

## Photo story: Israeli bulldozer driver murders American peace activist

Nigel Parry and Arjan El Fassed, *The Electronic Intifada*, 16 March 2003



An ISM volunteer holds up Rachel Corrie's US passport as another peace activist sits in shock, Al-Najjar Hospital, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. Rachel was killed by an Israeli bulldozer driver while protesting the demolition of a Palestinian home. (Mohammad Al-Moghair)

On 16 March 2003 in Rafah, occupied Gaza, 23-year-old American peace activist Rachel Corrie from Olympia, Washington, was murdered by an Israeli bulldozer driver. Rachel was in Gaza opposing the bulldozing of a Palestinian home as a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement.

Rachel and seven other ISM activists were in the Hi Es Salam area of Rafah, Gaza, trying to prevent the razing of Palestinian land and property. Present were two Israeli occupation army bulldozers and a tank. For a period of two hours, the activists played 'cat and mouse', attempting to prevent the illegal demolitions by physically blocking the passage of the two bulldozers.

An e-mailed report from the Palestine Monitor stated:

"Rachel Corey [sic], 23 years old from the state of Washington, was killed while she was trying to prevent Israeli army bulldozers from destroying a Palestinian home. Other foreigners who were with her said the driver of the bulldozer was aware that Rachel was there, and continued to destroy the house. Initially he dropped sand and other heavy debris on her, then the bulldozer pushed her to the ground where it proceeded to drive over her, fracturing both of her arms, legs and skull. She was transferred to hospital, where she later died. Another foreigner was also injured in the attack and has been hospitalized - at this stage his nationality is unknown." (15 March 2003)



Rachel Corrie (ISM Handout)

A press release from the International Solidarity Movement stated that: "Rachel had been staying in Palestinian homes threatened with illegal demolition, and today Rachel was standing with other non-violent international activists in front of a home scheduled for illegal demolition. According to witnesses, Rachel was run over twice by the Israeli military bulldozer in its process of demolishing the Palestinian home. Witnesses say that Rachel was clearly visible to the bulldozer driver, and was doing nothing to provoke an attack." (15 March 2003)

The photos below clearly show that Rachel was well marked, had a megaphone which removes any doubt that the activists' presence was somehow invisible to the driver, and she clearly posed no threat to the bulldozer driver.



Picture taken between 3:00-4:00PM, 16 March 2003, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. Rachel Corrie (L) and Nick (R) oppose the potential destruction of this home (to the west of the Doctor's home where Rachel was killed).

In the instance pictured, the bulldozer did not stop and Rachel was pinned between the scooped earth and the fence behind her. On this occasion, the driver stopped before seriously injuring her. Photo by Joseph Smith (ISM Handout).



Picture taken between 3:00-4:00PM on 16 March 2003, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. A clearly marked Rachel Corrie, holding a megaphone, confronts the driver of one of two Israeli bulldozers in the area that were attempting to demolish a Palestinian homes. She was confronting the bulldozer in order to disrupt its work, and prevent it from threatening any homes. Photo by Joseph Smith. (ISM Handout)



Picture taken at 4:45PM on 16 March 2003, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. Other peace activists tend to Rachel after she was fatally injured by the driver of the Israeli bulldozer (in background). This photo was taken seconds after the bulldozer driver dragged his blade over her for the second time while reversing back over her body. He lifted the blade as seen in the photo only after he had dragged it back over Rachel's body. This image clearly shows that had he lifted his blade at any time he may have avoided killing her, as the bottom section of the bulldozer is raised off the ground. Photo by Richard Pursell. (ISM Handout)



Picture taken at 4:47PM on 16 March 2003, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. Rachel Corrie lies on the ground fatally injured by the Israeli bulldozer driver. Rachel's fellow activists have dug her a little out of the sand and are trying to keep her neck straight due to spinal injury. Photo by Joseph Smith. (ISM Handout)



Rachel in Najjar hospital, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. Rachel arrived in the emergency room at 5:05PM and doctors scrambled to save her. By 5:20PM, she was gone. *Ha'aretz* newspaper reported that Dr. Ali Musa, a doctor at Al-Najjar, stated that the cause of death was "skull and chest fractures". ([Mohammad Al-Moghair](#))

A later report from ISM Media Coordinator Michael Shaik in Beit Sahour offered more details about the events:

"The confrontation between the ISM and the Israeli Army had been under way for two hours when Rachel was run over. Rachel and the other activists had clearly identified themselves as unarmed international peace activists throughout the confrontation.

