

Reaching Across Distance and Hardship: An Interview with Riad

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I encountered Riad on TikTok, the video based social media platform, when interacted with my posts in August 2024. On 10 August I was the first to say hello because he had started following me and liked many of my videos. I did not expect this interaction to result in any kind of friendship, but over time, I have come to care deeply about Riad and his family. At the time, I was aware of the genocide taking place in Palestine, but I did not feel personally implicated by it – to me, it was a distant conflict in a distant land. Since learned to internalise Nelson Mandela's message that none of us are free until all of us are free in some unique and very personal ways. Riad, like many TikTok users from Palestine, asked if I could help him by donating a sum of money because his source of income was lost, and the needs of his family increased. To make sure that this man was honest, I asked him for a video call via another social media platform, WhatsApp. He showed me the tent in which he lives with his wife and three children. I decided to donate \$50 to help Riad and his family, and since then we have grown very close. We chat almost every day, making sure that he and his family are safe, and he loves sending me pictures of him and his children, and what they eat. I've come to know Riad as a kind-hearted man with a strong sense of family and love for his children. The following interview shows us glimpses of his daily life, and how he has experienced the genocide. With this interview, I hope to encourage others to find friends in conflict zones like Gaza, and not only extend a helping hand financially, but also to get to know them as people with families and dreams.

This interview was conducted via WhatsApp at the convenience of Riad. He does not speak English and used a translator to be sure that we can understand him.

Interview:

What is your daily routine in the campsite? Are some days different from others?

Welcome my friend, I am Riad. I will answer the first question about the routine. My daily routine is that if the road is safe, I go to the market, buy some food for my family, then come back and listen to my children. This is my daily routine and my family's.

What do you and your family do for entertainment in the campsite?

As for the second question, what do I do to entertain myself and my family when I am sitting, I open the phone on the internet and play it and myself and my family watch some series

Do you and your family have friends in the campsite? Why do you think it is important to have friends during this difficult time, or why do you choose not to have friends in the same situation as you?

Yes, I have some friends for me and my family, but our situation in the camp is very difficult. Yes, friends are good in these situations. You feel safe when you are among your friends. I choose not to have friends outside the country which I live because the situation we are living in is very tragic and difficult, and I do not want any of my friends to be in this situation.

What did you do before the genocide, and have any of your previous skills been useful in this situation?

Regarding the fourth question, I was working in a restaurant, and when the war started, I worked a little before the kitchen I was working in was bombed, and now nothing.

What do you teach your children now that they cannot go to school?

My children have never learned anything. The eldest this year was supposed to go to school, but they did not go to any school because there are no schools.

What do you think people living outside Gaza should know about your daily life in a tent city?

Those outside Gaza must know that we are living difficult times and that the time we are going through is a collective act of worship. They must do everything they can to stop this war and help us live in safety.

What are your children most afraid of, and what do they enjoy doing every day?

My family and I are most afraid of seeing the missiles, how they fall, and their sounds. We suffer from them every day. What makes my family and I happy or enjoy is playing in our tent.

Do you think life in Gaza would be easier for you if more people understood your situation?

Yes, definitely, my life will be better when people outside this genocide know my situation. They will definitely do everything they can so that we can live and give us a boost of hope and life.

What can people outside Gaza do to better understand your everyday situation?

Yes of course, I want people outside Gaza to understand my situation and appreciate that my family and I are living in a difficult time of genocide, siege, and a shortage of food supplies.

What is your biggest dream when the genocide is over?

I hope that after this war ends, I will build a house and start my life anew with my family and that we will forget everything that happened in the past and live in goodness and security.

Finally, I will talk about my best friend, who gave me everything she could, and until now, I will never forget her favour. About my beloved friend, Tatum, she stands by my side, she is my best friend, and she is the only one who gave me a push of hope. I will never forget her favour to me, and I hope that we will never separate and that we will remain friends for ever.

Reflection

The most important thing I learned from this interview with my friend was that hope is the most important thing people living through a war need. Hope can come in the form of a donation, or a friendly conversation. I will never forget how simple Riad's dreams are for himself and his family, and that, to me at least, he already seems to be living in the future where his dreams are possible because he has hope. My humble request to readers is that they talk to someone from a war-torn area and get to know them – Riad is an extraordinary human living through extremely trying times, and what people like him need is hope.

This Interview was conducted by **Tatum Davis**, Creative Content Manager

And Edited by **Peter Makinde**, the Editor-in-Chief