

Video interview at University of Detroit
By Alice Rothchild

Hanneh Ahwal transcript

AR: I would love for you to tell the audience your name, where you were born, and what your story is.

HA: My name is Hanneh, used to be Hanneh Marta. Now I'm now Hanneh Ahwal. I am born in Jaffa, 1936, Christmas Eve.

AR: And what happened to you in 1948?

HA: 1948, while start fighting between Arab and Jew, and too much, you know, attack between Arab and Jew. After that, four days nonstop, what you call it. After that, from Jordanian friends, he send for a bus, for what you call it army, to defend over there. My father that day, he tell my mom. I have three sisters, two sisters, three brothers, and my mom, she said, if you want to go to Ramallah, right now? I remember, my mom, she make a bread before taking it to the bakery. She left it, you know, what do you call it, on the table. My mom started to take the sewing machine, and my father, he said, "No. Fifteen days, we're coming back."

And that day, I want to go about two miles down, to tell the lady, to coming with us to Ramallah, and the bombs was coming, it's called that area, Butneh, Zaar Butneh, I don't even know what it is in English, I hope you understand what I said. And we go and my father, he stay in Jaffa. Two, three brothers, and my two sisters, and me, and my mom, and one seat in the car. And I remember exactly when my youngest sister, she sitting next to me, when past Neter, you have, you know what do you call it, Jewish, you know what do you call it, for the army, and the chauffeur, he said "Everybody put your head down."

Nobody knows if somebody is shooting or no. And my sister, she under the seat, and she tell my mom, "Mom, you see my head?" And she passed over there, as we go to Ramallah, no place to stay, no place, and so then, in front of the church. One of my neighbors, from Jaffa to Ramallah, he take us over there. Fifteen days, my father escaped to Ramallah.

You see, my mom, she don't have any money. We left everything over there. My father, he said, "Just fifteen days, you're coming back to the same place." Nothing, since that day, 61 years ago, nobody back to Jaffa, except 1967, when open between Arab and Jew. I go to Jaffa. And that's why, that's a problem. It's very hard to live. And my father, when he's coming, if I want to tell you that story. I'm not against anybody. I love everybody. Jesus said or any prophet said, "Love the enemy." Nobody the enemy before me. All of us are human beings. I hope you understand what I say.

My father, he back to Jaffa. My father always share with the Jewish guy to work together like a partner for him. When he's coming back, he go to Jaffa, my father and my uncle, twins, identical, you think one person. And when he's coming back, he stopped, Neter, he stopped the truck, the Jewish stopped the truck over there. Seven passengers and my father too. 'He put them

inside, and the soldier over there, the sergeant, he told him, "You coming here." He talked with my father. My father almost collapsed, he can't see him.

He said, "Why?" He said, "Come here, I want you to sit here." He sitting. "You know who I am?" he said. My father, "No." He can't recognize who's that man. He said, "No." He asked him one more time, and three or four times, he said, "No." He shake my father, and tell him, "You know who I am?" God, Moses, Jesus, he don't know. He said, "Listen, Marta, I'm Joseph, I work with you." But he told him, "You're safe, but the others six persons, going to shoot them, cut them, leave them for the dog." My father, he said, "The dogs were that big." He killed the six people and after that he put my father in what Land Rover, drove the Jewish, what do you call, you know, he take him to Ramleh And after that, my father, back to Ramallah. Since that day to 1967, my mom and my father, everybody came to America, except me. I'm still over there. In 1967, I go to Jaffa. Nothing changed and the same the way it is. But that I remember exactly, when I'm in Jaffa. And after that, you want something from '67 or no, just from Jaffa?

AR: Let's focus back on Jaffa. Tell me more what it was like when the fighting started and how you got to Ramallah.

HA: I told you, when there's fighting too much, four buses take the people. Except I remember, my dress is red, and I can't a chance to change it, to put a new dress. You know, something is different. I'll go to Ramallah, My father, he escaped to death. For all of us, something it's happened. You know, when they go killed the people, I think, I don't know what I said. It's very difficult. You know, you have the mercy for the other people. That's the problem. I don't want to see anybody killed, no Arab, no Jewish, no American, no blood, no any kind of people killed. I don't know what the reason. But I live in Jaffa. I am so happy. My father he work with Jewish people and my mom plan too much friend with Jewish people, but I don't know what's happened.

After that, 1948, May 14th, I left Jaffa. May 15th, the British left the country. I remember the last thing. That true, yup. That I remember. We came to Ramallah. Thanks God.

