

Here comes the Gestapo

by Sarah Carlson
Columnist

It was around 10:30 on our second day of ICAHD's summer camp when I looked up from my work on the roof. My stomach dropped when I saw that bright orange bulldozer (paid for by US tax dollars) snaking down the dirt road leading to Anata. It was part of a convoy led by a big white van and two Israeli Defense Force (IDF) jeeps. *Here comes the Gestapo*, I thought. I yelled out to Hani, the project foreman, and he saw where my eyes were fixed. I didn't have to point out the obvious.

We were all very aware of the fact that the building of the Hamdan home was halted by the IDF the year before, when

they were issued a stop-work order on the second day of work. We were also aware of the fact that they had been watching us build the day before.

The Palestinian workers vanished into the abandoned apartment building next to the house (Anata is split in half two parts: East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. Anyone who has a West Bank ID is not allowed in Jerusalem; this is why most of the Palestinians had to run and hide when they saw the Israeli army coming; fear of arrest for being in their own neighborhood). We were sure that they were coming to our site, but convoy stopped about two blocks short of "our" house and surrounded a little

house at the bottom of the hill.

Everyone joined the Palestinians and ascended the steps of the abandoned apartment building to watch (and videotape) from the top floor. We watched. We watched the IDF surround this vacant home (the parents had taken their seven children to the eldest daughter's engagement party), break down the door, remove family's possessions and leave them on the side of the street. Everyone was silent. I was so angry; I was on the verge of tears. It was at this point that Hani, sensing that I was too upset to watch anymore, took me to a neighbor's apartment for coffee.

When we returned to the site—shortly after tear gas came wafting through the window of the apartment we were in—we found an Israeli soldier taking pictures of the Hamdan home, and the Mustafa family was officially homeless. I started crying. Hani gave me a hug, and when he pulled away, he stared straight into my eyes and said, "Sarah, do not cry. This is our everyday life. Everyone you will talk to here has either been through this, or is living every day with the knowledge that this could happen to them at any moment. Do not cry. Everything is okay."

But watching little boys search through the ruins of their home is not okay.

We helped the family move their possessions into a neighbor's back yard, and the next day we had one group working on "our house," while the other worked on rebuilding the "little house," both of which were rebuilt by the time our two weeks in Anata were over.



Palestinian children search through the rubble of their house

Photo by S. Carlson

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