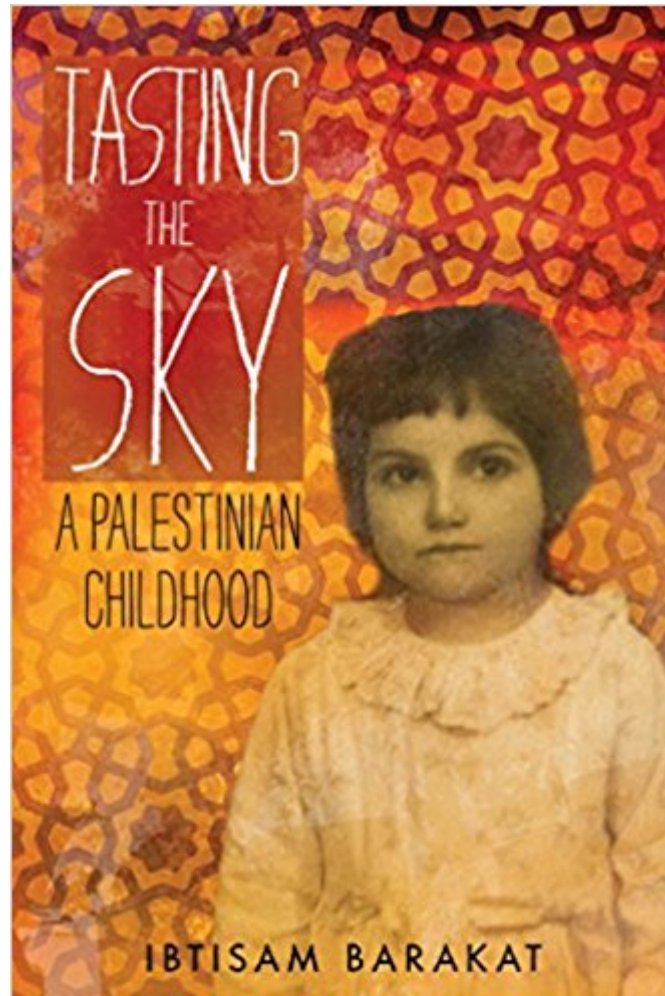




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Tasting The Sky: A Palestinian Childhood



Synopsis

"When a war ends it does not go away," my mother says. "It hides inside us . . . Just forget!" But I do not want to do what Mother says . . . I want to remember. In this groundbreaking memoir set in Ramallah during the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, Ibtisam Barakat captures what it is like to be a child whose world is shattered by war. With candor and courage, she stitches together memories of her childhood: fear and confusion as bombs explode near her home and she is separated from her family; the harshness of life in the Middle East as a Palestinian refugee; her unexpected joy when she discovers Alef, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. This is the beginning of her passionate connection to words, and as language becomes her refuge, allowing her to piece together the fragments of her world, it becomes her true home. Transcending the particulars of politics, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* is an illuminating and timely book that provides a telling glimpse into a part of the Middle East that has become an increasingly important part of the puzzle of world peace. Winner of the Arab American National Museum Book Award for Children's/YA Literature. "In vivid, beautiful prose, Ibtisam Barakat transports readers into a place few Westerners have ever seen—the interior life of a young girl and her family in the occupied West Bank. This book, appropriate for readers young and old, holds literature's great power: the power to humanize the other, and to therefore change the way we understand our world." —Sandy Tolan, author of *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East*

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 7 Up "This moving memoir of a Palestinian woman's childhood

experiences during the Six-Day War and its aftermath is presented in beautifully crafted vignettes. Barakat, now living and working in the United States, frames the story of her life between 1967 and 1970 with a pair of letters from herself as a high school student in 1981. Detained by soldiers during an ordinary bus trip, she was prompted to try to recall her shattered childhood and share her experiences with others around the world. She begins with a description of her three-year-old self, temporarily separated from her family in their first frantic flight from their Ramallah home as the war began. The author's love for the countryside and her culture shines through her bittersweet recollections. Careful choice of episodes and details brings to life a Palestinian world that may be unfamiliar to American readers, but which they will come to know and appreciate. Readers will be charmed by the writer-to-be as she falls in love with chalk, the Arabic alphabet, and the first-grade teacher who recognizes her abilities.

—Kathleen Isaacs, Towson University, MD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review In a spare, eloquent memoir, Barakat recalls life under military occupation. In 1981 the author, then in high school, boarded a bus bound for Ramallah. The bus was detained by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint on the West Bank, and she was taken to a detention center before being released. The episode triggers sometimes heart-wrenching memories of herself as a young child, at the start of the 1967 Six Days' War, as Israeli soldiers conducted raids, their planes bombed her home, and she fled with her family across the border to Jordan. She also recalls living under occupation and the thrill of being able to attend the United Nations school for refugees. The political upheaval is always in the background, but for young Barakat, much of the drama was in incidents that took place in everyday life.

