

United Jewish Appeal

Lebanon Live - Four Profiles

By Dvora Waysman

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL - Sharia was standing in the public square of Tyre when I noticed her. I was talking to the IDF Spokesman, who was giving me facts and figures on the local situation. She began plucking at his sleeve to attract his attention. "Please, can you give me a permit to go to Israel? I must see my son - he is in the hospital."

He directed her where to wait. There was already a crowd gathered, some wanting to go to Israel; others wanting to go to Beirut where the PLO had again broken the ceasefire and battles were raging.

I went over to her later - a middle-aged woman in a smart blue dress, with a gold crucifix around her neck. She would have been pretty except for the lines of worry

deeply etched around her eyes and mouth. "Can you help me get a permit?" she asked, clutching at straws.

Sharia had lived with her son in Tyre until the PLO had made life impossible. The whole city was held ransom and they took whatever they wanted - violently, if they refused. Like thousands of others, she fled north to Beirut in 1978, but the PLO began entrenching themselves there too. The "Peace for Galilee" operation had made it safe to return to Tyre, 20 kms. from the Israel border, and she returned with the wave of Lebanese finally able to come back to the south.

"It is good to come home," she told me. "My house is fine, not even a broken window; and it is wonderful to know that I am safe from the terrorists. But my son was caught in the crossfire in

Beirut before I left, and a helicopter took him to Nahariya. I've heard that he will get better, but I still want to visit him. After that I can start my life again properly."

I wished her luck in getting her permit. "God will help me," she said, fingering her crucifix, "...and Israel!" she added fervently.

The Lebanese city of Tyre is situated around a small bay, with a marina for fishing vessels. The skyline of minarets, spires and domes seems untouched by the war. In the city there is rubble from bomb damage, but not too much and life seemed very normal on this July Sunday morning. The shopping center was swarming with Lebanese, soldeirs and journalists and it was "business as usual" - maybe even "business better than usual."

Certainly Mr. Ramlawi, proprietor of "Patisserie Arabe" seemed very cheerful. His establishment in the center of town was doing a brisk business. Drinks and ice cream were being served outside. Inside the high-ceilinged exotic coffeehouse Turkish coffee was being drunk from tiny china cups and there was a selection of colored marzipan confections. A 10-tier wedding cake dominated the window.

"You are welcome in this country," he informed me, noticing my IDF Liaison Officer waiting nearby. "When the terrorists were here, they would come in the shop, ten at a time, taking whatever they wanted - food, money, drinks, cigarettes. It is good that you get them out."

On the door of his shop, in Hebrew letters, is the word "Open." Underneath it, is more Hebrew lettering: "Baruch Haba'a" - "Welcome."

The Lebanese coastline is beautiful. The sea was shimmering as we drove to Sidon, striped in bands of light aqua to deep indigo. Sidon is not unlike Haifa. It shows some war damage, and there are some ugly hulks of unfinished buildings. Most buildings fly flags. Over some flutter the Lebanese flag - two red stripes and a white central one with a kind of stylized fir tree in the center. A few houses have the Phalange flag but most, to be safe, fly a large white flag of surrender. Living through an eight-year war, most Lebanese choose the white flag.

What had once been an elegant villa showed roof damage...it sat at a crazy drunken angle, ludicrous atop the white facade and fluted columns. Through the open door I could glimpse very high ceilings, crystal

chandeliers, velvet drapes and a parquet floor.

A young man came out. No, he couldn't give my photographer permission to go upstairs to take pictures of his uncle's house - it was locked and he didn't have a key.

I asked if he were glad that Israel had launched "Peace for Galilee." He thought about it, before answering slowly. "You are doing a good job," he acknowledged. "War itself is not good - many people suffer. But we suffered more when the PLO were in Sidon. Of course there are still some hiding here, but we turned in 90 last week - to our Bishop of your soldiers. They are bad, the PLO ... we want them out of Lebanon. But when you finish the job - everyone must go. PLO, Syrians, Israelis too."

I assured him that our soldiers would be very happy to go home. He nodded. "But finish the job first," he replied.

There are times when you drive through Lebanon that you can forget the war completely. It seems unbelievable that a people living in a war situation for eight years can manage at times to ignore it, even when the sounds of battle are only a few kilometers away.

