

MONDAY, DECEMBER 05, 2005

➔ **But I Haven't Seen George Clooney Yet!**

**Gaza City** – Once again the weirdness of Gaza has opened my eyes to the myriad possibilities of third world entertainment. Now realize, that entertainment doesn't always have to mean something that is funny, informative, or even helpful in combating boredom. Sometimes the entertainment value just comes from the fact that you can sit back and say.....'Damn, I didn't know that people still acted like this on this side of the 19th century.' I was starting to rest again, thinking that Gaza was becoming (dare I say it).....normal. The pseudo-detente that exists between the Jews and Arabs had lulled me into a sense of calm. But just when I was just about asleep, Gaza goes and creates its own version of "the perfect storm," the convergence of two events that makes me again realize that when I cross the boundary at Erez, I'm not only traversing space, but time itself. I enter a medieval world of family feuds and tribal retributions. AND if I were ever to forget, Gaza will jerk me back to my senses. Witness the last couple of days.

First, when we arrived back after the weekend of taking it easy in Haifa (school-sponsored trip) we were told that we couldn't use the usual route home from Erez, as two Palestinian families were engaged in a dispute. As we walked through the tunnel going from the Israeli side to the Palestinian side, we could hear small arms fire in the distance. Hey, but so what, situation normal in Gaza. We didn't find out until the next day WHY they were fighting. It seems that there was a car-donkey cart collision. Yeah, you read it right.....a CAR.....DONKEY CART.....collision. An argument ensued, it escalated to shooting, then basically into a full-scale battle between the two families. From what we're hearing, there have been somewhere between 9-11 fatalities and apparently, its not over.

Second, once again, a few idiots with home chemistry sets decided that they would lob their latest creations towards the Israelis. Now of course, the chances of them actually hitting something with these HMRs (homemade rockets) were slim to none. In fact, that's what they hit.....nothing. So, in quick retaliation, the Israelis launched rockets attacks on northern Gaza and with deadly accuracy, they hit their targets: empty parking lots. Of course, this sends a basic message. 'You fire some, and we'll fire some. Now we're even.' But for the fact that this "strike" was accompanied by the return of the hated sonic booms, who the hell cares.

So there you go, the Gaza Strip Perfect Storm, the convergence of retaliation and retribution once again bringing on waves of no-damn-sleep for the innocent bystander. But that's entertainment!!!

*Addendum: Last night, the IDF decided to retaliate a little more, and with deadly accuracy, they killed the Palestinian Unknown Soldier Memorial statue. Damn these guys are good!*

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 9:21 AM

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2005

➔ **Damn These Guys are Good!**

Thursday night either the IDF (with shelling) or the IAF (from an F-16) showed just how accurate they are. There are only a few roads that les frères de qassam can use to get into the northern part of Gaza in order to fire their little toys into Israel. We use one of those roads in order to get to school in the morning. BUT, we won't be using it for a while it would seem (I don't have a lot of confidence that the PA will get the repair crews on the job in a hurry). The Israelis took out the road in such a perfect way that the crater stretches JUST from one side of the road to the other.

A lot of my friends ask me why I'm not afraid here, dealing with the constant Israeli strikes. One more time: I never see them, only hear them. These guys hit exactly where they aim. As long as I don't join Hamas (and have them proclaim me the leader) I'll stay safe.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 1:11 PM

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2006

## → One Month Later!!!!

I know, a month between posts is a little over the top. It's not that I have been shirking my duty or anything, it's just that I've been away from the action. But this post is to catch everyone up to the happenings before I left Gaza and what has greeted me upon my return.

The last week of school was the week from hell. Travel restrictions, shelling by the Israelis, idiots firing qassams EVEN IN DAYLIGHT.....you name it, it was happening. To top it off, our principal and vice-principal were kidnapped on the last day of school, the ultimate Gaza experience you can say. They were held for about eight hours before they were let go. A group claiming to be part of the Palestinian Force for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility, but the PFLP was really quick to say that it wasn't them. Poor kidnapers. They thought that they had a couple of Americans. Imagine their surprise when they found out that they had an Australian and a Dutchman. I teased Brian afterwards, asked him if they were ready to trade him for a biscuit when they found out that he was Australian.....LOL.

Around the first of January (after hearing that some idiot group had destroyed the UN Club, stupid bastards, can't stomach the idea that someone, someplace might be having a sinful good time), we were informed that school was going to be suspended until February 5th. But because of the nearness of my ticket and the fact that I was meeting a new teacher coming into Tel Aviv, I kept my original plans.

