

Abu Musa: The story of two men from Akka

Wiggins:

I visited Abu Musa and his wife Hanna in their home in Beit Sahour with my friends Inger and Kjell Jonasson. Abu Musa recounted the story he was writing about two men from Akka and their journey across the land after the Nakba. This story describes many of the tragedies, wars and massacres that the Palestinian people have experienced since 1948. These are some excerpts from his story.

Abu Musa:

I am writing the story of two men from Akka. In this story I mention many of the things that have happened to the Palestinians. There were two young men who grew up together during the time of the British – they finished school together and both got jobs. Abu Ahmad worked in the Department of Public Works – making roads and so on. Abu Habib worked in the General Health Department. These two men were good friends. In 1948 the British were leaving Palestine. Many people of Haifa and Akka fled - some by sea and some left by land. Most of them went to Lebanon. Abu Habib left and went to Lebanon.

Abu Ahmad did not want to go but eventually he had to leave as well. His family fled to the country. They came upon a man who was packing his belongings into a small truck. The man said he was going to Jenin. Abu Ahmad asked if he would take him and his family with him. The man said yes. The man took Abu Ahmad and his two sons, his daughter and his wife and they all went to Jenin.

In Jenin the refugees were living under the olive trees, it was very difficult. The Red Cross came and gave tents to all the people. Soon UNRWA came and they hired Abu Ahmad to manage things and issue supplies. Then UNRWA decided to help people build their own dwelling places. Abu Ahmad was the overseer and foreman.

He built a house near Jericho. It was a good place for his children. They had good schools and they were very happy for a time and they began to forget about Akka. But then came the Six Day War in 1967 and they were driven away again.

Israel occupied the rest of Palestine, including Jericho and the surrounding areas. Many many Palestinians fled. Abu Ahmad and his family fled to Amman. UNRWA gave him a job and a house at the refugee camp in Amman because he had been such a good employee in Jericho.

Then in 1968 the Israelis crossed the boundaries into Jordan and attacked the village of Karameh. The Palestinians stood against the Israelis in Karameh. In general the Arabs had many problems with their Arab fellows during the Six Day War. But in Karameh when the Jordanians saw that the Palestinians were holding their position against the Israeli tanks, they entered the battle and they fought well together. The Israeli's lost the battle and lost many soldiers. So the legend that the Israeli's can never lose a battle is not true. Abu Ahmads' older son died in the fighting in Karameh.

Then in 1970 came Black September - when King Hussein went against the Palestinians. More than 20,000 Palestinians fell in the fighting with the Jordanians. Abu Ahmad and his family had to flee from Jordan and they went north to Syria. They went to Damascus to the refugee camp of Yarmouk. The day after they arrived in the camp Abu Ahmad decided to go into Damascus. He went into the Quarter of the Martyrs and was very surprised to meet his friend Abu Habib. It was a heartfelt welcome. They told each other about all that had happened since they left Akka. Abu Habib said to Abu Ahmad, you must come with me to Beirut, it is a big city and it has work and opportunities for you and your son. I am in the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp at the edge of Beirut. He told him that many of the people in Tel al-Zaatar came from Akka originally.

So Abu Ahmad and his family went to Tel al-Zaatar. Then the War in Lebanon started. There was a terrible massacre at Tel al-Zataar in 1976. Abu Ahmad and his wife lost their second son and his wife and their grandchildren at Tel al-Zataar. The grief made his wife insane. They left Tel al-Zataar and they wandered from place to place. The war in Lebanon lasted for many years. Abu Ahmads' wife was very sick during this time. They were in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp when she died. Abu Ahmad was alone and he had nothing.

He decided to go to Damour. In Damour he found his friend Abu Habib again. Abu Habib was glad to see him and he had a meal in honor of Abu Ahmad and invited other men from Akka. After the meal they saw a show on the television that pictured some Israelis celebrating in a garden. Abu Ahmad saw this and he fell down and fainted. They gave him cold water and he came back to consciousness. They asked him what happened to you? Abu Ahmad asked - did you see the Israelis celebrating in the garden on the television? That was my garden in Akka.

The next day they took him to the clinic in the camp. The doctor said to take him to the hospital at Beirut University. Abu Habib took him to the hospital. They found he had a tumor in his brain and the doctors said that the operation was too dangerous and that they could not help him.

So I will stop my story here. This story could be that of any family from Yaffa or from Haifa or from anywhere in Palestine. All the Palestinians have faced many trials. Abu Ahmad started as a well to do man in Akka with a house and a garden and a family. At the end he was alone and he had nothing.