

YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

Anonymously Submitted

Recently, the movement to liberate Palestine has existed almost entirely on social media: major news outlets cover the political basics but have failed entirely at capturing the reality of life under Israeli occupation; so, outlets like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and others have become the movement's main source of information, both directly from occupied Palestine and from activists across the world. This fairly informal method of sharing content raises quite a few valid concerns: is it all just performative activism? How can we combat blatant misinformation when posts containing outright lies already have millions of likes and shares? Most disturbing to me, however, has been our widespread desensitization to violence—how easy it has become to swipe past a video of an entire apartment building bombed to the ground, a five-year-old Gazan girl buried under rubble, a father hugging the lifeless bodies of his children, without so much as a second's pause. And as much as I hate the fact that it takes imagining yourself in these situations to truly understand the magnitude of damage that Israel has caused recently, I find it the best way to break through the desensitization that social media activism forces upon us.

So right now, I want you to do something with me: I want you to look at the home you're in at this very moment—maybe it's your childhood home, an apartment, or somewhere else. But I want you to imagine you're in that home and suddenly you get a call from a government number. The voice on the other end tells you that in precisely five minutes, a missile is going to hit your home. You have five minutes to collect as much stuff as possible: important documents, clothes, childhood mementos, valuables—everything—and get out of the house before it crumbles atop you and your family. So what can you do? There's no time to think, to grieve, to call that number back and tell them that there's been a mistake—there are no terrorists here, only innocent children. So you run through the house frantically, grabbing only the bare necessities, checking the time every few seconds because you've never realized until this moment just how quickly five minutes go by, and trying above all else not to think about the fact that in five minutes, you're going to lose everything you have.

Three minutes are up: you sprint out of the building because who knows if they'll fire a little early? Better to lose belongings than family, right?





You run across the street, keeping your head down in case of flying debris, and hide behind a wall with the rest of your neighbors and family—but you don't go too far, partly because you need to see this, this destruction of everything you've ever known, but mostly because there simply isn't anywhere else to go. So you sit and you wait and sure enough, a minute later, a missile comes screaming out of the sky and crumbles your home into a million pieces. Just like that—gone. The sacrifices it took to afford that home—gone. Years of memories—gone. Your belongings, your childhood pictures, your clothes, your money, everything—gone.

You're homeless now.

Now a reminder: imagine this isn't happening halfway across the world in Palestine—imagine this is your town, your city.

As you sit there, watching your home crumble, trying to comfort your family even as your own heart breaks, you realize suddenly that there are some people missing from the group—not everyone evacuated.

Heart full of terror, you sprint towards the building and watch as your neighbors begin digging through the rubble, following the sounds of children screaming for help.

You recognize that voice—that's your seven-year-old neighbor crying for her mother, begging for someone to lift the stones crushing her legs so she can run. No one has the heart to tell her that her mother is just feet away, her body covered in a white sheet.

In fact, no one can do much more than pray—the ambulance won't be there for another three hours because the roads to both major hospitals in the city have been bombed. You sit there for hours, trying your best to keep her awake, trying not to give into the utter helplessness that permeates the air and makes it hard to breathe. By the time the ambulance arrives, they can only tell you what you already know: that little girl will never walk again. As they take her away, she asks you again where her mommy is and you don't know how to tell her. You don't know how to tell her that her mommy never heard the phone ring with that fatal call—she never even saw it coming.

And halfway across the world, someone sitting behind a computer screen tells you to be grateful they at least gave you a heads up and didn't just bomb the building with all of you inside. Tells you this is just how war goes, even though the people in that residential building weren't soldiers. Tells you that they couldn't possibly have warned everyone, as if those children buried under the rubble were just inevitable collateral damage, an unsavory detail, a price you just have to pay for the security of the country.

That's the reality behind those videos you see on people's stories.

That's what we have been desensitized towards—the videos that mean nothing to us anymore. To us, it's just a dusty old building falling down, but to the people that survive these bombings, it's a lifetime ripped away.

A building means nothing—a home is everything.

Even as I write this, I know how futile it is, how utterly insignificant my words are in the grand scheme of things. I write all of this, though, to remind myself as much as I remind you, that to decide that our inability to bring about any tangible relief for these people and taking the luxury of looking away is to forsake our very humanity. It fills me with an incredible depth of shame to admit that the only way I can keep looking at the horrific videos that emerge from Gaza and Ramallah and Jerusalem every day is to replace those nameless, faceless victims with myself

and my family—to imagine the utter helplessness of being trapped for hours under an entire apartment's worth of rubble, knowing all the while that they won't get to you in time, longing for one last hug from your parents, one last smile from your best friends, one last breath of fresh air at sunrise, and knowing you'll never get it. I imagine the rage of convincing the world that my seven-year-old child was not simply collateral damage, but a child with a personality and a family and a future—a person. I imagine these faraway tragedies here at home: here you are born into your mother's loving arms, here you are at the playground with your sister, here you are at family dinners—now here you are dead, here your family is, picking up the pieces while the world spins heedlessly on because you are one of 66 victims and while one death is a tragedy, sixty-six is a statistic, a political talking point, a prayer whispered over dinner.

Because when you are a statistic, they forget: that your favorite color was green, that you loved to watch old black-and-white movies with your brother, that you were just learning how to ride a bike, that you had always dreamed of becoming a teacher. They forget that our lives, which are so insignificant to those who have never met us, are all we know, that our loss from this world must mean something, anything, everything. They forget that accepting a child's death as a mere inevitability is to accept that our lives, too, are meaningless. How utterly devastating it is: to have lived, to have died, to know that the world has closed its eyes and covered its ears because to acknowledge that your loss deserves nothing short of a revolution means accepting the fact that we are all responsible for one another.

Maybe it is all pointless—articles and social media posts aren't going to reverse years of political vitriol or beckon in some whimsical era of goodwill for the world. But at the very least, we can stand here and say to that mother clutching her child's lifeless body—we did not look away. When you screamed out your rage and pain into the world, we screamed with you, if only to say:

We hear you. We are human. And you are not alone.