


*A Rose, by
any other Name
and
other
stories*



*Ali
Anthony
Bell*

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**and
Other Stories**

Ali Anthony Bell

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1) “**A Rose, by any other Name**” is fiction based on a real event that occurred on the 31st of May and the 1st of June 1921 in the community of Greenwood in the city of Tulsa Oklahoma, USA, known as the Tulsa Race Massacre.

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2) “**Sitting With the Mayday Tribe**” is fiction based on a real event that occurred on the 1st to the 3rd of May, 1971 in Washington DC, known as the “Mayday Tribe”, and also a real exposition *Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975* Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC (March 15, 2019 – August 18, 2019)

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3) “**The Wedge Blade**” is fiction based on a real historical movement in the USA that the author was part of in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

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4) “**My Heart Lies in Palestine**” is fiction based on an historical event of ethnical cleansing in 1948 known to Palestinians as the Nakba.

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5) “**Just a Stone’s Throw Away**” is fiction inspired by the testimonies of IDF Soldiers and a real event that occurred on the West Bank in January 2019. Source: Times of Israel.com

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A Rose, by any other Name

“Hello?”

“Rose Alison Walker?”

“Speaking, how may I help you?”

“Hello Mrs. Walker, I’m Anthony Bannister, I work for NPR, and I was wondering if I could interview you about your memories of the events of May 31st and June 1st 1921.”

“Are you a white man Mr. Bannister?”

“Yes, Mrs. Walker, I am. But I’m proud to say that my parents marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and I want to let the world know what happened to you and your town.”

“Well, it’s about time young man. White folk always wanted to cover it up.”

“I’m coming to Tulsa next week; may I visit you at your home?”

“Yes, Mr. Bannister, you may. I was only 12 at the time, but I’ll be happy to tell you everything I remember.”

“How about next Saturday afternoon, is that OK?”

“That suits me fine. See you then.”

On Saturday I stop by at a local flower shop, “Rose’s Florist” to pick up a bouquet of a dozen red roses that I had ordered as a gift to the old lady I’m about to visit. “It seems appropriate, since her name is Rose, and the name of the Florist is too.

When Mrs. Walker answers the door I present the sweet-smelling bouquet with a smile, and she’s taken aback, recoiling with a look of shock on her face and gasping for breath.

“The roses!” the words burst breathlessly from her lips as she starts to reel backwards.

I understand immediately and throw them on the ground behind me, then I reach out to help her steady herself.

“I’m so sorry Mrs. Walker, I had no idea you were allergic to roses.” I help her and we go to sit in her living room as she catches her breath. I wait patiently until she speaks.

“You almost gave me a heart attack young man. But you couldn’t have known. Ever since June 1st 1921, I can’t stand to see or smell roses. They bring back all the memories so vividly it’s like I’m living that horrible day all over again. It’s been ages now that everyone I know calls me Alison or Ali. No one calls me Rose anymore.”

“I’m truly sorry Mrs. Walker, may I call you Alison?”

“You may young man. At least, now, for your interview, everything is just like it happened yesterday.”

“May I record our conversation?”

“At last, someone wants to know what happened. Of course, I agree, if you promise that everyone will learn about what happened to us.”

“It won’t be a secret any longer, I promise Alison, the whole world will soon know about this tragedy.”

I start recording. After staring into space for a few minutes she starts to tell her story.

“May 31st was my twelfth birthday. My father had asked one of his white friends to go to DeHaven’s Flower Shop and buy a dozen red roses as a surprise for me. Fresh roses were rare, and very expensive, but DeHaven’s had them. They only let white people in the store though. Our family was well to do, my father was a physician and he was already 40 when WWI broke out, so he didn’t serve in the army. We had a large two-storey house on North Hartford Avenue in the Greenwood neighborhood filled with beautiful furniture and a large grand piano. I had started taking piano lessons when I was 6, and my heart was set on being a musician. That dream was shattered along with all the rest the next day.