The Israeli Army are attempting to dishonour her memory by claiming that

Rachel was killed accidentally when she ran in front of the bulldozer. Eyewitnesses to the murder insist that this is totally untrue. Rachel was sitting in the path of the bulldozer as it advanced towards her. When the bulldozer refused to stop or turn aside she climbed up onto the mound of dirt and rubble being gathered in front of it wearing a fluorescent jacket to look directly at the driver who kept on advancing. The bulldozer continued to advance so that she was pulled under the pile of dirt and rubble. After she had disappeared from view the driver kept advancing until the bulldozer was completely on top of her. The driver did not lift the bulldozer blade and so she was crushed beneath it. Then the driver backed off and the seven other ISM activists taking part in the action rushed to dig out her body. An ambulance rushed her to A-Najar hospital where she died."



Colleagues of Rachel comfort each other in Najjar hospital, Rafah, Occupied Gaza. *Ha'aretz* newspaper reported that a second activist was also injured at the same location. (Mohammad Al-Moghair)

"This is a regrettable accident," Israeli Defence Forces [sic] spokesman Captain Jacob Dallal was reported as saying in *Ha'aretz* newspaper. "We are dealing with a group of protesters who were acting very irresponsibly, putting everyone in danger."

Members of the Israeli army and associated Israeli settler paramilitary units have been responsible for the killing of 2,181 Palestinians and the injuring of another 22,218 between 29 September 2000 and 14 March 2003.

In addition to the killing of Rachel Corrie by the bulldozer driver, Israeli troops have shot and killed several other internationals in different incidents during the Intifada: German doctor Harald Fischer, Italian cameraman Rafaeli Ciriello, and British United Nations worker Iain Hook.

*Nigel Parry and Arjan El Fassed are two founders of the Electronic Intifada. Michael Brown and Ken Harper also contributed to this report. Last updated: 21 March 2003 (added detail to captions in images and context to second paragraph).*

## Remembering Rachel Corrie

Peter Bohmer, *The Electronic Intifada*, 17 March 2003

Rachel Corrie was an incredibly good person. I mourn and am very saddened by her murder earlier today, 16 March 2003. She was killed by a bulldozer as the Israeli military ran over her as she was protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes in Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

Rachel grew up in Olympia, Wa. I originally met her when she was a student in the options program at Lincoln school around 1989. She was a friend of my son and played on the same YMCA basketball team as my daughter. Rachel and I talked a lot the last two years and marched together at various demos. Rachel was a totally caring and gentle person who was outraged by oppression wherever it took place and had become very active working for social justice and peace.



A memorial card for Rachel Corrie, surrounded by candles, at a peace vigil on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C., 16 March 2003. There was an announcement about Rachel and the hundreds of attendees observed a moment of silence for her. (Ali Hadjarian)

Rachel was a very modest and responsible person who was the heart and soul of the Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace, a group she had originally begun working with as part of her study in the Local Knowledge program taught by Anne Fischel and Lin Nelson. Rachel was very active in opposing the U.S. "war against terror" and U.S. militarism.

One project she threw her mind and body into was a September 11th, 2002 day against the U.S. war in Afghanistan and against repression at home at Percival Landing in downtown Olympia. She got a lot of elementary school kids and classes to participate.

So it is very fitting that the vigil tonight (Sunday, March 16th at 7 P.M.) against the war in Iraq and to honor and mourn Rachel, was at Percival Landing. Close to 1000 people attended.

