

## “Voices Across the Divide”



Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church sponsored a May 15 screening of the powerful documentary “Voices Across the Divide,” followed by a lively discussion with director and producer Alice Rothchild at the Bethesda Women’s Center in Maryland. Rothchild’s film is an oral history which explores the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through rarely heard personal stories.

Introducing the filmmaker, Kay Halpern said she first discovered Rothchild’s compelling book, *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams*, in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Intrigued, she discovered Rothchild is a “mother, physician, activist, op-ed writer, blogger and now filmmaker, as well as a writer. She’s a Jewish woman who takes to heart the core of Judaism, which is we should always remember what it’s like to be ‘the other.’”

Rothchild said she was born in 1948, the same year that Israel was founded. She was raised in a small town as a practicing Jew, whose family made 14 “pilgrimages to Israel.” Her goal was to *tikkum olam*, Hebrew for “heal the world.” In the ‘60s she protested the Vietnam War and soon became more political, as she learned of “things you don’t hear about in Hebrew school.” In 1997, as the Boston Jewish community celebrated the 50th anniversary of Israel’s independence, she gathered the courage, along with other “progressive unhappy Jews,” to organize a Jewish-Palestinian peace forum, and a regular dialogue group was born.

In 2003 Rothchild participated in a physicians’ delegation to the West Bank and Gaza and discovered “the voices we don’t hear on National Public Radio or *The New York Times*.” Her

mother, Sylvia Rothchild, had written a book called *Voices from the Holocaust*, and Alice said she was struck by the shared human commonalities she heard in Palestine. As she spoke with Arabs she began to understand “pieces of the puzzle,” and soon started actively searching for and listening to voices she had never heard for her book *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams*.

A filmmaker followed her journey, which continued back in the United States, as she talked to Palestinian Americans. The stories, captured in “Voices Across the Divide,” are dramatic. Tahir Mansouri, one of the dozen interviewees in the film, is from Al-Qubab, one of the 500 villages Israel completely destroyed in 1948. Mansouri explains to Rothchild that “*Al Nakba* meant a loss of our home, our country and a reference for the future.”

Many of the Palestinians who share their stories say they believed they would return in two weeks. Yamila Shannan, a young Palestinian born in Colombia, described her parents’ ongoing trauma: “My father did not know how to deal with losing his country,” Shannan said. Terry Ahwal described her own *Nakba* in 1967, when she was 10 in 1967: “It was a transformation from childhood to hell.” The adults were panicking, she said. Nobody knew where their family members were and there was no communication. Everyone was listening to the radio and to bombs.

Diana Buttu, a Palestinian-Canadian lawyer, told her uncle’s story. On Purim in 1965, Buttu’s uncle, just a child at the time, was run over and killed by a drunken Israeli. “He was not even charged with a minor traffic offense. [My father] realized he would never be an equal in his homeland,” so he emigrated to Canada.

Buttu, like many of the interviewees in the film, remains optimistic, believing U.S. moral and financial support cannot go on for much longer. “People’s eyes are beginning to open to what Israel is doing,” Buttu remarked.

Change is necessary—and inevitable. “We must respect that Jews and Palestinians are equal human beings, and that our futures are inextricably intertwined,” Rothchild said. Jews were victimized by anti-Semitism, which culminated in the Nazi Holocaust—which “is part of our core identity,” Rothchild told the audience. “*Al Nakba* is the same. But for the Palestinians, the problem is that this has never been resolved... There has never been an opportunity to have closure on their trauma,” Rothchild told the audience.

The *Washington Report* highly recommends this film. Palestinians tell their stories eloquently, accompanied by excellent historical film footage, without subtitles or distractions. Rothchild said she made this film “to do restorative justice, and make it visible... We must educate the world.” This is the ideal teaching tool for the classroom, house of worship, community or simply sharing with friends. For more information visit <[www.voicesacrossthedivide.com](http://www.voicesacrossthedivide.com)> or purchase a copy from the AET Bookstore.

—Mitra Moin and Delinda Hanley