

### Author's Notes

A Journey Away from Hate is a spoken word, intended to be heard.

In the background, a mashup of modern interpretations of traditional Palestinian songs is played, illuminating the liberated and yet time-honored belief system of Salim.

A Journey Away from Hate recounts the story of Salim and what shaped his heart and mind from childhood to adulthood.

Salim was born in 1983 in Gaza, which at that time was under Israel's control, who seized it from the Egyptian in the six-days war in 1967. Salim lived through two Palestinian Intifadas and wars between Israel and the Palestinians. His path was shaped toward war and hatred, but he chose another way.

A Journey Away from Hate will walk the listener through this path with Salim, re-living a few of the life-changing, most identity-shaping events in his life, from a different age perspective every time.

Nowadays, and since 2006, Gaza is ruled by Hamas, a violent Islamist-Palestinian militant group. Egypt and Israel have enforced restrictions of access in-and-out Gaza and control its airspace and maritime borders.

Listeners are encouraged to think about the place where education lies in Salim's journey, and who holds the responsibility for constructing a balanced view of the world, if such a thing exists. While listening to Salim's story, I invite the listeners to reflect on their own relation to conflicts, pain and anger, and to have hope that *A Journey Away from Hate* is always possible.

#### About the songs in the background:

In order for Salim to be heard, his story is in English, as he told it to me. But the words are contrasted with his mother tongue language, the Arabic of his dreams, thoughts and struggle.

I created a mix of two Palestinian pieces by Palestinian artists. One of the pieces is *A Prayer* by Rim Banna who was a famous Palestinian singer, known for her modern interpretation of classical Palestinian music. *A Prayer* echoes Salim's relation to religion; the Mosque had a significant influence on building Salim's confidence as a learner, but he eventually rejected the content he learned there. And still, Salim now goes to the Mosque every week, praying to God for giving a different education to his girls than what he was given. The second piece is a collection of traditional Palestinian songs by Rola Azar, a young Palestinian singer who performs internationally, shedding light on Salim's success and adventures outside Gaza.

In choosing both female singers, I wanted to give voice to Salim's mother, as a person who swayed him through life, gently setting the tone.

## *A Journey Away from Hate*

This is about being a father, honoring a grandmother.  
About how we live with “the other.”

You see, my father didn't finish his education  
So, I was his salvation.  
I had the most important mission to accomplish: to become something in life.

“You have to reward him” my grandmother would repeat to me.  
I was smart, a top student, but I hated school.  
Hated the fear with which I would wake up every day, loathed the rules.

“Give me your hand! Fast!” Ibrahim yelled, the soldiers behind us quickly approaching.  
I'm in the sixth grade and I'm not strong at running or fighting. Nor am I good at climbing  
inside a stranger's house to find hiding. “Come on Salim, pull yourself up! Fast!” and so I did.  
And so the following day, I wasn't the murdered child the teacher mentioned in class.  
I was only the witness.  
And the judge.  
From then, I determined that Israelis are bad, and that we are good. The opposite is always bad.  
The Jews will go to hell, we will go to heaven. Justice must be served.

Stones, soldiers, prayers.  
We will use what we can, we don't need your lawyers.

I was smart, a top student, but I hated school.  
I hated that I had to memorize the names of all the Egyptians generals, recount the history of  
Egypt, and tell the story of the pyramids which I had never seen, and never will. I detested that  
I had to learn a history that wasn't mine and love the leaders who did not love me back.

I went to look for what I was missing and found it at the Mosque.  
I thrived in the alternative classes of the Mosque, I was inspired by its teachings and I found  
my place as the best student there, winning the first place in the weekly tests.  
I was happy.

I was a good kid. I had a mission to continue the education that the enemy took away from my  
father, and I fully intended to live up to this. My education was a message I had to deliver to  
the world, to my enemies.  
The Mosque helped me.  
I was on the right path of becoming a religious, honorable man. It was where I learned my  
strength and delved into the joy of learning. And it is where I cultivated my hatred for our  
enemy - Israel.

I will win, they will lose. I will go to heaven.

“What heaven little cousin? [laughter] Do you think that even I’ll go to heaven? Look at me, I’m a bad Muslim: I smoke weed, I sleep with girls and I drink alcohol. But what about a very good Jew or Christian not doing any of these? Do you think he’ll go to hell only because he’s not Muslim? Think little cousin. God does not care”

Until this day, my older cousin doesn’t know he is the reason for my change of season.

Spring has come – bringing with it questions about the source of justice. I gradually distanced myself from the Mosque, while remaining close to God.

I studied diligently. I questioned all of my lessons.

I was unwavering, however, in my quest to obtain an education. And even if this would require a four-year separation from my family, so be it. We leave in order to later reunite, stronger than before.

I was smart, one of the best students, and I enjoyed school. Even the Intifada did not sway me from my way.

It was a period of utter chaos. The university would shut down unexpectedly from time to time. Our minds were elsewhere, as were our hearts.

But ultimately, we prevailed, and I finished my bachelor’s degree, bringing home pride and joy.

War returned. This time it was not in our favor, but the result was insignificant. I learned to always support whoever was against the Israeli militants.

And while we fought against the Israelis, my father still had to work with them. Business is fearless.

One day, my father was on the phone with his Israeli friend and partner, Miro. This time, they weren’t arguing over price or talking about delivery dates. This time Miro was crying – his son was a soldier in the Israeli military, fighting against their adversary.

Their adversary – our dignitary.

But my father is appeasing our adversary “it will be okay Miro, I am praying for your son”.

Who is our adversary?

It is death this I know. And death touches everyone.

That day, I heard a father mourning his son, and I watched as a father lowered his gun.

That day I learned my most important lesson of all, from these two fathers. For the first time I viewed the Israeli through a different lens – I saw a father, a human being.

That day I decided that I will instill this lesson in my daughters. This is what really matters.

War erupted between Israel and Gaza. Miro called to speak with me: “Salim, you must stay home and be safe. Promise me. Because if something happens to you, your father will be devastated, and I’m worried about him. Promise me”

And that was enough for me to know that we can love each other. We can live together.

But if you want to change future relations, you must begin with education.

I was the first Gazan to study in an Israeli university.

I attend services at the Mosque every Friday, but I pray for good.

I am my father's son. I am smart, a top student, and I love school.