

Shifra Jacobs

## What Gives You Hope?

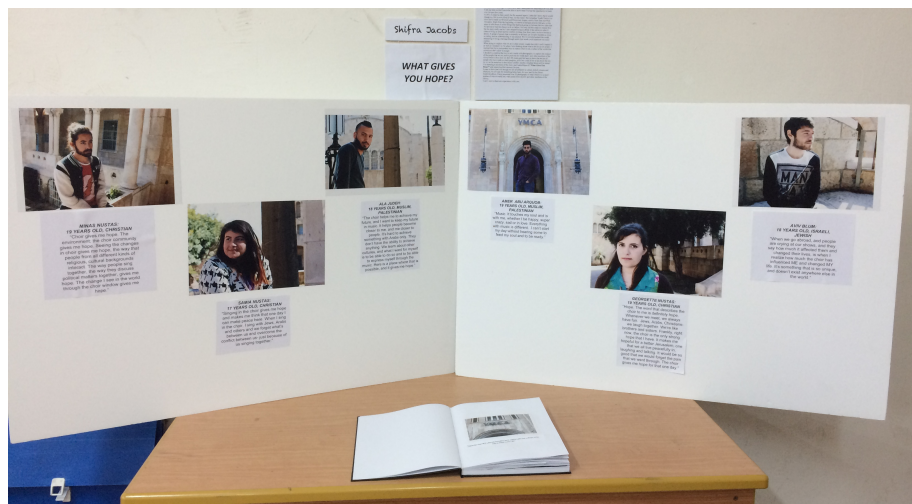
When thinking about what to choose to do my art project on, I knew it needed to be something that was close to my heart, and something through which I could express what direction I wanted to go in, artistically.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to completely step outside of what you're used to and comfortable with, in order to learn more about human individuality? If I'm a hundred percent honest, that kind of thought would never have entered my head a few years ago. It's only now, that I understand the importance of it all, that I can say how excited I am to be able to show what I've had the opportunity to learn over the past few years.

In 2012, I joined a choir, purely for the musical aspect. Little did I know that it would change my life in every kind of way - for the better. The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is a choir that is made up of Israeli and Palestinian singers, mainly from East and West Jerusalem. Right from the beginning, we started a dialogue process that gave us the space to talk about all of the things that had been going on between the two sides that we had never had the chance to do so before. Not only did this make me realise how big the story really can be, I also stopped being so afraid of the unknown when it came to living in Israel and the conflict.

In these four short years, we have become a family. A group of people that is societally so divided, yet we have become so close, so caring, and so understanding of one another. We've travelled around the world, attempting to bring a message through music that words could somehow not really explain.

When trying to explain what we do to other people, words also didn't really explain it as well as I wanted it to. So when I was thinking about what to do for the art project, I realised that this is just another way to express what we do, in place of the words that sometimes don't show it enough. I decided to combine the two; to mix words with photographs, to capture the essence of the people that we are, and to print out the words that I, and other members of the chorus believe show how we feel.



My main goal has been to show that we are all people who have made so much progress, and if we could all try to put down the limits we set for ourselves in this messy conflict, maybe a brighter future will be ahead. I'm featuring 6 members of the choir, and I asked them all "**What Gives You Hope?**" and presenting their answers for you.

I want to show that even though we are all different in culture, beliefs, dreams, and lifestyles, we all hope for something better here, for now, and for the future.

Inside the album, I have presented over 50 photographs of what I believe is a small portion of who we really are, with quotes from myself, and other members of the chorus.

I can't wait to share our experiences with you.



"I had no idea when I first walked into this building, that it would be a place that would give me the space to change my entire life."





'We meet here every week, even if there is war, fear or the loss of hope,  
to try to create a better future for the place we live in.'



'We stop being what everybody in society labels us as, and we start being whoever we want to be.'





'Sometimes I wonder if anybody else knows about the little world that we've created here—that's really not so little at all.'







Sometimes we just start playing music, and nothing else really matters in that moment other than sounding good as a whole entity of people.'





'It's not always easy, but it's always there.'





'We've stopped being a group of Israelis' and Palestinians' that sing together,  
Because we became a family years ago.'



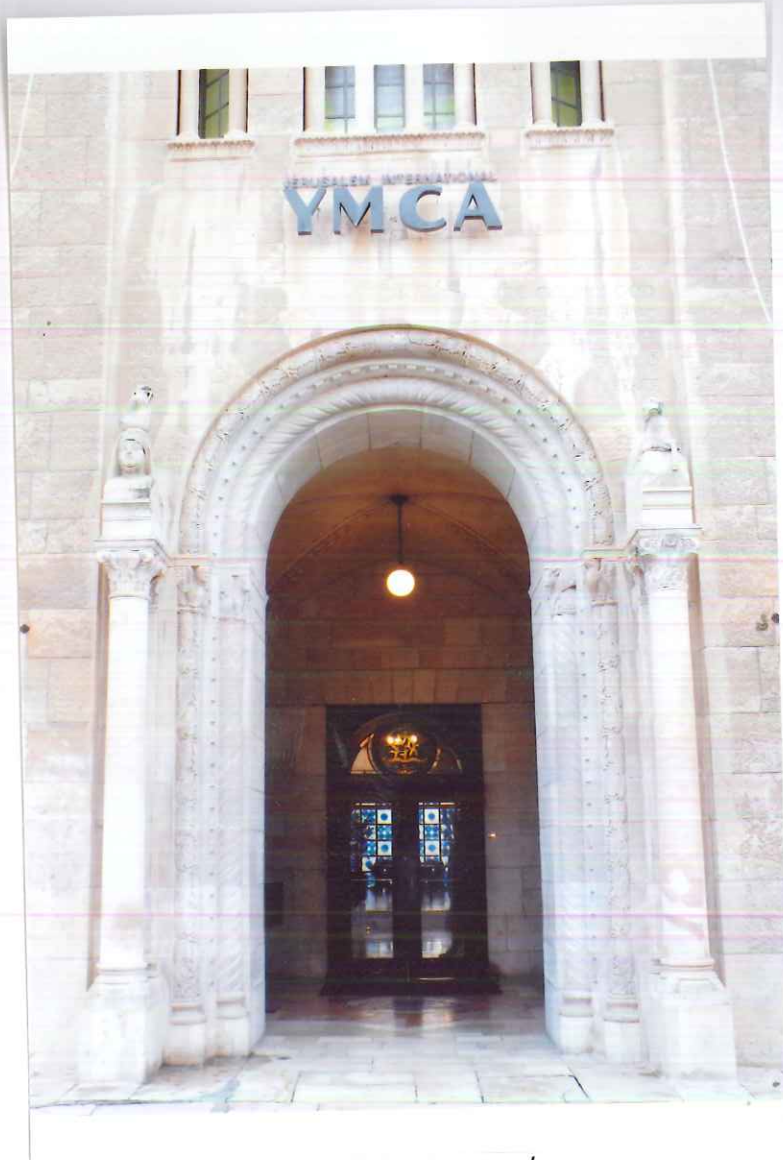


'We accept anyone and everyone, before they even know who they are and what there is to accept,

And it is within that, that our true selves get found.'







