

# Rund al-Shalabi

*Rund Mustafa Abdelrahim al-Shalabi is in the fifth grade and attends an elementary school in Jenin that is funded and operated by the United Nations. She is the top student in her class. She is a beautiful, eleven-year-old girl with very strong character. Her eyes are full of determination and sadness. She speaks freely and with wisdom beyond her years.*

I had a great father. No other father was like him. He was a member of the resistance. He defended his land and his children. My father was a very good man. He always murmured Quran and religious sayings. The last time he came to the house, he came to take some clothes to the resistance fighters. That was during the last invasion. He left and came back again to get a lantern. He often came back to the house during the battle to wash and pray. The last time he came, he stayed for a long time. He had us all sit down around him, and he ate with us. On that same day he was killed. He was killed on a Friday, a day that is blessed for Muslims.

On that day, my mother asked my cousin to go the area where my father was fighting. My mom and my brothers were terrified by the army. If anything fell, they would say, "The army is coming!" They were afraid of everything. Our life was consumed by fear. My mother asked my father if she should take us and flee the house. She said we had been suffering for days, were running out of food, and all my brothers and sisters were terrified. My father told her to stay home. They had a long discussion afterwards. I was also very terrified.

In those days, my mother was constantly reading Quran and praying. One of my brothers didn't know how to read, so my mother would teach him how to recite prayers that would help protect us from the army. We stayed this way until the eleventh day. It was then that the Israeli army moved into our house. They broke the door and stormed in shouting dirty words. We had been sleeping, but we immediately jumped out of our beds. My brothers were not very scared, but my mom and I were terrified. I was shivering from fear.

The soldiers filled the courtyard, they had all kinds of equipment with them. They shot and killed our sheep. They had a man from the neighborhood who knew some Hebrew translate. Then they used us

as shields. They broke our cupboards, our beds, and a coat tree. I was scared but I didn't cry.

After the invasion, I went to Switzerland to talk about our suffering during the invasion. I brought all kinds of toys for my brothers when I came home, because here you don't have the chance to get toys. Here, if you go to the market, the tanks come and start shooting. I brought a toy tank for my brother. But when the army returned to our house after I had returned home, they broke all the toys.

The Israeli soldiers made my mom sit on her knees, and they pointed a gun to her head, and asked, "Where are the *shebab*?" They had a female soldier search my mother. She also beat my mom up and took her money.

"God is stronger than you," my mom told them.

The soldiers laughed and asked, "Where is your husband?"

"My husband is dead," she replied.

"No, my father is a martyr!" shouted my brother.

"Your father is a son of a bitch!" shouted the soldiers.

Once they knew that my father was a martyr, they kept coming back to our house, they used the area in front of our house as a base for their tanks. One of the soldiers took his clothes off and started dancing as another took our drum and started playing music. We sat in the corner, they wouldn't let us move for five hours. They wouldn't allow us to drink either.

They came and they asked my mother, "Where are the weapons?"

"We have no weapons," she said. "You should be ashamed of yourselves! You call us terrorists, and you and your Sharon are the real terrorists. You come to our refugee camp, and you destroy it. What crime did our sheep commit to be killed?"

"Shut up!" shouted the soldiers back.

Two soldiers grabbed some sticks and pretended that they were having a sword fight. The soldiers said, "Look at us, we are better than the Arabs at this!"

"You are cowards!" said my brother in a loud voice.

The soldier laughed and hit my brother very hard in the face. My brother did not cry. But when they left, my mother scolded my brother.

"Are you crazy?" she asked. "What kind of nonsense is this? Do you want them to topple the house on us?" My brother said, "But they didn't have bulldozers."

As we cleaned the house another army unit came. My mother said, “Could you please leave us alone?”

“Shut up!” shouted the soldiers. “We are not done with you yet!”

They destroyed whatever they hadn’t broken already. They stayed until sunset. My mother kept telling them, “What are me and my children doing to you? Don’t you have hearts?

You are terrifying my children.” My mother finally started to weep. “Do whatever you want,” she said. “Kill us all if you want, if we die, we will go to Paradise. But what will happen to you when you die?”

“This is the last time I am going to tell you to shut up!” screamed a soldier after running up and putting a gun to my mother’s head. They stayed for a few more hours. They would go to the kitchen and would use our pots and pans as a toilet, they cut up all of our mattresses with knives. They tore up our schoolbooks and they burned our school bags. They got very mad when they saw a picture of a Palestinian flag in one of the books.

Before, I used to play all kinds of games. I used to play on the swing set and on the slide. Me and my best friend used to spend our days playing, and my brothers used to play soccer. But now we only play “Arabs and Israelis.” It is also difficult to find kids who want to be Israelis, even though the Israelis always get to destroy the Arabs’ houses.

When I grow up, I want to be a doctor, to treat the wounded with the will of God. My brother wants to be a teacher, and my other brother also wants to be a doctor. My father was poor, but he would take us to the market and say, “Choose whatever you want.” During the invasion, he told us that he was going to build us a swing set and a garden and a special room to do our homework. He used to say, “You will get the chance to play with all the children in the neighborhood.” But unfortunately God has chosen him to be a martyr. We are now on our summer vacation, although all of our schools were destroyed by the army.



*Rund Mustafa Abdelrahim  
al-Shalabi*

*Rund constantly speaks about her father and how much she loved him. Her grades remained high even after his death, because she said he wanted her to be a good student.*