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Author lends perspective to Middle East conflicts

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Cathy Sultan has lived through war. She has worked hard to make sure her children and family are safe. She moved to Eau Claire more than 20 years ago when it appeared as if peace would not come soon to her family's hometown of Beirut, Lebanon.

But the memories don't fade. Especially when, on July 12, 2006, the Israeli-Hezbollah war broke out.

In Sultan's new book released this month, *Tragedy in South Lebanon: The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006*, Sultan wrote that she was in Texas conducting a workshop on writing memoirs when she learned Hezbollah had captured two Israeli soldiers.

"The mention of Jamhour took me back to the morning I raced under the bombs in my VW Bug to rescue my children from school," she wrote.

Sultan grew up in Washington, D.C. While working at a hospital there she met a Lebanese intern, Michel Sultan. They fell in love, were married and had two children. When he finished his medical training, which included a year at University Hospital in Madison, they moved to Beirut.

In 1975, when Phalange militia attacked Palestinians in East Beirut, setting off a civil war, Sultan's life changed.

The Sultan family lived in Beirut for most of the period from 1975 through 1983. Sometimes when living in the war-torn city became too dangerous, they stayed with friends or relatives living elsewhere.

That's why, although Sultan lives in peaceful Eau Claire now, the news from Lebanon was so disheartening to her. She had started the book about South Lebanon during unrest years ago, but after the war broke out in 2006, she knew it was necessary to finish it.

"What prompted me to write this book was, first of all, the lure and the way it was started; and for a second time, a U.N. camp in South Lebanon had been bombed," she said in April after returning home from Palestine, which she visited as part of a delegation composed of Interfaith Peace-Builders and National Peace Foundation members. "Absolutely, I should have written this book in the first place."

Because Sultan lived in Beirut, she had a preconceived idea of the people who lived in South Lebanon. After doing research, her feelings changed.

"(At first) I behaved as did the majority of the Christians and Sunnis—to totally disregard the Shiite population of South Lebanon," she said. "We constantly said, 'It's not something we need to worry about.'"

"I came to understand that wasn't the proper way of thinking."

Out of that realization came a book she believes is fair to both sides and paints an entire picture—something she said the mainstream media in the United States don't do. As a result, Sultan says Americans have a skewed perception of what's happening in Lebanon.

Sultan's hope is that people will read her book and begin to understand the intricacies of the Middle East—and not just what the mainstream media report.

"Even though we don't pay a lot of attention to what's going on there ...

everyone else is watching the news," Sultan said of news sources she trusts, such as *Haaretz*—the online version of an Israeli newspaper. "These are things I think we as Americans need to understand better. We need to hold our elected officials responsible for what they do in our name."

Eileen Immerman, Sultan's longtime friend and a member of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, said she was proud of Sultan and her writings.

"(Sultan) wrote the first book initially as a catharsis, but one of her passions with the newest book is to get Americans to understand that Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian and Israeli people are no different than Americans. We all want peace," Immerman said. "She is proudly an American, but she isn't proud of our current administration's foreign policy and decision to use force."

Sultan said atrocities happen when the public isn't paying attention. She wants people at least to pay attention to what's going on in the rest of the world.

"You get that little grain of curiosity, and the door has opened for this to begin," Sultan said. "These are golden opportunities for us to ask questions."



Cathy Sultan, author of *A Beirut Heart: One Woman's War*, and *Israeli and Palestinian Voices: A Dialogue With Both Sides* has released a new book, *Tragedy in South Lebanon: The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006*.

Staff photo by Steve Kinderman

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