

DISPLACED,
REPLACED,
FORGOTTEN

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*This book is dedicated to my family
for the support they have given me
during the writing process.*

*Thanks to Maggi my wife,
my son Michael and his wife Maggie.*

*Also to my daughter Tina and her husband Travis
and especially to my grandchildren Ashley and Gavin.*

This book is part of their heritage.

*My gratitude goes to Rachel Ribeiro
who was very kind and patient in editing
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INTRODUCTION

IT IS JUNE of 2007, as I begin my attempt to put down on paper memories of myself and the many struggles I faced to reach my dream, a dream which so many times seemed hopelessly impossible and unattainable.

It is a true story of a Jerusalemite and the Yusef Nammar family. It is the story of my dad, my mom and the eight of us children attempting to survive the onslaught of the Zionist occupation of Palestine. But truly, however, *Displaced, Replaced, Forgotten* is the story of my growing up first as a kid in Palestine and then in Israel. It is also my story of traveling away from Israel, seeking to find out what “freedom” and “liberty” meant to the people of the many countries I visited.

I was born in Jerusalem, Palestine, in 1934 where I grew up during the years of relative peace and tranquility in that wonderful city. Anyway, that’s how I remember life in Jerusalem before that terrible year, that of 1948. My childhood days were filled with love and enjoyment and the appreciation of the life that surrounded me. Dad was an Arab Moslem, while my mother was an Armenian Orthodox Christian. I was named “Daoud,” after the name of my great grandfather, the Arabic equivalent of David. Whether one was Moslem, Christian, Jewish or other, the Palestinian population saw the establishment of

the state of Israel in 1948 as the most tragic event in the history of the region, if not the whole of the Middle East. This historical event of terror, murder and the displacement of 4.5 million Palestinian citizens from their homes and land was called the “Nakba” in Arabic. Today, over 60 years later, the situation for the population in the occupied Arab territories is worse than ever. Just yesterday the Palestinians in the West Bank marked forty years of harsh Israeli occupation. One might ask why peace has been so elusive. Simply said, from the beginning, Israel’s objective has been an ongoing plan for ethnic cleansing of the land and its people. The idea was to make life so unbearably miserable for the Palestinians that slowly, one by one, they would eventually leave the territories.

I was only about two years old when the Palestinian Arabs, the majority in that land, revolted against the British for their continued occupation and colonization of the territories. During the First World War an Arab uprising and British campaign let General Edmund Allenby, the British Empire’s commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, drive the Turks out of the Levant, part of which was the Sinai and Palestine Campaign. That’s when the United Kingdom had agreed to honor Arab independence of Palestine if they revolted against the Ottomans. That revolt occurred. Later, however, the UK together with France divided up the area under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, an act of betrayal in the opinion of the Arabs. Well, the revolt was quelled and nothing happened. But illegal Jewish immigration to the land in 1947 saw the Jewish Zionists and Jewish terrorist groups attacking the British establishments. That’s when the mighty British packed their bags and left, leaving the defenseless Palestinian population with no protection whatsoever.

It’s precisely why I am a U.S. citizen today. Even though I did not live in the West Bank, I was a Palestinian growing up in Jerusalem from my birth in 1934 until the time of my final escape to the USA in 1961. It was an escape in search of political freedom and liberty coupled with an individual ambition for further education and hopes for a better life. I made many attempted escapes earlier when I traveled to

Europe and South America telling my friends and family that I might not return, but unfortunately, return I did, not once or twice, but numerous times because things didn't work out as I had anticipated.

As a non-Jewish Israeli citizen born in the land of my father and great grandfathers, I should have had the same opportunities that any Israeli would have. But as time went on, I began to learn that having equal rights and equal opportunities would not happen. The future looked very bleak indeed for a non-Jew, and especially for an Arab, to continue and survive in this so called "democratic" state of Israel. All the elements of being a citizen - education, welfare and most of all, work, became extremely difficult to attain as time went slipping by.