When he came home on the evening of my birthday, my father put the roses in a vase and placed it on the grand piano on a pink and red granny-square that I had crocheted. I had never smelled roses before that day, and these boasted a particularly fragrant perfume. My dad sat down at the piano and played “Happy Birthday” while my mom brought my birthday cake into the living room and the whole family sang. I was right in the middle, with two older sisters and two younger brothers. After I had made a wish and blown out the candles, my mother cut a piece for everyone. My father asked me to play something for the family. I chose a composition that I had only mastered recently; "Les Roses D'Ispahan" Opus 39, No. 4, by Gabriel Fauré. As I played, I could see from their smiles that my parents were both filled with pride and admiration.

The phone rang and my dad answered, and as he listened a worried look came over his face. As we were used to his being called for emergencies, we all presumed that someone needed help. But it wasn’t the case this time. He didn’t take his doctor’s kit as he rushed out the door, but before leaving he told us all to come together for a big family hug, and he told us how much he loved us all. We were asleep when he came home, and I never learned where he went that night.

Early the next morning we were woken by the sound of gunfire and the smell of smoke, and we saw people running past the house; all black people from our neighborhood. Houses were burning all up the street from us. My dad went outside and we could hear him talking with some white men. They all had guns, and they ordered him to come with them. He begged them not to set the house on fire, but that’s what they did after he went with them. We tried to get out, but they had set all the doors on fire. All of us kids huddled together with our mom in the living room, terrified. They wanted to burn us alive! We heard a crash as a window shattered in the kitchen at the back of the house, then my dad rushed into the living room. He had succeeded in slipping away while the mobsters were busy dousing the house with kerosene. We all climbed through the broken window after my dad had smashed out all of the glass. As we ran down the street with all of the other black folk, an airplane overhead dropped burning balls and someone was also shooting from the plane. I saw an old man drop dead to the ground in front of us, but we had to keep running for our lives. Dad stopped to help a pregnant woman and he told us to keep running. We never saw him again. My mom and us

kids were picked up and brought to the YWCA in downtown Tulsa, where they had prepared mattresses on the floor of the gym. We were put there with lots of other black folk, mostly women and children with a few old men.

When all of the white folk had left our neighborhood, we went back. There was nothing left but ashes and smoke. Anything that had not been burned had been destroyed. We had nothing, and no father to help us rebuild our life.

Now, young man, perhaps you can see why I cannot stand the sight or the smell of roses, and why everyone calls me Alison now. I asked everyone I knew not to use my name.”

I thank her for her time and her contribution, and iterate that many people want the truth to be known. As I leave her house, I pick up the bouquet that I had thrown behind me. When I get home, I hang it upside down to let it dry.

Now the bouquet of dried roses sits in a vase on my piano (it’s an upright, not a grand) and I’ve recently learned how to play "Les Roses D'Ispahan".

Note: this story is fiction based on a real event that occurred on the 31st of May and the 1st of June 1921 in the community of Greenwood in the city of Tulsa Oklahoma, USA, known as the Tulsa Race Massacre.

*Sitting
with the
Mayday Tribe*

*All
Anthony
Bell*

“Sitting with the Mayday Tribe”

“Hello, Smithsonian American Art Museum, office of the curator, how may I help you?”

“Hello, this is Anthony Bannister with NPR, may I speak with Mr. Grayson D. Stoke please?”

“Let me see if he’s available, may I ask you the object of your call?”

“I’d like to schedule an interview for a radio show.”

“Hold on please.”

The music isn’t bad for once, I recognize the saxophone, must be ‘*Why Don’t you do Right?*’ I’m just starting to enjoy it when...

“Thank you for waiting Mr. Bannister, I’ll put you through.”

“Hello Mr. Bannister, Grayson Stoke here, my assistant informed me that you’d like to do an interview, it’s about the SAAM then I suppose.”

“Hello Mr. Stoke, thank you for taking my call. The interview isn’t about the SAAM though. I’m in DC next week interviewing people about the events of May 1st through 3rd, 1971. I imagine you remember those events well.”

“Impossible to forget, my life was marked forever. It’s incredible when I think about it, it was the first time I walked through these doors. Now I couldn’t count the number of times I’ve entered this building.”

“Actually, I found your name among the names of the more than 12,000 people arrested over those few days. What intrigued me is that you were only 12 years old at the time. I’d bet my reputation that you have a story worth listening to.”

