

## The Bakery

One of our tours took us into the Al Sharf Quarter. The name is unknown to many people because the Israelis changed the name to the Jewish Quarter. In the past many Palestinians lived there. Today they are almost all gone: 2% remain.

As we walked we explored some ancient ruins, peeked into shops, looked at an old map from when the Jewish Quarter was called Al Sharf, took photos, and in general we were happy to be there.

We saw Palestinian girls go into a house. They must live there, we thought. I ran to the door and knocked. I wanted to ask them what it was like to live in the Jewish Quarter. A little girl opened the door, and when I asked her about her life, she started to shut the door again.

“No, wait!”

“I’m sorry. I can’t talk ... we’re not free to talk about our problems here.” Fear was on her face, and the door closed. There was a security camera pointing at us.

We continued. Grabbing our attention was a group of religious Jews dancing and singing and blowing long, curling ram horns. Just in front of the group was a bakery that, from the looks of it, probably hadn’t changed in a hundred years. Ayad Abu Sninah, the owner of the bakery, is a short man of forty-five, he has white hair and clothes covered with flour. All his workers - his brothers, cousins, and sons – were as well covered with flour, just like the floor of the bakery. The owner inherited the business from his father, who got it from his father.

Ayad Abu Sninah lives in the neighborhood of Ras al-Amud, a few minutes out of the old city.

“This is my bakery and I have to feed my children, but there’s not business,” he said to us. “The people here,” he was pointing out to the Jewish Quarter – “they don’t buy bread from me. Some of them hit my children and tear off the hijab from my daughters. Then they tell the tourists not to buy from me. They send them to an Israeli bakery nearby.”

He looked sad but I felt he was also strong and courageous to tell us about his miserable situation.

Ayad Abu Sninah had more to say. “The Israelis in the Quarter want me to sell my bakery and leave. They don’t want an Arab here. I won’t do it. I refuse. No matter what they do.” He said someone released mice into his store. It was a Mice War. “I don’t care. Not many people come to my bakery, but even if no one comes, I’ll stay.”

What came to my mind, hearing about his hope and strength and his smart ideas, was an olive tree outside Al Aqsa mosque. That was how I pictured him, strong and ancient.

“I don’t have any problems with the government,” he answered when I asked. “Just with the people living here. I don’t expect them to love us, I just want to do my work and feed my children. Is that so much?”

I left feeling that we need to take care of the Al Sharf Quarter, and it’s OK if the Israelis call it the Jewish Quarter and go from there to pray at the Wailing Wall. They should live their lives in peace. But they won’t be able to drive the baker away. I hope he will give the bakery to his children, who will give it to their children. I hope he will no longer have any problems with the Jews in the neighborhood. That Jews and Palestinians will buy his bread.

And why not?

By Nisreen Al-Abead