I returned to a very subdued Gaza. It seems that people are on pins and needles, awaiting the coming elections on the 25th (one of the main reasons that school has been suspended). I spent about three days in my apartment, doing delivery food for the most part, but I did get into the streets a little. The changes in the feel of the street are subtle, but very noticeable. Once, the taxi I was in was stopped by a group of teenage boys who had erected a makeshift checkpoint where they were demanding a toll from each car that passed. Another group of boys were stopping cars to warn them about the first group. My driver just went another direction, but when we came out near Al Deira, the first group of boys was getting busted by the PA Security – but there was a lot of discussion (Arab style) since they didn't want to give up their little business.

*To be continued.....*

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 12:50 PM

### COMMENTS

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶I would admire your contribution if it wasn't for the fact that you call some of them stupid bastards... Hmm, however your blog is very innresting, please tell us more of daily Gaza life. ¶Regards ¶Imaan ¶6:28 PM

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶INTERESTING... sorry ¶6:29 PM

**The Tower Keeper said...** ¶Sorry about damaging your sensibilities (seriously not being sarcastic), but

one of the things that I'm known for is my absolute pessimism about the ability of either side in this conflict to actually see the logic of peace. Be assured, that my choice of words is meant as a description of both sides in the conflict. I have gone through times when my Palestinian friends aren't talking to me, and I have gone through times when my Israeli friends aren't talking to me. Believe me, I have made enemies on both sides of the Green Line. So my use of the words stupid bastards was a choice meant to seriously offend the egos of the infantile idiots on BOTH sides of the conflict who refuse to see the wall of destruction waiting for them if they continue down the path of hatred. ¶Thanks for your comment. ¶7:17 PM

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶Well, I have been known to "complain" a lot on Gazans in my blog well, so it's ok! Keep up the good work. ¶6:21 PM

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶"...in my blog AS WELL," cannot seem to make a comment here without mistakes. Sorry again! ¶6:22 PM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 08, 2006



### The Calm Version!

Okay, I've got the message. I usually let several people see the article that I plan to put on the page. They do several things for me. First, they proofread for me (hey, even English teachers are prone to grammar errors when they're typing on the fly) and second, I get a small sampling of opinion on what I'm putting out there. On this occasion, I have been told by no greater authority than the woman that feeds my children that I might need to rethink publishing it to the blog. Personally, I think that it's great, a little strongly worded, but still great. But who am I to judge? Therefore, you'll get a watered-down version of how I feel about the protests that have erupted following the revelation that MONTHS ago a Danish newspaper ran cartoons which depicted the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH-better safe than sorry). But before that, let's get a little Gaza update. (Don't take away my English teacher credentials, I'll stay on task.)

Yesterday I sat by my classroom window watching the Israelis 'getting even' for the steady diet of qassams being sent their way (which of course the senders claim are in retaliation for IDF killings of those Israel calls terrorists). For most of the day, the IDF shelled the ridge about two hundred meters from the school. It was a completely surreal experience. I sat there watching Palestinian workers tending the strawberry field right in the front of the school as the shells hit the ground just over the ridge from where they were standing. There was even a time when several of them walked up to the top of the hill to watch. If that wasn't strange enough, those of us from the protected West have grown so used to the battlefield that is Gaza, that we kept teaching without paying it much attention (even when students and teachers in the far end of the hall could hear the qassams on the outbound). It is amazing what you can get used to.

Now what does that have to do with the cartoons? There is an incredibly easy answer to that question. Here you have a nascent nation (inshallah), with a newly elected government which the entire world sees as proven terrorists. They're being shelled daily by their incredibly more militarily powerful neighbor. They have a 50% unemployment rate. The disparity between rich and poor is a huge gulf. Every idiot and his brother is walking around with an automatic weapon. AND YET, the first internationally recognized thing these fledging leaders of government do is to hold a rally at which they condemn another nation for allowing freedom of expression. They allow other idiot factions amongst them to threaten to kidnap the few Westerners who brave the danger of working in this hell, in order to assuage their insulted little being. All of this because ONE guy, in ONE country drew a few cartoons?! Don't get me wrong, I under-