*'It's just a second home.'*

'Sometimes it's scary to think about what's going on around us,



And the only place I truly feel safe is in the choir.'

'Jerusalem has so much beauty, and so much pain



And we want to **emphasise the beauty.**'





'Everything we do, we do as a group. During the first year of the choir, the staff members told us on a trip we were on that a winning group of a contest we were doing would be able to sing abroad. When it was over, the winning group needed to decide whether they wanted to go, and the entire choir started chanting:

***'We don't go anywhere, unless we go together.'***



'My dream is to show as many people as possible how real the love we have for each other really is.'



And how achievable it really is.'





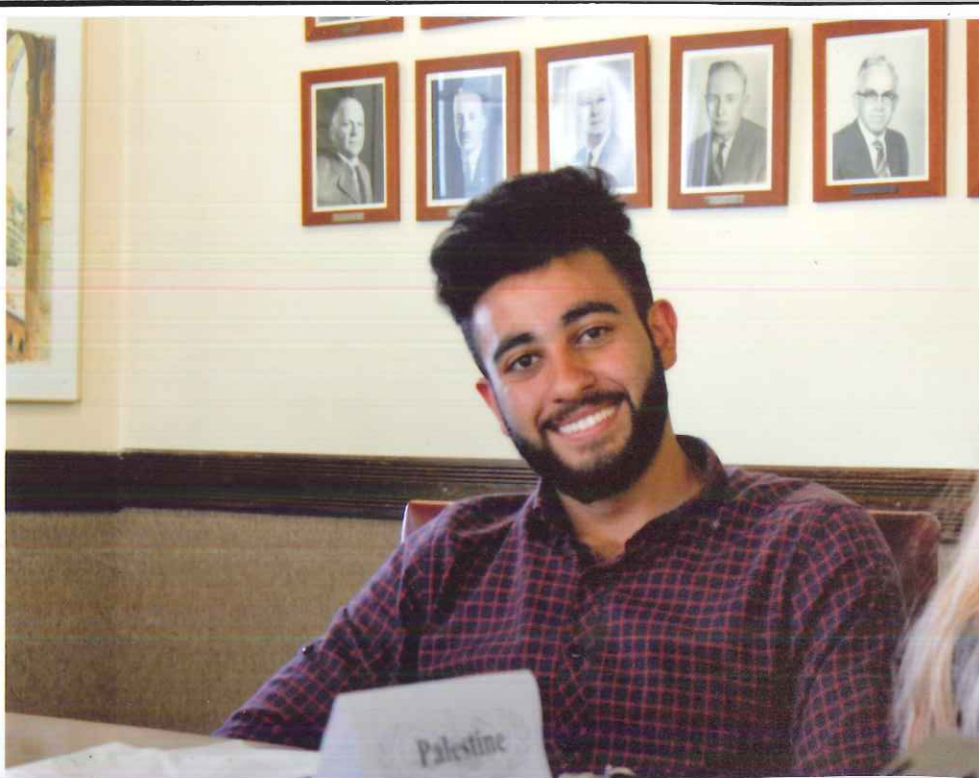
'For us, expression is key. Even when it's difficult, we talk about it,  
And even when we talk about it, it's difficult. But we don't stop moving forwards.'



'We never stop trying to be better people than we already have become,



And I think that's why we work. We never stop learning.'

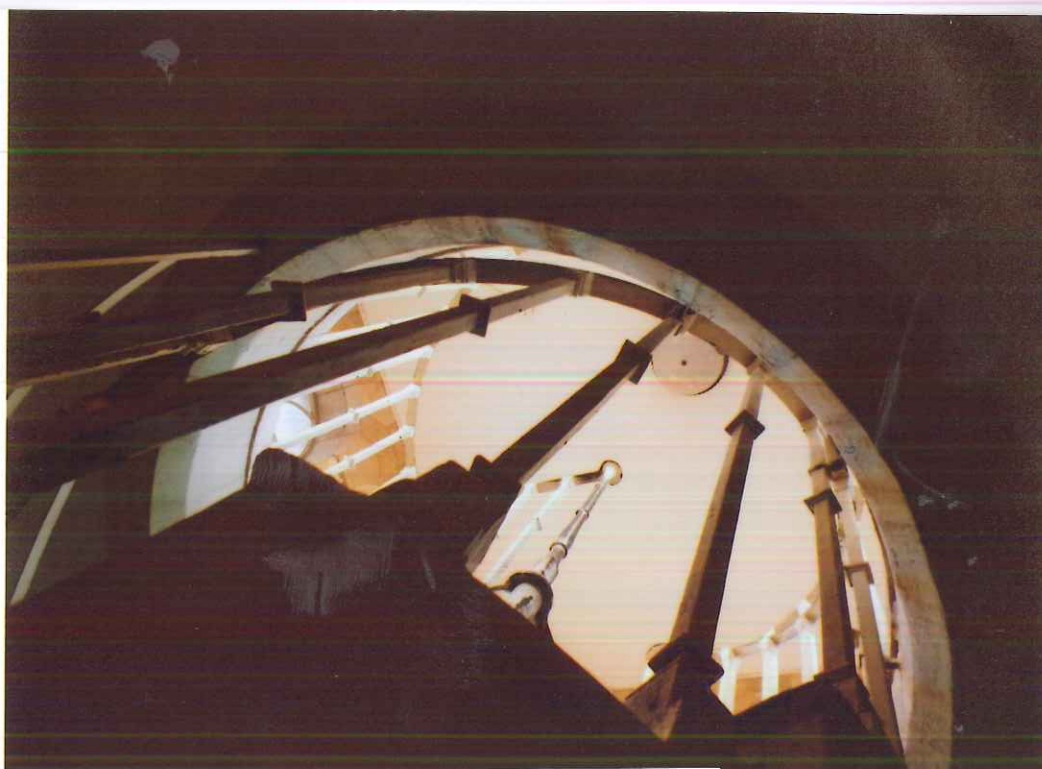


'Once you turn the lights on and see what was in the darkness, it stops scaring you.'

'We know that with each day, we're doing something meaningful. It's such an honor to be a part of.'







'The only way we can go is up.'

