

Rose Shomali Oral History Interview

Track 1 [duration: 1:17:07] [Session one: 22 December 2012]

[00:00] Rose Shomali [RS] Born Beit Zahour, Palestine, eldest of eight, mother married age 14, RS born when 15. Describes feeling responsible for siblings, like second mother. Father writer, working in Jordan. Describes father's previous work as teacher in Beit Safafa, Palestine, coming home with stories developing RS' consciousness. Recalls arrival of refugees from South Hebron, 1948. Describes father addressed as Abu Rose, after firstborn RS, this changing on birth of brother, now referring to his name, Abu Basil, RS realisation that something wrong, of being treated differently as girl, experienced from early age. Description of community celebrations surrounding brother's baptism, not important as girl. Story about RS repeating brother's accident to receive bananas and chocolates as he had, but nothing given to her.

[06:30] Describes jealousy, overcoming feelings to care for siblings, helping with studies, teaching new things. Describes imaginative play without toys, leading to writing poetry, putting own words to music heard in church, discovery that can play with words and create own. Describes same activity with small radio at home, taking tunes and putting new words to them.

[12:00] Describes winning inter-school competition for writing about Djamila Bouhired and Algeria's fight for liberation. Comments on father's pride, but as writer steering children towards sciences for more financial security. Describes start of adolescence, travelling alone to school in Bethlehem, discovery of books, writing more and reading own compositions at morning assembly. Describes borrowing books from friend's older sister (now famous novelist Laila Al-Atrash), reading Ihsan Abdel Quddus, Naguib Mahfouz at young age. Describes father's library at home, mother reading books then recounting stories to RS and siblings. Describes spending school break choosing books in library, reading by gas lamp at night.

[17:45] Describes layout of house built by paternal grandfather, first mayor of Beit Zahour, each son taking two of six rooms, RS growing up with cousins. Describes one of cousins having books but not sharing with RS, RS reading whole books and return them without him knowing. Mentions 'The Arabian Nights', Maktab al Khadra, The Green Library, Egypt. Describes siblings' interest in reading, brother well known poet in Germany, another in Palestine, writing children's books, novels for youth.

[22:12] Describes father writing plays, also in charge of cinema, Beit Zahour, first in West Bank, RS meeting him there from kindergarten, returning home together, exposed to Egyptian films from early age, recounting the whole film to others. Father's writing published daily in 'Jerida Phalastin', often writing under pseudonym Basil Jabir, and different signature for 'Veto' column, all in same edition, father's novels published in daily chapters, inviting readers to write in with suggestions for ending. Recounts one of stories greatly affected by. Discusses progressive nature of activities, 1950s when no electricity, and newspapers uncommon. Recalls father placing RS on table to read newspaper for others.

[30:12] Discusses concept of forgiveness. Describes Jewish child adopted in local family when RS growing up. Describes maternal grandparents, grandfather sent to war, commenting on absence of men of that generation in Beit Zahour. Describes grandfather telling stories from war and speaking German on return. Describes family playing oriental flute. Describes summer nights sleeping outdoors, grandmother telling stories. Mentions 'Jemail al Nam', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Cinderella'.

[37:45] Describes scholarship granted to attend Birzeit College, Palestine, describes as new life opening to RS. Describes experience, first exposure to classical music. Story about RS' daily writings on bulletin board, entering and winning Jerusalem district competition for article written, accused that not own writing. Describes excelling in Gymnastics, remarking that many girls didn't participate, using excuse of menstruation, RS winning awards in Table Tennis, Basketball, wanting to experience everything. Explains common myth that Gymnastics compromised virginity.

[44:00] Describes rural/farmer tradition of displaying strength by not kissing children, recalling sadness at father leaving RS at Birzeit. Relays family sacrifices, sharing and distribution of food, never enough for one cup of milk, or one banana each, RS admonished for eating a whole egg. Evocative description of first night at college, first time seeing knife and fork at table, did not eat, wearing simple dress unlike others, simple plait. Remarks that peers later discovered RS' strength, becoming their confidante, writing their love letters.

