

AMNON CARMİ SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a junior at Beachwood High School. He loves the arts including drawing, painting and writing, but especially film-making which he feels is one of the best ways to express emotion. He dreams of being a film director after college and working in the entertainment industry.

For one year, Israel was my home. I had moved from a quiet suburb of Cleveland, Ohio to noisy Tel Aviv, Israel. And the noise was not just city sounds - bombs fell mere miles away from me and my family. I became personally aware of the reality of the blinding fury that inspires radical Palestinians to send missiles, suicide bombers, and to escalate a seemingly unsolvable political issue.

From an ocean away I had only seen the issue through glimpses at a news channel. Even when I finally moved to Tel-Aviv, I did not understand the situation. I was isolated amongst a community of Israelis and attending an Israeli high school. Nor had I come to Israel to learn about the Palestinian conflict, but to connect with my Israeli heritage and family.

One day a Palestinian speaker came to our school. With a strong Arabic accent, he wove the story of his past; throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers as a kid, time in jail, and losing his closest family members. Teary-eyed, he pleaded that Israelis and Palestinians can work together, that Palestinians are not all evil and that we can reach an understanding. He was honorable, moving and brave.

In the silence that followed, a girl in my class raised her hand and spoke, "Yes... but it's still your fault." I listened in disbelief as more students chimed in, blaming Arabs, defending their country and ridiculing the speaker. He sat with a sad smile on his face and calmly refuted their remarks.

I understood I was witnessing hate. The students expressing this fury were my friends. As their hatred exploded in that room, it took with it my belief that there was an end in sight to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I was ashamed to be near them, to hear them savagely beat down this man. I alone tried to argue for the speaker. But my responses were droned out by shouts of outrage. I left the classroom completely upset and feeling powerless.

It was only after I had been back home and began preparing for a return visit during winter break, that I decided to try to do something that felt true to me. I researched the Foundation for Global Community, gathered my courage and gave them a call. The founders, Libby and Len Traubman, spent time on the phone with me and began supporting my interest in breaching the gap I discovered in my high school in Tel Aviv.

I am going back to Israel to visit next week with connections to some main figures in the Israeli-Palestinian peace movement and the opportunity to visit an Arab school. I hope to come back home to the USA this time with a better understanding of the issues, and hands-on experience in engaging in dialogue with Palestinians and Israelis alike. Maybe, because I am an Israeli but also an American, I can develop some tools that I can share with others, and someday, make a difference.