Rachel was a very reflective person who constantly thought about how to link together various groups working for justice, e.g., the labor movement and the peace movement. She volunteered at the Evergreen Labor Center and played

a major role in organizing a conference dealing with networking and strategies for justice and peace last spring, 2002.

Another major concern of hers was to involve the local Olympia community that was not connected to Evergreen to the anti-war and economic and social justice issues and groups. Besides going to the Evergreen State College, Rachel also worked at BHR, a local mental health clinic and was active in her union, 1199, a part of SEIU.

Justice for the Palestinian people was one of many issues Rachel felt deeply about. She strongly opposed the Israeli occupation and supported a Palestinian state. For Rachel, feeling deeply always meant also doing something about her concerns.

She had studied Arabic at Evergreen and decided to go to the Gaza Strip in occupied Palestine for winter quarter. Part of her reasoning was that it was important to have international observers there as Israeli aggression was likely to increase when the U.S. attacked, bombed and invaded Iraq. She strongly opposed the U.S. war against Iraq.

Rachel was aware of the dangers and risks of going to Gaza. She left Olympia on January 18th of this year, went to the West Bank and then Gaza, threw herself fully into human rights activism and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

She volunteered with the International Solidarity Movement, people from around the world who have been witnesses to Israeli attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. She had planned to return to Evergreen State College for spring quarter to finish her studies.

Rachel Corrie will not be coming back to Olympia but let us all take a moment to reflect on what each of us can do to carry on her legacy by doing a little more to oppose war and further justice, equality and peace in the Middle East, around the world and in the U.S. Rachel Corrie was an ordinary and an extraordinary person.

*Peter Bohmer is a faculty member, professor of economics, at the Evergreen State College. He has been active in social justice movements from the late 1960's to the present.*

## Rachel's war - Part I

This weekend 23-year-old American peace activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death by a bulldozer as she tried to prevent the Israeli army destroying homes in the Gaza Strip. In a remarkable series of emails to her family, she explained why she was risking her life

**Tuesday March 18, 2003**

**The Guardian**

**February 7 2003**

Hi friends and family, and others,

I have been in Palestine for two weeks and one hour now, and I still have very few words to describe what I see. It is most difficult for me to think about what's going on here when I sit down to write back to the United States. Something about the virtual portal into luxury. I don't know if many of the children here have ever existed without tank-shell holes in their walls and the towers of an occupying army surveying them constantly from the near horizons. I think, although I'm not entirely sure, that even the smallest of these children understand that life is not like this everywhere. An eight-year-old was shot and killed by an Israeli tank two days before I got here, and many of the children murmur his name to me - Ali - or point at the posters of him on the walls. The children also love to get me to practice my limited Arabic by asking me, "Kaif Sharon?" "Kaif Bush?" and they laugh when I say, "Bush Majnoon", "Sharon Majnoon" back in my limited arabic. (How is Sharon? How is Bush? Bush is crazy. Sharon is crazy.) Of course this isn't quite what I believe, and some of the adults who have the English correct me: "Bush mish Majnoon" ... Bush is a businessman. Today I tried to learn to say, "Bush is a tool", but I don't think it translated quite right. But anyway, there are eight-year-olds here much more aware of the workings of the global power structure than I was just a few years ago.

Nevertheless, no amount of reading, attendance at conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just can't imagine it unless you see it - and even then you are always well aware that your experience of it is not at all the reality: what with the difficulties the Israeli army would face if they shot an unarmed US citizen, and with the fact that I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and the fact, of course, that I have the option of leaving. Nobody in my family has been shot, driving in their car, by a rocket launcher from a tower at the end of a major street in my hometown. I have a home. I am allowed to go see the ocean. When I leave for school or work I can be relatively certain that there will not be a heavily armed soldier waiting halfway between Mud Bay and downtown Olympia at a checkpoint with the power to decide whether I can go about my business, and whether I can get home again when I'm done. As an afterthought to all this rambling, I am in Rafah: a city of about 140,000 people, approximately 60% of whom are refugees - many of whom are twice or three times refugees. Today, as I walked on top of the rubble where homes once stood, Egyptian soldiers called to me from the other side of the border, "Go! Go!" because a tank was coming. And then waving and "What's your name?". Something disturbing about this

