

ANERA *Newsletter*

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American Near East Refugee Aid

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Snapshots

Travel Notes from the West Bank, Gaza and Israel

There are great stories to tell about economic and social development in this part of the world. In spite of recent headlines and political turmoil, an ANERA tour of the region offers unforgettable impressions of people and projects that are working.



Jonathan Bransky



Lisa Gilliam

At the schools, children greeted me with a smile and song (above).

Students train in the woodshop, at the Society for the Care of Handicapped Children in Gaza, to build toys and furniture for the school (below).

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This spring three members of our Washington staff visited the West Bank, Gaza and Israel. We each travelled to different places, bringing with us varied backgrounds and perspectives. Join us then on an ANERA tour: snapshots of dairy cooperatives, clinics, refugee camps and schools. *Ahlan wa sahlan*. Welcome.

REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

As an American Jew, my family told me of the importance of Israel. My grandmother vividly described Czarist Russia and pogroms against the Jews. My teachers taught me the horrors of Nazi Germany. It only made sense that there should be a safe

haven for the Jews, and in the land promised to us by God. I knew nobody would be interested in this desert land occupied only by nomads. I also believed that after the Israelis "made the desert bloom" Arab terrorists wanted it for themselves. In college my ideas began to change. I met Palestinians who taught me a different story, one of refugees, military occupation, destroyed villages, expropriated land, and denial of human and political rights.

When I learned I might visit ANERA's projects, my family objected, but they knew how I felt. I hoped they understood that being pro-Palestinian did not mean being anti-Israel. The idea of going both excited and scared me. How would people react? Do I say I am Jewish? My mother told me, "Remember who you are," and a Palestinian friend wailed at the airport, "Oh, he is going back to *our homeland*." "Am I doing the right thing?" I wondered.

I first visited a friend in Rama, an Arab village in the Galilee. The town was expecting me, and all knew I was Jewish. Each night a different family invited me to dinner and I was welcomed as a friend by all. One family even made me an honorary lifetime member.

In the nearby development town of Karmiel, I met an Israeli woman who seemed pleased to hear of my work and mentioned she had several Arab friends. She hoped the government would give equal health and community services to her friends in the neighboring Arab villages. Without encountering any negative comments, I left the Galilee for Jerusalem, confident that I would have no problem as a Jew and an employee of ANERA.

In Jerusalem, one expects to feel the tranquility of a religious site. Instead, I felt great tension. Initially, I thought it was just the daily stress of living in a crowded city. I discussed the tensions I felt with Ghada Rabah, ANERA's Education specialist. Since we work together on ANERA's scholarship program, I asked her about the difficulties of working under *Intifada* conditions. Strike days and curfews keep the schools closed too often, she replied, the children are restless and tense. At least one or two children come to school with a story to tell from the night before of army raids and family members beaten or arrested. One evening I drove with Ghada through the dark, deserted streets of Ramallah; I thought it was late. She said, "It only feels late because no one but the *shabab* (Palestinian youth) go out on the streets at night, this is how we now live our lives." The great tension I felt had just been clearly explained.

Still feeling comfortable about who I was, I explored Jerusalem. In the Old City's Jewish Quarter, I encountered resident American Jews. Pleased to meet me, they invited me to attend religious services, to be followed by a lecture on terrorism and the necessity of "Greater Israel". I declined. When I talked about my job and my week in Rama, they were shocked. "I am glad you made it out alive," one responded. I also met two Israeli soldiers. One loved being a soldier. Proud because his friend had "killed some Arabs in Lebanon", he could not wait to go there and kill some himself. The other was a Soviet immigrant. He disliked the Israeli treatment of Palestinians and did not want to serve in the West Bank or Gaza, but said it was necessary that the territories remain under Israeli control. He explained how life was for his family and said, "any Jew who wants to come to Israel should be able to." I kept thinking of my family and my Palestinian friend. I was totally confused.

My confusion cleared when I saw ANERA projects. I visited **Rawdat El-Zuhur** and **Dar El-Tifl**, two schools that ANERA's scholarship donors support. Rawdat El-Zuhur, an elementary school serving 250 students in a six-room building, had just received permission to add a second floor. The school felt like a home, clean and comfortable. The staff knew the personalities and problems of each child. Dar El-Tifl, while much

larger, was also well-run. The school, which houses many orphans and boarding students, has adjusted to life under the *Intifada*. Rooms facing the main street are no longer used as dormitories because the military disturbances endangered the children. I was very encouraged by the work of both schools and proud of my part in helping over 1500 children.

