

Interview with Doaa J. Alareere

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Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Doaa J. Alareere. I live in an area called Sijaiyyah in Gaza. I have three daughters and three sons. I am 35 years old. My husband and my eldest son were killed on December 18th. My son was seven years old. I am wounded—I lost all 10 toes on my feet, and I have very severe burns on my body up to my knees and on my arms as well. My youngest son, Joud, who is four years old, lost his leg at three and a half years old at the beginning of the war. That is why I am here in the U.S.—for Joud to receive treatment.

We were asked to move from the South to the North, then from the North to the South, relocating multiple times. Before I came to the U.S., I was staying at Al-Shifa Hospital. Al-Shifa Hospital is very well known in Gaza, and while we were there, there were bombings. Before we came to the U.S., we stayed in Egypt for six months because I was in the ICU for 15 days.

Can you describe your experiences with the healthcare system in Gaza before and after the war, and compare the two since they are very different?

Even before the war, the healthcare treatment we received was only 50% of what we needed. During the war, it became even worse—almost nonexistent. Why? Because we lost doctors, we lost hospitals, and even when my son Joud lost his leg after a bombing, it took almost a month and a half for them to amputate his leg and provide some treatment. Then, after about two months, we moved to Egypt for Joud's surgery with the help of the Palestine Children's Relief Fund (PCRF), an organization that helps children in Palestine. They offered us the opportunity to go to the U.S. I was

scared and hesitant to come to the U.S., so I initially decided to stay in Egypt. We remained there for six months, but Joud's surgery was unsuccessful on another part of his leg. It was then that I decided to come to the U.S., and I have been here ever since.

What was the relationship between patients and healthcare workers in Gaza during the war?

There is a very strong bond between healthcare workers and patients. The staff and medical personnel are incredibly supportive. When I received treatment, they helped me not only medically but also emotionally. During their shifts, doctors sometimes saw their own relatives, sons, and daughters in need of treatment—or even martyred. We all became like one big family, trying to help and support each other.

How was your access to food, clean water, and electricity in Gaza before and during the war?

Even before the war, Gaza has been under closure for 17 to 18 years. Out of the 24 hours in a day, we had electricity for only two hours. In order to have clean drinking water, we had to filter seawater as much as possible, yet even after filtering, dirt was still visible in the water.

Despite having only the bare minimum, the people of Gaza always support one another. Families help each other and share what little they have. Sometimes, we would store gallons of water for emergencies because we never knew when we would have access to clean water again. We managed with what little we had, but it was only possible because of the support and solidarity among Gazans.

When we had electricity for just two hours a day, we had to cook, clean, and complete all household tasks before it shut down again. Homes felt like they were in a state of emergency, with everyone rushing to get things done. Sometimes, the electricity would come on at midnight or while we were sleeping, and even then, we would wake up to wash clothes, bake bread for the kids, and complete as many tasks

as possible before losing power again. The Palestinian people are incredibly resourceful and creative in times of hardship. For example, they found a way to use car batteries with leads to generate electricity instead.

How do you experience healing and cope with the trauma of being displaced by the war? What practices help keep you happy and resilient after everything that has happened?

What helps me cope and heal is *sabr*, or patience. There is a verse in the Quran: “Give good news to those who patiently endure—who say, when struck by a disaster, ‘Surely to Allah we belong and to Him we will all return’” (2:156). I also find strength in *yaqeen*, or certainty in Allah, and in the deep belief that my husband and son are in a better place—Paradise. Sometimes, I sit and reflect, and my mind and heart tell me two different things: my mind says that I lost my beloved husband and son, and I begin to cry because my mind cannot accept it. But my heart tells me to be patient, that they will enter Paradise and that they will be the reason I enter Paradise as well.

I am not the only one who lost family in this war. Entire families were killed. My three daughters are still in Gaza, and I have not seen them for a year and a half due to being displaced—first moving to Egypt, then coming to the U.S. for Joud’s treatment. I still have family in Gaza, but I must be here in the U.S. to ensure Joud receives the care he needs. With patience and the belief that Allah has something better planned for my future, I am able to endure and move forward through these difficult times.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences or hopes for the future?

Even though I now live in the U.S., where I am safe, where there are no curfews, and where I have a secure and comfortable life, I still long for my home. To me, home is not just four walls—it is my family.

Even if I had to live in a tent under the conditions in Gaza, I would still go back. Even if I were given a castle in the U.S., I would still return to Gaza. I am deeply grateful to all the people who have helped me and who welcomed Joud and me to the U.S. with warmth and kindness.

Joud dreams of becoming a doctor so that he can return to Gaza and help his people. For now, I am waiting to hear back about my visa so I can return to Egypt and stay there until I am able to reunite with the rest of my family in Gaza.