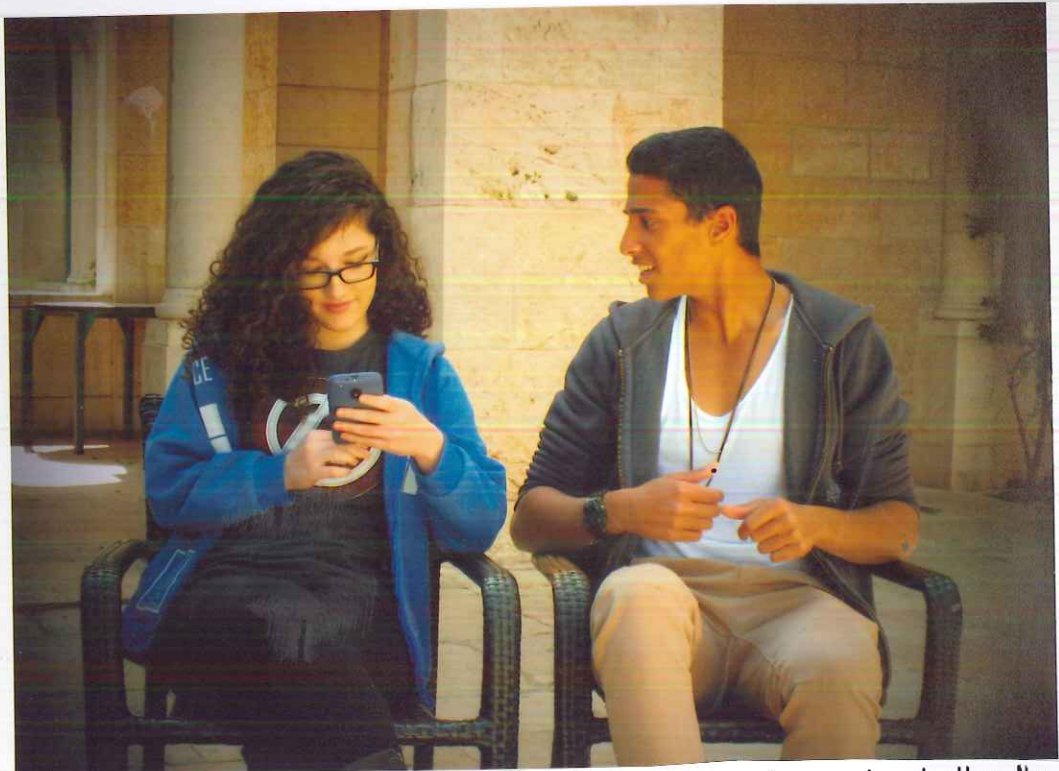
'During Operation Protective Edge, we were having a rehearsal when a siren went off, so we all ran down to the YMCA bomb shelter, which was the entire hallway of the bottom floor. The YMCA is a hotel, so there were quite a few tourists with children who had never experienced this before and were scared,



'And somebody from our group starting singing a song we had, with the words "Sing Till The Power of the Lord Come Down." and we all joined. Before we knew it, somewhere in Jerusalem, during a bomb siren, there was a group of Israeli and Palestinian teenagers singing about not being afraid in a bomb shelter to people who were scared to spread joy. **That is who we are.**'

'We all learn from each other. You start to remove yourself from the boundaries you set for yourself and start opening up to accept every kind of person.'





'It's crazy to think that we were just a group of kids that would never have met each other. Now we've travelled the world together, and become the people we are today just by knowing one another. We haven't always been accepted by everyone, but we have accepted everyone. Even when it's difficult, and we don't understand, instead of running away from the issue, we gravitate towards it and try to understand anyway. I believe that is the key to moving forwards in the place we live.'





'We've continued to meet and to build and to try to solve issues even during times of war, terror and fear. Even when people told us not to come because it might be dangerous, we kept coming because this is where we feel like we can actually make changes.'







'I think at the end of the day, I want people to know that we're just people that want to spread as much love and positivity as possible, and to learn as much as we can about how to be compassionate towards any person.'



'There was a girl who couldn't get out of her neighborhood because of security, and we had a meeting. She walked into the YMCA a little bit late, and told us she ran past soldiers so she could make it to rehearsal. Her reasoning was: **'This is where I feel safe.'**





Micah is one of the most selfless people I know. He picked up his whole life and moved from America in hopes of making Jerusalem, and the world, a better place. In four years, he has created something that people could only have dreamed of. People from both sides of Jerusalem join together because they want to, and they learn each others narratives because they ask to, and they are a family because they love each other, and the only labels they would put on each other is "Friend".

**('To Micah, you have succeeded 100%.')**





'We never stop learning more. Most of us were in facilitated dialogue for years, and it taught us how to raise our own questions. So now, even if we aren't in that framework, we start to ask each other about how we think, cope and act within each situation. We take from each other things that honestly make us better, more compassionate people.'





'We don't just learn about how things in the world affect us, we also sometimes learn about how it affects many more people. One Friday, I arrived to choir to find the group sitting around a large table, all with place cards representing different countries. We were each given a country, and had to speak about how that country was affected by malnutrition. It was amazing because we stepped outside of what defined us in the sense of nationality, and learned about other people. This is one of the many examples of how this place gives us tools to learn from for the rest of our lives.'



'There have been many people who think we should stop meeting. I think a message I've always wanted to put out is that we're here to stay. We love each other, and we will try our hardest to never stop working towards something better.'

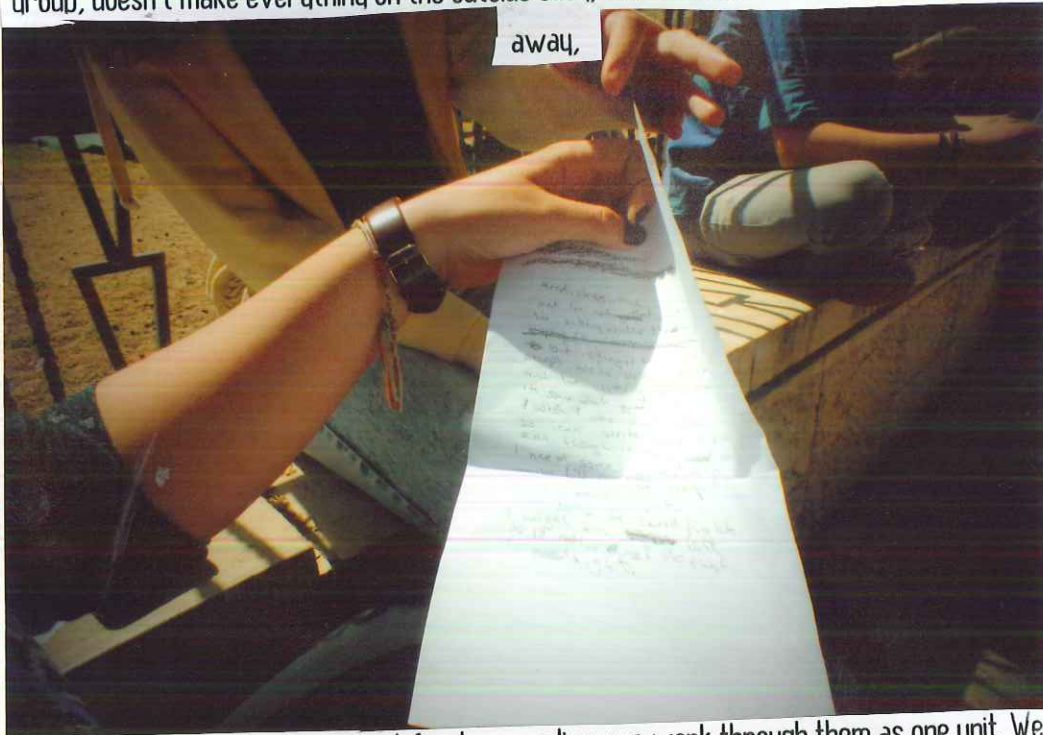






'Most of the time, we're just goofy teenagers that have so much in common that we forget what divided us in the first place.'

