

# How I Left Jerusalem

Laura Baramki's Story in 1948



By Laura  
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was asked to write my story and experience, indeed the story of my parents when we left Jerusalem, Palestine in April 1948. However, my story does not differ from other

stories of the plight of Palestinians who were forced to leave their country, fleeing for their lives and the lives of their children.

My story begins on an evening in January 1948 when my grandmother and I were alone at home in Talbiyeh, an exclusively Palestinian neighborhood. I was studying for my exams at the Teachers Training College and wishing I would finish studying so that I could visit my friend who was living nearby. All of a sudden, we heard a menacing voice emanating from a monstrous tank that was completely closed except for two slits, ordering all Arabs in the Talbiyeh quarter to leave now, now! We panicked, especially because my parents were not at home at the time and we did not know what to do. Eventually my parents came home and we had to leave our house that evening and go to my uncle's house in Lower Baq'a – another exclusively Palestinian-inhabited neighborhood – because that armored tank was relentless and insistent in its driving around and making sure that we would all be scared to stay. That was the second time that we had moved house while still in Jerusalem.

I had lived all my life until that fateful year in a house that my father had built near what became known after 1948 as Mandlebaum Gate. My father, Andoni Baramki, was an architect and he owned two houses. The one we were living in until we had to take refuge in the Talbiyeh quarter because the area became very dangerous due to the Haganah (a Jewish underground movement) terrorizing the area and shooting indiscriminately at any passerby. The other house, almost across the street from where we were living, was always rented out and after 1967 became a museum with changing names, currently called

Museum on the Seam. And to add insult to injury, the Israeli curators of the museum never acknowledged the fact that the building belonged to my father. All they mentioned was that the house, with its special architectural beauty, was constructed by Mr. Andoni Baramki, omitting by intention the fact that it was owned by Andoni Baramki.

However, the situation was getting worse and random shots were becoming an everyday happening. I almost got killed one evening as I was returning home from college, when a stray bullet grazed my hair. At first, I thought it was a bird flying over until a man passing by told me how lucky I was, barely missing that bullet.

In April of 1948, when everybody was leaving in the wake of the Deir Yassin massacre, and no place

seemed safe enough, we left our home in Jerusalem, taking nothing with us except some of our clothes, thinking that it was a temporary refuge in Birzeit, a town north of Jerusalem, so that we would be close by to return when all would be well again. But it was never well again. My family and I never saw again the Jerusalem we knew and had lived in.

After living in Gaza, then Beirut for a few years, we eventually returned to Jerusalem in 1953. What we found was a destroyed city, a city with its soul gone. Our families and friends were no longer there. Our homes were full of bullet holes, all run down and neglected.

I mourned for my youth that was lost in Jerusalem. Oh, how I had yearned to be a young adult in Jerusalem after finishing boarding school in

■ Andoni Baramki's house; currently the Museum on the Seam.



1947. I longed to live all year round in my city, wondering what my life would have been like. I was just about to be on the threshold of a new teenage life full of expectations, of romance if you like, or just plain living.

Palestine was like a beautiful tapestry, with myriad brilliant colors all tightly woven together with communities living together in harmony.

Alas, we came back to a ravished tapestry, all torn, its threads scattered all over the country, indeed across many countries.

My plight, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, is only from my point of view and what my family and I went through. However, this is nothing compared to the rest of Palestine, to all the villages that were destroyed, their lands taken,

their men, women, and children shot at and driven out of their homes at gunpoint, never to return, becoming refugees living in camps up until this day.

Not to mention the indelible trauma that all the families of my parents' generation suffered as they had to leave their homes, their work, and all their achievements behind, as well as their dreams for their children. It was like a huge tsunami that happened and obliterated everything that ever was, except that this tsunami was man-made by evil people with the collaboration of other countries, not least the British who, thought our country was theirs to give away and divide. But of course, the British did this everywhere they ruled.

We will never forget, and our stories will continue to be passed on from one generation to the next and someday justice will prevail.



■ The author in front of her father's house.

P.S. After the war of 1967, I read an article in *The Jerusalem Post* (a newspaper that was more liberal then) by Menachem Begin in which

he wrote, "The massacre of Deir Yassin was a blessing in disguise, because it helped create the State of Israel."

Talbiyeh neighborhood. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection; Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-matpc-14431g.