“Indeed, I do. I’ll be more than happy to do your interview. Let me look at my schedule. How about Tuesday? I’m available either from 9 to 11 or 3 to 5.”

“Tuesday at 9 is fine, it won’t take 2 hours, but perhaps you can pencil the 2 hours in and give me a tour of your collection after we finish? If you’re not too busy.”

“An art lover! Great! See you next Tuesday. I’ll inform my assistant. Good bye Mr. Bannister.”

“Good bye Mr. Stoke, see you next week.”

It’s too far to drive to the Capitol, so I fly in Sunday evening. Not having any interviews scheduled Monday, I relax and take the occasion to visit the National Gallery of Art Downtown.

Tuesday I’m up early like usual. The Hampton Inn Convention Center is only 10 minutes’ walk from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. I’ve reserved a small meeting room to do interviews with several other witnesses during the week, but this one will probably be the best.

I'm 10 minutes early so Mr. Stoke's assistant asks me to wait, but he comes out to greet me straight away.

"Good morning Mr. Bannister, pleasure to meet you. Please." He signals to come in.

"Morning Mr. Stoke, The pleasure is shared, thank you for accepting the interview. I'd just like you to speak freely, and tell your story. Our listeners love stories. I probably won't ask any questions."

We're sitting in the small lounging area in his office with a coffee table between us.

"Would you like something? Coffee?"

Having spotted his espresso machine, I accept. "Yes please, the coffee at the hotel wasn't great. Strong, no sugar."

He serves me and sits down facing me, I place my recorder on the coffee table and start it. "Whenever you're ready. I can edit it afterwards."

He beaths deeply and stares off into space as he zooms back 48 years into the past.

"My uncle Simon was the first curator here in this building. He already worked for Smithsonian, and this building used to be the Patent Office Building. It was to be demolished to build a parking lot." He notices my eyes. "Yeah, I know what you're thinking, my uncle had the same opinion. He was part of a group that opposed the bill. They won and the building opened as the new location for Smithsonian's Art Museum in '68. (My mind is singing '*Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you got till it's gone.*' Joni Mitchell, not to be confused with U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell, who ordered the mass arrests) Anyway, as you already know, in '71 I was 12 years old. Now I'm 60 and ready to retire. Art has been a passion all my life, and I got my first oil painting kit for my 12th birthday. We lived in Rhode Island, and we came to DC from time to time to visit. My father had a business meeting here on Monday, and even though I had school, I begged him to let me come to see Uncle Simon at the museum and he gave in and let me come with him. My parents always supported my love for art. That's how I came to be here on that fateful weekend. We came on Saturday, May 1st, and me and my dad came to take a little guided tour with Uncle Simon. When we left the building in the afternoon, we saw masses of people all headed towards West Potomac Park, carrying signs to protest against the Viet-Nam War. My parents were both opposers of the war, and so we decided to join them. We didn't know it, but it was an enormous demonstration called the 'Mayday Tribe'. There were about 35,000 protestors sitting and camping out in the park near the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. It was about an hour's walk from the museum. We hadn't prepared to camp out, but everyone helped everyone. Dad called Mom from a payphone so she wouldn't worry. He spent the whole afternoon and evening talking with organizers and planning actions for Monday. We were going to shut down the capitol. We slept out under the stars. It was already an experience for me, but we had no idea what was about to go down. Sunday morning at dawn my eyes were burning as soon as I woke up. There were riot police everywhere, clubbing people, frisking them, taking them away in vans. My dad and me were able to get away and drive back to Uncle Simon's house. He was determined to stay and take part in the demonstration again the next day, and he said I should stay safe in my uncle's house. I told him that I was just as much against the war as he was and begged to go with him. So, Monday

we went back downtown, and the tear gas and billysticks were there to meet us. The police didn't even ask us any questions, they just jammed us into police vans and hauled us off. We found ourselves literally in a concentration camp, behind wires on a football practice field with thousands of other protestors. There were soldiers all around the field to keep us in. No food. No water. No toilets. I can still remember hearing that President Nixon had fully approved of the way the protest had been handled. That's the way it happened. I love my country, and I love being able to make people aware the beautiful works that are part of our culture and heritage, but as Smedley Darlington Butler put it '*War is a Racket*'. My story is told. I hope that your broadcast will be a success."