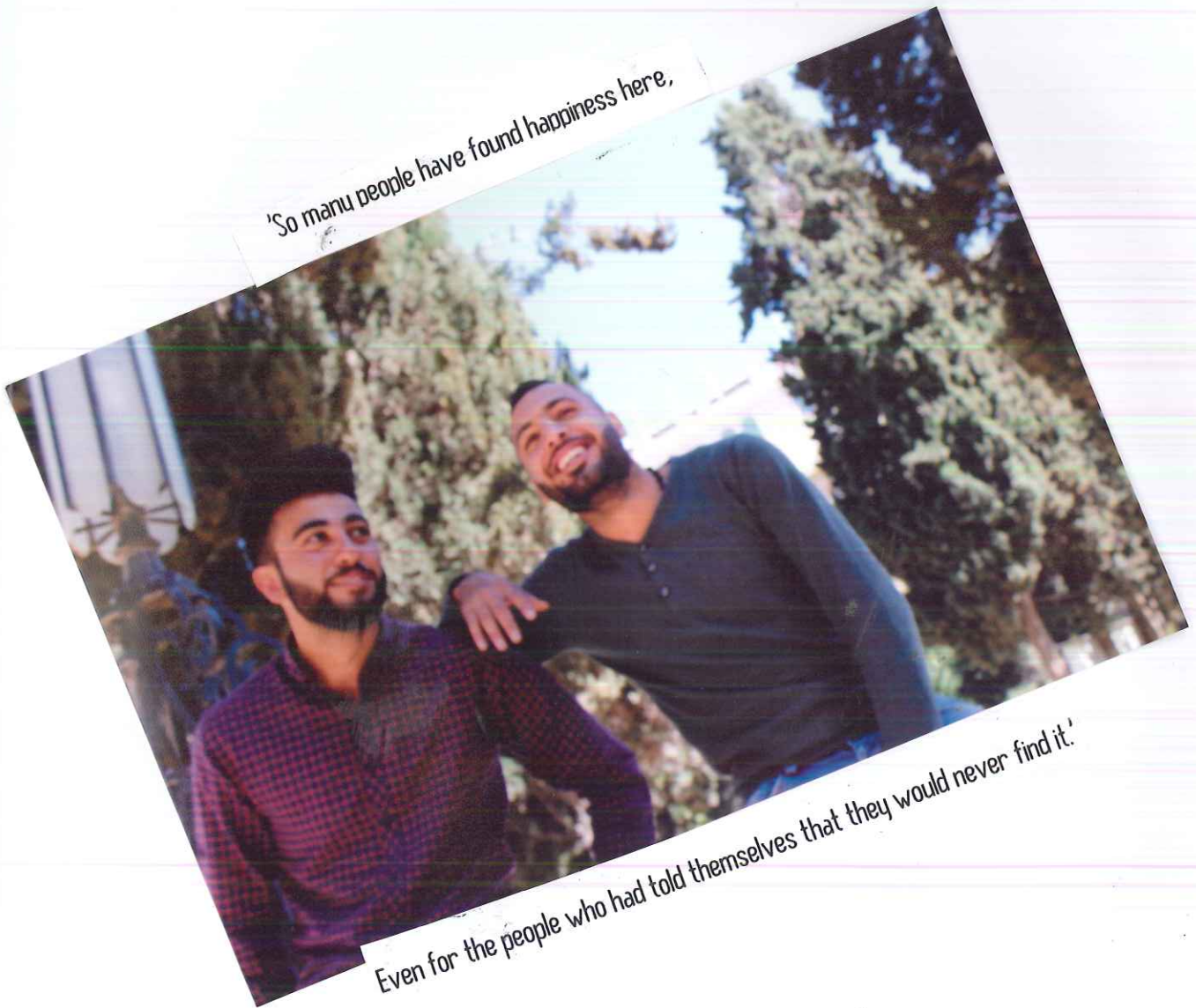
'There have been so many times where we've been divided by labels. Just because we're in this group, doesn't make everything on the outside easy, and it doesn't make the issues we have go away,



But instead of letting those barriers define how we live, we work through them as one unit. We don't hide away from the problems, we embrace that they exist, and by doing so, we embrace the changes that we will make.'



'So many people have found happiness here,



Even for the people who had told themselves that they would never find it.'



'This was one of the most amazing moments for us. Some of the kids in the choir had never been near airplanes before, and all of a sudden we were halfway across the world, performing to thousands of people.'





'It was a chance for us to step outside of our own culture and learn about a new one together, and to just wholeheartedly be ready to do the unexpected and the amazing. It was incredible. We practiced every single day, even though there were rockets every week. We just kept going, and didn't want anything to be able to stop us.'



'We were living together. For two weeks, we were all each other had. There were kids keeping kosher, Shabbat; kids needing to pray Muslim prayers; kids who wanted to go to church, and we all had to accomodate for each others needs, and recognize how different we are and how okay that is.'





### ***SECOND TOUR : LONDON. 2014***

'And then the whirlwind continued, and we were in the UK, singing live on the BBC, and live on the West End, and it was like everything we had worked for was completely coming true.'

'We were given opportunities, that would never have been able to happen to us without the support we had been given by so many wonderful people. They put their faith in us because they believed we could make a difference, and we will always be so grateful.'







'I remember looking back and saying to myself, that this was the greatest week of my life. Everything was positive, and it was beautiful. We were making change, memories, and everything was amazing.'







**THIRD TOUR : UNITED STATES , JUNE 2015**

'This tour was bigger than anything we'd ever done. We performed in New York City with massive groups that supported coexistence. It was scary, it was real, and it was incredible.'