[48:43] Birzeit students from Jordan, Kuwait, coming for good education, 1962, Birzeit as yet unoccupied by Israel. Describes herself as poorest among peers, but all needed RS, in Mathematics, Arabic, becoming well known for skills, participating in all activities, two operas, singing, acting, dancing, obtaining excellent grades with minimum study. Mentions Arabic teacher Tawfiq Abu Saud. Describes play written age 15, before Birzeit, collecting neighbourhood children to act, presented at Arab Cultural Centre to full house, attended by Governor and Educational Directorate.

[53:06] Describes winning poetry prize at Birzeit, 1965. Poem about mother, previous prize for article about home. Reflects that would be nice to have article now, as was away from family for 25 years. Describes boarding school dormitory, two lines of 14 girls, no electricity, generator turned off at 10pm, RS reading with torch. Describes curriculum text books in English not Arabic, RS aiming for more.

[58:24] Describes growing up eating meat only on Sundays, butcher taking orders, family favourite *Mujadara*, growing vegetables in garden. Describes community meal in *taboun*, six or more households participating to use oven for one day, passing on to next household while hot.

[1:03:29] Describes exchange of foods grown in garden in community. Describes attempt to make Birzeit foods at home. [1:06:30] Story of parents' courtship, mother most beautiful among five sisters, scandal as refused to marry within family. Describes father's expression through sense of humour, never fighting, never showing affection until became grandfather. Describes mother acting in father's plays.

[1:11:43] Amusing story of maternal grandparents' marriage. Describes staying at grandmother's house to be with aunt and to study. Describes relationship with mother, frustrations and hardship of every day chores, exhaustion, RS making dough before school, going to one house for water from uncle's well, another to bake. Remarks that responsibility made RS strong. [pause]

Track 2 [18:16] [Session one: 22 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes wanting to finish education, but family could not afford fees, RS understanding that if had been for brothers, would have sold house. Story about refusing to eat for three days, journey to Jordan to see father, hearing name over radio, announcing call for scholarship, RS among top ten students in Jerusalem Directorate of Education. Another scholarship offered from the Army, to study Medicine in Beirut, system requiring four years' subsequent service in return for each year of study. Describes visiting aunt, staff nurse at hospital in Bethlehem and RS knowing unable to cope with situation there. Describes father crying when signing scholarship contract, upset that RS not studying medicine. Start of study at Birzeit University (BZU) continuing at American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

[05:00] Describes 1967 Arab-Israeli 'Six-Day War' war occurring while in junior year, father's directive to family that must not leave home no matter what. Describes home being hit, neighbor killed. Story about brother's scholarship to study in Germany, arriving later same year in Jordan, RS buying coat, boots, necessary items for brother's life in Germany with scholarship money. Israeli census taken at time in Beit Zahour not accounting for RS and brother as residents.

[09:35] Story about start of relationship/courtship with future husband, transpiring that study of Dentistry cover for activist work with medical services of Fatah. Mentions Che Guevara, clinic in Salt, Jordan. Describes shared concept of living for others, father's advice to RS upon marriage.

Track 3 [duration: 09:56] [Session one: 22 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes being great friends with husband's sister while at school, studying together in his family home. Anecdote from mother-in-law from that period. Comments on girls' earlier maturity. Remarks that first in Beit Zahour to continue education to university level. Story about returning home during study, neighbours' coming to see how RS changed. Remarks that positive example paved way for 15 girls to pursue university education after RS' graduation.

[04:45] Describes perception that RS missing chance to marry with years of study away from home, coinciding with family proposals for her sister, RS' father persuading RS to dissuade from accepting, resulting in comedy of errors, insulting to RS. Describes refusal to have traditional wedding, instead church wedding, no party, refusal of gold, special dresses. Rented house to please father. Describes having to work in Jordan to satisfy two years for each year of scholarship from then Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Track 4 [duration: 0:52] [Session two: 23 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes natural interest in defending women's rights as already interested in national rights.

Track 5 [duration: 1:00:31] [Session two: 23 December 2012]

[00:00] Describes being approached by friend to help, working with women at Tel al-Zaatar Palestinian refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon. Mentions teaching English at Bourj al-Barajneh camp, Beirut, Lebanon. Describes lack of child care, arriving with young daughter, women caring for child as RS taught them to read and write, to enable them to participate in First Aid training as to support each other as camp liable to be under siege. Mentions collaborating with teachers from The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Mentions training operation in Berj Hammoud, Lebanon, teaching literacy using Paulo Freire approach, RS contacting Palestinian Planning Centre (developing philosophy and values of Palestinian education), affiliated to Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to begin similar in Tel al-Zaatar camp.