I'm all smiles. "Thank you so much Mr. Stokes, that was wonderful. How about a tour of your collection? I'd also like to invite you to lunch, if you don't mind."

"Sure, and you know what? Our current exhibition fits the bill exactly! It's entitled *Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975*. Let's go then Mr Bannister."

He's just a year older than me, and I've got a feeling that we're going to become good friends, despite the 2000 miles between us.

Note: this story is fiction based on a real event that occurred on the 1st to the 3rd of May, 1971 in Washington DC, known as the "Mayday Tribe".

The
Wedge
Blade



Ali

Anthony

Bell

“The Wedge Blade”

“Hello, you’ve reached the Manning residence, we’re not available at the moment. Please leave a message and we’ll call you back.” It’s a low husky voice on the answer phone, but it’s not the voice of anyone in the old remote Texas farmhouse, it’s only to dissuade thieves.

“Hello Ms. Manning, Anthony Bannister from NPR, I was wondering if you could help me. Your son Ali Anthony gave me your name...”

“Hello Mr. Bannister, yes, I’m here. He wrote me and told me you might call. I don’t quite understand what you want.”

“It’s like this: I published a request for life stories of people who were involved in the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Your son contacted me and said that you might be willing to tell us a bit of your story.”

“Well, I never...”

“I understand your need for privacy Ms. Manning, it can be an anonymous contribution. You can say as much or as little as you want. Your son believes it might do you some good to get everything off of your chest. He told me you still have nightmares. Perhaps I can come to see you? We can record your memories and we can even change the sound of your voice if you wish.”

“Well, I suppose that’ll be alright. Qué sera sera. We left the ICA 36 years ago, in 1983, the same year my ex-husband quit smoking and drinking. He passed away 7 years ago from lung cancer anyway, 29 years after he quit.”

“I’m sorry to hear that Ms Manning. When is a good time for you? Perhaps sometime next week?”

“Any day is like another. Whenever suits you. The morning’s better if you’re an early riser, before it starts getting hot.”

“I’ll come on Monday then, how about 8?”

“That will be fine Mr. Bannister.”

“One last thing, I don’t know how to get to your house, I just have a PO Box number.”

“You can just ask Ed or Jack at the Phillips 66 Station on West 2nd Street. They can give you directions. I’ll tell them you’re coming. Have a nice weekend Mr. Bannister.”

“Thank you so much Ms Manning, you too, see you Monday morning.”

It’ll be a 15-hour drive down to see her, so I decide to do the trip in two days over the weekend, I can visit Monument Valley and the Navajo Reservation, I always love a visit there and I have some good friends, I’ll probably be able to find a bed for Saturday night. I book a room for Sunday night at the Red River Inn Best Western in Clarendon.

A border collie comes running up to meet me as my pick up stops in a cloud of dust. Its joyful barks fill the air, chiming in with some clucking and the gentle creaking of the water well windmill.

Lilly Evelyn Manning strolls out of the old ranch house, a hardy 50-some daughter close behind. They work their little piece of land together, about 40 acres, just a few head of cattle, some poultry...just enough to get by without any extras. Oval wire rimmed glasses encircle Lilly's powder blue eyes, her hazel hair sways gently and the warmth of her smile is mirrored by the intense crow's feet on her temples. Kindness and peace of mind seems to well forth from her whole being.

"Good morning Mr. Bannister, please come in. Some tea?"

"Morning Ms Manning, Yes, please." I follow her into the living room, she bids me to sit and heads off to the kitchen. Framed grandchildren's smiles welcome me from all corners of the room, and the all-too-familiar sweet smell of printed pages blends with those of the ranch through the flapping curtains. The bookshelves are packed. No television or other mod cons. I notice a weary Bible next to an English translation of the Holy Qur'an on the end table next to my easy chair. She reappears a few minutes later with a platter, two mugs with T-bags in them and Texas fruitcake. "*Sultan Moroccan Chai*" is marked on the T-bag tickets.

"My daughter has chores, so she won't be joining us." She notices my intrigue about the "*Sultan*". My son Ali sent the tea from Morocco for Christmas, it's delicious. So, I guess we should get started?"