I visited the **Jericho Women's Society**, where women gather at an elementary school and prepare pickled vegetables, jams, and concentrated juices for sale. With ANERA's assistance, they have learned to improve the taste, appearance, bottling, labeling, advertising and distribution of their products. There are many such projects funded by ANERA in the



Jonathan Bronsky

Dar El-Tifl students receive training in science, music appreciation, physical education and foreign languages.

Occupied Territories. They are a crucial part of Palestinian self-sufficiency, giving people an alternative to imported products and allowing families to earn income.

I was encouraged by the projects I saw. I met good Israelis and Palestinians, as well as those whose prejudiced views clouded their thinking. I know that assisting Palestinians to become self-sufficient will contribute to a realistic, fair and lasting peace.

Jonathan Bronsky, Executive Assistant

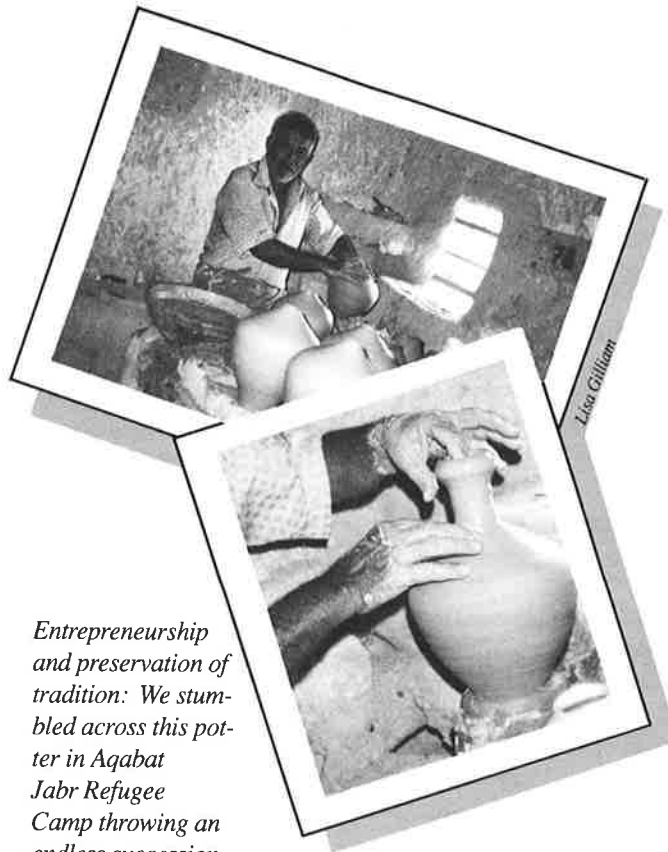
A RETURN TO FAMILIAR PLACES

This trip was a long-awaited return to familiar places and reunions with friends. I had spent a year in the Galilee during graduate school interning with the Galilee Society for Health Research and Services, an organization working to improve health conditions in the Arab villages of northern Israel (see box). It was, on the other hand, my first visit to ANERA projects, and first real exposure to the *Intifada*, so I was anticipating seeing a world that I had not seen before.

While East Jerusalem seemed peaceful, something different struck me immediately. It was the graffiti. Every wall, every surface, was covered with writing. Initially appalled at the defacing of the old stones, I was soon intrigued. The slogans were generally positive: "Yes to national unity," "Long live Abu Jihad". Each piece was signed to identify the political affiliation of its author, usually "Fatah", "Hamas", or "Popular

Front". Perhaps graffiti that calls for violence or is offensive is quickly painted over, but the worst I encountered were two garbage cans labelled "Shamir's house" and "Shamir's office." Walking down Salah Ad-din Street one day, I was startled by the commotion of storekeepers rolling down their metal doors. I saw soldiers forcing a Palestinian to paint over graffiti. The feeling I had-of wanting to grab a spray can and write-made me realize that these slogans represent not only political expression, but also proud defiance of the military occupation.

