My name is Sara Friedlander and I’m from Santa Cruz California. My work “Stonewalled in Jerusalem” was created to help open a dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian impasse.

In terms of a specific event, as catalyst for this piece –my response is that I grew up in a very politically and socially progressive family, who marched together during the Vietnam War and argued politics nightly at the dinner table. But questioning or even discussing Israeli policies was off the table. Later I was to discover how common this was in American Jewish families.

In 2011, at the invitation of my closest cousin, also American and on the left, who’s husband had just been named the ambassador to Israel from the EU, I went there to see for myself what the situation really was. This piece grew from my photographs and my heart-wrenching reaction to what I saw during this brief visit. The installation took a year to create and was wrought with inner conflict and questioning. Not the least of which was, “Who was I to try to take this on?” But it just seemed to grow intuitively as a direct response to the trauma and pain that I felt was embedded in the history and in the stone walls themselves.

The format, a collection of narrative collages, sculpted and modeled on the Wailing Wall, allowed me to engage the viewers and offer them a way to summon up and then share their own thoughts and hopes for a just resolution.

The two best things that I’ve received so far: One was a note that read:

My Name is Nathan and Sara, you and I share many similar beliefs. But I’m now married to a Palestinian woman and together we have a 4 year old daughter. If everyone could see how beautiful she is, they’d know what is possible when we are open and can embrace our shared humanity.

Another treasured experience was when the wall was exhibited at UC Santa Cruz for a quarter and there was an elective meet-the-artist presentation, and 150 students showed up. A young American Palestinian student challenged me right off the bat with his voice trembling, “Why did you have to include so many images of the Holocaust, which happened 70 years ago, when right this minute my grandparents, who had nothing to do with the Holocaust are under siege in the West Bank?” The conversation that followed was a gift to everyone in the room.