My father, Yusef Rashid Nammar



My mother, Touma Marie Nammar



My family

1947-1948

THE PEACEFUL PALESTINIAN countryside was beginning to unfurl into uneasiness and fear among the mostly Arab population. I was thirteen years old then, and had just completed my elementary education at the “College des Freres,” a French parochial school situated within the confines of the old city walls of Jerusalem.

Palestine was still a British protectorate. The majority of the Nammars including our family lived outside the old city walls in this modern southwestern area of Jerusalem called “Bakaa.” The street we lived on was appropriately named Nammar Street. Almost all the houses on that street and beyond belonged to the Nammars. The area was also called “Hart El Namamreh” (Nammar Quarter). During the last few weeks of school, before the summer recess, the Jerusalem city buses I rode were modified with bullet-proof shields to protect us from the occasional shootings throughout this once peaceful city. Most of this insurgency, I was told, came from some armed illegal European Zionist gangs and other Jewish terrorist groups. It was believed the movement was aimed at ousting the British from its mandate over Palestine. But as my family would soon learn firsthand, their intention was to terrorize the unarmed and defenseless Arab population in this land as well.

By the spring of 1948, concerned for their safety, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, men, women and children, fled their homes, while others were physically forced away from their towns

and villages by the Zionist insurgency. Some have questioned why the Palestinians left their villages and more particularly their homes from the major cities of Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and other cities. They were scared to death because of what had happened just a week or so before. Early in the morning of Friday, April 9, 1948, commandos of the Irgun, headed by Menachem Begin, and the Stern Gang attacked Deir Yassin, a sleepy village with 750 peaceful defenseless Palestinian residents located on high ground in the corridor between Jaffa and Jerusalem. Not even one soul was left alive in that village to tell the story. It was a terrible massacre of men, women and children, the news of which stretched throughout the land.

All of a sudden my family saw Nammar Street becoming deserted as most left to seek safer places. They all left their homes intact, with the furniture, food and their belongings in place, hoping they would return soon. Our family, however, was unable to find refuge, so my parents decided to stay put, and face the unknown. There was Dad and Mom with us eight children, five boys and three girls ranging in age from four to eighteen years. Older than I, was my sister Fahima and my half-brother Mehran (Armenian for Michael).

With most of our neighbors gone, the area seemed very quiet on one spring morning in 1948. As we were playing in our yard, we suddenly noticed on the horizon the movement of Jewish militia with armored vehicles slowly entering this deserted region of our neighborhood. Fear of the unknown came upon my parents as they pondered what to do next. Mom had just started cooking a stew of chicken and "mlukhieh," a popular Middle Eastern green leafy vegetable similar to spinach, while Dad had started to bake some pita bread in our outdoor oven.

To be safe, they decided that instead of staying at home, we should all take refuge at the nearby German Hospice. The German Hospice had been established a long time ago by an order of Catholic nuns from Germany. My mother had sent me there for school as a five year old, and I spent about a year or so there learning German, English and Arabic, besides the other fun things we did in the classroom and in their wonderful gardens. Unfortunately, during the early part of my first grade, the British government ordered the school closed in

retaliation for Germany's offensive against the British and the escalation of World War II.

Now, this place where I had spent so many wonderful moments as a child, would shelter my family and others like us. First Mom would take the very young children with her to the hospice, which was about four short blocks from our home. It would be safe there for all of us. However the three older boys would wait with Dad until the food was ready and the bread baked, then follow the rest of the family, bringing the meal with us.

It was mid-to-late afternoon by the time the chicken stew with the freshly baked bread was ready. By that point we figured that Mom with the rest of the children were safe at their destination. Dad locked the house and the four of us proceeded to walk towards the German Hospice, hoping to join the rest of the family. From Nammar Street, we had completed two blocks and had just turned the corner of the third when we were suddenly confronted by the Jewish militia as they moved forward canvassing that street, their guns pointed at us. Thinking we were about to be shot at, we froze helplessly. Two of the militia directed all four of us to a corner of the next street just a few steps away from the hospice. There, they inspected the contents of the fresh cooked food we were carrying and ordered us to wait against the wall until they had further orders. The aroma of the food we were carrying wafted all around us as we waited, fearing what might be an end of our existence. Even though they spoke Arabic with us and saw how clearly harmless we were, they refused to let us go.