In our fundraising we always say things like "It is the strength and initiative of the Palestinians themselves that make our projects successful." Statements like these came to life for me as we visited ANERA projects. I was most impressed with a small **soap-producing facility** in Aqabat Jabr Refugee Camp, on the outskirts of Jericho. Most of the residents of this camp fled in 1967, and today it has a deserted, eerie feel and I was surprised to see three young men emerge from one of the crumbling, mud brick huts as we drove up. I was even more astonished when we entered their "factory." Bottles of different sizes, shapes and bright colors filled two small rooms. They had pooled their resources as a cooperative with seven other friends and collected the necessary ingredients for liquid soaps. They are now producing, bottling and labelling their own products - shampoo, dishwashing soap and floor cleaner. Selling largely in the camp and Jericho, they hope to expand sales to other West Bank towns. ANERA is providing funds to buy more sophisticated equipment that will streamline pro-



Entrepreneurship and preservation of tradition: We stumbled across this potter in Aqabat Jabr Refugee Camp throwing an endless succession of water jugs.



Neighborhood sentiments—"Down with the Occupation"

duction and make this expansion possible.

Never having been to the Gaza Strip, I was anxious to see if it is as bad as everyone says. It is worse - almost like a war zone. Army jeeps speed through the streets, jumping curbs to get around traffic. Spent tear gas canisters hang from electrical wires like Christmas ornaments. Children run barefoot through the dusty streets. Driving through Palestine Square, an intersection crowded with automobiles and people, we noticed a commotion and saw youths taunting soldiers and throwing rocks. My hands gripped the seat as I strained to see across the crowded street. Shots rang out just as we turned the corner and rushed through the gates of the Al-Ahli Hospital compound to safety.

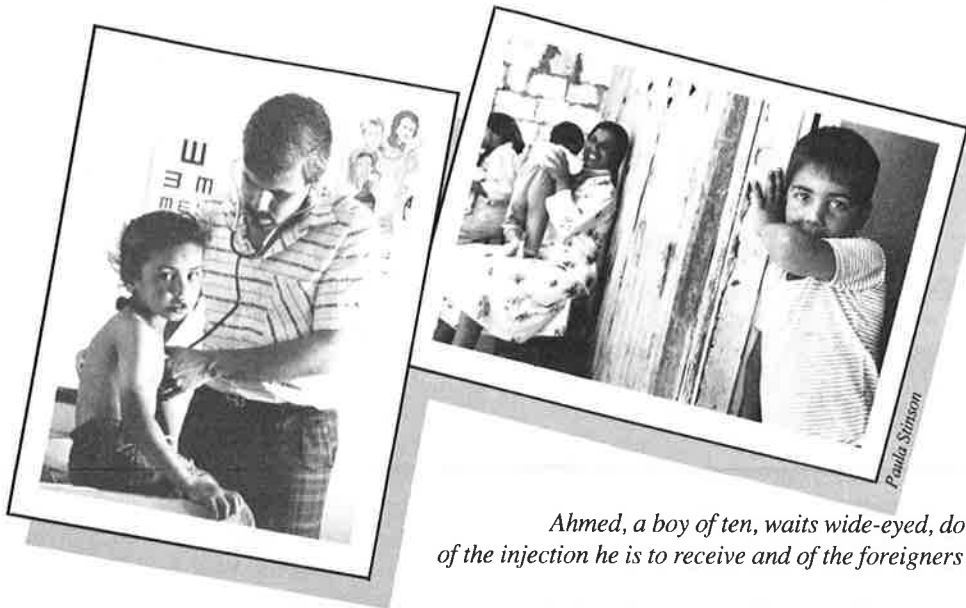
The director of the **Al-Ahli Hospital**, Mr. Rosendal, a soft-spoken Dane, told us of

the difficulties facing the institution. The only private hospital in the Gaza Strip, Al-Ahli has become the treatment center for *Intifada*-related injuries. As it has only 75 beds, injuries like gunshots, gas inhalation, and beatings must be handled on an out-patient basis. Patients increasingly cannot pay for treatment and the hospital is extremely short of funds. Explained Mr. Rosendal, "We are only trying to keep the skin on our nose." He seemed calm and matter-of-fact as he spoke and I thought he must be accustomed to reciting horrifying statistics of hardship to every visitor, yet his chain-smoking belied the stresses of his job.