AR: And so where did you live in Ramallah when you came there?

HA: I lived in, you know what do you call it, you know the city of Ramallah.

AR: Did you have a refugee status at that point?

HA: Yeah, but us, we lived in, what do you call it, a house. A lot of people lived in a camp, but us, no. We live in a house.

AR: And why was that?

HA: Well, in 1948, and something like that, that year, when we left Jaffa to come to Ramallah. I remember exactly. May 14th, '48, we left Jaffa to come to Ramallah. To 1967, back to see Jaffa.

I love Jaffa. I am born over there. I swim like a fish in the water, not far away from my mom's house, my father's house. That was a problem. But I wish peace all over the world. I wish.

AR: And you have brothers and sisters?

HA: I have three brothers. I have three sisters and me.

AR: And where did they end up? Did they go to Ramallah?

HA: Yeah, all of us. I am the oldest one. Me and my brother are the oldest, with everybody under me.

AR: And are they now in the United States?

HA: Well no. Now, I am the last person to come from Ramallah. My father and my oldest brother, in 1955, he's in the United States. And my second brother, 1959, he came too; and 1964, my youngest brother; and after that, 1967, my mom and my sisters. And my father, he in the United States, even the embassy, don't give my mom a visa. She left Ramallah, except me. I have seven girls and one boy and I live in Ramallah. Coming to the United States, the reason is my father is sick. Always, he asks about me. My name is Hanneh. "Where's Hanneh? Where's Hanneh? Where's Hanneh?" I come and see my father is here. When I come and see my father, I see the situation completely different.

I have one daughter, I don't know if you know about her. She stand up for the human rights. Like now, for example, I'm coming here. "Mom, there are people still so and so. No mom, I have to listen to both sides." Ok, she went in 1967, I'm scared to death to pass through the Jewish soldier. No, don't think that I am scared of people, the Jewish. No. I love them. But, what do you call it, you know. She stand up. I'm scared to Jewish and put them in jail. That's why I bring her here and her sister. And I'm back to Ramallah and bring my other family. About 17 months and I'm still over there. And after that, I'm coming here. Thanks God, in Arabic *nishkarala*.

AR: And if someone asks you, where is home, what would you say?

HA: Now, my home is here. I respect that country. I love that country. If I don't love that country, I'm not coming here. I love that country. I love the people, you see, any kind of people. I don't say that Christian, that Muslim, that Jewish. No. All of us are human beings. I love everybody.

Now, my kids all of them live here. All of them is married. Thanks God. No, any problem. I am working. I left my country, the last trip, 1974. June 27, I left Ramallah. June 28th, I'm in the United States. June 29th, I start working.

AR: What kind of work?

HA: Well, my cousin, she work on the hotel telegrapher on Plymouth Road. And my cousin, she asked that lady, she tell her, "My cousin, she came from Ramallah, and she needs a job." I go

make an interview the same night, same day. The next day, I start working. I'm working in United States 34 years ago. I'm idiot, I'm quit working. I love to work. I love to work. My son-in-law, he said, "That's enough. Go help the church." One Orthodox church, one Catholic church. I go to both sides. I am so happy.

AR: Is there anything else you want us to know about that time, about 1948, about your experiences? Is there anything you left out that you want to add?

HA: Like what?

AR: Well, it's your story, so you need to tell me.

HA: Ok, the life story? Or what do you call it, you know?

AR: There are a lot of young people here who have no idea of what life was like.

HA: The Mediterranean Sea, Jaffa, and everything, is open, back and forth, working, and in the school. And my father is working, supporting us, and everything.

AR: So life was good?

HA: Yeah. Yup, yup, I never ever forgot Jaffa. No. I'm in the United States and I'm so happy, but when I grew up with that country over there, I love it. I love it, I love it, I love it. It is my country. I am an American citizen and that's OK, but not like when my head just came down.

AR: Well, thank you very much.

HA: Thank you for listening to me. I'm sorry my English is very poor.

AR: It's very good. It's very good. Thank you.

HA: I want to tell you a little story. One bishop, he said, "Hanneh, from where?" I said, "I'm originally from back home." He said, "Pray for me in the Arabic language." "Why?" He said, "God, he speaks Arabic." One year after, he asked me, "You pray for me in Arabic language?" I told him, "No." He said, "Yes, why?" I said, "God, he speaks English, but he has a happy accent like me."