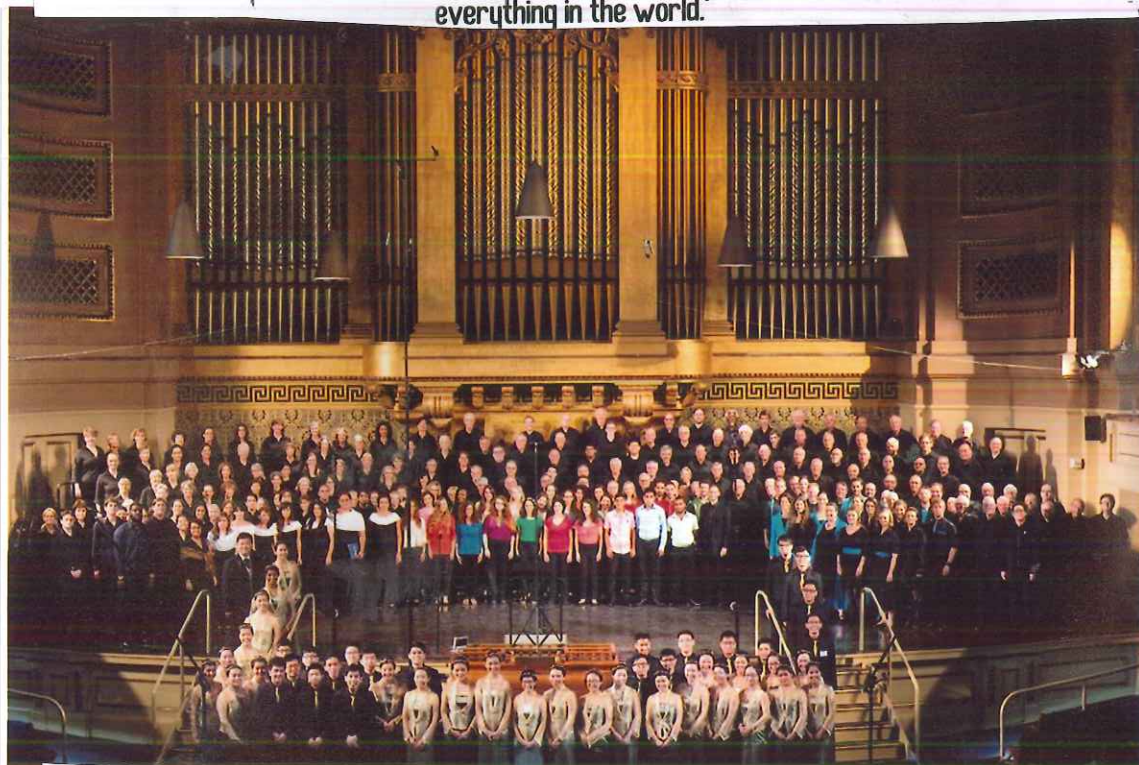




'People were so interested to hear what we had to say, and they wanted to learn from us. We would speak and sing for rooms filled with adults and they would listen to what a group of teenagers had to say about the world, and it was beautiful.'



'We were welcomed in with so much love, and it made all the hard work seem like it was worth everything in the world.'



'We were invited to Yale University to take part in their choral festival, where we got to see and perform with incredible singers from all around the world. This was another huge step in working towards coexistence, and it was incredible to be able to stay at the university and to be able to meet the amazing people that we met. We sung in some of their biggest halls, and it was a privilege.'



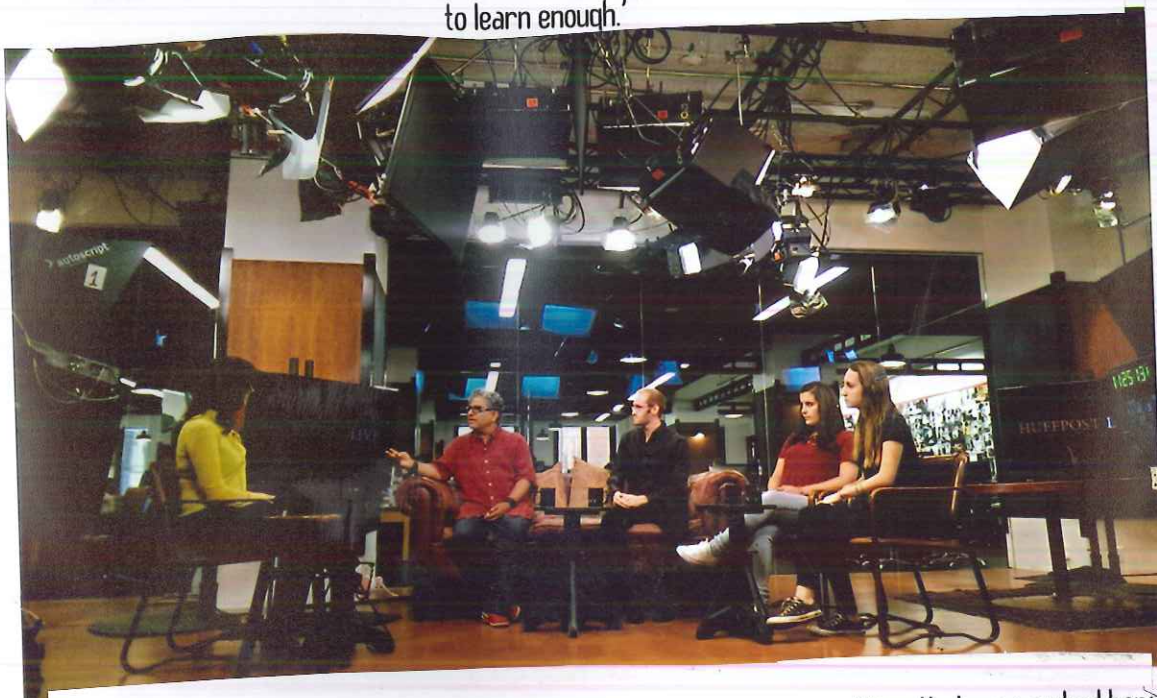
'This was by far the most incredible, crazy trip we went on. We found out about the opportunity two weeks before flying, and we were invited to sing for the UN's International Day of Peace, be interviewed by The Huffington post, be on The Late Show With Stephen Colbert, and much, much more. It was the trip of a life time, all because people supported us and believed in us.'

### **FOURTH TOUR: UNITED STATES, SEPTEMBER 2015**

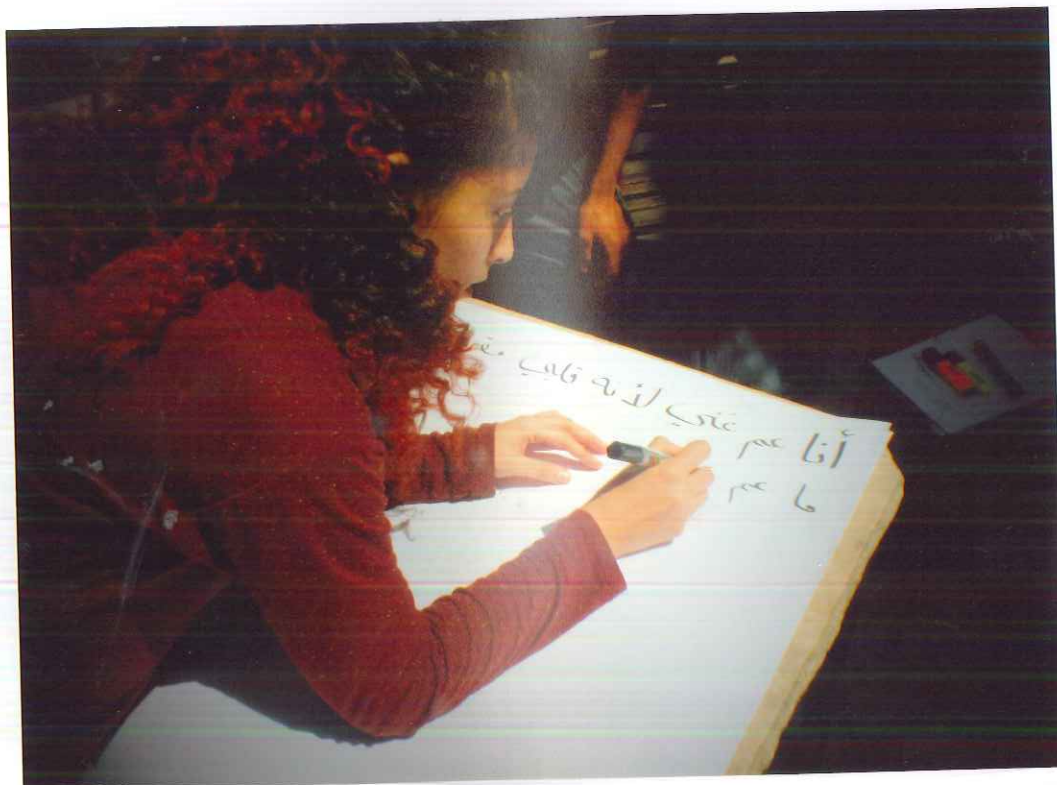
'We were invited back to Yale University, and we got to sing and meet with their music groups, and they let us in like we were family. Everything was so pure and moving.'