friendly curiosity. It reminded me of how much, to some degree, we are all kids curious about other kids. Egyptian kids shouting at strange women wandering into the path of tanks. Palestinian kids shot from the tanks when they peak out from behind walls to see what's going on. International kids standing in front of tanks with banners. Israeli kids in the tanks anonymously - occasionally shouting and also occasionally waving - many forced to be here, many just aggressive - shooting into the houses as we wander away.

I've been having trouble accessing news about the outside world here, but I hear an escalation of war on Iraq is inevitable. There is a great deal of concern here about the "reoccupation of Gaza". Gaza is reoccupied every day to various extents but I think the fear is that the tanks will enter all the streets and remain here instead of entering some of the streets and then withdrawing after some hours or days to observe and shoot from the edges of the communities. If people aren't already thinking about the consequences of this war for the people of the entire region then I hope you will start.

My love to everyone. My love to my mom. My love to smooch. My love to fg and barnhair and sesamees and Lincoln School. My love to Olympia.

Rachel

**February 20 2003**

Mama,

Now the Israeli army has actually dug up the road to Gaza, and both of the major checkpoints are closed. This means that Palestinians who want to go and register for their next quarter at university can't. People can't get to their jobs and those who are trapped on the other side can't get home; and internationals, who have a meeting tomorrow in the West Bank, won't make it. We could probably make it through if we made serious use of our international white person privilege, but that would also mean some risk of arrest and deportation, even though none of us has done anything illegal.

The Gaza Strip is divided in thirds now. There is some talk about the "reoccupation of Gaza", but I seriously doubt this will happen, because I think it would be a geopolitically stupid move for Israel right now. I think the more likely thing is an increase in smaller below-the-international-outcry-radar incursions and possibly the oft-hinted "population transfer".

I am staying put in Rafah for now, no plans to head north. I still feel like I'm relatively safe and think that my most likely risk in case of a larger-scale incursion is arrest. A move to reoccupy Gaza would generate a much larger outcry than Sharon's assassination-during-peace-negotiations/land grab strategy, which is working very well now to create settlements all over, slowly but surely eliminating any meaningful possibility for Palestinian self-determination. Know that I have a lot of very nice Palestinians looking after me. I have a small flu bug, and got some very nice lemony drinks to cure me. Also, the woman who keeps the key for the well where we still sleep keeps asking me about you. She doesn't speak a bit of English, but she asks about my mom pretty frequently - wants to make sure I'm calling you.

Love to you and Dad and Sarah and Chris and everybody.

## **Rachel's War - Part II**

**February 27 2003**

(To her mother)

Love you. Really miss you. I have bad nightmares about tanks and bulldozers outside our house and you and me inside. Sometimes the adrenaline acts as an anesthetic for weeks and then in the evening or at night it just hits me again - a little bit of the reality of the situation. I am really scared for the people here. Yesterday, I watched a father lead his two tiny children, holding his hands, out into the sight of tanks and a sniper tower and bulldozers and Jeeps because he thought his house was going to be exploded. Jenny and I stayed in the house with several women and two small babies. It was our mistake in translation that caused him to think it was his house that was being exploded. In fact, the Israeli army was in the process of detonating an explosive in the ground nearby - one that appears to have been planted by Palestinian resistance.

This is in the area where Sunday about 150 men were rounded up and contained outside the settlement with gunfire over their heads and around them, while tanks and bulldozers destroyed 25 greenhouses - the livelihoods for 300 people. The explosive was right in front of the greenhouses - right in the point of entry for tanks that might come back again. I was terrified to think that this man felt it was less of a risk to walk out in view of the tanks with his kids than to stay in his house. I was really scared that they were all going to be shot and I tried to stand between them and the tank. This happens every day, but just this father walking out with his two little kids just looking very sad, just happened to get my attention more at this particular moment, probably because I felt it was our translation problems that made him leave.

