

Dear Susan abu Alhawa,

I am 17 and Palestinian, Never in those abundant years of my life have I been to Palestine. I always hear stories from my grandparents about how they were forced to leave; the reason why we Palestinians are scattered everywhere in different countries seeking shelter and education. Each and every single person from around the globe has a certain prized possession that means wonders to them like a fragrance that reminds them of a certain person, a necklace that once belonged to a loved one, or even a picture that could tell the best memory in the world. My mother began writing when she was 11 and stopped when she was 17. Her journals were in French, Arabic, and English. One of the things she spoke about in her journal was the hostile conditions of war that she and her family had to encounter. My mother turned this 11-17 writing process into a family tradition. I turned 17 this summer and we sat down that night and exchanged diaries. I found that most of my entries were all based on curiosity. I traveled to a lot of places but I still felt that something was missing. A few days ago I found the answer and my prized possession. Words jotted on 300 pages. Words that summarized my life. My diary in addition to my mother's summed up to one novel.

Suffice it to say that *Mornings in Jenin* is a book that I will never forget, and am glad to have read it for the historical aspect and educational value it afforded me. It gave me a new look at the face of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict, one that is ongoing, today. It gave me a foundation and history of the beginnings of the conflict. It is a book that leaves one unable to take a breath, at times, in its intensity and heartfelt and heartbreaking portrayals. It led me to question, and I still am questioning, the events that led up to Israeli's statehood, a statehood founded upon removing an entire culture from its land, doing to others what had been done to them.

Your writing is absolutely beautiful, your prose almost lyrical at times, and poetic. Depictions of the Palestinians and Jews is seemingly one-sided, you show Jewish individuals in a fairly positive light. You lend the reader to think, question, think, question In my opinion that is what you want from the reader. To think about what we read. Understand and acknowledge that the Palestinians are human and humane, and not negative or evil, as they are so often portrayed by the news media. They are individuals like you and like me. They are family-oriented individuals, religious, hard workers, even if their culture is not the same as ours, they want what we want. You would like the reader to try to understand the depth of the Palestinian issue, and the fact the circumstances need telling, need to be told in order to educate the outside world.

In this novel, humanity doesn't seem to be embraced. We are all a part of the global force from a humanity perspective, and are one under the planet. We must remember this, and not be quick to judge or assume. There are two sides to every event or story, and this particular perspective needed its face to be shown. You did so with sensitivity, and acknowledged the goodness of individual Jews, such as the character Ari in the story. But, *Mornings in Jenin* isn't about the Jews, it is about the Palestinians and their culture and history, and how it was basically wiped off the face of Israel. You aren't asking us to take one side over the other, but to understand the gravity of the Palestinian history. You aren't asking for agreement one way or the other. I believe that you want the reader to try to understand and realize the humanistic and humane proportions of the story you convey. I would recommend this novel to the world.

Mornings in Jenin is a novel that confronts many, many issues but the one that stood out most to me and made my heart ache was the idea that the creation of the state of Israel took away the culture and history of an entire Middle Eastern people, in retaliation for a horrific act that was done to them by European powers. My three questions to you are: What inspired you to write this novel? Were you ever hesitant about publishing this book? Were you surprised to know that your novel is one of the best sellers today? Thank you. Thank you, Miss Susan, for showing me a map of home!

Rayann

**Rayann Mohammad, Grade 12
Algonquin Regional High School, Northborough**