



Video Story Transcript

Peacemaking Beyond Borders: An Israeli Palestinian Friendship

By: Storyteller Noa Baum

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=823rSpxUIOY>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Noa Baum.

Jumana and I met on the green grass of America. It was a family potluck. I was holding my baby boy, she was holding hers. And she had the kind of dark beauty that I recognized immediately from home. So, I walked up to her. "What's his name?"

"Tammer. And yours?"

"Ittai. Where are you from?"

"Jerusalem. Near Ramalla, actually."

"I'm from Jerusalem too."

Her American husband stepped right in, "My wife, is a Palestinian, you know." As if I didn't know. But I didn't know she'd want to talk to me, and she didn't know if I'd want to talk to her.

You see, I grew up, in Jerusalem. A divided city where the buildings are made of chiseled stones, white, cream, gray. And when I was a little girl before 1967, there were always places at the edge of the city you couldn't go to. It was the border. Once my mother took me to such a place. There were rusty, orange signs, "Caution: mines," "No man's land," "No passing beyond this point." And she took my hand and we climbed on a heap of stones and stopped in front of the large roll of barbed wire. And through it, I could see a vast field with slabs

of concrete and iron beams sticking out like crooked fingers. And beyond them, filling the entire horizon was a wall, that almost looked like the walls from the fairy tales, with rounded roofs and minarets peeking behind it.

But I didn't like it there. I wanted to go home. I was scared of them. The Arabs. When my grandmother hears the word "Arab," she says, (*Spits*), "Yimach shermam, may their name be erased. They took my Yaakov. Yimach shermam." Yaakov was her son. He's gone. Where I come from, we say he fell.

I come from a place where the news is on the radio every hour, 24 hours a day. And on the buses, the drivers turn the volume up and all conversations stop. There is always something. Bombs in the market place. Buses blowing up and wars. But there's no choice. That's what I grew up with. "There's no choice."

"We don't want wars but there is no choice."

"There's no choice."

"They want to throw us into the sea."

"There's no choice. This is our only home."

Jumana and I watched our children grow up on the green grass of America. Tammer and Ittai spend hours being Pokemon. And we watched them grow without the fear. And no one put it in words. But each of us knew. Back home, my son would grow up to go to the army and check ID's at roadblocks. Her son would grow up to arrive at the checkpoint and throw stones at the oppressor.

Slowly, over the years, Jumana and I started to talk. But for many years it was just, you know, the kids and diapers. Mom stuff. But then one day, I started working on a story about my memories from third grade, the 1967 war. And I realized I've known Jumana, this Palestinian woman for seven years. And she grew up in Jerusalem, just like me, not even five miles away from where I grew up. And I never heard what that war was like for her. Did they sleep with all the neighbors together in the furnace room when the bombs were falling? Did they even have a bomb shelter?

I called her up and a new chapter in our relationship began. I asked questions and I listened. And for the first time in my life, I heard what it actually feels like to be a Palestinian growing up under Israeli occupation.

She told me how when she was 10 years old, she saw a 13-year-old boy being beaten by Israeli soldiers and that was the first time in her life she understood the meaning of the word hate. Hearing this was like somebody just kicked me in the gut. Those soldiers, that terrified and haunted her entire childhood, were my people. Our boys, our symbols of security. everyone that I knew that turned 18 and went to the Army, including my brother. It was so painful. But I continued to listen because she was telling me her story.

And eventually, we started talking about difficult stuff. You know, the history of our people. And she would say something that was history, the truth with a capital "T," that she learned in school. And I would look at her and say, "But that's not true at all. That's, that's Arab propaganda."

And then I would say something that was history, that was the truth with a capital "T." And she would look at me and say, "But that's not true at all. Zionist propaganda."

And we would argue. And then she'd say, "Look at us. We're getting defensive again." And we'd laugh. And then I pick up the baby so that she could go make the soft-boiled egg for the other kids. And we continued to talk. And there was never a moment when I felt, "I can't talk to this person." And this experience, of being able to talk despite differences, the way our stories helped us hold contradicting points of view, this

experience of being able to hold onto our compassion through all that, was so powerful that I decided I had to do something about it.

And being a storyteller, I created a storytelling performance called, "A Land Twice Promised." And I tell the stories of our families. And I tell the stories that echo the contradicting national narratives of our people. I've been performing it now for more than 14 years. I recently wrote a book about it that tells the journey of my transformation from the, the black and white narratives of my childhood, to learning how to listen to the other, and using storytelling for building bridges for peace.

And over the years I've heard so many responses. There are those that say that I'm a traitor to my people because I tell the stories of the Palestinians. And there are others that say that, oh, I'm telling only the suffering of the Jews. I can't begin to tell the story of the Palestinians. And there are those that come say, "What's the point? What's the point of all this storytelling? How can you even believe in peace? Can't you see what's going on in the world?" And I don't always know what to say.

But I keep thinking about what my Palestinian friend recently said to me. She said, "I consider it a privilege having gotten to know you as a person and hearing her stories. Before hearing your side of things, the Israelis were just the enemy, the abuser, the one who took away my rights, rolled over me, terrorized me. The soldier, the settler, that's what I knew of as Israelis. So, getting to know you and hearing your stories made a huge difference."

And I think, about March of 2002. It is called in Israel Black March because almost every day there were suicide bombers exploding. And my most peace activist friends could not utter the word Palestinian, wouldn't even let me say the word Palestinian. But, my Palestinian friend kept calling. "Hey, Noa, I heard about that bomb in Netanya. Is your family all right?"

And I couldn't help call her. "Jumana. I just heard about those tanks in Ramala. Is your brother OK?"

So, to the cynics and the naysayers I say, we heard each other's stories. Why do I believe in peace? Because we heard each other's stories and we have no choice. We have no choice.