

Drinking the Sea at Gaza

Amira Hass (1999)

Extract from Chapter – *Yesterday's Permit*

UNDER SIEGE

'The only thing that's missing here in Gaza is the morning roll call,' said Abu Majed. We were sitting on thin mattresses – the sole furniture in the room – drinking tea and nibbling cookies, a special treat for the Id al-Fitr holiday, which marks the end of the month-long Ramadan fast. Abu Majed's past reads like the saga of a Fatah everyman: occasional menial jobs in Israel, arrests and interrogations as a teenager, ten years in Israeli jails, eventual work as a Palestinian police officer. I can see him, a skinny boy mixing cement in Beersheba or hauling crates in Tel Aviv's Carmel market, making the most of his few Hebrew sentences, awed at first by the tall buildings and wide city streets, stealing glances at the women, then chiding himself for his weakness. I imagine him coming home to Gaza in the evenings with some cash for his family and a small present for his sister. And then the *intifada* and joining a UNL cell,¹ arrests and more arrests, trial and prison.

It was Abu Majed who made the connection between Gaza, prison and peppers, the hot little red and green variety that, chopped up fine with garlic and tomatoes, gives Gazan salad its fierce reputation. 'We missed those peppers in prison,' he said, 'the way they'd bring tears to your eyes. We could have pretended it was the sting that was making us cry and not our longing for home.' Abu Majed went on to tell a story he had heard from some Israeli – a guard or one of his bosses, he couldn't remember which. Investigating a series of attacks on northern Israeli farms on the Lebanese border in the 1970s, the IDF² concluded the infiltrators originated from Gaza, even though they had come by way of Lebanon. They had broken water pipes,

¹ United National Leadership, a revolutionary group in Gaza that prepared the ground for the *intifada* in 1987.

² Israeli Defence Forces.

smashed greenhouses, and ruined the fields, but one crop, though somewhat plundered, had escaped serious harm – the bushes of little green and red peppers. At least now, Abu Majed concluded ruefully, Gazans have plenty of peppers. ‘It’s just the roll call that’s missing.’ That and the constant presence of Israelis. ‘It’s been so long since I’ve spoken Hebrew,’ Abu Majed said. ‘You’re the first Israeli I’ve met in two years, since I got out of prison. You’re a real museum piece.’

<https://www.abebooks.co.uk/9780805057393/Drinking-Sea-Gaza-Days-Nights-0805057390/plp>

Meet the CamperForce, Amazon's Nomadic Retiree Army

Jessica Bruder (2017)

In the spring of 1960, just after he turned 16, Chuck Stout went to work as a “garbage boy” at a McDonald’s in Toledo, Ohio. For 85 cents an hour, he swept and mopped the floors, kept the drive-in lot tidy, filled the shake machine, and washed dishes. Chuck loved the job. It was an escape—somewhere to go that wasn’t the Weiler Homes public housing complex, where he lived with his mother and sister. They were barely scraping by. “My mom drank so much,” he says, “she didn’t know what I was doing.”

Not only did Chuck love his job, the job loved him. He went from garbage boy to french fry maker to burger cook to cashier. He became a manager, then a supervisor, then a field consultant, then a professor at Hamburger University, where McDonald’s trains new franchise owners and managers. By 1976, Chuck was serving as a director of product development for the entire corporation. For the effort, Chuck was rewarded with a handsome bonus and a personal letter from founder Ray Kroc, whose wisdom Chuck was fond of quoting from memory....

Chuck retired from McDonald’s in 2002. He moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and bought a two-bedroom cottage with a hot tub on the 10th green of a golf course in a gated community. To stave off restlessness, he took a job leading open-air jeep tours of the Carolina Lowcountry. He

began having dinner with a fellow guide named Barbara Gatti, then going bowling with her, then going to the local Unity church with her. In 2007 she moved in with him. They were happy. They were not prepared.

Chuck still remembers the call from Wells Fargo that brought the 2008 financial crisis crashing down on his head. He had invested his \$250,000 nest egg in a fund that supposedly guaranteed him \$4,000 a month to live on. “You have no more money,” he recalls his banker saying flatly. “What do you want us to do?” Unable to think of a better answer, Chuck told him, “Well, shove your foot up your ass.” Then he hung up.

Barb had lost her savings too, some \$200,000 in investments. And with the travel industry flattened by the Great Recession, bookings at Carolina Adventure Tours dwindled. By the time Barb and Chuck got married in 2009, they were upside down on their mortgage and grappling with credit card debt.

The couple was facing bankruptcy, which scared Chuck to death. It brought back the terror of growing up poor—the pervasive insecurity he’d stamped out by going to work at 16. But by 2012, they had run out of options.

After filing their papers, Chuck and Barb began liquidating their lives. They sold most of their possessions, including all of their appliances and furniture. What didn’t sell on Craigslist went to an auctioneer. Barb let go of her record collection and two pianos. Chuck surrendered his golf clubs. Objects they couldn’t bear to part with—including Chuck’s letter from Ray Kroc, framed and hanging on the wall—went to one of Barb’s daughters for safekeeping.

Whatever survived the purge had to fit in their new dwelling: a 29-foot 1996 National RV Sea Breeze motor home, which Barb’s brother sold to them for \$500. The rig had dry-rotted tires, a dead generator, and a leak in the gas line...

The Stouts set off in early 2013. First they drove south to Pensacola, Florida, where they stayed for a month in a downscale RV park. Next they moved into a New Orleans trailer court wedged between a rail yard and a highway. Then to Memphis, Tennessee, then on to South Dakota and Mount Rushmore. By the time they settled in for the summer at Palisade State Park in central Utah, the adventure was already wearing them down. Whenever it rained, water began leaking into their RV from all sides; the rubber seals surrounding the windows and the bathroom skylight were shot.

In Utah they worked as campground hosts—welcoming visitors, cleaning toilets, shoveling out fire pits, running an office—but the job didn’t pay; it just gave them a free spot to park TC, with hookups for water, electricity, and sewage. Cash was getting tight. Chuck was receiving \$1,186 a month from Social Security, and Barb got some money each year from her family. Neither of them had health insurance. That summer, while waiting for a check to arrive, they watched their food rations dwindle to two cans of black beans, a can of corn, and some iced tea. Their account was down to \$8.

Full article - <https://www.wired.com/story/meet-camperforce-amazons-nomadic-retiree-army/>

Nomadland (2021) - <https://uk.bookshop.org/books/nomadland-academy-award-winner-best-picture-best-director-best-actress/9781800750302>