

Understanding Jerusalem



Tamara Beliak
(’00), Los Angeles, California

Middle East Non-Violence and Democracy (MEND), East Jerusalem

Bat Shalom, West Jerusalem



Project Goals At Mend

- To prepare materials about children living in violence for a camp hosting Palestinian and Black South African Youth
- To help Palestinian youth reflect on their positive and negative life experiences through writing
- To begin a curriculum for Jewish youth in the U.S. and Israel that is informative about Palestinian life without demonizing Israelis

Project Goal at Bat Shalom

- To develop a Web site on the confiscation of Jerusalem ID cards

Personal Goals

- To address my fears of Palestinian civilians and of terrorism while coming to know Palestinian people as human beings
- To improve my Arabic
- To work towards common goals with Jewish Israeli coexistence workers

Activities

- Organized workshops for Palestinian youth
- Visited Palestinian communities in Palestinian-controlled regions
- Wrote material for the Web page on ID card confiscations
- Outlined workbook on 'Stereotypes of Palestinians' using writing by Palestinian youth

Key Dilemmas

- In a context of extreme political inequality and pain on both sides, how can stereotypes be meaningfully addressed?
- Should I identify myself as a Jew when I am working with people for whom this knowledge would overtake all other emotions?
- How can I address the fears both of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, when my own experiences confirm the perceptions that gave rise to their fears?

Important Learnings

- For many Palestinians, the best indicator of my care and respect was that I had studied Arabic language and Palestinian culture both before I arrived and during my stay.
- Fear is a very strong barrier.
- It seems that most Jewish Israelis are more concerned with the religious-secular split in Israel than about negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.
- In Palestinian society, American women have more freedom than Palestinian women.

