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**THE MARTYR
IN SOCIETY**

**PERSONAL
STORIES**

**HOW YOU
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PERSONAL STORIES

"My homeland is Palestine"

Amin Mohammed Jabr Barbakh, "Mandela", aged 17, Khan Younis Refugee Camp, Gaza Strip.

Right: Amin

Amin was born to a very poor family in Khan Younis Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. His family of seven lived in a one room house with Amin the only breadwinner in the family.

Due to his family's difficulties, he decided to quit school early and find work. His father had heart disease and was unable to support the family. Amin bought a few goods and worked as a peddler, selling his goods near the medical centre in the camp. The district where Amin used to work was known as *Mandela*. He admired Nelson Mandela very much as a prisoner of conscience, and he took the nickname *Mandela*.

Within the camp Amin was known for his generosity. The medical staff of the clinic tell how he never refused to help them in any way. He used to help the patients in the clinic with their medicines and help them fill out their medical forms. In the afternoon he would come back home, put his sports clothes on, and play football with his friends. He was the goalkeeper in the team.

He loved soccer dearly and dreamt of becoming a professional player. He supported the Egyptian team "Al Ahli" and his uncle, who was the coach of his team, supported "Ez Zamalik" (another Egyptian team). Whenever Al Ahli beat Ez Zamalik he would buy some sweets and give them to his uncle.

His uncle says "Once we were training and I asked Mandela to change with another player. He refused, I insisted and again he refused and not thinking I slapped him in the face. Amin paused and didn't say a word, but his eyes were full of tears and he ran home. In the evening I went to his house and told him I want you to become a professional but you have to rest. You can't play all the time. I apologised, then he kissed me and said: "Forget it. What can I do? This is football."