After an hour or so of waiting helplessly, an army carrier came. Their leader shouted roughly to my father, "Get in the truck!" Turning to my older brother Michael he added, "Him, too." Then he looked at me and my younger brother and said, "Go on, to wherever you were headed." They just kidnapped them for no reason at all. Remembering this, it was all senseless. It was terribly cruel to leave us – my brother Suleiman a kid of ten and myself a thirteen-year-old – by ourselves on the hostile streets. We cried and cried, but our tears were not enough a persuasion to have our dad and brother released with us. Still in tears, Suleiman and I proceeded with the food to the hospice. Minutes later we were knocking at the gate of the compound. Two armed Jewish commandos,

after seeing us through the peep hole, opened the gate to let us in. About fifty or so families with children were already there seeking a safe place. They were all anxious to know of the situation outside and what happened to Dad and Michael. Still weeping and traumatized by the whole event, we just said that they were taken away by the soldiers. Though they utterly had nothing to do with the conflict or the situation, we would later learn that they had become prisoners of war, and would be kept from us in some secret camp for an indefinite time. The question that reverberated in my mind then and now is why they would take a Palestinian resident as a prisoner of war when they knew for sure that none of us were fighting?

We remembered the mlukhieh and the bread that my younger brother and I had carried into the hospice without Dad and our older brother Michael, as the aroma of it filled the air in that large room where everybody was taking refuge. We shared our meal with the other refugees in somber companionship. Even though I haven't had mlukhieh since my departure from the homeland, I still crave it every time I think of Mama's kitchen.

MLUKHIEH MAAJAJ (Mlukhieh with Chicken)

- 1 large bunch mlukhieh leaves
- 1 whole chicken cut into 4 to 6 pieces
- 1 tbsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 tbsp. whole cardamoms
- 1 or 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 bulb garlic, crushed or finely chopped
- Olive oil
- Salt and fresh lemon juice to taste

In a large saucepan, place the chicken, cardamoms, peppercorns, bay leaves and salt; cover with water and bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for about one hour.

Remove the chicken from the saucepan and reserve the stock. Place the chicken in a baking dish and brown in a 450F pre-heated oven, for about 15-20 minutes, keeping an eye on it.

In a saucepan, heat the oil and add the garlic, cilantro, salt and the ground coriander. Stir-fry for about 5 minutes and then add the mlukhieh and continue frying for another 5 minutes.

Add 4 cups of the stock to the mlukhieh, bring to a boil, add the chicken and simmer for about 30 minutes. Season with salt to taste and add lemon juice. Continue to cook on low heat for another 5 minutes.

Serve hot with cooked basmati rice and extra lemon juice to taste.



1936 – Jerusalem – Daoud, Suleiman, mom, Fahima and Michael.



1938 – At age 4 traveling with Dad.
His bus in the background in a city street of Tiberias, Palestine.

THE NAMMARS

THE NAMMARS OR Al Nammari families have lived in Palestine for many hundreds of years. Over the years they accumulated a large amount of property and land, both in Jerusalem and in villages around the land. Most of their wealth was entrusted in an Islamic Trust called a “Waqf.”

Unlike the rest of the Nammar families, ours was certainly different. My father Joseph (Yusef in Arabic) was kind of a nonconformist. While most Nammars married within the family, Dad revolted against the practice. Because of it, and especially after marrying my mom, a Christian, the family disinherited him for a while. He was handsome and tall and a good honest man. He loved cars and the good life, evidenced by the rusted old Model T Ford that he kept in the corner of his brother’s carpentry shop. Needless to say, he stayed poor and rebellious, took a job as a car mechanic and later became an inter-city bus driver. During the 1930s and 40s his bus travels took him throughout the Middle East; from Jerusalem he drove these ancient busses to Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. I remember that once he drove a group of British tourists for a four month bus journey from Jerusalem through the Middle Eastern deserts all the way to India and back. I remember it well, because he brought back with him all these hot and exquisite Indian spices. It was unbelievable that man was able to drive these old busses over such long and distant journeys.