'Taking part of the UN's International Day of Peace, along with celebrities, was amazing. We got to speak about what we believe in and show everybody what the world can look like if you are willing to learn enough.'



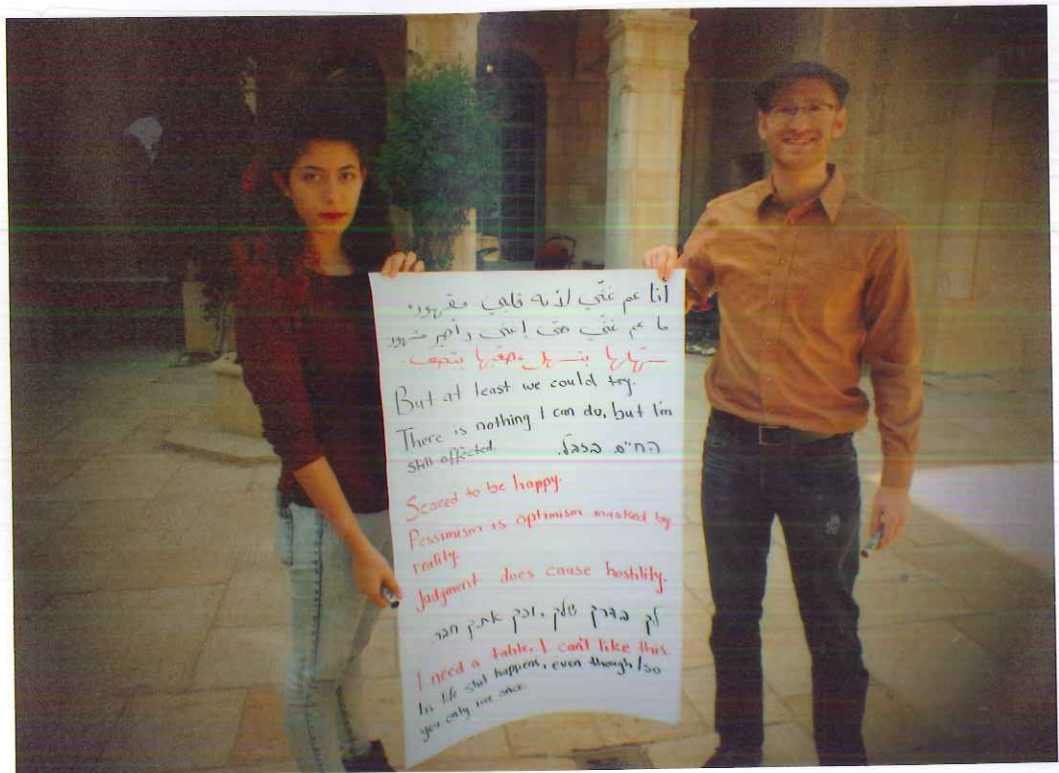
'Everything we did on this trip seemed to matter. Everything was something that we worked hard for, and it was all one big adventure that is printed in all of our memories. We were on live national television, spreading the message that we'd been creating for four years. I can't even begin to explain how much joy it brought us all.'



'I hope one day this can set an example for all of us who live here. Love, respect, compassion and exposure are the fundamental keys we need to hold close to ourselves in order to make the world a better place.'



'We were asked to write the differences between optimism, realism, pessimism and agency. We took all of our ideas together, in three different languages, and started to craft a song from it. This is how we express ourselves.'