I start my Tascam voice recorder running and nod. "Please, I'm truly grateful."

"In my youth I was set on being a missionary. James and I met in seminary in the Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He was a very kind man, tall, slim, and full of joy. We married and had our first son James Jr. here in Texas in '57. James had his first parish in Brownsville, and then in '59 we were sent to a Mission on the Blackfeet reservation in Montana. We were both thrilled with being sent to work on the mission, and spent 9 years there. We had twin boys, one of them died, then we had another boy in '63 and in '66 we adopted two Assiniboine sisters from another reservation in Montana. James always attended the United Methodist Annual Conferences, and that's where we learned of the Ecumenical Institute. In the summer of '67 we attended a study program with them in an Urban Development Program they had started in the Black ghetto on the West Side of Chicago called '5th City'. That's where it all began for us. They had a vision, and they had a plan to change the world. They would use the existing global network of Christian churches throughout the world to recruit and build an organization full of people willing to give up everything. I believe that the most significant symbol was one that they taught from the very beginning; it was called "The Wedge Blade" You can picture it like this: a **V** shape pointing to the right with a vertical bar on the far right. The small tip of the **V** to the right of the bar represented the "*vanguard*", those who were willing to throw themselves on the barbed wire of the front lines of a war, thus giving their lives for the sake of all the others. It was a religious order, and we took vows when we joined in '69. Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. We defined Chastity not as abstention, but as placing God and the cause above all else. We learned to think of the family as a worldly value, and as such, something that had to be sacrificed like possessions. Because the family was to be sacrificed, all children were

separated from their parents at 12 years of age and sent to live with guardians somewhere else in the world, other adults in the movement. We were so involved in our mission to change the world that we forgot the importance of being close as a family. We rarely saw each other. The Ecumenical Institute wanted to change its image for the outside world and changed their public name to The Institute of Cultural Affairs, but it was still secretly a religious order. It grew to around 5000 members by the end of the '70s. The years went by and we were all separated, James and I were sent to Korea, then to Hong Kong, and then to Lagos Nigeria, while our children were all sent here and there around the US and abroad. I don't regret having made sacrifices, but I realized too late that essential pages had been torn out of our lives. I don't believe that we can ever repair the damage done. As my son mentioned, I do have recurring nightmares. I pray God daily to forgive me for my negligence. My daughter that you saw outside didn't go through all of this. James and I adopted her here in Texas after we left the Order and James went back to preaching. I'm happy that she's here to help me. Thank God. I'm grateful and I know that Jesus loves me."

She wipes her eyes with a bandana and a slight smile lets me know she's alright. She's said all she wants to, and it's enough. I can imagine how hard it must be for her to make something as private as this public. "Thank you for your contribution, I'm ever so grateful Ms. Manning. You're a brave and good woman. I'm sure your children love you dearly and don't hold anything against you. I can see that your grandchildren are present in your life. About the recording, would you like me to change the sound of your voice on the radio?"

"That won't be necessary, thank you." I finish my tea and she follows me out to my truck. I'm thinking that the four-day trip was well worth the few minutes of witness. The border collie comes running up for some attention so I pet it.

"She likes you. Dogs can always tell a kind person. Goodbye and take care Mr. Bannister, God bless and protect you."

"Good bye Ms Manning, thank you again. Take care of yourself, I'll call you before it airs."

Her red bandana waves goodbye through a cloud of dust as I pull out of the driveway.

Note: This story is fiction based on a real historical movement in the USA that the author was part of in the 1960's and 1970's.



*My Heart
Lies in
Palestine*

*Alí Anthony
Bell*

My Heart Lies in Palestine

“Hello?”

“Mr. Ahmed Ebrahim?”

“Speaking.”

“Hello, this is Anthony Bannister, I’m an investigative reporter with NPR. We have a radio show coming up on May 15th dedicated to Nakba Day, and I’m looking for survivors to bear witness to what they lived through. There aren’t many refugees here in the States, but your grand-daughter Aya contacted me and said that she’s sure you’d be willing to give me an interview. As you know, not many Americans know about this catastrophe, and my job is to increase awareness.”

“That was 73 years ago. I was only 10 years old, but I’ll be happy to tell you what I remember. People should know.”