I thought a lot about what you said on the phone about Palestinian violence not helping the situation. Sixty thousand workers from Rafah worked in Israel two years ago. Now only 600 can go to Israel for jobs. Of these 600, many have moved, because the three checkpoints between here and Ashkelon (the closest city in Israel) make what used to be a 40-minute drive, now a 12-hour or impassible journey. In addition, what Rafah identified in 1999 as sources of economic growth are all completely destroyed - the Gaza international airport (runways demolished, totally closed); the border for trade with Egypt (now with a giant Israeli sniper tower in the middle of the crossing); access to the ocean (completely cut off in the last two years by a checkpoint and the Gush Katif settlement). The count of homes destroyed in Rafah since the beginning of this intifada is up around 600, by and large people with no connection to the resistance but who happen to live along the border. I think it is maybe official now that Rafah is the poorest place in the world. There used to be a middle class here - recently. We also get reports that in the past, Gazan flower shipments to Europe were delayed for two weeks at the Erez crossing for security inspections. You can imagine the value of two-week-old cut flowers in the European market, so that market dried up. And then the bulldozers come and take out people's vegetable farms and gardens. What is left for people? Tell me if you can think of anything. I can't.

If any of us had our lives and welfare completely strangled, lived with children in a shrinking place where we knew, because of previous experience, that soldiers and tanks and bulldozers could come for us at any moment and destroy all the greenhouses that we had been cultivating for however long, and did this while some of us were beaten and held captive with 149 other people for several hours - do you think we might try to use somewhat violent means to protect whatever fragments remained? I think about this especially when I see orchards and greenhouses and fruit trees destroyed - just years of care and cultivation. I think about you and how long it takes to make things grow and what a labour of love it is. I really think, in a similar situation, most people would defend themselves as best they could. I think Uncle Craig would. I think probably Grandma would. I think I would.

You asked me about non-violent resistance.

When that explosive detonated yesterday it broke all the windows in the family's house. I was in the process of being served tea and playing with the two small babies. I'm having a hard time right now. Just feel sick to my stomach a lot from being doted on all the time, very sweetly, by people who are facing doom. I know that from the United States, it all sounds like hyperbole. Honestly, a lot of the time the sheer kindness of the people here, coupled with the overwhelming evidence of the wilful destruction of their lives, makes it seem unreal to me. I really can't believe that something like this can happen in the world without a bigger outcry about it. It really hurts me, again, like it has hurt me in the past, to witness how awful we can allow the world to be. I felt after talking to you that maybe you didn't completely believe me. I think it's actually good if you don't, because I do believe pretty much above all else in the importance of independent critical thinking. And I also realise that with you I'm much less careful than usual about trying to source every assertion that I make. A lot of the reason for that is I know that you actually do go and do your own research. But it makes me worry about the job I'm doing. All of the situation that I tried to enumerate above - and a lot of other things - constitutes a somewhat gradual - often hidden, but nevertheless massive - removal and destruction of the ability of a particular group of people to survive. This is what I am seeing here. The assassinations, rocket attacks and shooting of children are atrocities - but in focusing on them I'm terrified of missing their context. The vast majority of people here - even if they had the economic means to escape, even if they actually wanted to give up resisting on their land and just leave (which appears to be maybe the less nefarious of Sharon's possible goals), can't leave. Because they can't even get into Israel to apply for visas, and because their destination countries won't let them in (both our country and Arab countries). So I think when all means of survival is cut off in a pen (Gaza) which people can't get out of, I think that qualifies as genocide. Even if they could get out, I think it would still qualify as genocide. Maybe you could look up the definition of genocide according to international law. I don't remember it right now. I'm going to get better at illustrating this, hopefully. I don't like to use those charged words. I think you know this about me. I really value words. I really try to illustrate and let people draw their own conclusions.