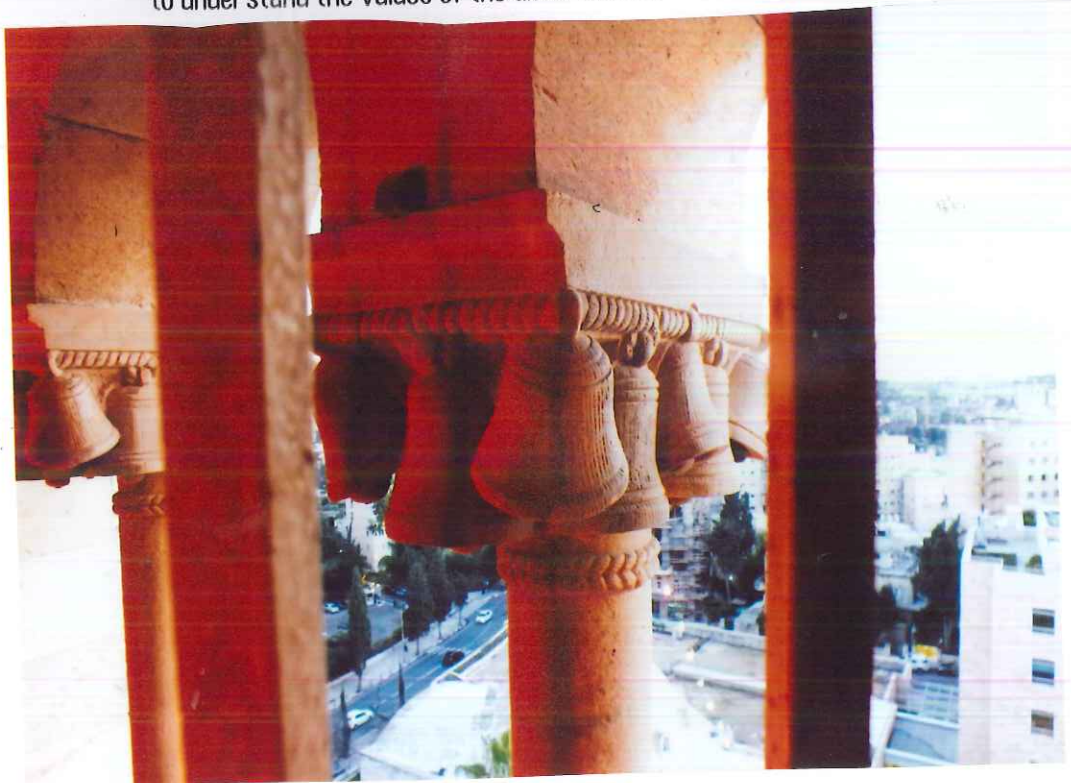


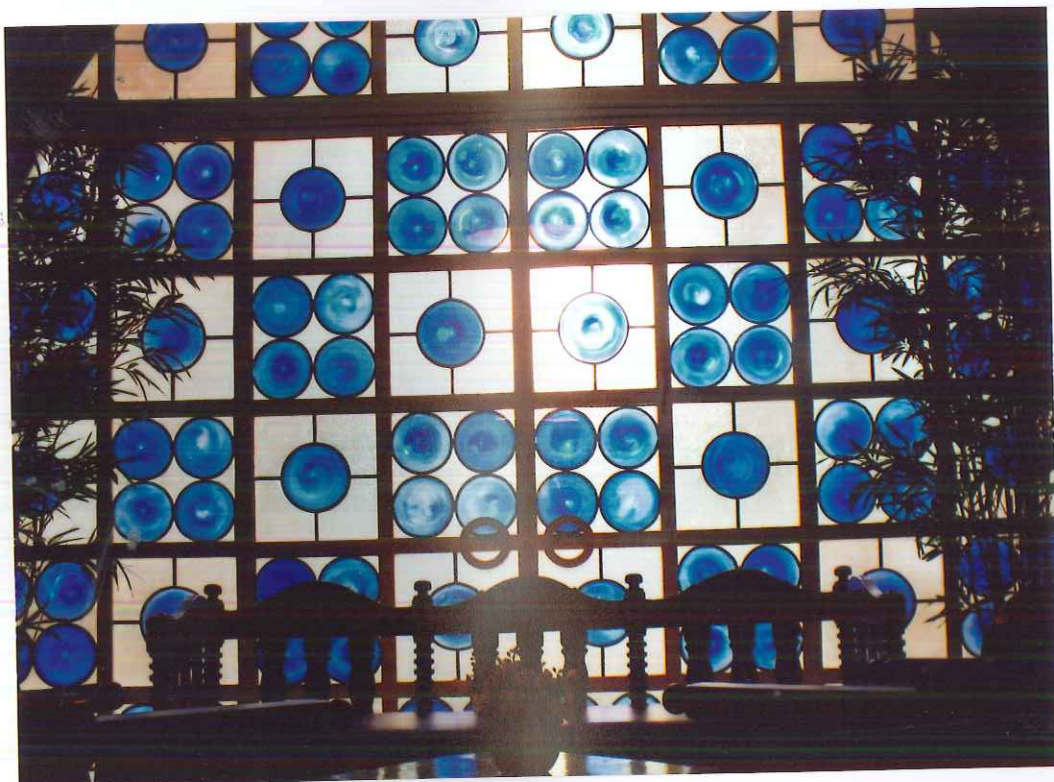
We want to create a Jerusalem that is good for all of us to live in. All of us matter as individuals, and all of us matter as a whole.'





'This has always been a place where we can share our ideas, learn other people's ideas, and start to understand the values of the difference between the two.'





One of our most frequently sung songs chorus is:

"I believe in the religion of love, wherever love is found, for love is my religion and my faith."  
I believe this represents us in such a huge way, and this is the kind of thing we sing to our audiences.'

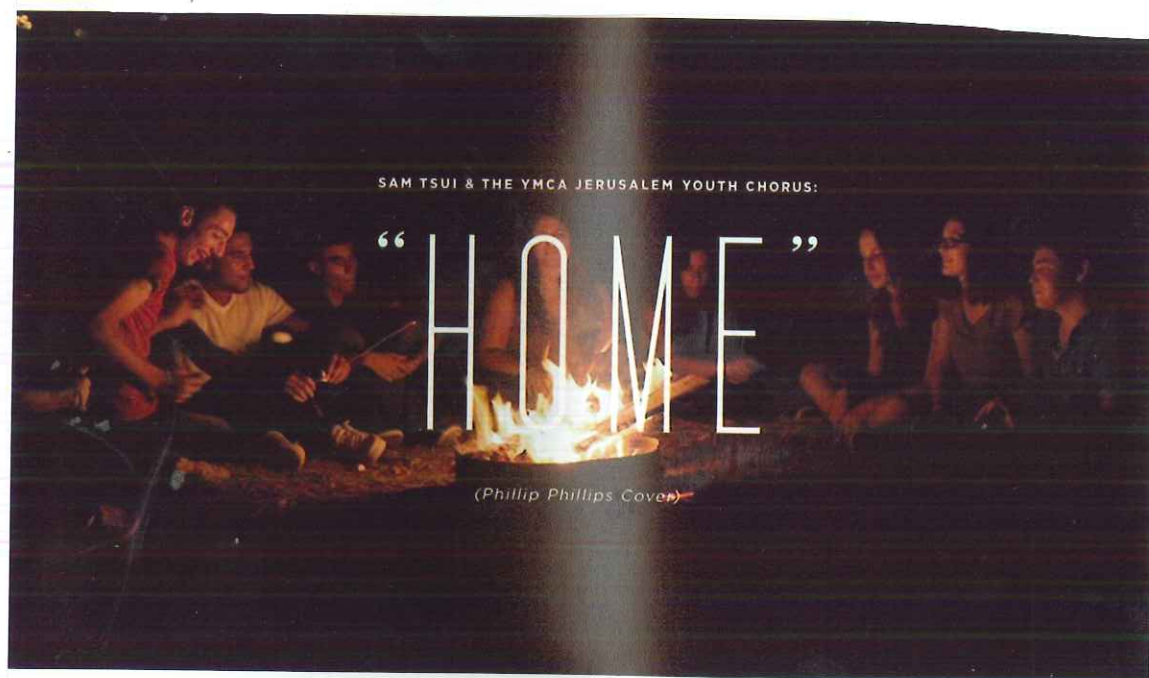


'At the end of the day, we're just teenagers who love to be with each other, and to learn from each other. Anything that divides us is from pre-conceived ideas that we wish to work on, and will always continue to.'



'And NOBODY deserves less just because they aren't like you. Everybody deserves to be listened to, and to try to be understood.'

'A song that is a huge part of our repertoire is called Home. We sing this at almost every single concert, and feel that the lyrics represent us so well.'

