



# A Street Divided: Stories From Jerusalem's Alley of God

*Dion Nissenbaum*

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It has been the home to priests and prostitutes, poets and spies. It has been the stage for an improbable flirtation between an Israeli girl and a Palestinian boy living on opposite sides of the barbed wire that separated enemy nations. It has even been the scene of an unsolved international murder. This one-time shepherd's path between Jerusalem and Bethlehem has been a dividing line for decades. Arab families called it "*al Mantiqa Haram*." Jewish residents knew it as "*shetach hefker*." In both languages, in both Israel and Jordan, it meant the same thing: "the Forbidden Area." Peacekeepers that monitored the steep fault line dubbed it "Barbed Wire Alley." To folks on either side of the border, it was the same thing: A dangerous no-man's land separating warring nations and feuding cultures in the Middle East. The barbed wire came down in 1967. But it was soon supplanted by evermore formidable cultural, emotional and political barriers separating Arab and Jew.

For nearly two decades, coils of barbed wire ran right down the middle of what became Assael Street, marking the fissure between Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem and Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem. In a beautiful narrative, Dion Nissenbaum's *A Street Divided* offers a more intimate look at one road at the heart of the conflict, where inches really do matter.

The author is a convert to Islam.

## A Street Divided: Stories From Jerusalem's Alley of God Details

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## **From Reader Review A Street Divided: Stories From Jerusalem's Alley of God for online ebook**

### **Sylvia says**

It's terribly sad and frustrating to learn via the people who live in this area (Jew and Palestinian) what colonization, followed by corruption, fear, ignorance, and hate can do to a country and its inhabitants.

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### **Adam Ashton says**

I love this street level view of dividing lines between Israel and Palestine. Dion brings out intimate portraits of Arab and Jewish families living side by side, often uncomfortably. The book works because it takes us inside the homes of real people living one of the world's great flash points. Worth your time.

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### **Meredith says**

I received this book through a Goodreads giveaway.

You hear about Israel and the Palestinians on the news almost every night. Reports of bombings and shootings are the only topics the reporters cover. This book, however, written and researched by a reporter, looks more closely at the individuals living in the heart of the fighting in Jerusalem. Dion Nissenbaum put together a remarkable book composed of stories and life events experienced by those, Jewish and Muslim, living on Assaell Street. This area was once deemed 'No Man's Land' due to the poor planning after Israel became a nation. Today, the street is on the edge of both the Israeli side and Palestinian side of Jerusalem. One side of the street is Jewish, while the other side is Muslim. The stories of individuals are amazing. This book reads like a novel. I could not put it down. If you are looking for reasons why there is constant fighting, this book is able to convey the emotions of everyday citizens living in a war-zone, instead of just what politicians and reporters say. I loved this book.

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### **Linda Fisher says**

#### **Boring**

I felt like I was reading the same chapter over and over. It is a true story but there are few memorable characters. The street is the important issue and it gets very boring after a few chapters.

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### **Jennifer says**

A Street Divided: Stories from Jerusalem's Alley of God by Dion Nissenbaum is a remarkable true story set in one of the most conflicted areas of the world. Assael Street, separating West and East Jerusalem, once

lined with barbed wire, is the setting for Nissenbaum's expertly crafted telling of the stories on this 300-yard long dead end street, which separates Jews from Muslims. Readers are reminded that even in a world of conflict, there are neighborhoods where people of differing backgrounds and beliefs learn to co-exist. Nissenbaum sensitively writes about the families and their daily interactions with those on the other side of the street, including the turmoil created when animals from one side of the street find their way into the region called "no man's land". I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the lives of the families living on the edge of Israel and Palestine for Nissenbaum has truthfully brought to readers around the world a glimpse into life in this unusual place in the Middle East.

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### **Mandy says**

This moving and saddening book explores the history of Assael Street in the mixed Jerusalem neighbourhood of Abu Tor, where Jews live on one side and Muslims on the other. For decades it marked the border between Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem and Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem, and was a dangerous, even lethal, no-man's land separating 2 nations. The author takes us into the lives of the Jewish and Palestinian neighbours and it's a must-read for anyone wanting to find out more about the conflict. Told with sympathy and understanding, well-researched and detailed, it's a valuable window into how tragic and difficult life is for those who live in such a troubled and disputed area.

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### **Ruthie says**

I had read reviews that called this book biased, but I decided to see for myself. I was intrigued by some of the summaries and reviews that portrayed this as a study of a tiny street and how life has been lived on this street throughout the years of the conflict. The author expanded far beyond the realm of the street and the challenges of its residents - partially to give context, but more often to show support for the Palestinian cause, never the Israeli point of view. Sadly, the author (who is a convert to Islam) couldn't control his personal point of view - quotes are always aimed at condemning Israel and its supporters while polishing the Palestinian viewpoint. Rock and rocket throwers are always "protestors" and any police or military response is always the focus - the reason for the response, mentioned as an afterthought.

I was truly hoping for an impartial, rational view into the conflict as it played out on this tiny street, but do not feel that is what this book provided. Sometimes the author reluctantly gave interesting points of view that veered from his narrative - Palestinians who would rather be citizens of Israel than a Palestinian state- but it feels like this is painful for him to write.

As someone who has conflicted feeling about this whole subject I was hoping for an objective examination of the issues, but sadly it was not found here. BTW - the whole summary (above) about priests and prostitutes, flirting, etc is barely mentioned, never mind any kind of focus of the book - false advertising!

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### **Chris says**

Disclaimer: ARC via Netgalley.

