelis entered the village, he was wearing a general's military uniform. He was a general in the army. He was crueler than the others. He knew the people. He knew the homes, the entrances and who might have had weapons because he spent a lot time in the villages. When they gathered the men in the village, who were 15-16 years and older, they gathered them in the village square. All the men were supposed to gather there. My father was sitting at the door. There was a wall around the house, and he sat by the gate watching. Al-Shouli came and said: You have a weapon. He said he didn't. I don't know how he was upset and wanted to force him to bring his weapon, **he hit him like this in the head with his hand**, my father was wearing a kufiya and it fell off. I remember this clearly. It was very painful for me.

Faisal: We went to Deir el Debban, which had not yet been attacked. Our relatives there received us as guests, headed by Abu Adnan, the Mayor. More refugees, wave after wave, flooded in from other villages that had been attacked. Deir el Debban was no longer able to feed all these people. People thought of sneaking back to the villages to look in the remnants of homes for food, covers, etc. I remember both my grandfathers took two of Abu Adnan's camels. My paternal grandfather, who was the Mayor of our village, came back with flour, oil, and other staple foods and some covers that were left undamaged. My maternal grandfather [who was the head of our national committee] – I still remember the lesson I learned from him –

came back with our school books and books from our home library. He told us that we had lost everything but what we still possessed was education.

Sharif: I remember it as if there were no “me”. With the situation as it was, I didn’t think of myself. I remember the situation, how people acted, the Jews, the young men, the family.

Faisal: I think our childhood began to be lost from the beginning of the events in 1947. When Deir el Debban was attacked my grandmother had taken her goat, a sack of Frikeh [dried smoked wheat] and a bit of salt. I think it was from Abu Adnan’s house. We found ourselves in the middle of crowds that extended into the wilderness as far as I could see as a child. We stayed for countless days and nights. I cannot remember how many. The scene where I think my childhood ended: I remember a family from our village who were very poor. They were in the wilderness. The mother and father had a lot of children. Once, we were gathering by a cave’s entrance, eating the little food we had. Those children came looking for something to eat. They stood near us. We were all sitting there. Without a pre-agreement we automatically ignored them because we had only a few bites of food for each one of us. I remember the moment – which I believe determined my stand on life entirely. I dipped a bite of bread in the milk. I moved it toward my mouth, and my eyes met the eyes of the youngest child. He was staring and craving it. Some mysterious thing came from my insides and pushed me to give the bite to him. My aunt, who was four years older than I, exclaimed: “God, look at what we were and what we are now!” Everyone was moved. My grandmother packed a little dried wheat and found something to put the milk in. She gave them to the children, saying “Take this to your mother to feed the baby.”

Rima: I remember what she did. My Lebanese friend, her mother was Palestinian. We sat and wrote an article. I remember I was about 16 years old. We asked the girls not to buy jewelry, and to give the money to help the homeland. We addressed the Arabs: if you are ready for war, go ahead, if not please wait until we’re ready.

Faisal: On the way to Beit Jibreen, after checking, we found it was possible for us to get there. We were in undescrivable misery. Suddenly we heard sounds in the sky. We saw airplanes. It was the first time in my life that I saw any airplanes. They appeared and then retreated and reappeared. Of course, the march of people became chaotic and we were confused. People began to ask why the airplanes were coming, and if they would drop explosive barrels. They called them Danat at that time. They would fly lower to shoot some places in this wide trail of people in the wilderness. This happened several times. It was like a chase. Everyone was saying "We left our villages and you occupied them. Why are you chasing refugees?" Until my Uncle Nafeth paid attention. He had finished high school and had a matriculation degree. He was the politician, advisor and educator in the village. He realized that we were walking in a direction that kept us inside Palestine. The Israelis were putting pressure on us, pushing us to the east so we would cross the Jordan River and go outside of Palestine.

Sharif: There was a lot of crying, by the women. They were gathered at the corner of the square where the men stood. We were afraid that they would all be killed, or at least a number of them. In the end no one was killed. They brought big trucks, and they carried them away in the trucks. These men have been called the detainees since then. They detained them for periods varying between 6 months and two to three years. Some of them, I remember, including one of my cousins, they said were left at the borders with Lebanon or Jordan.

Faisal: When we arrived in Beit Jibreen after sunset a battle was taking place between the Egyptian army and the Hagana, which had become part of the Israeli army. It was the first time I saw light shooting out of cannons. They lit the battlefield. The people did not know what to do. There was bombing from both sides. Some went to the left and some went to the right, including our family. Al-Masmeyeh was behind us, Deir el Debban was behind us. We were going south. Those who went to the right would

end up in the Gaza Strip. Those who went to the left would end up in the West Bank.

