



Greenhouses For Gaza

Connecting to My Palestinian Roots through Gardening and Philanthropy



By Griffin Abdo

Identity is everything to me. It informs my writing, my worldview, and how the world sees me. I'm blessed to have a rich and diverse ethnic identity with lineages in both Vietnam and Palestine, two places I hold extremely close to my heart. I live in Washington, DC and am very fortunate to have had a Vietnamese upbringing. Just before the fall of Saigon, my mother's family took refuge in America, settling in Northern Virginia, where they remain to this day. Naturally, Vietnamese

culture, people, traditions, and cuisine have shaped my childhood. I've even had the privilege of visiting my mother's homeland.

Unfortunately, I can't say the same about my Palestinian side.

When I was younger, I never really understood why. Perhaps it was because my Palestinian

Griffin doing gardening work with the Audubon Society.



We all deserve access to fresh and healthy food, no matter the circumstances.

grandfather lived over 300 miles away. Maybe it was because the rest of my Palestinian family was scattered even further around the world. Or maybe it had to do with the consequential erasure caused by ethnic cleansing that has been going on since the *Nakba*.

I never understood why we never visited Palestine or why I could never even find Palestine on a map. I never understood why the news would make my father so upset sometimes. Whenever I'd ask, he'd always reply, "I'll explain when you're older."

The ambiguity only fueled my yearning for connection.

As I've grown and learned of Palestine's history and current circumstances, I've developed nothing but pride in my Palestinian identity and deep empathy for those living under occupation – which inspired me to take action. My father has been a long-time contributor to a DC nonprofit organization called Anera (American Near East Refugee Aid), whose primary mission is to aid vulnerable communities in Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. I connected with Anera's president and CEO, Mr. Sean Carroll, with a desire to aid Palestine in alleviating its food insecurities. If I wanted to, I could walk into my kitchen right now to find a fridge stocked full of beautiful food. It sickens me to know that not every Palestinian can say the same.





Griffin with his Vietnamese family.

Griffin playing chess with his Palestinian grandfather.

Mathhar Yousef Abdo, US Army, 6th Infantry Division.



During the summer of 2020, I read that the Israeli government had further limited Palestinian access to the sea for fishing, which motivated me to think of creating a fish farm in Gaza. I did some research and found that running a fish farm in Gaza would be not only expensive but also unsustainable due to unpredictable power cuts.

When I shared my interest in food security with people at Anera, they told me of some of their initiatives, including family-owned hydroponic greenhouses that they had built in Gaza. Unfortunately, there isn't much room on land for Anera to construct such greenhouses due to Gaza's high population density. However, an über-successful rooftop greenhouse atop a women's center sparked our project, G4G (Greenhouses For Gaza).

In November of 2020, my paternal grandfather passed away at the age of 91. In addition to being a Palestinian refugee, Mathhar

Yousef Abdo was an American veteran and loyal patriot. We felt it would be appropriate to launch the 2020 G4G fundraising campaign in his honor. Through tireless outreach, we are thrilled to have raised enough to build 20 rooftop greenhouses! To date, G4G has raised over US\$98,700.

Inspired by Anera's work in Gaza, I've been doing work on my end to learn about hydroponics and the pride one can derive from gardening. I volunteered and attended classes at a rooftop hydroponics center here in DC. I also did gardening work with the New York Audubon Society over the summer. And I even had a chance to intern at Anera to better connect with some of the wonderful people who help make G4G a reality.

Eventually, I hope to visit some of our greenhouses in Gaza. I feel most connected to my Vietnamese roots whenever I'm in Vietnam, so I hope that a visit to Palestine is in my future.

To learn more about me and G4G, visit our website at greenhousesforgaza.org, and to learn more about Anera, visit anera.org.

Griffin Abdo is seventeen years old and lives in Washington, DC. The son of a Vietnamese mother and a half-Palestinian father, he is very proud of his ethnic identity. Griffin loves music, movies, and untold stories, plays the guitar and the piano, and enjoys singing as well.

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