

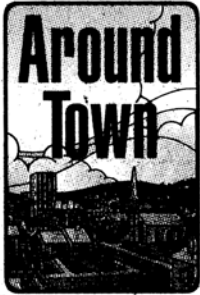
CITY/REGION

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War-torn city at heart of book written as therapy

By Joe Knight
Leader-Telegram staff

Cathy Sultan returned to her family's apartment to find the usual shattered glass on the floor from recent bombings. Her apron, which had been hung in the kitchen, had a bullet hole.



Eau Claire

Her son found the spent round on the floor and saved it for his collection.

She took a broom and began sweeping. It was life as usual in Beirut, Lebanon, which Sultan, now of Eau Claire, called home for 14 years.

"Despite a nightlong battle in your street you have your children dressed and fed in time to take the school bus at 6:45 a.m. You no longer walk your streets casually, stopping at the green grocery and the bakery. Instead you dodge behind overturned shipping containers to avoid the lurking rooftop sniper," she writes in the prologue of "A Beirut Heart: One Woman's War," a book that she recently had published.

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.

The Beirut that they moved to was not the war-torn Beirut of today. It was a city of gardens, buildings with ornate French architecture where you could shop in ancient open markets and dine in fine restaurants. English, French and Arabic were spoken — her children grew up speaking all three.

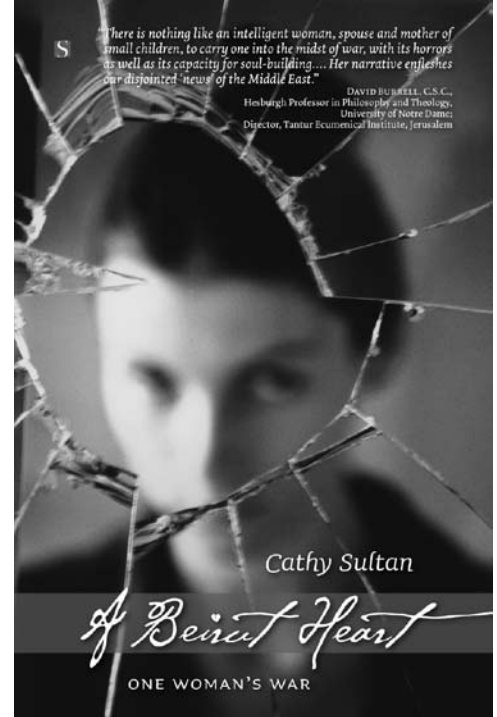
Seventeen religious sects lived in harmony, at least for the first six years they were there. Their home was a rooftop apartment with a terrace of flowers overlooking the city.

"That was the Beirut I fell in love with," she said in a recent interview.

That changed in 1975 when Phalange militia attacked Palestinians in East Beirut, setting off a civil war that essentially continues today.

The Sultan family lived in Beirut for most of the first eight years. Sometimes when the fighting was the fiercest, they would stay with friends for relatives outside of the city. Eleven times they left, then returned to the same apartment, cleaned up and began life as usual again.

For a while Michel would come home



from his medical practice, grab a rifle after dinner and patrol with the neighborhood militia.

People ask why they kept coming back, and she said she may have been "too detached emotionally to make a rational decision." Also, Michel was dedicated to

his medical practice, and they considered Beirut their home, she said.

Their Lebanese friends and relatives were not leaving, she said. And the fighting was not constant, she said. At times, during ceasefires, life became somewhat normal.

"You can get acclimated to surviving a war. Look at the poor people in Iraq, what

they're going through," she said.

When they left Beirut for good in 1984, it was not planned. She was in the states with their children,

and Michel joined them. He was convinced by friends that the civil war would not be resolved anytime soon. Their great regret was that they were unable to get the family dog out with them.

Michel had obtained a license to practice medicine in Wisconsin in 1977, and doctors at University Hospital in Madison helped him find a position in Eau Claire, where a group of independent physicians were looking for a gastroenterologist.

Their daughter, Nayla, lived in Eau Claire for two years and attended Memorial High School. She later studied in Paris and now is married and living in Rome.

Their son, Naim, stayed in Boston to finish his last year at

Boston College High School. Naim graduated from Harvard then traveled the world for a while before starting a teak wood plantation in Costa Rica. He is married and living in southern Mexico.

Sultan began writing "Beirut Heart" for her children and as therapy for depression related to living in a war zone.

She wrote one other book, "Israeli and Palestinian Voices: A Dialogue with Both Sides." She is revising that book to include a few more Israeli voices. It will be published by Scarletta Press of Minneapolis, the publisher of "Beirut Heart."

Sultan has become involved in peace issues. She is on the executive board of the National Peace Foundation, where she

directs Middle East educational projects.

The Sultans return to Beirut regularly. Some of the downtown has been rebuilt, but it has lost much of its old world charm, she said. It once was a center of banking and headquarters for many corporations, but those are mostly gone. The city no longer has a middle class, she said.

Don Betz, chancellor of UW-River Falls, endorsed the book.

"Cathy has effectively combined a dramatic personal and family story of life in the Lebanese capital with the complex context of Lebanese and Middle Eastern politics," he wrote in a review.



Sultan