

SEVENTH LETTER FROM ROSEMARY IN PALESTINE 07/12/04

WEDNESDAY 1st December

I thought I'd finished writing except perhaps for a brief note from Jerusalem, but I find I have to write about what happened today. Two of us, Lotten and myself, decided to go to Beit Furik, (a village of 10,000 to the South East of Nablus) to say goodbye to some people we had met when we were there earlier and to deliver some photos.

We had been there to learn about the situation of the village which has several new settlements of Israelis nearby, and to help with the olive harvest. (I wrote a bit about this in my 4th letter). One family we helped kindly asked us back to their home for a large and very tasty meal, which was especially kind of them as they were still fasting due to Ramadhan.

We were looking for their house when we realised with great shock it was in ruins. We soon learned what had happened. At about 3:00am on 2nd November there was banging on the door. It was Israeli soldiers who told the family to get out – they had 25 mins to take what they needed and then the house would be destroyed. No explanation, but the mother feared that her son, who has been in hiding for 3 years, had been found and killed and this was a punishment military operation. They shouted to the neighbours to help, but at first this wasn't allowed. After a bit the soldiers relented and the family and neighbours threw as much as they could out of the windows and took the heavy furniture through the doors.

Next door to the house there is a petrol station and the owner reasoned with the Captain. Too much explosive and the whole thing could go up. The Captain agreed this could be disastrous and gave orders for a limited explosion.

Time was up, the family pleaded and were given 5 more minutes, but then they had to leave. Half an hour after the bang on the door they watched as the house the father had built 24 years previously, and where they had brought up seven sons and 4 daughters, collapsed.

Today what we saw, instead of the happy home where we had feasted so well just a few weeks ago, were piles of rubble, twisted metal rods bare of concrete, a shattered bath, the wall blocks lying in the garden – and a family trying to rebuild their lives in what remains of the ground floor of the house. (This would also have been destroyed if it hadn't been a "limited explosion". This had been the apartment for one of the married sons and his family – 4 in all. Now it houses 13, crammed in with the saved furniture, and with rain coming in through the cracks caused by the explosion.

An explanation was given at the end of the "operation". The Israelis said they believed that the son in hiding had been behind the suicide bomber in Tel Aviv on 1st Nov. He is still in hiding. What they hoped to achieve by destroying a house he hasn't visited in 3 years I don't know. Why they suspected him of that particular atrocity I don't know.

What I do know is that they have caused a lot of suffering to the family and much resentment amongst the younger sons.

JERUSALEM 7th December

And now I am in Jerusalem, trying to wind down. Saying goodbye to our friends in Nablus was very difficult and saying goodbye to the rest of the team – from 7 nations – is also proving hard.

Working here for even such a short time has been a great experience and privilege.

I have laughed, cried, been scared, threatened, challenged and bored – but mostly I have been struck by how awful life is for the majority of Palestinians for most of the time. One thing for me to be stuck at a checkpoint for an hour or so – I always knew I was going to be OK and at the end of 3 months would be leaving this situation. Not so for those who go through it all the time and who will be hearing the gunfire tonight....and tomorrow.....and the night after.

Rosemary

07/12/2004

I am currently working for the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. If you would like to use any part of the above please contact Larry Fata at eappi-co@jrol.com