

# Gaza Strip: What We're Doing

From Jackie Lubeck of Theatre Day Productions, a WACC project holder in the Gaza Strip.

This is an unbelievable time for all of us. We have watched it go from bad to worse to terrible to unbelievable to unbearable...

In Hebron, our guys are safe but scared since the Israeli incursion of two days ago. ... We speak to them all daily. Schools are closed. In Tulkarem, Ghassan has been in jail for 18 months but we heard him speak on an Arabic radio station. We haven't been able to locate Ala. In Nablus, we spoke to our animation teacher this morning and he 'can't talk'...

...Work on 'The Walking Boy' began in December 2000. The Al Aqsa Intifada had begun. Children were being killed every day while other children looked on helplessly as the funeral processions passed by their homes and schools. We could not imagine the effect this was having on the young people in Palestine. For us, it hurt... and it was then that we decided to make a play about a boy who was simply walking to school one day, when out of nowhere, he is shot.

A simple boy from Hebron... a walking boy. 'The Walking Boy' is about imagination! It is the story of Omar, told from his dreams, his memories, and his imagination. At the start of the play, Omar is shot. In his fever and in his shock, the details of his life pass before him. We meet him, his family, and we discover his dreams for the future. We also meet Abu Sultan. Who is this strange man wearing a bizarre coat? Where does he come from and what is his role in Omar's life? Omar is accompanied on his trip to the hospital and his trip through his imagination by his best friend Majed. Together with Abu Sultan, they cry, they laugh, they fight, they run, they discuss, they visit, they play, they fly. Omar dies... leaving the world to Majed, Abu Sultan, and all children.

The play opened on March 28 for the children of the school where we worked. They were fascinated... touched... and in some little way...healed. Ironically, it was 2 days later that tanks moved into the Hebron area and a 13 year-old was killed in Fawwar Refugee camp.

We watched the tanks roll into Ramallah from Jerusalem... glued in front of the tv, zapping from station to station, country to country, point of view to point of view. The helicopters were in the sky... enormous things. It took a few days to decide whether or not to go to Gaza. Rumors were everywhere... phone-calls up and down the country... to go or not to go... to go or not to go... we went.

Nahid was in the final week of rehearsing our new play 'The Elephant Oh King of This Time' - about a king's elephant who tramples the town and the people who are too scared to say anything about it. Nahid worked with our new Gaza training group and this is their first play scheduled to tour. Seven men, all dressed in black and white, create a village and a palace and a crowd of people. Rafat was in the final week of his final project... meaning that he completed our 3-year training program and this is his graduation project. He wrote a play 'The Medium' and directed it with a group of rascal boys (14-19 years old) from the neighbourhood around the theatre. Both Nahid and Rafat had been working on their own since February.

To open or not to open... what should we do in this atmosphere? Open. Keeping a low profile, we asked both directors, all actors, and all our staff to invite close people. Nahid opened his show to a full house on April 7 and Rafat opened his, also to a full house the next day. The audience could not have been happier and more appreciative of what we were doing. The Ministry of Education saw both shows and although ALL co-curricula activities were cancelled, we convinced them - and the UNRWA education department - that the TDP program of a play followed by a drama workshop was a relieving and helpful activity for the kids. The 4 hours of school that they have are not enough of a structure to keep them awake and thinking. Touring of both shows started Saturday April 13.

TDP, like all the country, is now trying to create alternative plans and projects in the event that the situation stays at its disgusting status quo. When the occupied cities reopen, there will be a crisis that no one can imagine. If Gaza is occupied... I have no words.

Jackie

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