[07:05] Discusses principles of Paulo Friere as 'pedagogy of the oppressed', explaining teaching style. Describes working with trainers to develop and adapt curriculum from Lebanese to Palestinian context, creating new words. Mentions women in camp working in ice cream factory, El Karantina, Lebanon. Other women trained, housewives, shopkeepers, learning to calculate. Describes UNRWA providing schoolrooms enabling mothers to learn while children already there.

[12:10] Describes husband's support of work but housework non negotiable, RS managing before leaving for camp. Reflects on evolution of relationship, today husband partner in domestic responsibilities Describes difficulty of daily journey to volunteer in camp, walking final 2km carrying daughter, before prevented by siege. UNRWA teacher killed.

[15:00] Describes personal growth at Tel al-Zaatar camp, witnessing strength of women, learning from them how to approach collective work. Describes returning home every night to cry from scenes witnessed in camp, feeling of desperation changing as experienced strength of women, viewing them as powerful. Methodology then applied to all camps in Lebanon, resulting in team of 100 trained people. Remarks that when United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) came to start literacy campaign, cadre already in place. Followed with work at Palestinian Planning Centre, implementing philosophy of education through kindergartens. Explains framework of philosophy, involving freedom of expression, democratic and nationalist values. *Dar al Fatah Arabi*, Arab Publishing House for Youth, established by Palestinian Planning Centre.

[20:05] Drive to address kindergartens, training 40 women from different camps over 40 days in space provided by school for martyrs' sons and daughters, in mountains. Describes discovery of physical impact of patriarchy, Baalbek women unable to open basic body parts during morning exercise, due to history of constraint, body always

covered without freedom of movement. Anecdote about Al-Rashidiya camp, Lebanon.

[26:44] Describes training women to be community leaders amidst airplane bombardment, anxiety about protecting children leading to contact PLO requesting shelter. PLO department for construction opening shelters in Bourj Shomali, Al-Rashidiya, and Ain al-Hilweh camps. Mentions destruction of Nabatia camp, evolving into space resembling football ground. Describes people seeking shelter in UNRWA schools. Describes training women on how to use local resources for kindergartens, using community. Mentions visit from President of the World Council of Churches, Palestinian Red Crescent clinic. RS writings on experience published by BZU, presented at Second Conference for Palestinian Education.

[35:21] Describes women worked with as nucleus for General Union for Palestinian Women in Lebanon. RS elected responsible for General Union in Sabra refugee camp, Lebanon. Describes having no health facilities. Draws attention to F-16 fighter planes flying overhead, explaining route to Gaza. Remarks that frightening, reminder of war in Lebanon. Continues about women in Sabra camp suffering from skin diseases, worsened by open sewers. Describes seeking advice from family pediatrician working at American University of Beirut Hospital, collaborating with him, training three women from the camp in related health and hygiene, transforming camp within week, and using General Union's space for regular check ups and immunization, RS buying wood and enlisting help to build table for purpose.

[44:03] Describes coordinating with Fatah Women's Committee and The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) for proper clinic in upper part of camp, then setting up kindergarten. Story about boys and girls tidying and cleaning kindergarten before going home, mother complaining that boys shouldn't be cleaning. Remarks that nurturing equality from kindergarten building future. Describes leaving fieldwork in 1979 to work at Palestinian Research Centre, Beirut, Lebanon. Member of Administrative Committee for the Union in Lebanon, RS previously in charge of Economic Committee while working with children. Describes using Union hall for lunch at noon, establishing kitchen to enable women to have lunch cheaply releasing from cooking, while creating employment. Explains that Palestinians not permitted to have jobs in Lebanon, 77 jobs prohibited, including janitor.

[49:00] Discusses Palestinians finding salvation through PLO affiliated organisations, enabling work and protecting from Lebanese intelligentsia. Describes men taken from the refugee camps and never returned. Refers to oral history recordings, illustrating how PLO instilled hope and trust in people. Describes return to Palestine after Oslo, Norway, husband returning earlier. Describes husband's work at Al-Yarmouk camp, Damascus, Syria, member of Executive Committee of PRCS. Story about Yasser Arafat offering husband position as Governor of Bethlehem, instead choosing to be Head of Dentistry Department for the West Bank until retirement.