Rima: Music break.

My biggest fear was that the goat I was leading, affected by the noise of the battle, would get away from me and that my grandmother would be angry. The goat determined my fate. The people discovered a big pipe under a little bridge, so they descended the valley and crossed through the pipe. I wanted to descend into the valley. The goat's hooves got stuck or something. It got away from me. I wanted to get it back. My family reached the pipe before me. When there was light they waved at me but I was afraid to lose the goat, until I caught it and crossed through the pipe with it. My fate was to go right.

I left with my grandmother. I met with the refugees' trail on that side and there I went back to the family of my paternal father, who decided to go to Al-Falouji, which was being attacked almost every night. One day I was playing in front of a coffee shop near a bus stop. The bus came. My Uncle Nafeth came out. I spoke about what happened near Beit Jibreen. My uncle left and ended up in the West Bank. He came to check on us after ending up in Damascus. He saw me playing from the bus window. He asked the permission of my grandfather, who was sitting in the café, to take me to see my grandmother in Hamameh, a village near Asdud and promised him to bring me back.

It happened that Al-Falouji was besieged after I left it. I survived from the siege but my family stayed. Consecutive massacres took place during the siege, and as usual, they were Israeli massacres against civilians. Half of the members of my family were killed in one of these massacres, my grandfather, one of his two sons and two of four daughters lost their lives.

Chanting:

Sing for him, father, and take him to the mosque
He is not a bridegroom, his rifle is not shining
Sing for him, father, and take him up
He is not a groom and the bride is not waiting
I wish, my love, that you would come home
We would make sacrifices and fulfill our promise.

Samia: Here, we conducted the consensus for the refugees. We had tables, papers and pens. We met daily. After that we asked Abdul Qader Al-Husseini's army to impose curfew on the village, because we wanted an accurate consensus of the refugees to Birzeit. My father felt that this was a great catastrophe and it was a disaster if we didn't document it.

Faisal: I stayed with my grandmother in Hamameh. There I found out that my mother, who had remarried in Big Al-Masmeyyeh, had met my grandmother and that she and her two children were living in a room in one of the houses in Hamameh that hosted refugees. We, the children, used to spend time at the sea. One day, after I returned home, my mother noticed that my left eye was red like an ember. From Hamameh we went to Al-Majdal to look for a doctor. It was my first visit to this town. Minutes after our arrival a massacre took place. Israeli planes destroyed the main crowded market in the town. I witnessed it with my own eyes. I came there just a few minutes after the airplane left. I saw human beings' bodies mixed with vegetables and groceries. It is an unforgettable scene in my memory. Of course, we returned without seeing a doctor. The next day they took me again to Al-Majdal. The doctor told us it was too late. The children started to tease me, as was the custom at that time, calling me "one eye". I discovered that since we left Deir el Debban until that moment, I had not stood in front of a mirror.

Sharif: The Israeli army came daily and entered all the houses. In every house they entered they found a weapon. Then they distributed ration cards, they called them staples cards,

for everyone in the family. We could not buy or get anything unless it was allowed in the card. It was only staple foods. I remember people depended a lot on the wilderness; they ate wild greens and types of plants that had never been considered edible.

Faisal: When Hamameh and the area were attacked I walked with the crowd of refugees who started from Hamameh. I walked for what was later estimated to be 24 to 26 kilometres. I walked under the sun, barefoot, with huge crowds. I ended up in the trail that took us to Deir el Balah, which was later called the Gaza Strip. My maternal grandfather went to Damascus and did the impossible to have us join the family there. In Gaza we travelled by train toward Egypt on our way to Syria. The train still worked then. It was part of the Al-Hijaz railway. It came from Horan to the Palestinian shore and arrived at the Egyptian border to join the Egyptian railway. At the train station of Gaza I said goodbye to my mother and to my mother country. I left my mother and my country in one day.

Sharif: The Jews want to monopolize pain and sadness. No one else gets to complain because they suffered the Holocaust. I think what the Palestinians have suffered is far worse. Because that was for a short time and it was over. It had consequences which they used and lived and prospered on. They created a state and everything. The Palestinians are in what resembles concentration camps until today, both the refugees and those who stayed in the country. Do you think they have suffered only a little? And they are serving another people in order to find something to eat. Do you think this situation is easier than that of the people who died in the holocaust? I don't think so.