stand that the cartoon(s) were disturbing to adherents of Islam. But the response has been totally unwarranted. As a former (and present) resident of several of the third world backwaters where these protests have occurred, believe me, I know that that these people have a laundry list of problems that are hugely more important about which to protest. So, my message to them would be: Try protesting that your governments don't educate your children. Try protesting that most of your economies are still mired in the 14th century (largely due to the fact that huge quantities of your national GDP's find its way into the pockets of the ruling elite). Try protesting the fact that your people are still subject to deprivations created almost entirely of problems instigated by the stupidity of your own leaders. What should be insulting to you is NOT that some idiot decided to taunt the Moslem world with a cartoon, but that your leaders used your righteous anger at your hideous condition to create an entirely senseless, foolish, impotent orgy of rage that does nothing but cause the deaths of fellow Moslems.

As a Westerner, with the inbred biases of years of Western schooling, I can tell my Eastern friends that they just don't get it. No one controls an individual in the West. We do whatever the hell we want to do. We don't care who we insult. Committing sacrilege is the point. It is the through the committing of that sacrilege that we MAKE our point. That is entirely the point of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Without this right, there would be no democracy and without democracy the West would be just like the bulk of the "Islamic world," a reactionary, might-makes-right, tribal, revenge oriented societal hell. If my choices are the West with its occasional insults or the poverty-stricken, religiously over-zealous, mobs of the East, believe me when I tell you, I'll have absolutely no problem living in the freedom of the West where all I have to worry about is having my religious beliefs insulted every once in awhile.

Now for those of you who would like to see the article that I have been told that I can't publish.....let me know. After you have been screened for security, emotional stability and the ability to understand sarcasm, I'll then consider whether you're stable enough for me to forward it to you.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 11:11 AM

#### COMMENTS

**Erin said...** ¶ This is quite an amazing blog. Bravo to you for writing it. ¶ Makes my existence to the north seem like a house of cards... ¶ 12:02 AM

**The Tower Keeper said...** ¶ Thank you very much for your support. I don't think that you're exactly in a house of cards, but there needs to be serious discussions on both sides of the Green Line. This amount of unstable behavior can only lead to serious psychosis of innocents in both populations. I know that since you live here (here describing the combined Israel/Palestine) you can see it all around you. It's a serious paranoia and schizophrenia quickly spreading through the region. It seems to manifest itself in a lack of empathy for the suffering that pervades the country (on both sides). But being an outsider, maybe it's something that I can see that natives seem to miss. ¶ 3:26 PM

**lisoosh said...** ¶ I would really like to see the full article. Another blog (livingin Gaza) had suggested that part of the problem is cultures that are insulated from outside influence. Do you think that is relevant? ¶ I must say that as someone who used to live in Israel and is still interested in the area and in seeing eventual relative peace you are really depressing me. ¶ 6:50 PM

**The Tower Keeper said...** ¶ Lisoosh, I don't know if losing hope is completely in order. I think that my natural cynicism has just been nurtured by this place. But the longer I stay here, the more I think that

it will take Moses (Moshe, Musa, whatever the name of the day is) coming back from the dead and partitioning the land. That might be the only way that we get peace. ¶5:54 PM

**denjensu said...** ¶a natural cynic? Indeed! Never forget this as you read... ¶2:08 AM

**Laila said...** ¶wow Arthur that's a bit harsh and over the top don't you think? I mean, freedom of speech "3ala rassi wi 3ayni" (kind of like, "I'll give u that") but as an English teacher who influences and molds young minds, do you REALLY think that the "East" whatever the "east" can be lumped together as a "poverty-stricken, religiously over-zealous, mob"? Even Gandhi would have been disappointed with your analysis and sweeping generalizations. I mean – what makes you think you understand or know "the bulk of the Islamic world" that you describe as "a reactionary, right-makes-right, tribal, revenge oriented societal hell." CNN? BBC? Al Jazeera? no one focuses on the positive, proactive efforts of Muslims and Arabs and the "East" as you like to call them. ¶3:57 PM

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 09, 2006

→ **SNOW DAY!!!**

I feel sorry for all of my colleagues that I left in Houston. They only get a snow day about once in a generation. When I left for Gaza, I thought that my chance at getting a snow day was even more remote. How was I supposed to know that there is a Gaza equivalent!! This morning the phone tree was enacted at about 6:00am (thank you Ryan). We were told that there was no school today because the PA Security forces had not been paid – an instant recipe for disorder in the streets. So there.....a Gaza snow day!! Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!!!! Hmmmmmmm.....sounds like a song.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 5:19 PM

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2006

→ **Take that trip to Blockbuster!!!**

I have a movie reference for you. Does anyone out there remember who Snake Plissken was? If you don't remember, I can tell that you aren't a B movie fan. You know the movies, the ones that Kurt Russell specialized in during the '80s. Why would I be writing about early '80s B movies? EASY.....I'M LIVING ONE!!! Escape From New York to be exact (thus the Snake Plissken reference)! For those of you who still don't get it. Escape From New York was about a sane man who was dropped on Manhattan Island. The island had become a futuristic super max prison that made Alcatraz look like day camp. There were no guards, no law, and no organized society, except for that created by the inmates.