[58:55] Describes return to Palestine, 1995. Teaching with own methodology at Bethlehem University. [telephone rings]

Track 6 [duration: 1:07:01] [Session two: 23 December 2012]

[00:00] Reflects on inspiration from ordinary women who have been deprived of many things yet proved strong. Example of own mother, cooking and cleaning, married at 15, standing alone to face soldiers who came to put family in exile. Story of family home being evacuated, confusion of arrest when being deported. History of youngest brother accused of throwing stone at Israeli administrative governor of Bethlehem, imprisoned and tortured in front of father, left for dead. Mentions Al Ahli Hospital. Describes how father collected from prison, misunderstanding that released, sisters collected from hospital vigil, taken to bare shelter to make home. Continues with account of family's evacuation to Ein as-Sultan camp, Jericho, West Bank.

[06:25] Gives history of Ein as-Sultan, Akbar Jaber, Al-Bakr camps. Family case taken to Supreme Court of Israel by Felicia Langer. Describes media coverage of family's story as example of new Israeli policy, experience of receiving news in Lebanon. Mentions Kaabi family.

[13:43] Comments on mother's selfless and positive attitude, richness in self. Mentions asset of father's many languages to express himself in adversity. Describes Israeli offer of villas in Jericho, father's non-acceptance of anywhere other than home. Describes support from leftist Israelis, media pressure, eventual return home. Describes brother's sentencing, pursuit of him following release, Israeli forces regularly breaking into family home at night. Describes impact of brother's torture age 15. Mention of mother's work during 1987 *Intifada*.

[22:30] Describes first involvement in working for women's rights in Palestine, awareness raised while teaching at Bethlehem University. Describes being recruited to work for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on Global Education programme in Ministry of Education. Describes integration of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in curriculum, development of knowledge on gender issues. Describes taking directorship of Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) applying grassroots and academic background to role.

[26:49] Describes foremost issue at time as need for strategy after The Oslo Accords, working towards building democratic state. First focus on laws discriminating against women, mentions demonstration demanding gender sensitive laws, parliamentary candidates committing. Describes impact of geographical annexing of Gaza to Egypt, West Bank to Jordan, laws different in each place, amendment of Personal Status Laws and Penal Code in Egypt and Jordan, but not in Palestine, West Bank or Gaza. Comments that strongest laws Israeli, governing lives of people in Jerusalem. Describes deterioration after reoccupation of areas in 2002.

[30:27] Describes worst policy as non-consideration of Palestinians as citizens in Jerusalem, giving temporary resident status. Describes own story of losing citizenship in West Bank, exiled for 23 years, granted citizenship after 25 years. Reflect on loss of important family time, on birth of children. Describes shelling of PRCS Hospital in Al-Hazmieh, as leaving for home, husband needed by medical team, leaving RS alone with firstborn.

[34:34] Describes ongoing battle to change Penal Code, chance at time of first Palestinian Legislative Council. Comments that even some members of Fateh against change, some women against demand for parliamentary quota. Mentions Hanan Ashrawi, Rawia Al- Shawa, Taleb Behowad, Mwatn. Describes attempt to unify effort of others working on election laws as a whole, and WATC on female quota. Describes creation of committee of those involved with women's issues in decision making positions, giving chair to General Union of the Palestinian Woman. Describes campaigns, training of nominees, preparing manual to support when reach Parliament, re-budgeting from gender perspective.

[39:07] Describes first Parliament, five women, work done to raise issue of corruption, leading campaign in Legislative Council. Describes build up to registration of nominees, 100 women registering in one day. Mentions WATC making film about woman, Suheir, from Khirbet Kais, Palestine, election as head of local council, creating accessible model of ordinary woman. Mentions Hanan Ashrawi, Zahira Kamal as inaccessible. Creation of discussion, breaking expectations and perceptions, commenting that Christians more difficult than Moslems. Use of theatre to enact scenarios and raise questions, presented in Beit Jala, Bethlehem.

