

# Peacemakers: LCC Students From Israel And Palestine

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Yaara Tal, Left, and Deema Yusuf

Just over three weeks ago, Eugene welcomed two international students who will spend the next two years studying at Lane Community College; Yaara Tal, 22, is Israeli and Deema Yusuf, 18, is Palestinian. Both young women are dedicated to the prospect of peace and are graduates of Creativity for Peace, a nonprofit organization whose vision is to prepare young Israeli and Palestinian women to pave the way for peace in

their communities and across borders. These two grew up on opposite sides of a conflict that has been ongoing since before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Through the Peacemakers Project, Tal and Yusuf received scholarships to attend LCC that cover the cost of tuition and fees, books and supplies, room and board, spending money, medical insurance and travel.

In 2008, Tal attended Creativity for Peace's three-week camp in Santa Fe, N.M. She grew up on a kibbutz in Israel less than 10 miles from the Gaza Strip and remembers running to seek shelter throughout high school when she heard approaching rockets. She says she wanted to attend the camp because she wanted to hear the story of someone who lives in the Gaza Strip, a place so close to her home yet an opportunity nearly impossible to achieve.

"You always hear about the other side through the media — always in the newspaper, always the Qassam rockets, the sirens, whatever is in the news — but you never see the other person," Tal says.

Yusuf, who is an Israeli citizen but lives in Ramallah on the West Bank, attended the same camp in 2012. She remembers that her family and friends were nervous about what she'd learn through her experience in Santa Fe.

"They always say, 'Oh no, you're going to go there and talk to the Israelis and the Jews and you're going to forget about the history and what happened.' I was so shocked when a lot of Israelis had a really, really hard time. They also suffered. I didn't even know that," she says.

Tal adds, "I'm kind of like an ambassador but more like an ambassador of myself. I cannot represent Israel because there are a lot of different opinions in Israel."

The women say they have learned that although they come from different sides of a historical conflict, they have a similar way of thinking about peace and want to engage in events throughout the year to educate the community about the conflict and the nature of peace.

Presentations by Tal and Yusuf as well as Dottie Indyke, executive director for Creativity for Peace, will be from 7 to 8:30 pm Monday, Oct. 21, at Temple Beth Israel, 1175 E. 29th Ave., and from 1 to 3 pm Tuesday, Oct. 22, at the LCC main campus, Building 19 auditorium.