

state of the union: in between dreams

For our *State of the Union* issue, we received some fascinating submissions and heard some great and illuminating stories. In this invited blog post, Israeli-based writer Jennifer Lang tells us of some tense moments in the summer of 2014, during the Israel-Gaza conflict that was called by many outlets *The Fifty Day War*:



In Between Dreams by Jennifer Lang

Day 13. I wake up, and the whole cycle starts all over again: email, Facebook, news threads, then texting my son, and whatsapping with my girls. I need to know my children are safe near Gaza, in Ghana, and Paris. We have raised them to want to explore the world, speak different languages, make friends with and respect others who are different from us, but everything happening around us seems to be sending them the opposing message: of hatred and anti-Semitism and small-mindedness.

At 8:45am, my yoga students arrive, and I crank up Jack Johnson's *In Between Dreams* album only to be interrupted twenty minutes later by my husband Philippe. "Azaka. Don't you hear it?" he says, dashing down the studio stairs. As soon as I lower the volume, the inimitable wail summons us. We walk into the window-less room. We stand with our arms crossed in front of our chests. We hear a close-by boom. We wait a few seconds. We return to our mats. I begin the sequence of poses from the beginning to recapture my train of thought and to block out all the other terrifying ones.

By midday, I'm unable to concentrate on my writing assignment, flitting back and forth to Facebook and ynet and jpost to see where sirens are sounding and trying to determine who's suffering more—Hamas or us.

When our former au pair Skypes me from Switzerland, I collapse. With our cameras on and our faces exposed, we cry. My head hurts and my stomach aches, and after we hang up, I force myself to step away from the screens. For the remainder of the afternoon, I lie on my bed, awake, my mind pounding.

Amidst the despair, we go out to dinner with close friends, a date we'd set in June, long before the operation began. Diners occupy every seat. Laughter and chitchat ring in my ears. Would we hear a siren if it sounded? Would we all fit into the restaurant's bomb shelter, assuming it has one? Before ordering, we acknowledge how weird we feel and wonder about Israeli protocol for times like this. "You can't stop living," our friend says. "*Yihiyeh beseder*, as they say," every Israeli's favorite expression for it'll be okay. I shove my phone across the table, toward Philippe. My head stops throbbing. I force myself to eat.

When, about an hour later, the white light on my phone blinks, a whatsapp from Daniella asking if we're safe, I answer immediately. Then Simone calls with the same question. They might be far away physically, but emotionally, they're here. Philippe and I arrive home close to midnight, realizing it's too late to call Benjamin. In bed, we hold each other and lull our bodies to sleep.

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