

While I have been in Palestine I have been so pleased to see the fundraiser reach so many people. Thank you everyone who has donated to such important work in Gaza. Please keep sharing [the link to the fundraiser](#) and my updates from Palestine.

I am sitting in a beautiful courtyard looking out to Yatta in the South Hebron hills. Beans and spring onions growing from a container that was once a fridge , pink roses spilling from a wall and chrysanthemums overflowing near the slope down to the garden. The man of the house comes out and I say in my pathetically halting Arabic how very beautiful it is, 'Jamil jidan', and in spreading my arms feel a muscle twist in my back. Possibly this is due to built up tension from yesterday.

I have been here a week now and have got into the rhythm of uncertainty. Nothing is predictable - not the car that ferries us around, the actions of police and military, nor of the animals. Only the welcome we receive in people's homes. How terrible at one level to have to have strangers there every night and needing to make extra food, of which there is not much anyway, and to try to be good humoured.

After our legal briefing (which I [wrote about last week](#)) we make off to our base just south of Yatta.

As soon as we arrive at the flat there are three old hands - that is they have been here for a fortnight - who give us a quick rundown of what happens. It is complicated and multi dimensional. The geography impacts the logistics, the politics impacts the prioritised families, the occupation and the sudden whims of the military impact our ability to get around.

Eventually a rota for the night is cobbled together and I am to stay in a remote farm in the firing zone. This is isolated and the people are vulnerable. The military stops cars travelling on the approach road, so we go after dark and leave before first light.

Unusually for this location, I am told, we slept inside. The protocol is to get in bed as soon as we arrive. As soon as we get there we are offered a drink. Music is playing on a phone. One of the men is speaking to a friend. I am conscious above all of the intense poverty. It is hard to know how the people maintain a sense of dignity. But they do.

Finally we get into bed and I doze for a couple of hours. I hear loud booms and realise I am listening to bombs falling on Gaza only 24 miles away. It was the night of the schools being bombed. I am furious and cannot sleep. I am trying to make sense of the killing just a few miles away and get up and write a rap.

I get up at 4.30 and walk to where we will be picked up. In the half light it's easy to miss our road. The sun starts to lift above the horizon and we see the South Hebron Hills in all their splendour. The calm and quiet washes away my fury in a dry whisper.



Two days later, we get a potted history of the area from the local coordinator of our group.

The gradual stealing of land using Ottoman and British Imperial and sometimes Jordanian laws, the establishment of settlements after Oslo and then the declaration of a firing zone and the increased settler pressure. These have brought about an emptying of the land - from fear, from economic pressure, by house demolitions, and this feeds into the law that land left uncultivated for 3 years passes to the state - Israel. Though actually we need to recall that as Israel is the occupying power, if it *is* the State then it has annexed the West Bank.

Our host was a significant figure in ensuring there was a resistance committee, and he has been targeted, arrested and beaten. His guest house is due for demolition. He tells us how important it is we are here to document what is happening.

That night I go to the house of a beautiful couple with their seven children. E, the mother is strong and elegant while the father, K, has piercing smiling eyes that overflow with energy. His keffiyeh is wrapped around his head and he cuts a dominant figure as he strides around his courtyard.

I wake up and am ushered by one of the children - whose names I do not know yet - to come to the sheep pen and we separate ewes for milking.

It is a school day so the kids are wandering around doing chores. They scuttle across the courtyard carrying water, or jugs of milk or eggs. There is a bit of time and so I play a funny version of hockey with olive tree sticks and a football with the kids.

And all the while, Israeli army choppers taking troops or supplies fly overhead .

Eventually we are called to go out with the sheep and take a slow walk towards the next neighbour.

The valley we look on is lost to Palestinians now - K tells just how they used to grow wheat and olives and fruit there. They would wander through it as families and have a picnic in the fields.

As we approach half way we come to an enclosure, a settler is there with about 40 sheep. He is young and unconcerned. Quite what fuels his confidence is hard to know. There is no shame in his walk, no turning of the head to see what we're up to. It is the walk of someone who despises K.

We film him as he gets nearer and K keeps his sheep back. I assume he does not want the flocks to mix. There is no desire to have a confrontation, and also we are waiting for the police.

They come and talk with the settlers for maybe 20 minutes. We hang back with K who by now has his papers. We see his neighbour walk down to sort his papers too.

The police come to us, there are two police and an army reservist who is so young he may not have had his bar mitzvah!

The police ask for ID. I give them a copy of my passport and visa and he complains I should have my passport. I don't answer when he asks if I have it. He asks for my phone number and I start to give him my UK number. Then they give up. They are a bit harder on my buddy who has to give her number by calling one of the police.





The older policeman leaves to talk on his phone and we have the bearded policeman and the baby asking questions. This is led by the baby. He asks me and my buddy what we are doing here and how we met. We are walking and seeing this beautiful country. We only just met. I am looking to go somewhere for Passover and will visit Yad Vashem. I ask him if he is looking forward to Passover. He is a bit nonplussed. I want to ask him when his bar mitzvah is (normally held when you are 13), but think better of it.

They back off and an ATV approaches with two people. One of them is a well known settler called Amichai who is armed with a machine gun. He has a reputation. I start to feel this might not end well - but then pull myself together. He is just a gunslinger and nothing is happening to encourage heat.

The police and Amichai start to have a lovely chin wag. I don't know what about, but perhaps the merits or otherwise of allowing the settler to carry on shepherding on K's land.

Meanwhile K has shown his papers.

They chat for about another 20 minutes. Then the police go, having taken no action. I cannot understand why. Presenting papers of ownership means they should be moving the settler boy and his sheep on.

So we are left with an armed settler and a shepherd and a mate of his. Amichai brings his truck round down which blocks our path home, and my heart misses a beat, but he is just trying to frightening us. It is not long before he picks up the shepherd's mate and goes.

Meanwhile the shepherd stays in the enclosure.

After a while, I spot K seated by a rock crouched up, processing what has just happened. Normally strong and optimistic, he now seems downhearted.

We stay out into the hot midday sun. The settler is still there, holding his head in his hands. He will be tired and thirsty like us. Finally we see E stride proudly across the hill with some food. We sit by the well and take in the spectacular midday feast. The sight of us sitting and eating gets him off his feet and he takes his sheep round the valley and away. E and the kids wave him off. She is especially happy. I know it is transient. Tomorrow he will be back but today Palestinian Sumud is the victor.





Living here is not easy. K has had differences with Palestinians from a nearby village who left. The villagers have now come back having won a Supreme Court order that they can rebuild their village. K is annoyed because he stayed - and he has had his house raided by settlers and been beaten up. But he will stay. This land is for his children too, he says. It is not his place to abandon it.