The most dramatic action Dad took against the family's ties and wishes was of course marrying my mother who was a Christian and certainly an outsider from the Nammar clan.

It was because of Mom's perseverance and caring love of her children that we became who we are today. More importantly, my eventual success that I would later achieve as an adult was because of all her encouragement.

Mom was born Touma Douchian in Yerevan, Armenia from a rather important and well-to-do Armenian family I was told. Sadly, her parents were victims of the Armenian massacre by the Turks in 1915. Most of her history, however, she kept to herself, only ever sharing but a few tidbits of her life before she married Dad.

As a child, after the horrible Armenian holocaust, she was taken in by a Turkish land owner and farmer to the village of Diyarbakir in Turkey. One day, she recounted, as she was shepherding his flock of sheep a wolf attack scattered the flock. Afraid of being punished or even worse being killed, she ran away to find some help from a group of Armenians she knew. With their help she eventually ended up in an orphanage in Beirut, Lebanon. Others in my family may have heard slightly different accounts of how Mom came to settle in Beirut.

Some years later she was married to an Armenian violinist and had her first child, my half-brother Michael. Mom wouldn't tell exactly what happened with that marriage except that her travels with him took her to Italy where they lived for a few years. I remember her mentioning the Mediterranean cities of Portofino and Livorno. Whatever happened to her maestro husband always remained a mystery. All we knew is that he somehow died, possibly in a car crash. After his death, Mom returned to Beirut and to the same orphanage with baby Michael.

She was certainly a beautiful woman. Somehow Dad met her through acquaintances in Beirut and fell in love. They were married there, and he eventually smuggled them both to Palestine and Jerusalem. Because of his actions, the rest of the Nammar family segregated themselves from him, at least for a while. When they got married Mom did not speak Arabic and Dad did not speak Armenian.

However, both spoke Turkish; a language that none of us children learned. The oldest three of us learned some conversational Armenian from Mom. In Dad's presence, when Mom wanted to tell us something she wouldn't want Dad to know, she would speak to us in Armenian. On the other hand, when Dad and Mom didn't want us to hear what they were telling each other, they would converse in Turkish.

I always thought that by marrying Mom, Dad took after one great grandfather of his who fell in love with a Jewish woman in Jerusalem back in the late 1800s or early 1900s. It was even more uncommon in those days for Arabs to marry Jews. His could have been one of the very few exceptions. Because of her family's objection to her relationship with an Arab, they rushed to get her married to one of their own. Great grandfather Daoud was so in love with that Jewish woman that he was determined that no other man would marry her except himself. Well, during the outdoor Jewish wedding ceremony, Daoud rode his white stallion to the gathering of the outdoor wedding and snatched her away, riding as fast as he could with her, heading south through the desert to Egypt. They were married there. She converted to Islam and returned with him to Jerusalem years later, a completely transformed woman, who studied more about the Arabic culture and religion than I ever did myself. I remember as a four and five year old, I would be taken to their house to listen to her narrating stories of a thousand-and-one-nights to us children in the neighborhood. We would sit on the floor in a circle with her and listen quietly for hours and hours to the wonderful children's stories she would tell.

It certainly wasn't easy for Mom to integrate herself into the fold of the Nammars, especially the women such as Dad's sister, my aunt and her family. They occupied all of the rooms in this spacious house and gave Dad only one room for his family. This room was in the lower level of the house. It had a private front entrance, a small kitchen and an outhouse for a toilet.

As a housewife, my mother did her best to take care of her family, considering the difficulties she had feeding and clothing the eight children in a one room house. All of us children were born in that same room, except for our half-brother Michael. I have four brothers, the oldest being Michael. The other three brothers under me were Suleiman, Jacob and Zakaria.

My three sisters are Fahima, who is older, with Wedad and Fadwa being younger. Note the biblical names of the boys in contrast to the modern Arabic names of the girls. It is traditional in the Arab world to address a father by his firstborn son's name. So since I was born, all my dad's relatives and friends would call him "Abu Daoud," meaning the father of Daoud. He felt very proud to be addressed that way.