“Great. Can I come to your house to record your witness?”

“Sure.”

“The address I have is 4604 Roosevelt Ave., in Sacramento Heights; is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“How about next Monday morning, May 10th, at 9 am? Does that suit you?”

“That will be fine.”

“Thank you so much Mr. Ebrahim, see you Monday, God willing.”

“It’s my pleasure Mr. Bannister, see you then Insha Allah.”

My knowledge of Islam is limited, but I do know that when Muslims speak of the future, statements are always followed by ‘*God willing*’. I’ve started reading a translation of the Holy Qur’an since I saw it sitting next to the Bible on an end table beside the easy chair of an old Texan woman I interviewed two years ago.

I check my itinerary on the net and see that it’s 9 and-a-half hours’ drive to Sacramento, so I decide to drive on Sunday and book a room in the Rodeway Inn Sacramento Central Hotel. It’s a 2-star with a swimming pool at \$100 a night, just 10 minutes’ drive to Ahmed’s House.

On Monday morning Ahmed meets me at the door with a big smile, he’s in a beige suit jacket and slacks, his white shirt open at the top without a tie, and a traditional black and white keffiyeh covers his head. Behind him in the entryway is a Palestinian flag over an old framed black and white photo of a stone house in a village. A big old iron key is hanging on the wall next to the photo.

“Good morning Mr. Bannister, please come in.” We shake hands.

“Good morning Mr. Ebrahim, Al Salam Alaykoum (God’s Peace be with you).”

Ahmed's smile becomes even larger. "Wa Alaykoum Salam, it's indeed a nice surprise to hear you pronounce these words. Are you a Muslim?"

"No, but I read a translation of the Qur'an sometimes."

"So, of course you're not fasting, would you like some tea? You can call me Ahmed." An old woman appears in the entryway behind him. She's in a long black dress with red trimmings and embroidery, a black and red headscarf covers her hair. "And this is my wife, Aisha."

"Pleased to meet you, Aisha." I extend my hand, but she motions 'no' with a smile, and I remember suddenly that Muslim men and women traditionally don't shake hands with people of the opposite sex. I also realize that it's Ramadan, so they must be fasting. "Yes, I'll gladly have some tea." Aisha disappears back into the kitchen.

Ahmed shows me the old photo. "This is our home in Lydda, Palestine. My children or my grandchildren will go home to it one day Insha Allah. Please have a seat." Ahmed motions towards the living room.

As I sit on the sofa, I get out my Tascam voice recorder and set it on the coffee table.

Ahmed sits beside me. "I was very surprised by your call. Our people have been talking about the Nakba for 72 years, but the world remains deaf and blind to our suffering."

"In fact, I too was ignorant, until I met a fellow reporter who had visited the occupied territories after the Gaza War 7 years ago. What he told me made me want to help your people. I was able to persuade the direction to do a radio show to commemorate Nakba Day this next Saturday. What is aired is subject to approval though. So, try not to say anything that they could deem as defamatory."

Aisha comes and serves me tea and cake, then takes a seat on an easy chair. "Thank you, Mrs. Ebrahim, the tea smells nice, it has a fragrance of sage."

"Your welcome Mr. Bannister."

"If you want to speak, I'll be happy to have your testimony too. Let's start, shall we?" I turn on my voice recorder. "How did you become a refugee Mr. Ebrahim?"

"Lydda was a quiet city. Christians and Muslims lived in peace together. There weren't any Jewish people in our town. I was 10 years old in July '48 when everyone in our village was rounded up and herded out by the IDF. The Israelian soldiers let us take just a few things. My mother was wearing gold bracelets and they stripped them off of her arms, just like they took my father's watch. They took all of the women's jewelry, and everyone's money. They didn't leave anyone with any valuables. My father kept the key to the house, and we all thought that we would be coming back. There were thousands of us, and we were forced to walk all the way to Jordan. Many people dropped dead as we were walking, but the soldiers kept forcing us on. Later I learned that there were some 70,000 people in the Lydda Death March. I spent my childhood in a refugee camp in Jordan, at Al Mahatta. That's where I met Aisha, we went to school together in the UNRWA school, and we both excelled in our studies."

