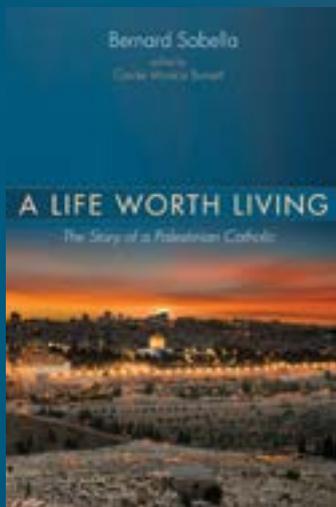


A Life Worth Living The Story of a Palestinian Catholic

By **Bernard Sabella**, edited by **Carole Monica Burnett**
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My constant worries that the memories of growing up in Jerusalem's Old City during the fifties of the last century would forever be lost to the newer generations were a primary motivation for writing *A Life Worth Living*. The fact that our plight was exemplary for so many formed another motive: Just as 726,000 other Palestinians, we became refugees as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. My parental family had to leave Qatamon, as did the other families from the neighborhood. Their attempt to recreate the social life of pre-1948 in our new residence in the Old City was witness to the resolve of these and other refugee families to overcome the trauma of 1948. The adaptation process saw the emergence of various aspects of social life, as Jerusalem refugee families sought to re-root themselves in the new environment. The fifties were an exciting time,

as they witnessed - among other developments - the introduction of the cinema in Jerusalem, and transistor radios became a hit. I do not recall whether electricity arrived before or after the introduction of transistor radios, but I remember that my father purchased an old console radio that became the source of news about the world and developments in the Arab Middle East. The cinema was discussed at length by those who were enthusiastic about it and those who fought against it for the evil it represented. My mother sided with the pros, whereas father was adamantly opposed to going to the cinema. Brother Felix, the principal of the College des Frères at New Gate, not only opposed the cinema but sent his spies to record who among the students frequented the popular Sunday afternoon shows. Jerusalem's middle class saw the cinema as a social gathering point, especially on Sunday evenings, when, among other movies, James Bond films were popular. In spite of the tragedy that befell us Palestinians, Jerusalem in the fifties and early sixties was an exciting and joyful city, where everybody knew everybody else, and where the culinary skills of up-and-coming street chefs added flavor.

The book also dwells on the experience that I and others in my family had later on during our sojourns in the United States in order to pursue an education. I stayed there for more than ten years, and my reflections on this experience make up an essential part of the book. The late sixties were an exciting time in the United States, as protests against the Vietnam War erupted on the campus of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and on other US campuses. Bethlehem University, where my wife Mary worked as a counselor for over 30 years and where I taught sociology for over 25 years is another focus of the book. The relationship between church and society is discussed in one of the chapters, as I relate work I have done in dialogue across religions, especially between Catholics and Muslims in the Vatican. A chapter is devoted to my political experience and my views on the political situation in which we live. I have often been accused of sitting on the fence and of not taking a definite stance on issues and concerns. Perhaps this accusation has some value, as my academic background in sociology ingrained in me the need to look at things in an objective manner, to weigh the pros and cons.

Someone recently asked me why I added "a Palestinian Catholic" to the title. My answer is "Why not?" If Palestinian society is more than its component religions and promotes pluralism, then I see no contradiction whatsoever between my identity as a Christian and as a Palestinian. The two go together quite well. The book is addressed to those who would like to revisit the fifties in the Old City of Jerusalem, but it is also intended for Western audiences, Americans in particular, to sensitize them to a Palestinian perspective that is frequently ignored by their media and politicians.