If you want to imagine Gaza, go down to Blockbuster and rent yourself a copy of Escape From New York. Now that Erez has been closed again and I can't get out of the place, I'm quickly finding a great affinity for Snake, our erstwhile hero. But he was a little luckier than I am.....at least he was well-armed. Tomorrow, I think I'll check on changing that.

Okay, okay.....don't get excited, it's only hyperbole. I'll be satisfied with just being armed. I'll work on the 'well' some other day.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 7:47 PM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2006

→ **The Sound of Distant Thunder**

After one week of shelling I'm barely actually hearing the explosions anymore. I'm amazed that the point hasn't been made yet. I'm sure that if they wanted to, the Israelis could just broadcast loudly throughout the Gaza Strip, "for every qassam that falls on us, we will send three tank shells (mortars, missiles, whatever represents the artillery of the day) to you." Although I'm sure that this wouldn't help in the long run, at least that would be out there in the rhetoric cloud that floats constantly over this southern Megiddo. Last night and most of today I experienced my first real thunderstorm in Gaza. Strange how you sit there for a little while trying to determine whether what you just heard was shelling, an out-bound but failed qassam, or thunder (today it was mostly thunder). No wonder that after six years of this Palestinians don't even look up when they hear an explosion. That could be the answer to why the Israelis believe that the sonic booms are necessary. It's just a way to get the jaded Gazan attention.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 2:43 PM

COMMENT

**Laila said...** ¶I can TOTALLY relate – is that thunder sonic boom, artillery fire, or gunship rocket?  
¶3:44 PM

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2006

→ **Weekend Furlough**

I spent the weekend in Jerusalem. Every time I go over and stay a few days it amazes me that I'm only about an hour from Gaza. Last night I spent time sitting on the balcony of my room in the hostel looking down on the people in Zion Square, marveling at the freedom of movement that I had. Nothing stopped me from sitting in there with my computer trying to get the WIFI connection that feeds Ben Yehuda Street. If I'd had a working battery on my computer, I could have sat down on the pedestrian mall made up by Ben Yehuda and surfed to my heart's content. My friend in Jerusalem seems to think that I'm afraid to take the bus but that's not the case. (The reason that I tend to take taxis is that I don't know the Jerusalem bus system well enough to get exactly where I'm going most of the time.) Riding the buses is not a frightening thing for me (at the moment at least). I guess that I just get a little hyper-vigilant, which I'm sure that is something that is common in Israel among the bus riding public.

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv don't have the feeling of cities under siege that people in the West seem to think that they have. I feel infinitely safer walking the streets of Jerusalem and riding its buses than I do in Houston, Oakland or Boston, EVEN with the terrorist threat that hangs overhead. I still have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than having to deal with terrorism, even here in Israel/Palestine.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 7:45 PM

COMMENT

**Ari said...** ¶Gaza Resident – I'm trying to raise some awareness regarding the topic of my last blog posting.

Here's the link: <http://arimiller.blogspot.com/2006/02/jew-is-mightier-than-sword-or-i-eat-my.html#comments> ¶¶ If you could post this on your blog and pass this along that would be great. ¶Ari ¶8:31 PM

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2006

## → The Importance of Cookies

Never forget the importance of cookies!! After over a month, imprisoned in our apartments, let out ONLY with an escort, it is the small things, the minute things, that we find when we're out in our class field trips (also known as 'the shopping pack,' 'the crazy teachers make bigger kidnapping targets consortium,' 'the pseudo-safety out of the house essentials grabbing traveling group,' etc. etc, etc.....you get the picture), that keep some of us hanging on to our sanity. The longer this goes on, the more unbalanced the bulk of us get. Just the need to sit in a place and have a coffee without the rest of the pack surrounding you becomes an absolute need. I know and understand completely why Marlene Dietrich wanted to be alone (or at least have the ability to exclude all but the nearest and dearest from her living space).