"I was better than you" Aisha adds. "Except for math, you always beat me there!"

"We both did so well in our studies that we were hired by the UN. I worked as a schoolteacher and Aisha worked as a nurse. My father died in the camp and gave me the key

to our home in Lydda. I've always kept it. I was able to return to see it once. I knocked on the door and a Jewish settler answered. I told him that it was my home, and asked if I could enter to look around. He said that it was his home now, and no Arab would ever come into his home. He told me to go away or he'd call the police."

"How did you arrive in the USA?"

"Allah was good to us. We married in the camp, and were both able to get scholarships to study at the California State University here in Sacramento, so we managed to come here. Travelling here was hard. We didn't have passports; Palestinians weren't allowed to have them. We just had an official document that permitted us to travel across borders. Because we didn't have passports, we weren't allowed to stay in the airport like the other passengers when we were changing planes. We were separated and held in a cell like prisoners while we waited for our departure."

"We made it though. We both got a PhD, mine is in Political Science, and Ahmed is a Doctor of Physics. We were able to get good jobs and buy our little house here. But it's not home."

"You're not happy with your new life here?"

They both smile. Ahmed speaks "As I said, Allah has been good to us. We're happy, happier than most of our people. There are almost 6 million Palestinian refugees in the world, and about a million and a half are still in refugee camps. We both still have family members in Jordan. But this is not our home. Our homes were taken from us. Any Jewish person in the world can get a visa to live in Israel, but all the Palestinian refugees may not. We dream of returning to the land that was stolen from us. We always keep hope that one day justice will prevail. Our children live here in California, but they will return to Palestine if they are allowed."

"Is it hard being a Palestinian and a Muslim in America?"

"There is a lot of hatred and misunderstanding. I don't blame people for the biases that they have grown up with, and we stay discrete. I only wear my keffiyeh in the house. I wore it especially for you, Aisha wore her traditional dress for your visit too. We're fortunate, there's a small Muslim community here, and the closest Mosque, the Masjid As-Sabur, is only 15 minutes' walk from here."

"May I enter and pray the noon prayer with you?" (This will have to be edited out of the recording)

"Of course, it will be a pleasure. Islam allows non-Muslims to pray in a Masjid. You will just need to do a ritual cleansing. I'll be happy to show you how. Aisha will make you lunch."

I spend the rest of the day with them, talking and learning about their incredible lives, until they break their fasting a little after 8 pm. Their children, Aya, Othman, and Ryann, and their families all come to break the fast with the elders, and I thank Aya for having given me her father's name. They all confirm their wish to live in Palestine, and they consider it to be their home even though they've never been there. It is where Ahmed and Aisha were born.

I bid them farewell and tell them to tune in on Saturday for the Nakba Day commemoration show. There are still rooms at the Rodeway Inn, so I can head back home in the morning. As I'm about to leave Ahmed gives me a token of his appreciation, an original Palestinian

keffiyeh, and I promise to wear it. I've become an activist, and from now on I'll try to take part in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Note: This story is fiction based on an historical event of ethnical cleansing in 1948 known to Palestinians as the Nakba.

Alí Anthony Bell



*Just a
Stone's
Throw Away*

Just a Stone's Throw Away

Daniel Starkman grew up in the Bay Area, and he was like all his friends. He was taught to take pride in being Jewish, while living in a world that was full of anti-Semitism. Zionism gave him a sense of belonging. It was an integral part of his life, and when he came of age, he didn't hesitate to enroll in the IDF. He was thrilled to be able to defend Israel and to participate in taking back the land that was rightfully theirs.

Lapidos Rivkin was from Tel Aviv. His parents came to Israel as Ashkenazi Jewish settlers before he was born. He was ultra nationalist and well versed in the Talmud, which served as his justification for all of his actions. To understand this, we need to look at a few excerpts from the Talmud:

In the book of Schulchan Aruch, Choszen Hamiszpat, chapter 348 it is written "*All property of other nations belongs to the Jewish nation, which, consequently, is entitled to seize upon it without any scruples.*" From the book of Baba Neria 114, verse 6, "*The Jews are human beings, but the nations of the world are not human beings but beasts.*" Also, in the book of Tosefta. Aboda Zara B, verse 5, "*If a goy kills a goy or a Jew, he is responsible; but if a Jew kills a goy, he is not responsible.*" (a goy is a non-Jew).

