

Abeer Abbas

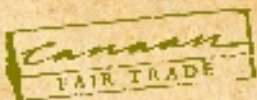
CANAAN FAIR TRADE MEMBER OF WOMEN COOP FROM FAQU'A VILLAGE



A COLLECTIVE OF SISTERHOOD

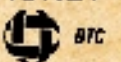
Unlike your regular dried tomatoes, Abeer Abbas's tomatoes are homegrown, hand washed, carried in buckets, and spread to dry in natural sunlight. Cutting up red tomatoes and gently placing them on mats, 32 year old Abeer, who is a member of Canaan Fair Trade Faqua'a village women's cooperative, recalls her life before she and her husband, Mahmoud, became part of the Palestine Fair Trade Association. "Palestine Fair Trade Association made our lives easier." As a young mother, Abeer has already experienced her share of life's ordeals. Soon after her eldest son, Ahmed, was born he was diagnosed with Leukemia and her husband soon after developed diabetes. "When my husband and I got

married we were so excited and we never thought we would be dealt such a blow." Living under difficult economic circumstances and restricting political realities, she explains how having a child with a serious illness is doubly hard. "We have to apply for permits from Israel to go to the hospital in Haifa to get treatment. During the months of treatment it was not only financially stressful but it was also very lonely as my husband, Mahmoud, was denied permit to come and be with us in the hospital." But those were also the days that Abeer learned how important her relationship with the other women in her coop was. "Before we worked together making sun-dried tomatoes we hardly knew each other. We had cordial relationships but after working collectively in our village we developed very strong bonds and life became more fun." Aside from good times, Abeer's



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membership in the coop and her relationship to the other women has also created a support system for her in times when she most needed it. “In 2007, we were in the last week of Maftoul (couscous) season and my son had to get treatment in the hospital so I had to stop working, but the women in my coop paid me my share as if I had worked the full three months with them. I will never forget how they stood by me and supported me in that time. That is when I knew that I was not part of a regular coop but rather a collective of sisterhood.”



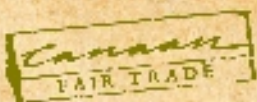
Abeer making organic sun-dried tomatoes

MAFTOUL AS STORY TELLER

Like most Canaan Fair Trade women coops, the women in Faqu’a do not work separately in their homes. All the women meet in one place and put their hands together in making Maftoul and sun-dried tomatoes. When they first started they were a small group but today many women have joined making their coop one of the largest in the area. “We all work together and we split the pay equally. No one looks at who works more or less. We are committed to working together to help our families.”

Visiting their newly rented house where they produce sun-dried tomatoes, Abeer explains how when all the women get together their laughter reaches the hills. As they are hand rolling the wheat they are weaving their life stories. “It is tiring work but we spend the time laughing. Each one of us has a story and as we make the Maftoul for example we talk about our lives. Our wheat is mixed with our hands and our life stories.”

A mother of three beautiful children, Hanan, Ahmed, and Hamodeh, Abeer says that her dream is to live an independent life filled with happiness and good partnerships. This is why her work with the women coop is so important. “A woman has to help financially because men in our society cannot control their income. There are few jobs available and no access to other cities.” But despite the isolation that her village is forced under, Abeer is finding hope and support from visitors who come from other countries to learn about their coop. “I get so many visitors from around the world. It is very exciting and my wish is to be able to learn more English so that I can better communicate and understand what they are saying.”



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