

Conversation with Murad

Wiggins:

I sat with Murad in April 2009 and I asked him to tell me about the history of the Dheisheh refugee camp and about his life and the current situation in the camp. Our conversation was in English. Here are some excerpts from our talk.

Murad

"In the beginning the Palestinian refugees left their homes and their lands in 1948 and 1949. They thought they would return when the shelling stopped so they left everything and they closed their houses and took their keys. At first they lived under the trees and on the mountainsides near their villages. As the occupation continued they were pushed further and further away from their villages. The refugees had to stay on any empty land that they could find.

After some time the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees of the Near East (UNRWA) came and gave the refugees tents and food and clothes because they did not have anything. The Dheisheh camp was established in 1949. The people of Dheisheh, with the help of UNRWA, rented this land for the camp as a place for the refugees to live temporarily until the people could go back to their land. But as you can see, there is still no solution to this problem.

When I was a young child my Grandmother would come to tell us bedtime stories about her village and her life before she became a refugee. These stories are in my memory. I will never forget these stories. My father has not forgotten and I have not forgotten and my children will not forget. We will not lose our right to return.

We must continue to think about the current situation here in the camp and all the refugee camps. It has been UNRWA's role to take care of all the refugees and all our needs. They are responsible for food, clothing, buildings, homes, water and electricity. Every year the assistance is being decreased. We have been protesting this situation in Dheisheh and in other camps as well. UNRWA has not done anything.

We have to think about how to deal with our current situation and how to be strong. The situation is very bad and very hard for us. There are many barriers in my future, but I need to overcome these barriers to reach my goals. I am studying psychology and social work at Bethlehem University. It is expensive and it is hard on my family. I will finish my 4 year Bachelor's degree next year but there are no jobs.

I want to make Dheisheh a better place and I care about all of Palestine. When I finish my degree I would like to work with all the cities inside Palestine to do good work for all of the people of Palestine."