I have been with ANERA for over a year and have avidly consumed information on our projects here in the office, so seeing projects and meeting the people involved was gratifying. The Palestinians with whom ANERA works expressed the same feelings. They are proud of what they are accomplishing, but are extremely frustrated with the occupation and the shortage of resources:

- The Treasurer of the **Kalandia Refugee Women's Handicraft Cooperative** explained that the number of women wanting to participate is high, especially those willing to do work at home, but the Cooperative can not lend out sewing machines as it had intended for fear that they will be confiscated or destroyed.
- At the **Beit Jala Olive Press Cooperative**, the Chairman showed us a huge pool of waste

WORKING TOWARD EQUAL HEALTH CARE



Ahmed, a boy of ten, waits wide-eyed, doubly fearful of the injection he is to receive and of the foreigners watching him (above.)

Dr. Imad gives a Bedouin girl her first check-up (left.)

Siham Badarni, a travelling public health nurse with the Galilee Society for Health Research and Services in northern Israel, drives up winding roads to the hilltop Bedouin village of Naim. It is the site of one of the Mother/Child Health clinics she visits on a weekly basis. Settled long ago, the Bedouin citizens of Israel live on their ancestral land. However, they are denied electricity and running water as part of the government's efforts to pressure them to settle in approved areas. In stark contrast, a new Jewish settlement perches on the same hill. Here, children ride bicycles through streets of orderly houses.

Anticipating her arrival, mothers wait with their children outside the corrugated tin shack that serves as Siham's clinic. Even on a cool, spring day, the heat inside is stifling. Sixteen people live in this shack.

Dr. Imad Makhoul, a Nazareth pediatrician, volunteers his time to provide follow-up visits to children who require further care. As a team, Siham and Dr. Imad have, in just a few months, made a noticeable difference. Children are being immunized and almost all women receive pre-natal care. Most importantly, the Ministry of Health now funds these clinics. The Galilee Society functions as a catalyst in the drive for equal health care—once a project is established, the government is obliged to support it, and the Society moves on to the next problem. ANERA recently began funding the Galilee Society in an effort to address some of the health needs of the Palestinians within Israel.

L.G.

from the presses that had collected together with sewage, rainwater, and garbage. It is a serious health threat. A simple cover on the pool would improve matters, but they do not even have the money for this.

I never quite realized the extent of our work and how much difference ANERA makes. I felt proud, but a little guilty because I know that most of the credit belongs to the Palestinians who are committed to improving their communities, and to our supporters, who make it all possible.

*Lisa Gilliam,
AMER Director*

DEEPLY CONCERNED

This was my second ANERA trip since the *Intifada* began. I knew that tensions were high in May, but I was not prepared for the rapid events and intense emotions that followed. On the night of my arrival, Jewish "crazies" desecrated tombs in Haifa in an effort to inflame anti-Arab hatred. Things got worse, progressing through the massacres of Palestinians in Rishon Lezion, subsequent demonstrations and killings, and ending with a fatal pipe bomb in West Jerusalem and moronic

speedboat attack by Palestinian "crazies" on a Tel-Aviv beach.

I was just passing through, not directly touched by this violence, but for a few weeks I felt the same emotional strain and fear as the Palestinians and Jews who live there. Things can get scary fast - what next? Who might hurt me? What happens to people who feel these eruptions year after year? What will the children become? Why can't people see where this is leading? Of course many people do see, and actively work for respect and understanding of each other. My ANERA tour gave me powerful examples of how people can transcend rage and hatred.

Many of our staff, all highly-skilled Palestinian professionals, could perhaps make more money elsewhere. They, and the hundreds of Palestinians with whom we work, share dreams and visions of what they want for their society. They have specific goals for their projects, which help them deal with the numerous obstacles. This is easy to forget when visiting, and all you hear about are problems, pain and suffering. I also met committed Jews and Americans steadily working towards peace: medical volunteers, political activists, youth counselors. I returned shaken and depressed from my trip, but certainly not hopeless.

Economic development programs in the Occupied Territories are sometimes a contradiction in terms. Projects not only face typical development problems - lack of capital, training and poor infrastructure and communications - but the reality of military occupation often prevents them. I travelled around the West Bank with ANERA staff members (before the army imposed a five day curfew), for a look at how all of these factors can affect projects.

Outside Hebron, the **Tarqumiya Nursery Cooperative** is well into its first year of cultivating healthy grapevine rootstock for sale to farmers to replace plants contaminated with phylloxera. This highly contagious disease periodically destroys the grape crop in the West Bank, and ANERA has spent several years designing a regional program. The result of collaboration with the University of California at Davis, the cooperative is making a successful transition from producing olive seedlings, which proved difficult to distribute regularly, to producing this much-needed, popular product. Several cycles of plants have been sold to farmers around the West Bank and the first vines should begin producing grapes in November.