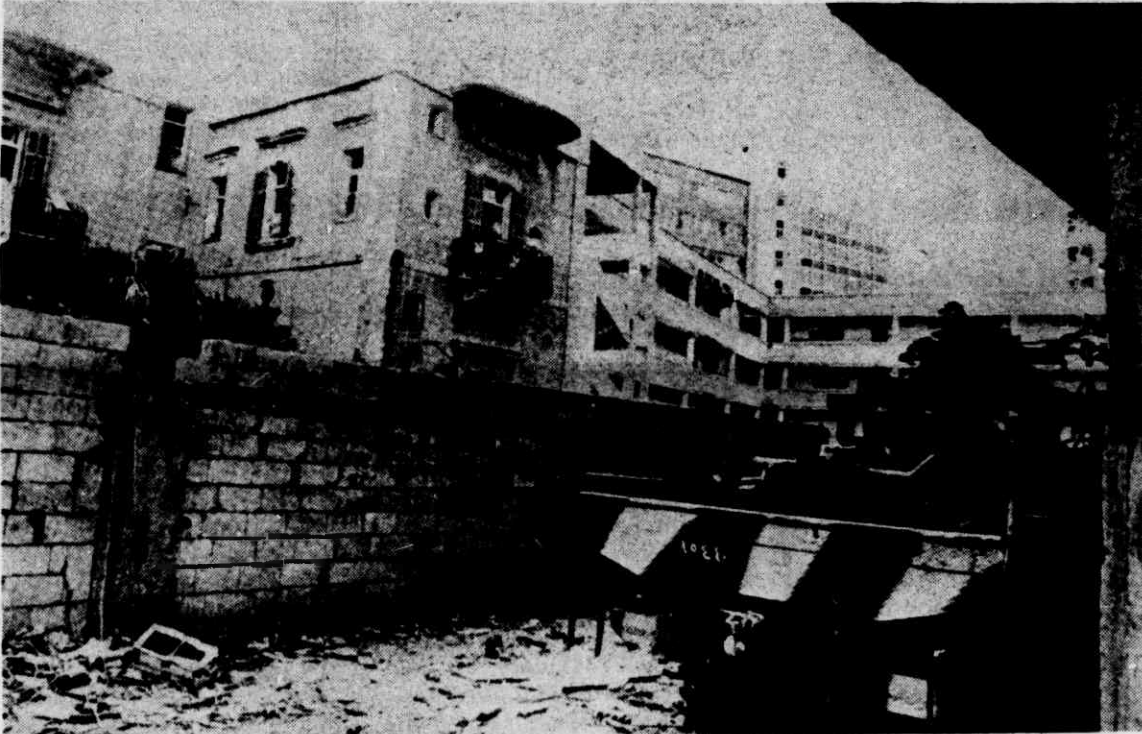
We stopped for refreshments at a beachfront promenade that bore the unlikely name SANDS ROCK BEACH. It had the atmosphere of any seaside vacation resort...people sat on the terrace drinking coke and 7-up, eating grilled chicken and chips; pretty girls in bikinis showed off their suntans; children licked ice-cream cones, and the swimming pools and beach below were crowded with Sunday pleasure-seekers.

We were waited on by the owner's son, a young man named Pierre Azzi, who was wearing a 10-gallon hat. He was home on vacation from the University of Texas in San Antonio where he is studying hotel management. Despite the crowds waiting to be served, he was happy to chat.

"You know, I was nearly killed by the PLO twice," he informed me. "Once they beat me until my father gave them a lot of money to stop. Another time they came to rob us - I got out the window and hid until they were gone. Now they've left this town, thanks to Israel, and we can get on with our lives."

Despite the boom of cannons from West Beirut where the PLO had again broken the ceasefire only a short distance away, the sounds at SANDS ROCK BEACH were of friends calling to each other, children laughing, people splashing in the water below. "I hope one day we can come back as tourists," I told Pierre.

"Inshallah," he replied fervently. "May Allah will it!"



UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE: This PLO anti-aircraft gun in Sidon was one of many that were found in the center of heavily-populated residential areas. The PLO and their weapons located themselves in these areas because they knew that Israeli forces would be reluctant to open fire on clusters of civilians. (Richard Lobell)



PEOPLE TO PEOPLE: The Magen David Adom collection station in Jerusalem was inundated with gifts of goods, clothing, shoes and blankets for shipments to Lebanon. (Scoop 80)



FOR LIFE: This Lebanese civilian in Jerusalem's Hadassah University Hospital is one of hundreds receiving expert medical care in Israel's hospitals. (Scoop 80)