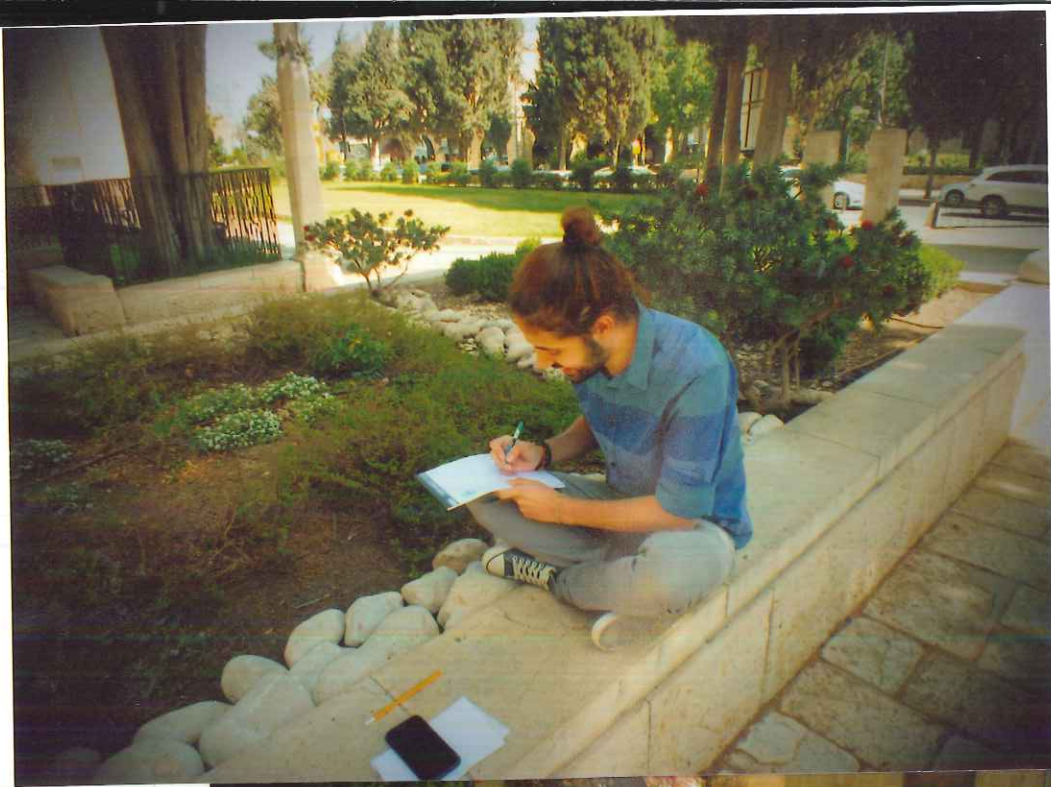


'Settle down, it will all be clear.  
Don't pay no mind to your demons they fill you fear.  
Trouble it might drag you down, if you get lost you can always be found.  
Just know you're not alone.  
Because I'm going to make this place your home.'

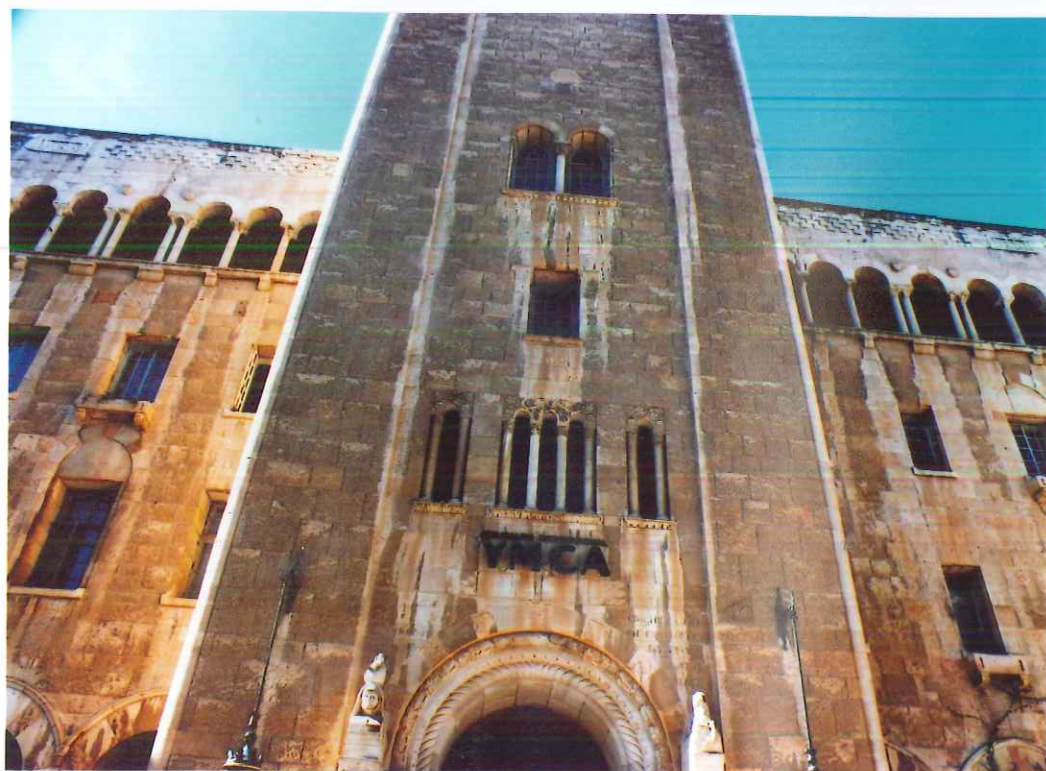


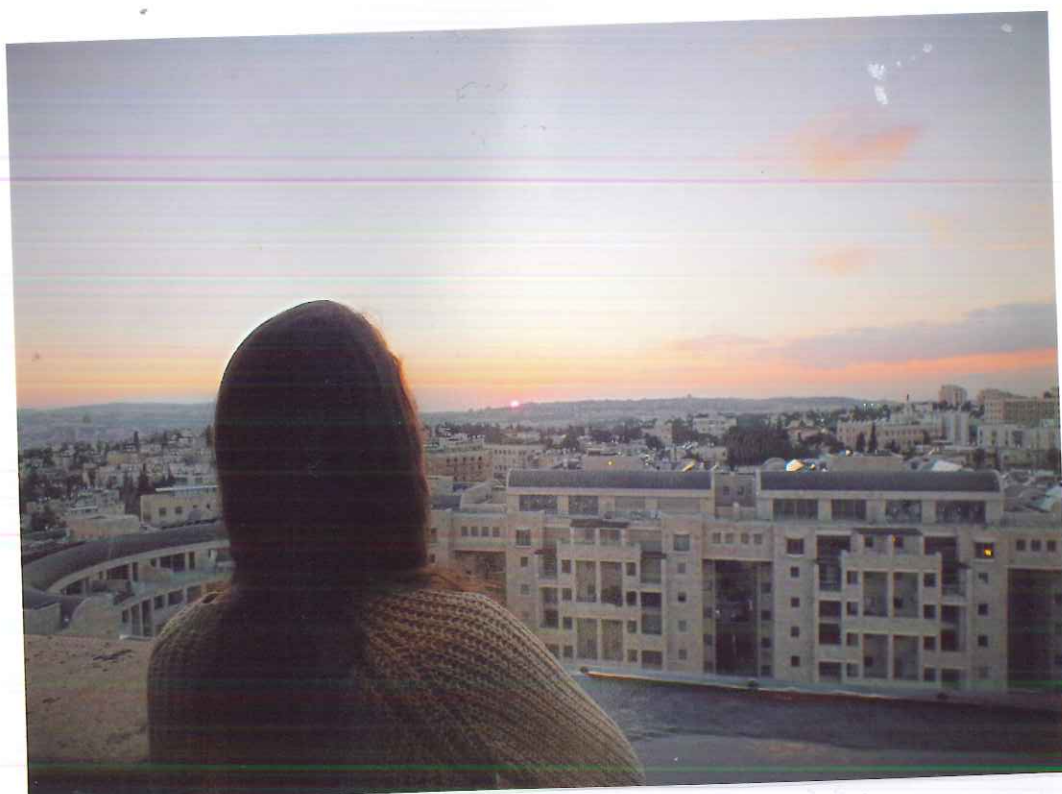












'I think the message that I've always wanted to share, is that all of us are human beings, and individually beautiful people.'