Daniel's first assignment as a private in 2006 was in Hebron, in an area where there were many Jewish settlers and also Palestinians residing. It was a common thing to see the Jewish kids throwing rocks at the Palestinian kids or spitting on them and cursing them. They were encouraged by their parents, who would also spit on them and curse them. Daniel became used to spitting on Palestinians too. He had learned to hate them. He thought about it this way; he wasn't on a special force to kill terrorists, so he couldn't kill anyone, but he *could* humiliate Palestinians by spitting on them. He could scare them too, because the soldiers had all the power. It was a routine thing to cock their weapon "chick-chick" and point it at Palestinians, even little kids. He used to laugh with his buddies at how scared they were. It was cool.

Fast forward to 2019, Daniel Starkman had put himself fully into his military career and worked his way up to the rank of Sergeant. He was now stationed at Ramallah on the West Bank and Lapidos Rivkin was Daniel's direct superior, as First Sergeant.

The soldiers were accustomed to Palestinian boys throwing rocks, and they used it as reason to arrest them, sometimes with little or no proof that they were the same boys that threw the rocks. One day Daniel and Lapidos were sitting in the back of a Jeep with a 5-year-old kid they had caught throwing rocks, they were bringing him into the Territories. So, he had been picked up and slapped around, then taken into the back of Jeep.

The kid was crying and trembling with fear, pleading with the soldiers not to harm him, when Lapidos yelled at him "Hey snot-nose, don't cry!" The man started smiling at him so finally the kid smiled back, and then suddenly – wham! He landed a big a punch in the kid's belly. Daniel was a bit taken aback, because even if he hated them, still, he was just a kid, and the punch would have been hard even for a strong adult. He was wondering why his comrade had done that when he got the answer. "How dare you laugh at me you little piece of shit!" Lapidos sneered with hate.

A few days later, on Friday January 18th, thousands of Palestinians were gathered at the Gaza Strip's Israeli border for a demonstration, as they did weekly, burning tires and hurling stones at Israeli soldiers.

Daniel and Lapidos got word that three teenage boys were throwing rocks at Israeli cars near Route 60, the West Bank's main north-south road, so they went to take care of it.

Upon arriving on the scene, Lapidos scowled, "These little bastards, I'm sick of their shit. This time, there will be three less terrorists to worry about. Let's give 'em lead! Shoot to kill!"

Daniel was fighting an internal battle. His superior had given an order. He had to obey, and one side of his mind was telling him that it was right to kill them, that it was justified. Throwing rocks at vehicles had indeed resulted in deaths sometimes. Even just a few days earlier, on the northern West Bank settlement of Rehelim, a 16-year-old Israeli youth had been charged with manslaughter for aggravated stone throwing at a moving vehicle. The stone throwing had resulted in the death of a 47-year-old Palestinian mother of eight children. So, wasn't it right to defend ourselves and stop these teenagers before they kill someone? Meanwhile, his conscience was telling him that he shouldn't shoot to kill, and he couldn't understand why he felt uncomfortable at the idea of killing them.

"Can't we just wound them and take them in?" Daniel dared to ask, but he was sure of the answer even before it came.

"These scumbags don't deserve to live! And don't you ever take sides with them. Are you a coward? A traitor? Come on, show your colors and defend your country!"

They shot at the 3 boys and hit 2 of them, but Daniel didn't aim to kill. As he came up to the boy he had shot as he was lying on the ground, writhing in pain, their eyes met and something cracked inside of him. He was sure that what he had done was wrong. They took the boy for medical assistance, but he didn't survive. Daniel couldn't sleep that night, and his sleep was troubled every night from then on. He had started to question his role as a soldier.

He decided to quit the army, and he went on to bear witness to everything he had seen and done during his time in the IDF. He wasn't alone. Other soldiers also dared to testify about the crimes they had committed to an association called "Breaking the Silence".

Note: This story is fiction inspired by the testimonies of IDF Soldiers and a real event that occurred on the West Bank in January 2019. Source: Times of Israel.com