Projects with a more checkered success rate are the **micro dairies in Nablus, Tulkarem and Ramallah**. While addressing a critical need for clean, locally-produced dairy products, the dairies face problems that are

often beyond the scope of the cooperatives to solve.

- **Production:** Since the *Intifada* began, many families now own cows to provide milk and income. The down side is that more unclean milk is on the market. The dairy cooperatives are starting programs to collect this raw milk, and process it in a hygienic manner. There are problems of farmers delivering tainted milk (watered or containing antibiotics) to the cooperatives. This is controlled by constant testing, but ideally should be addressed by better farmer training.

- **Operations:** Extended curfews, which prevent employees from coming to work and delay shipments, often stop production. Electricity is sometimes cut off, and the unrefrigerated milk spoils.

- **Marketing:** With strikes and curfews, reliable transportation is always a problem. There are not yet enough stores equipped to handle perishable dairy products, for example, many shopkeepers turn the electricity off at night to save money.

I found the tension and unhappiness very hard to deal with on this trip. People usually give you "the harangue" when you travel in Israel and the West Bank, both to vent their feelings and get you to agree with their point of view. Everybody wanted to talk about how tense their lives were. "So how do you deal with stress?" became my standard question.

Nights are frightening; you feel people's fear even when you see nothing. Only the army, the police and the *shabab* (youth) are out in the streets, so many people stay inside night after night. When people do travel, they take a child or friend along to avoid an arbitrary arrest at a roadblock. This has been going on for three years now; it has taken its toll on people's mental well-being. Some areas, Gaza and Jenin for example, have been under dusk-to-dawn curfew since the *Intifada* began.

Nablus has been under a de facto curfew as well.

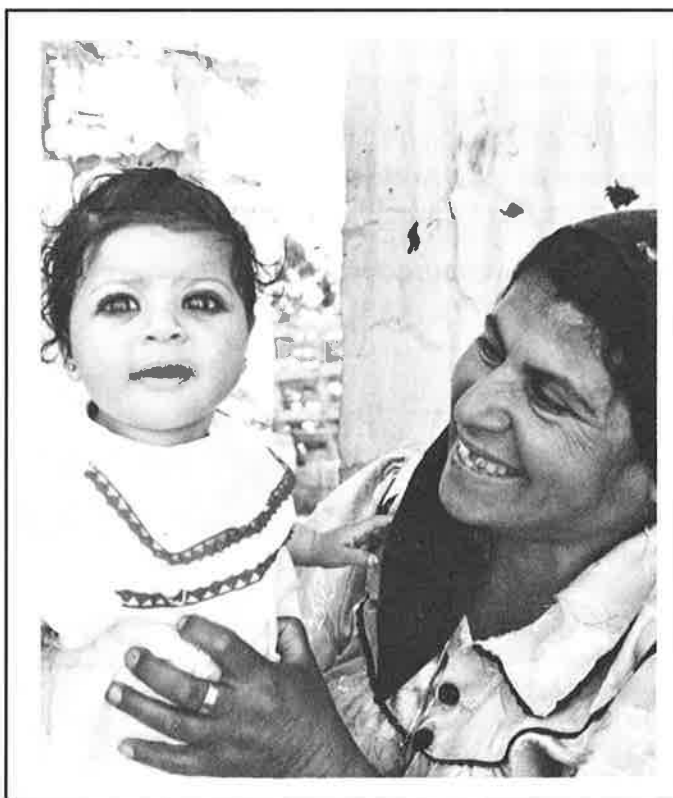
It was hard to avoid sensing the animosity between many Palestinians and Jews. Yet, I met many people who overcome these emotional obstacles in their daily commitment to well-planned and successful development projects. This quality is one of the greatest strengths of ANERA's Middle East staff. The results speak for themselves.

*Paula Stinson,
Vice President*



Helping people meet their basic needs contributes to peace.

Paula Stinson



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* Sponsors receive a photo of the child and a letter from the school during the year.

Contributions to ANERA are tax-deductible and should be sent with this form to the ANERA office. Thank you for your help!

Edited and designed by Paula Stinson. Welcome to Tom Webster, ANERA's new administrative assistant. He replaces Maggie Gran, who is headed for Syria as a Fullbright scholar. Congratulations to both.



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SNAPSHOTS

Travel Notes from the West Bank, Gaza and Israel

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