B What makes the memoir so compelling is the immediacy of the child's viewpoint, which depicts both conflict and daily life without exploitation or sentimentality. An annotated bibliography will help readers fill in the facts. Hazel Rochman

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I found this a moving, poignant, powerful story of a girl growing up in war and under occupation. There are grim details in here, but Ibtisam captures the joy and delight of childhood and growing up more than anything else. I have purchased many copies of this book to give out to friends and family because I love to support independent writers, women writing their memoirs and books that go beyond politics and rhetoric to show us the true heart of humanity. Without exception everyone I have given the book to has been deeply touched by the story and in turn passed their copy on to

someone else. I do believe the world is made a better place by hearing well told stories of ALL people. This particular book fills a large void in world literature -- the voice of a Palestinian young woman!

Love the poetic writing and heartwrenching tale about Ibtisam as a little girl in Palestine. We read this as a family and learned so much about the time period and social mores of the culture.

This is a lovely book. I would strongly recommend it for a high school age child or young adult. (Part of 9th grade reading list for my state.)

I just finished reading this exquisite book by a writer I met 10 years ago at a writing retreat for women. Ibtisam struck me then as an exceptionally vibrant and talented young writer who gave me her favorite book of poems by Hafiz. She had just begun writing her memoir, *Tasting the Sky*, at the time so it was with delight I read that it had been published. The stars must have been dancing around this young woman as she wrote because her words sing across the pages, even while narrating the traumatic experience of fleeing her home at the age of 3 1/2 during the Six Day 1967 Arab-Israeli War, when she was separated from her parents and walked for days in bleeding bare feet before finding them. This is a story of a closely knit family who manage to gather every joy to be found as they struggle to rebuild their lives and make a home. Two loving brothers, a doting and dedicated father, the lively young girl herself and her strict but caring mother share a generosity of spirit and hopefulness that lifts what could be a story of victimization into one of ongoing hopefulness, and yes, forgiveness.

I used this book as a read aloud in my 5th grade daughter's homeschooling segment on the middle east. We both really enjoyed how the story was told and the details. It gave us a lot to discuss as far as the history of the Middle East, Israel, and Palestine. While many parts of the story were sad there was also an excellent sense of humor through the story. The chapter on circumcision was especially funny (and terrifying) especially as this topic was new to my daughter. I know we can debate Israel/Palestine until the end of time but as a resource to show how these conflicts affect us as children this story was an invaluable resource.

Bought this for my daughter for a school assignment but ended up reading it myself too. This is a classic childhood remembrance story combined with the horrors of war....definitely a deep book but

worth the investment...the author, about whom the book is about, still manages to leave the reader with a feeling of hope for the future despite the situational pain she faces during her journey...suitable for older kids, my daughter is 11 (advanced reader) and was able to comprehend the material, but some of the background info kinda flew over her head because she is not old enough to have really been exposed to something like this yet...

I borrowed a copy from the library because I wanted to educate my sons on how fortunate they are to live in America. They've been asking a lot of intense questions about other kids in different parts of the world and I thought perhaps they would learn something from this one. I picked it up last night to read it myself and could not put it down. In fact, I ended up ordering a copy for our own personal library ... this is a beautifully written memoir of a Palestinian childhood just after the Six Day War (which I know nothing about). This is about a little girl who never wanted to leave her family and this is about a little girl who fell in love with her letters and life and her family. This is a beautiful memoir that describes certain memories the child may have in such exquisite details that one cannot help but imagine it completely. This book is not a political book. The child doesn't understand why her country is being occupied by soldiers ... all she knows is that things are uncertain and times are hard. All she cares about is making sure that she won't get separated from her family again. This memoir also shares the memories of a childhood marked by poverty, by fear, by joy, by love and amazement. It is a small glimpse into the life of a young girl who is a refugee in her own country. The writing itself is poetical and I found myself reading the words over and over again just for the sheer simplicity of the words describing an ordinary moment that then becomes immortal in its grace. This is absolutely gorgeous and I hope the author will share more stories with us as her talent is real. 4/15/10

I highly recommend this childhood memoir by Palestinian-American writer Ibtisam Barakat. Amazingly poignant and powerful story of how she was forced with her family and hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians into exile in 1967. She never mentions politics in the whole book. But it is as vivid as Diary of Anne Frank about injustice. One of the best books I have ever read.

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