But for some of us, it is something as small as a brand of chocolate chip cookies from home. It was amazing to see the excitement caused by one package of cookies. Who am I to judge? If I found a can of Dr. Pepper in Remal Supermarket (if you could see the place you'd fall down laughing at the humor of this place calling itself super), the people in the store would probably wonder why I'd screamed and passed out on the floor.

So, to keep this Texas boy from a homicidal rampage, brought on by the sheer tediousness of tower imprisonment, I have a few demands. And here they are (not in order of importance):

\* Dr. Pepper!! (Come on guys, if you can sneak in qassam parts, you can surely get in a few cans of Texas water) ¶\* Ben and Jerry's ¶\* More books! ¶\* A&W (What good is vanilla ice cream without the lord of root beers) ¶\* God!!! Doesn't anyone make a respectable pizza in this place!!! ¶\* And finally.....Bernadette Peters (I'm sure the Israelis would coordinate that and yes people, I know that dates me, but what can I say, some women never lose it!)

I will accept these demands in full OR a substantial amount of cash (however, if the powers that be choose the cash option, it must be in an amount that will balance my need for relief). To those in charge, get together, get gathering and start delivering!

*Addendum: At the writing of this entry, I didn't know what brand the cookies were....now I know!!! They're Pepperidge Farm!!! And DAMN they're good!!!*

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 10:05 AM

### COMMENTS

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶They say "Pizza, Pizza" beside British Council serves delicious pizza... ¶10:30 PM

**The Tower Keeper said...** ¶Yes, but the owner of Pizza Pizza is now gone to safer pastures (San Diego, California), so now even that pizza isn't an option. ¶But hey, Pizza Pizza was no Dominos ¶8:14 AM

**Laila said...** ¶Is he really gone?? Anyway his pizza sucked, regardless. I hate chicago dish. I make some damned good neopolitan style pizza, so you're welcome to join me here when I do, free of charge! ¶3:36 PM



## → Operation Northern Thunder

The Israelis call it Operation Northern Thunder. Amazing how that name is so apropos to what it actually sounds like when their missiles, mortars or tank shells hit the ground near the school. For about a week we have lived with the constant sound of shelling. It didn't matter where you were in Gaza, you could hear the shelling going on near the borders. There were a few nights where the shelling sounded like it was right outside. I know that I have repeated it often, but it's amazing what you'll get used to if you're put in the right situation. We've had nice dinners during the shelling. We held final exams for our students during the shelling and some of us have even had barbeques while being serenaded by explosions. The roof of the apartment building has become the place to be at night during the shelling. On a clear night we can see the shells exploding across the not so distant landscape.

Erez is even more fun, since we can hear the shells on the outbound and then hear them hit. Yet, I'm still trying to figure out how this is going to help the Israelis gain peace. So this is just a question in the wind: "How does the violence and deprivation suffered by the innocent citizens of Gaza help to gain even the remotest possibility of peace?" Along with that question I would like to send a direct message to the decision makers in Israel: "Your bombs and explosions are not changing any minds on this side of the Green Line, only entrenching them."

Get this, I'm complaining and I get to escape this place on the weekends. Damn, I must be a spoiled Westerner.

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 12:32 PM

### COMMENTS

**Imaan On Ice said...** ¶Not very spoiled to NOT want bombs around your ears. I for one really don't miss that. Please tell us more how YOU handle it. ¶10:32 PM

**The Tower Keeper said...** ¶I don't really know how I've actually handled it. I've gotten so used to it, that I barely register it anymore. Yesterday a qassam was set off near the school and when the kids reacted, I didn't even look until they told me that it had actually flown in the wrong direction! ¶8:18 AM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 01, 2006

## → The Guns of NavaSharon

BOOM!!! And again I say, BOOM!!!

posted by The Tower Keeper @ 10:50 AM

### COMMENTS

**Mohammed Is A Woman, Peace Be Upon Her said...** ¶The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon Her, is a woman ¶5:02 AM

**Anonymous said...** ¶Hi, Towerkeeper. I'm an Israeli. I would like to know if you're alright, since the riots that broke out after the Jericho stand-off. ¶That's because I like your blog. So, I got to like you. ¶Hopefully you can email me that everything's alright with you? ¶Take care & be well, ¶Tsedek ¶12:56 AM