

AMONG OUR REVIEWERS

SKIP SCHIEL, ETHICAL WITNESS PHOTOGRAPHER

“Riveting” was the word that reviewer Louise Dunlap and I used independently on reading Skip Schiel’s weekly journal postings from Palestine. Now we welcome Skip back to the Myers Outstanding Book Awards panel after a dramatic three-month stay in the occupied territories.

Skip is an ethical witness photographer. He lived with, observed, and learned through participation how Palestinians are resisting the injustices of occupation — one of them a 350+ mile wall of separation crazily placed with 700+ checkpoints and permanent obstacles between homes and farm land, between one family member and another.

On this, his third trip to the region, Skip offered his services to many community organizations. He taught photography and writing workshops to young people who wanted to gain additional skills to better get the real stories out about current realities for Palestinians. One photograph shows Skip with youth trainees of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).



Skip photographed and participated in several non-

violent demonstrations. About one in Bil’in, he noted:

At times, soldiers attempted to arrest or at least pull out Palestinians, but each time other Palestinians and internationals – this is where internationals play a crucial role – would grab onto the person pulled by the soldiers, hanging on, sometimes being dragged across the rocky terrain. And each time,



eventually, the soldiers relented, releasing the Palestinians.

Skip’s journal postings reflect on the experiences and context of the photos with intensity, often including the voices of the many working for peace and justice for the Palestinians. We do not see such photographs, or this level of discussion, in the mainstream media. His work takes us into the heart of the maelstrom of Palestinian reality. For example, on May 27th, while alternative media in this country were decrying internationally withheld medical supplies (boycotting the democratically elected Hamas government), Skip wrote:

The main work of the day was visiting Gaza City’s main hospital, Shifa. Calling it the house of suffering would not be

an exaggeration. Expertly toured by Mohanad Al-Helo, a medical doctor working for an advanced degree in community health, we visited sick and dying people, suffering not only from the usual pains and threats of life but the siege, the occupation, the problems induced by the current political conditions, especially the US-led funding slashes. Causes of the injuries include the factional violence that cuts down innocent children, hits by the Israeli army, and even family violence generated by the anxieties of the siege. Most revealing, most difficult to observe were the children. Some on IV tubes, some with advanced cancer, some with bodies distorted by congenital disease, and the babies in incubators.



The photos show the human face of anguish as parents stand by a dying child who could have been saved had not the medicine supply been cut off by our government. No cancer drugs, either, only palliatives; weekly dialysis treatments cut from three to two. ❖

QUOTE OF NOTE

It is not sufficient simply to condemn racism; it is necessary to act on the collective social conditions of its existence.

Albert Memmi