

# Four Years Ago Today

by Starhawk

March 16, 2007

Four years ago today, I was in Nablus in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement that supports the nonviolent movement among the Palestinians. I was also supporting my friend Neta Golan, an Israeli woman and one of the founders of ISM, now married to a Palestinian, who was about to give birth. I had spent a strangely idyllic day in a small village outside Nablus, where a group of ISM volunteers had gone because we'd received a report that the Israeli army was harassing villagers. When we got there, the army had left, the cyclamen and blood-red anemones were in bloom underneath ancient olive trees, and the villagers insisted we stay for a barbecue.

We were just passing through the checkpoint on our way back to Nablus when we got a call from Rafah, in the Gaza strip. Rachel Corrie, a young ISM volunteer, had trying to prevent an Israeli bulldozer from demolishing a home near the border. The bulldozer operator saw her, and went forward anyway, crushing her to death.

Rachel's death was a small preview of the horrific violence that the U.S. unleashed, three days later, with the invasion of Iraq. In Nablus, we were gearing up for a possible Israeli invasion when the war began. I was working with another volunteer, Brian Avery, to coordinate the team that would maintain a human rights witness in the Balata refugee camp on the outskirts of Nablus. I was also praying that Neta would not go into labor at some moment when the whole town would be under siege and we could not get to a hospital, and boning up on such midwifery knowledge as I possess. Perhaps I prayed too hard—she showed no signs of going into labor at all, and finally, in an act of great unselfishness, sent me down to Rafah to support the team there that had been with Rachel. I offered such comfort as I could to volunteers who were young enough that most had never before experienced the death of someone close to them.

It was a strange spring. I made it back to Nablus to support Neta's birth—but the joy of that event was tinged with horror, for the night before, Brian was shot in the face in Jenin by the Israeli military in an unprovoked attack on a group of international volunteers. All during Neta's labor, the nurses (yes, thank Goddess, we made it to the hospital!) kept turning on Al Jazeera which was showing scenes of the U.S. bombardment of Iraq. I kept turning it off. Even in a world full of war, I wanted her child to be born in a small island of peace.

I went to Jenin to support the team that had been with Brian, and then to Haifa to visit him where he was awaiting surgery. I spent much of the next weeks traveling

frenetically, often alone, through the one piece of ground on earth most difficult to travel in, where checkpoints truncate every route. The olive trees broke into leaf, and the almonds swelled into fuzzy green pods which the Palestinians eat young. They taste lemony, sharp and poignant, like the moment itself.

I visited with the Israeli Women in Black in Jerusalem, and trained ISM volunteers in Beit Sahour. A young British volunteer, Tom Hurndall, went down to Rafah straight from the training. Walking on the border, near where Rachel was killed, he saw a group of children under fire from an Israeli sniper tower. He ran beneath the rain of bullets, pulled a young boy to safety, went back again for another child. The sniper targeted him, shooting him in the head. So I went back to Rafah, that surreal town of rubble and barbed wire, ripe oranges and bullet holes, to support the team that had been with Tom

Everywhere I went, the sun shone, the flowers bloomed, and the army seemed to melt away, as if I carried some magic circle of protection. I was a long distance witness to death, a support for grief without suffering the searing personal pain that comes with the loss of a child, a parent, a lover. My own grief hit later, when I was home, and safe, and cried for weeks.

I cry now, every spring, here in California as the daffodils bloom and the plum trees flower. The beauty of spring is forever tinged, for me, with the grief and wonder and horror of that time: Neta sweating in labor while the TV news shows images of war, blood staining the wildflowers a deeper red.

I cry, and then I get I mad. Four years have gone by, and the killing still goes on—in Palestine, in Iraq, and if Bush has his way, in Iran. Ghosts haunt the green hills, shimmering like heat waves under an unnaturally hot sun: all the uncounted dead of this uncalled-for war, all those yet to die.

I've got a garden to plant, and a thousand things I'd rather do, but once again this spring, I'm gearing up for action. The peace marches have become boring, strident and predictable. To be absolutely honest, I hate marching around in the street chanting the same slogans I've been chanting for forty years. I'm going, anyway. I'm so tired of die-ins and sit-ins and predictable speeches shouted over bullhorns that I could scream if I weren't hearing in my ears the far more bitter screams of the dying. I'm even tired of trying to drum and sing and make the protest into a creative act of magic. It's not creative—it's a damn protest, and I have real creative work to do: books to write, courses to teach, and rituals to plan. Nonetheless, Sunday will find me trudging along on the peace march and Monday will find me lying down on Market Street in some picturesque fashion with a group of friends and our requisite banners.

Why? So I can look myself in the mirror without flinching, and answer to those hundred thousand ghosts. But more than that, because it's time, friends. Public opinion has turned—now we must make it mean something real. It's time to send the Democrats back to their committee meetings saying, "Hell, I can't even get into my office—the halls are blocked and the streets are choked with people angry about this war." Time to send the Republicans off to their caucuses murmuring quietly "If we continue to support this disaster we're going to lose every semblance of power or popular support we once possessed." Time to let the rest of the world know that dissent is alive and well here

in the U.S.A. Time to regenerate a movement as nature regenerates life in the spring, with the rising energy that alone can turn our interminable trudging into a dance of defiance.

You come, too. You can skip out on the boring speeches and make cynical remarks—but get your feet out on the street this weekend, somewhere. There's a thousand different actions planned around the country—and if you don't know where to go or what to do, check the websites below.

Act because hundreds of thousands who are now alive are marked for death if this war goes on or expands into Iran. Act because every perfumed flower and every bud that breaks into leaf this calls to us to cherish and safeguard life.

Starhawk  
[www.starhawk.org](http://www.starhawk.org)

For a listing of actions, check:

[www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org)

or

<http://declarationofpeace.org/march-16-19-nationwide-nonviolent-civil-disobedience>

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Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path*, as well as *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*; and eight other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the RANT trainer's collective, [www.rantcollective.org](http://www.rantcollective.org) that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.

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