

teen years old at that time; my agitation when she asked me questions probably aroused her suspicions. Whatever it was, she opened the envelope and read the contents before I had time to cross the street and catch a taxi. She started screaming at the people in the street to catch me; I remember she used a lot of obscene words. Anyway, I had to run across an open field to the other side where I caught a taxi and went to the appointed meeting place. The taxi driver said, «Oh, look, that woman is calling after you.» She had left the house and started running after me herself when nobody had responded to her. I just shrugged and told the taxi driver I had never seen her before - which was true.

MESSENGER TO FAMILIES

Sometimes we would be charged with other tasks which were less dramatic, but potentially just as dangerous. I was supposed to distribute salaries or letters to the families of martyrs or of comrades on the run or imprisoned. The letters were in a very compact form so that we could easily hide them, or if necessary swallow them. Money was distributed every two months; a reduction in frequency was necessary so as not to look suspicious. Once, I and my girl friend had such a mission to carry out. She was always the very serious type, and soldiers at checkpoints were always picking on her in particular. I was more fashion-conscious and gave the impression of not being the type to be involved in any serious work. At one checkpoint, this paid off. My friend was asked to get out of the car and enter a tent the Zionists had set up for searching women. I was not asked to get out. Luckily I was the one carrying the letters and money. I had the letters in my mouth, making ready to swallow them if I was called to be searched. Fortunately, things never came to that.

As I said before, my brother used to cover up for me when I was absent from home, carrying out my duties. However, he was killed by the Zionists, and my freedom of movement was greatly reduced. I had to find different excuses to leave the house. This was difficult because my family was over-protective of me as the only daughter, and especially so after my brother's martyrdom. This situation was temporary however, only a few months. Then I graduated from high school and enrolled in a community college. My

teacher had been a member of the PFLP, and was aware that I was politically active. He would therefore give me special permission to leave the college when I asked. This allowed me to carry on my organizational duties. I also wore the traditional Gaza dress (a long, black skirt and head cover) so that when I moved about, I could cover my face and not risk that people recognized me and reported back to my family.

MILITARY TRAINING

After a period of carrying out duties of the type I have described, my girl friend and I started demanding to be trained for the military section. Our record was good, and our comrades arranged for us to be trained to carry and use arms, not just smuggle or hide them. However, our means and methods were very primitive. We could not afford to use live ammunition in training. Bullets were few and precious. We used to be trained in somewhat isolated and sheltered backyards, or inside. We were taught how to dry damp bullets in hot sand, how to hold and aim a pistol, and how to use hand grenades.

Our organizational duties continued much the same as usual; we would hold our meetings as always. Not more than two or three of us would meet, always in public places, and never for long periods of time. None of us knew the others' real names. This was a precaution we learned to appreciate later on when some of our comrades were caught during an operation. At the risk of sounding vain, I must say that the comrades of our group were something special. They were as militant, loyal and steadfast in prison as they had been outside. I must also say that it was not just our comrades who acted commendably.

THE MILITANTS AND THE MASSES

Although the majority of the Palestinian people in Gaza were not actively involved in the resistance organizations, their hearts were with us. When Zionist patrols attacked us during demonstrations or chased us down the streets, we could be sure that any door we knocked on would be immediately opened to give us refuge. Sometimes we were hosed down with red water, a dye used to spray

demonstrators so they could be identified later. People would take us in, give us a change of clothes and help us clean up. Sometimes I would lose my way when sent to a new area to distribute money to martyrs' families. People would willingly and discretely walk me to the house I asked about.

I remember one woman who had two sons in the Zionist jails. She was our special link to these prisons. My family's neighbors were always ready to hide the handbills I had to distribute, because I could not keep them at home for fear of my parents discovering them. One night while I was distributing handbills, a man walked up to me out of a side alley and asked for one. I was taken completely by surprise. (The militants' objective was to spread the handbills without actually handing them to persons, for they could be arrested if 'caught in the act'.) I tried to put on a brave face and denied having anything with me, but the man persisted and tried to persuade me that he was 'on our side' as they say. Finally, because I was desperate to shake him and get my job done, I let my intuition overrule my sense of caution. I gave him a handbill and he walked away.

Sometimes, however, our experiences were not pleasant, especially as females in a society such as ours. Once I was keeping watch on a certain position several days in a row. One shopkeeper noticed me and obviously thought I was hanging around for - you know - immoral purposes. He walked up to me and offered me money. I was so upset that I shouted at him. Later, the organization had a male comrade accompany me for such tasks.

I was also active in the framework of my regular life, i.e., at school. The high school I attended had over 1,000 girl students. Literally all of us would take part in demonstrations. One time all the girls agreed to march in a demonstration commemorating a certain event which I no longer remember. Our school had the reputation for giving the Zionist authorities a particularly troublesome time, so we expected that the soldiers would be very brutal in dispersing the demonstration. Therefore, we prepared a molotov cocktail to use in self-defense, or so we thought. We hid it in the girls' washroom on the window sill. We had not however counted on the sun overheating our homemade bomb. It ex-▶