



Winner in the Israeli Press category:

Helen Schary Motro

'That boy who wore our hand-me-downs'

Originally published in The Jerusalem Post, October 2000

“God has pity on children in kindergartens, / He pities school children – less” wrote Yehuda Amichai. The poet’s death last month spared him seeing his words come back to haunt the whole of Israel.

A schoolchild who wore my children’s outgrown clothes was Mohammed Aldura. Mohammed was one whom God pitied less when he was killed in his father’s arms in Gaza as the eyes of the world watched.

Other children, many others, have died or been wounded during this black October. Some had been throwing rocks, some were walking with bookbags on their way home from school to be caught in a swirling mob, some were hit by stones while riding in the baby seat of cars. Mohammed has become the icon of them all.

At first I stared with the rest of the horrified world at the photo of the anonymous Palestinian father holding his anonymous Palestinian son - father wounded, son dead. Only after reading the description in the newspaper did I realize he was not anonymous to me.

Mohammed’s father was our Jamal.

Our Jamal Aldura who, working for an Israeli contractor I hired, had helped build my Israeli house at the height of the intifada and maintained it afterward.

In 1988 Jamal was an angry young man. Tall, thin and glowering, he kept to himself and spoke in monosyllables. I had just had my baby when I met Jamal; his wife was pregnant with their first child. I tried to give him my old maternity clothes, but Jamal turned his back, too proud to accept them.

The terrified boy the whole world saw screaming in the crook of his father’s arm and slumped dead a moment later was the child Jamal’s wife had been carrying.

Ten years later I hired the same contractor to repaint my house. The Jamal who walked up the garden stairs was a changed man. He was 35 but looked 50. He limped and his hair was flecked with gray. For a decade Jamal had been rising from his bed at 3:30 a.m. to take the bus at four to the border crossing, then board a second bus an hour later out of Gaza, to begin work at six. This

backbreaking cycle of physical labor was a journey he prayed to make; without it there would be no work at all.

Jamal smiled, and I did too. There was something of friends in our greeting, but even as I say that word, I know it is not true. Beyond the economic inequality, we could never look at each other without nationalities in mind. His Arabness hung in the air, as did my Jewishness.

And what did I, transplanted from another place, represent for Jamal?

Jamal told me he now had six children. This time he accepted the bags of used clothing and discarded toys I left for him to take.

My daughter is 12, like Mohammed was. Jamal's boy loved to swim in the sea; my daughter is on a swim team. Her pet dog waits impatiently for her to come home. Jamal's son had birds for pets.

Yehuda Amichai said "knowledge of peace / passes from country to country, / like children's games, / which are so much alike, everywhere." But had Jamal's son lived to be a grandfather, our children never, never would have met.

Jamal lies with multiple gun wounds in a Jordanian hospital; the Israeli army accepted responsibility for his son's shooting. Jamal's first public statement was to call for avenging Mohammed's death. To this, his Israeli boss responded by quoting the Talmud: "A man is not to be held accountable in the time of his sorrow."

Then, a few days after the shooting, everybody in Israel heard Jamal say live to them on Israeli radio: "I am a man of peace. We two peoples must live together. There is no other possibility, no other possibility." Jamal spoke to me by telephone from his hospital bed.

I asked him what he wishes for his remaining children. "My children? To grow as all the children in the world." His voice broke. "That they will be surrounded by all good things and nothing bad."

In wards adjoining those where unconscious, wounded children lie, new babies are making their first life cries. Oblivious to this black October they arrive in Nazareth, in Tel Aviv-Yafo, in beleaguered Jerusalem. Will God take pity on their futures, or will they too, as in Amichai's lament, go out in the morning only to risk being "brought home in the evening, like small change"?

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Originally published in *The Jerusalem Post*, October 2000 - Distributed by Common Ground News Service / Middle East

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The Two honorable-mentions in the Israeli Press category:

* “Support Israel and Palestine,” by Ami Isseroff. Published in *Peace Watch* (www.ariga.com/peacewatch/), June 29, 2001

* “Camp David's Achievements, Mistakes,” by Yair Hirschfeld. Published in the *Jerusalem Post*, August 24, 2001.

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