

# Letters from Palestine

2013-05-14 - Its been quite a week in Lake Woah--most-of-the-Palestinians-land--be gone!

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I have listened to Garrison Keillor far too much! Thank you for reading my accounts. I feel privileged to know many friends and family read my letters.

Last week Wednesday I went to Jerusalem for the day. I was totally shocked by the luxuriousness of West Jerusalem—which is where the Israelis and a small number of permitted Palestinians are free to roam. East Jerusalem is on the other side of the very tall, imposing wall, which has various gates at which those who have permission, including someone like me—a tourist--can go in and out of all day long. But the unpermitted Palestinians must remain inside the walls. There is a stark contrast between East and West Jerusalem, which reminds me of the contrasts I have seen in my travels between the global South and North, East and West, “undeveloped” and “developed” nations. In West Jerusalem: very, very clean streets; smooth, sleek, quiet train running right through the center of town; well-dressed, usually expressionless people walking around; lots of groups of tourists with leaders telling them lots of things.

The place was sooooo ultra-neat-and-tidy that I wondered how much money is spent just for this. And then there are the fancy stores after fancy stores after expensive restaurants and hotels. Banks are at every turn. In one place I saw three ATMs next to each other, something I have never seen anywhere else. Have you? I noticed myself feeling indignant and judgmental all day long. I felt very separate from the people who would create this extravagant lifestyle-- largely off of US taxpayers' support-- in a world where resources are dwindling and so many people are impoverished. Being in West Jerusalem reminded me of being many places in the United States and other places in the "developed" world, where one does not see or feel the consequences of wasteful activities which are destructive to the environment and indigenous peoples.

Wednesday night I heard Ilan Pappé, author of *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, speak to a room packed with people. I drew his portrait while listening and he signed it afterwards!



He told me he liked the sketch as well as my question asked during the Q-and-A after his talk about how the weapons industry is affecting Israel's relations with the US and European countries, and how analysts have referred to Palestine as a "weapons laboratory" for Israel. He responded that this is a very big issue, but he is only one activist, working in his sphere of influence and the Israel/Palestine conflict is only one part of the huge defense trade. One of my favorite points of the lecture was that the propaganda mission of Israel--to proclaim itself as a democratic nation protecting human rights--is failing. Physicist Stephen Hawking's recent announcement of his intellectual boycott of an important conference in Israel adds validity to this argument.

Saturday I taught an art class for children at Alrowwad Cultural Center in Aida Camp! The seven and eight year old kids were delightfully respectful and great followers of directions. I include some pictures below. See the wonderful diversity of shapes and colors the kids achieved on their papers!



This past week I continued to make more drawings and paintings in various places—including some of the uglier parts of OCCUPIED Palestine:

On Sunday afternoon I went to the site on the edge of Al Walaja village where a gate was suddenly erected last week. Up until this gate was built, cars could drive directly between Al Walaja, Cremison monastery and Beit Jala. Israelis plan to completely surround Al Walaja village with the apartheid wall, and they plan to destroy forested land on the uphill side of Cremison where they want to put the wall. If this happens, all of Cremison would be “annexed” as part of Israel. If the wall is built below Cremison and around Al Walaja, 53 families will lose their olive trees and access to their land. (To learn more about the **historic winery** operated by the monks at Cremison, see: [cremison.org](http://cremison.org).)

Sunday afternoon I took an expensive taxi ride to this place so that I could bring my easel and big watercolor board to sketch the crazy scene for a future painting of this gate blocking the road directly at the edge of the home of Omar and his family. The Israelis want this house of Omar’s so badly that they have offered him ONE MILLION DOLLARS for it or rent payments for 99 years; still, he has refused to sell. Omar has been thrown down the hill outside his house by the IDF—and his son was also thrown—when they were protesting the bulldozing of their olive trees. Omar’s seven-year-old was hit in the head with a gun that day as well.

I also visited Ush Ghraib—a part of Beit Sahour which settlers have claimed with the title Shdema. I was dropped off by Mazin at an area where I had a view of a watchtower and wall covered with barbed wire. At first I wondered if anyone is using the tower regularly since there was no sign of any soldiers. Shortly after I began the drawing of the tower and walls, an SUV drove up which a guy who appeared to be Palestinian was driving. He parked the car and watched me draw. He asked if I wanted to have coffee. I just kept drawing. He got out of the vehicle, crouched down right next to me and watched me draw. I asked him, “Do you know why this watchtower is here?” He smiled and said, “I no speak English.” When finished with the drawing, I went to the Peace Park (amusement park and glorified jungle gym with fountains and shaded picnic areas built by USAID) next door to use the bathroom. When finished there, I headed back past the tower in order to walk home. I noticed a soldier was now sitting on top of the tower. After I turned the corner, walking toward home, decided to once again get out my sketchbook to add the soldier to my drawing. As I was doing so, the SUV came by and the man asked if he could see my drawing. I said no and walked home.

Yesterday I spent a delightful couple of hours at Bustan Quraaqa, a permaculture farm run by Palestinians and internationals in Beit Sahour! I began a watercolor painting of the composting toilet!!! Because there is a continual crisis over water supplies in Palestine, I have cringed every time I flush a toilet here. I cringe in the US every time too. One example of how the so-called “developed” world is actually insanely destructive: it is a trademark sign of the industrialized, modern world to use lots of good drinking and irrigation water to carry valuable human excrement—which makes amazing compost-- far away where lots of energy is used to treat it-- usually with chemicals (the creation of which causes further pollution). I enjoyed using Bustan Quraaqa’s composting toilet a few times and also drawing many of the beautiful plants and trees fed by the incredible compost coming from the toilets’ many contributors.

I will take further time when I am back in the US—one week from today—to elaborate more on other activities of this past week. Stay tuned! I celebrate every one of your responses. Please write back! And/or share the emails with others. Sending love and hugs, Deb



PS. This pictures is of Mahmoud, of Beit Ummar, whose house I visited with permaculture teacher Alice. Mahmoud is pictured with Palestinian cauliflower, a plant that requires very little water but takes nine months to mature! Alice and Mahmoud planted 800 in one day. They had to leave the field because protestors nearby had been teargas and the gas reached the field.