[44:45] Discusses problem of national issues naturally taking priority over women's issues, history of WATC related to absence of women in technical committees at The Madrid Conference, 1991. Describes technical committees becoming ministries on establishment of Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat declining to grant Ministry for Women, instead establishing women's units, now called gender units, in each ministry. Remarks that units did not play active role. Describes importance of addressing national issues following imprisonment of 12,000 Palestinians after re-occupation of West Bank and *Intifada*, 2002, connecting women's issues with national issues. Describes issues of women prisoners, example of giving birth at check points, coming to forefront. Discusses urgency of practical response needs overtaking strategic needs regarding laws, example of occupation of Gaza, training social workers in dealing with women post-trauma.

[51:51] Describes drafting unified Family Law, taking into consideration The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Human Rights issues, deterioration of national situation making impossible to continue with such advanced ideas. Discusses Penal Code, most significant law regarding honour killings, practice linked to inheritance rights. Describes advocacy work, documenting cases, use of theatre. Describes partnership with Ashtar Theatre, co-production of 'Hegeit Amna' with WATC, petition signed by audience for presentation to Palestinian Legislative Councils. Discusses importance of targeting different sectors simultaneously. Describes use of radio, 'Against Silence' programme on women's issues, publishing 'The Voice of Women' newspaper.

[56:30] Describes new initiative, training policemen in dealing with women. Study carried out on women running away from home, to facilitate shelter for women, Beit Zahour, Palestine. Comments that Beit Zahour chosen as location as people more tolerant and accepting. Describes women brought to shelter from Gaza, rehabilitated away from their environment. Remarks that theatre very effective tool for change. Discusses own writing and poetry as expression of social and physical barriers faced

by women, pain of loss as mother, pain of war as woman. Story about suffering discrimination in Lebanon when landlord discovered that RS Palestinian despite Jordanian passport, miscarrying child in fifth month of pregnancy.

[1:01:28] Describes tackling obstacles created for pregnant Palestinian women through training of midwives. Describes own experience of doctor refusing to come after water had broken with daughter born prematurely. Story about involvement with emergency response for Christian Lebanese including 13 nuns, after loss of homes in Moor area of Khalt, while in charge of Sabra refugee camp, Lebanon. Remarks that in war, women make peace. Mentions Hind Jowhariyeh.

Track 7 [duration: 28:21] [Session two: 23 December 2012]

[00:00] Discusses how people change, example of father wanting RS to be educated, but to not work. Comments on technology and media facilitating change. Discusses competition among coalition of women's organisations, struggle to change so unified, also with Human Rights organisations. Mentions Mwaten, Al Haq. Belief in women's rights as human rights. Describes successful coalitions for Family Law, Penal Code. Discusses interventions of Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza, internal division between Hamas and Fateh creating political division between areas, impacting on implementation of gender sensitive laws. Consideration of role of President as separate to legislative responsibilities. Work to raise marriage age, training younger boys and girls on women's issues so can bring to community, signing of petition presented to President's consultant then Chief Justice. Comments that new Chief Justice, Yusef Da'is supportive of women's rights, agreeing to idea of national coalition for women's law. Discusses predominant issues regarding Family Law.

[09:26] Examples of antagonism from community, manipulation of issues related to marriage with comparisons to the west. Describes marriage laws relating to rape.

[11:40] Describes discovery of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) through 'Leading to Choices' manual on leadership. Remarks that important milestone in RS' life. Describes effectiveness of training, producing leaders in community. Describes contributing gender component to manuals, WLP's positive response, provision of Internet Centre, Ramallah. Mentions another centre in Gaza, with support from Spain, still standing after Hamas attack on computer centres.

[18:17] Describes experience of WLP partner meetings, regional training. Mentions Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI), Jordan, Sakina Yaqubi. Discusses impact of partnership, giving strength, learning about others' experiences internalised. Mentions Asma Khader, Lina Abou Habib, Amina Lamrini. Describes sense of solidarity. Story about Mauritanian partner's action on attack on Gaza. Mentions Mahnaz Afkhami, Rakhee Goyal in translation of Moroccan women's experience, making available to wider audience. Comments on importance of Iranian One Million Signatures campaign for women in Arab world, WLP enabling women in Arab and Muslim world to learn from each other's experiences, network. Describes experience of giving talk at John Hopkins University, Maryland, United States of America (USA). Remarks on voices being heard in international community, through WLP.