Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood by Ibtisam Barakat


But I do not want to do what Mother says . . . I want to remember.

In this groundbreaking memoir set in Ramallah during the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, Ibtisam Barakat captures what it is like to be a child whose world is shattered by war. With candor and courage, she stitches together memories of her childhood: fear and confusion as bombs explode near her home and she is separated from her family; the harshness of life as a Palestinian refugee; her unexpected joy when she discovers Alef, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. This is the beginning of her passionate connection to words, and as language becomes her refuge, allowing her to piece together the fragments of her world, it becomes her true home.

Transcending the particulars of politics, this illuminating and timely book provides a telling glimpse into a little-known culture that has become an increasingly important part of the puzzle of world peace.

Features:

Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood is Ibtisam Barakats memoir of her childhood growing up on the war-torn West Bank.

The story begins in 1981. 17-year-old Ibtisam is on a bus heading home to Ramallah when Israeli soldiers board the bus and order the driver to take the passengers to a nearby detention center. It is here when we first get a glimpse into the fear that has consumed Ibtisams life for nearly 15 years since the 6-day war of 1967.
As Ibtisam is released unharmed and safely returns home, she takes us back to that day in 1967 when the war was declared. What was a normal day soon turns to terror as three-and-a-half year old Ibtisam, her family, and neighbors are forced to flee their homes. In the rush to get away, Ibtisam doesn’t have time to put on both shoes and somehow loses her family and her other shoe. She miraculously finds her family after walking quite a distance barefoot. Her feet are injured, but they must continue onto Jordan where they’ve been granted refuge.

We see the next four years of Ibtisam’s life through her eyes—the eyes of a child dealing with the realities of war. We see her parents struggle to protect their children, to keep their family together, and try to maintain some semblance of normalcy. They do have happy moments but are often reminded that the life they once led is gone, that Ramallah is occupied by Israeli soldiers, and that they must always be on guard.

A gripping and emotional story, I was drawn in from the beginning and had a difficult time putting the book down. As I was initially reading, I felt I wanted to know a bit more about the history of the war and what was going on politically, but then I realized that Ibtisam Barakat was intentionally leaving this information out because she was telling us the story from a child’s point of view. It simply wouldn’t have worked if she would have added more historical information aside from the brief note in the beginning. All we see is how a child tries to grip with what’s going on around her, and she sticks to this point of view throughout the entire story.

It also helped me put a face to war and to the innocent people and children who live in war-torn countries. It also made me realize that regardless of where you’re from or what happens in your life, we all have the same emotions. Kids will be able to relate to this book even though they may not have had the same experiences.

I recommend this book to everyone, not just children, and I hope its not the last we hear from Ibtisam Barakat.

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