Anyway, I'm rambling. Just want to write to my Mom and tell her that I'm witnessing this chronic, insidious genocide and I'm really scared, and questioning my fundamental belief in the goodness of human nature. This has to stop. I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop. I

don't think it's an extremist thing to do anymore. I still really want to dance around to Pat Benatar and have boyfriends and make comics for my coworkers. But I also want this to stop. Disbelief and horror is what I feel. Disappointment. I am disappointed that this is the base reality of our world and that we, in fact, participate in it. This is not at all what I asked for when I came into this world. This is not at all what the people here asked for when they came into this world. This is not the world you and Dad wanted me to come into when you decided to have me. This is not what I meant when I looked at Capital Lake and said: "This is the wide world and I'm coming to it." I did not mean that I was coming into a world where I could live a comfortable life and possibly, with no effort at all, exist in complete unawareness of my participation in genocide. More big explosions somewhere in the distance outside.

When I come back from Palestine, I probably will have nightmares and constantly feel guilty for not being here, but I can channel that into more work. Coming here is one of the better things I've ever done. So when I sound crazy, or if the Israeli military should break with their racist tendency not to injure white people, please pin the reason squarely on the fact that I am in the midst of a genocide which I am also indirectly supporting, and for which my government is largely responsible.

I love you and Dad. Sorry for the diatribe. OK, some strange men next to me just gave me some peas, so I need to eat and thank them.

Rachel

**February 28 2003**

(To her mother)

Thanks, Mom, for your response to my email. It really helps me to get word from you, and from other people who care about me.

After I wrote to you I went incommunicado from the affinity group for about 10 hours which I spent with a family on the front line in Hi Salam - who fixed me dinner - and have cable TV. The two front rooms of their house are unusable because gunshots have been fired through the walls, so the whole family - three kids and two parents - sleep in the parent's bedroom. I sleep on the floor next to the youngest daughter, Iman, and we all shared blankets. I helped the son with his English homework a little, and we all watched Pet Semetary, which is a horrifying movie. I think they all thought it was pretty funny how much trouble I had watching it. Friday is the holiday, and when I woke up they were watching Gummy Bears dubbed into Arabic. So I ate breakfast with them and sat there for a while and just enjoyed being in this big puddle of blankets with this family watching what for me seemed like Saturday morning cartoons. Then I walked some way to B'razil, which is where Nidal and Mansur and Grandmother and Rafat and all the rest of the big family that has really wholeheartedly adopted me live. (The other day, by the way, Grandmother gave me a pantomimed lecture in Arabic that involved a lot of blowing and pointing to her black shawl. I got Nidal to tell her that my mother would appreciate knowing that someone here was giving me a lecture about smoking turning my lungs black.) I met their sister-in-law, who is visiting from Nusserat camp, and played with her small baby.

Nidal's English gets better every day. He's the one who calls me, "My sister". He started teaching Grandmother how to say, "Hello. How are you?" In English. You can always hear the tanks and bulldozers passing by, but all of these people are genuinely cheerful with each other, and with me. When I am with Palestinian friends I tend to be somewhat less horrified than when I am trying to act in a role of human rights observer, documenter, or direct-action resister. They are a good example of how to be in it for the long haul. I know that the situation gets to them - and may ultimately get them - on all kinds of levels, but I am nevertheless amazed at their strength in being able to defend such a large degree of their humanity - laughter, generosity, family-time - against the incredible horror occurring in their lives and against the constant presence of death. I felt much better after this morning. I spent a lot of time writing about the disappointment of discovering, somewhat first-hand, the degree of evil of which we are still capable. I should at least mention that I am also discovering a degree of strength and of basic ability for humans to remain human in the direst of circumstances - which I also haven't seen before. I think the word is dignity. I wish you could meet these people. Maybe, hopefully, someday you will.