

## Combatants for Peace Personal Story



**Adi Greenfeld** was born in Rehovot, and has been living in Jerusalem since 2008. She's been a member of the Jerusalem-Bethlehem group of Combatants for Peace for two years, and is currently the Israeli coordinator of the group.

I was born a year before the First Intifada broke out, and in my earliest childhood memories I remember the TV on, showing mass demonstrations, stone throwing and burning tires. I went to elementary school during the Oslo years and the suicide bombings of the mid-90's, and went to high-school during the Second Intifada. I grew up in Rehovot, a relatively small city in central Israel, and although two girls in my class were injured in the Dolphinarium suicide bombing in 2001, I remember most of the violence in the form of TV news coverage and big newspaper headlines.

I was aware of the hate and the conflict ever since I could remember, but I didn't know where it was coming from. All I knew was that there's "us" and there's "them", that "they" hated "us", and that in my house, at least, we don't hate "them" back. I grew up in a pretty liberal home, and went to a socialist youth movement, where we spoke about humanistic values and international solidarity. For all I knew then I thought of myself as a politically aware and involved person, and a leftist. At the same time, just as my leftist dad never questioned doing his reserve service in Hebron or Jericho, I never questioned going to the army. Unlike many cases, my army service in Tel-Aviv didn't bring me any closer to the political reality, but rather moved me even further from it. I finished my two years in 2007, still not knowing anything about the reasons for the conflict and what or where the "occupied territories" were, and having never met a Palestinian person other than the occasional construction worker or waiter.

After a year of working and traveling I moved to Jerusalem to start school at the Hebrew University. Two months later Operation Cast Lead started. The newspapers headlines and the news on TV brought back the memories from other times of escalation and violence, but this time I was older, the range of the rockets seemed to get wider every day, potentially even reaching my hometown, and I had friends living in the south where the rockets had already been hitting. I found myself preoccupied with the events, and would start every shift at the cafe where I worked by going over the papers that were delivered there every morning. Alongside the front page headlines, smaller boxes would read something like "20 dead in Gaza last night", or "70 dead in Gaza last night", and I remember the sudden realization, that those 12 or 20 or 35 killed were people just like the cooks and bartenders and dishwashers I worked with and had gotten to know pretty well by then, who were all Palestinian, and who would all peek over my shoulder at the newspaper headlines. I was ashamed of not realizing that till then. I found it hard to raise my head from the paper I was looking down on and face them.

Humanization of the other side for the first time, even in that time of escalation, made me feel like I owe it to myself and to my society to know more about the political situation. I started reading more and seeing more – first visiting East Jerusalem, then the West Bank. The more I learned of Israel's actions in the West Bank the more I wanted to become active in resisting them.

During that time I had the opportunity to join Combatants for Peace in a few of their activities. On one occasion the Jerusalem-Bethlehem group was taking a group of mostly children and a few parents from Nahalin to the beach in Tel-Aviv. Watching the parents, some of them members of Combatants for Peace, former terrorists for all I knew, playing with their children in the water, I found myself thinking "Oh, right, they must love their children, too, as we do". Again, I was shocked by having to realize that, and ashamed that it still wasn't trivial to me, even after the long way I thought I had come. That's when I decided that whichever way I'd eventually end up involved in activism, it would have to be where I would constantly be reminded that there is no "them", only people - with names, faces, and families, who want no less than what I want for myself and deserve no less than that - and where I could work with those people for a cause which is just as crucial for us as it is for them.

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Later that summer I joined Combatants for Peace, where after over two years of joint work I still find myself faced with the humanity of people I had spent years thinking of as a collective “them”, and as an enemy, which is something you rarely, if ever, have to do as an Israeli. The binational work we do in Combatants for Peace is important in the sense of its effectiveness, of what we can achieve together on the ground; but at the same time it's extremely important to me as a person, as a means of really becoming the humanist I always thought I was.

