

Marie's Story: The Other Side of the Fence

By Joan Silberstein

METULLA, ISRAEL —Metulla could be a hilltop village in Switzerland. The green valley. The sun-warmed scent of apples from foothill orchards. The red rooftops on the gracious homes lining the main street, looking like chalets. Small hotels and pensions, in the European manner, for tourists and vacationers. Over all, a sense of abiding peace...

The illusion passes. Metulla is a border town in Israel's embattled north, a slender fingertip between

Syria and Lebanon. Pointing to a cross-hatched wiring unique to boundaries that divide nation from nation. This one — the Good Fence — beckons and invites... and this is the story of Marie, who walks through its gateway every morning into Israel and walks back again every night.

Marie lives on the other side of the fence, in Lebanon. For eight years, since the Lebanese Civil War in 1974-75, her Arab Christian village was a tragic mirror image of Metulla, shelled constantly by PLO katyushas. But with no army

to retaliate or protect the people or minimize terrorist raids. Men and boys disappeared, women were raped, houses were plundered...

Even here, on the other side of the fence, sitting in an office she cleans — even now, when the seige of terror has been lifted — the memories continue to haunt her. They come out jaggedly, rapid Arabic translated stolidly into English. My photographer catches every expression in Marie's eyes. Proud. Hurt.

"Eight years ago," she says, "I came to the Good Fence. I came to the Israelis for help. Blood all over me,

cut up from shrapnel from the terrorists. The Israelis took me to their hospital, they took care of me."

She gets up from her chair, comes to stand directly in front of me, a 53 year old woman, solid of body. She has borne four children, two sons and two daughters. She has grandchildren. She lifts the hem of her simple black dress to show me, woman to woman, the shrapnel scars on her legs and thighs, then pushes at her sleeves to expose the burn marks on her arms.

"They did that. The PLO. If the Israelis didn't stop them, they might have killed

us all. For eight years, we were suffering all the time. Their bomb ruined our house. We were in the shelter. My husband's brother was hit, and afterwards they had to amputate his legs. It was a nightmare."

Marie smooths the hem of her skirt, sits down again opposite me. As she talks, she twists a bit of grey cleaning rag in her hands, then spreads it out flat and presses it down hard on her lap, as if to push the painful memories away.

"We had no money," she goes on. "Our land was

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