While Nissenbaum's title refers to a street that is home to both Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem, the title does describe any street really. A street cuts though; it separates two blocks or two sides from each. True, it

usually isn't a huge separation, and one that is easily solved by crossing the street. In most cities, you can even hear the noise from the residents across the street. A street by its nature is at once a way of transportation, a way of bringing together, and a way of separating.

Nissenbaum's street is in a neighborhood of Jerusalem, it is a border street, the flashpoint as it were, and yet it is also a street where Christians, Jews, and Muslims co-existed with various degrees of success. This street is, today, called Assael Street, though it existed far back in history and religion. It is a street where Nissenbaum himself lived.

The history of the area is traced first, and there is the story of the lost denatures which raises all types of questions – you can save teeth. Then, Nissenbaum chronicles the views and lives of various residents, both Muslim and Jewish. It is to Nissenbaum's credit that he does such an even-handed job in depicting the various conflicts that occur on the street. There is a story about writing/painting on a wall, and Nissenbaum's reporting of this conflict between a Muslim family and the Jewish woman whose wall was painted on, not only capture two different cultures but also different ways to look at what should have been done. In other words, Nissenbaum doesn't take sides.

This is true even when the case isn't simply one of Muslim vs. Jew. There is a chapter that describes a Jewish family that moved into the neighborhood. When the daughter reaches her teen years and draws unwanted attention from the young Muslim boys in the neighborhood. The interesting thing is reading the interaction of the parents. The father thinks it is boys being boys; the mother is upset, not so much because of who the boys are, but because of what they are doing. She objects to the cat-calling, and when she talks about culture in this context, she seems to be referring to modern day versus back then. It's a wonderful use of reporting because it captures the discussion about catcalling, one that occurs in a great many places, as well as division between men and women in how it is viewed.

And perhaps that is the point.

Nissenbaum looks at the impact of Israel on its Arab citizens, on how Jews combat various isms, and how Muslims do. He looks at the conflict over land. But at the heart of this book is how alike everyone is, whether or not they know it. How, regardless of the family, fathers and son view things differently, the "war" between eh genders, the need to put friendship first. In many ways, the book appeals to the humanity of people – like the story of the denatures that starts the book.

Perhaps, there is hope after all if we use the street differently.

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### **Athena says**

Full disclosure: this book was written by a friend. A personal, vivid, heart-felt account of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict told through the history of a single street, a dividing line between warring populations that has long been shared by people on both sides. Incredible, indelible stories that sum up the problem facing the region -- and specifically the city of Jerusalem-- in a way nothing else I've read has.

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### **Linda Tortorici says**

(In compliance with FTC Guidelines, I disclose That I have received a copy of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads Program).

Assael Street, as.sa.el "made by God".

A former sheep path on Jerusalem's hillside. Prior to the 1967 Six-day war, this divided residential street functioned at times as both the official and unofficial DMZ of a divided Jerusalem. A no-man's land, controlled neither by Israel or Jordan. After the war the barbed wire came down, and Palestinian and Jewish neighbors faced-off as neighbors do, on a daily basis.

Author Dion Nissenbaum, himself a past resident of the Abu Tor neighborhood, traces the history of this little street, along with putting human faces to the anonymous lives struggling to make homes for themselves.

If you suspect this book may be skewed toward pro-Zionism, you are emphatically mistaken. The stories related are important and at times heart-wrenching. Although these accountings may conversely, not be quite as unbiased or objective as the author believes.

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### **Alicia Arrick says**

Found the stories interesting but author jumped around too much with the timeline. It was difficult to follow what happened when, which families lived there during which timeframe.

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### **Bob H says**

This is a nonfiction book about generations of families living on either side of what had been the 1949-1967 ceasefire line in Jerusalem, and then re-named Assael Street (or Asa'el, the very spellings are in dispute). It's a place with a view of the Temple Mount, and its neighborhood -- Abu Tor -- is also on the Hill of Evil Counsel, where Judas supposedly met with Caiaphas, and where Moshe Dayan and his Jordanian counterpart, in 1949, would draw a ceasefire line on a map, divide a neighborhood with two grease pencils, and leave a permanent border, sometimes visibly barricaded, sometimes not so visibly.

The book reads, oddly enough, like a James Michener saga with its focus on the families there, but it is sensitively written, and about real people on the knife-edge: a small dead-end street on the border between East and West Jerusalem. The author is at his best at telling the stories of several families, Jewish and Palestinian, over the years as their goats and chickens stray into no man's land, as Israeli and Jordanian soldiers snipe at the residents (some times fatally) and UN officers negotiate border alignment and, in one case, look for dentures dropped in the zone.

We learn about the brief conciliation and tentative friendships of these neighbors after the 1967 war and the replacement of barbed wire with a common street, and the gradual hardening of suspicions as outside events affect these people. The author's a bit conclusory in his review of outside events but he does show how these people are affected personally, as security checkpoints tighten, as the Israeli occupation questions house and property ownership, as they encounter hassles over ID and building permits, as an oversized new building goes up smack in the middle of the neighborhood. A new wall is coming, proposed as a division between

East and West Jerusalem, to this very place, again.

The narrative does leap back and forth in time, although the author's focus on a few families helps keep it coherent. He has a sympathetic way of writing about these people, Palestinian and Israeli, that does shade toward the former, although it's more a matter of telling about personal misfortune rather than getting into polemics. *Vae victis.*

The book is worthwhile as sociology, a story of how events and a very unique geography affects a small neighborhood. It's not so much a "microcosm" of the larger conflict as it is a camera, a street view during some stormy decades. Strongly recommend.

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### **The Jewish Book Council says**

Review by Joy Getnick for the Jewish Book Council.

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