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DIARIES



After 25 years, who remembers?

Franklin Lamb writing from Sabra-Shatila camp, *Live from Lebanon*, Sep 13, 2007

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A Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian from Haifa carries pictures of her children killed in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila Massacre during a 25th anniversary commemoration near the camps in Beirut, 10 September 2007. (Maureen Clare Murphy)

Dearest Janet,

It's a very beautiful fall day here in Beirut, 25 years ago this week since the 16-18 September 1982 Massacre at the Palestinian refugee camps at Sabra-Shatila. Bright blue sky and a fall breeze. It actually rained last night, enough to clean out some of the humidity and dust. Fortunately, not enough to make the usual rain-created swamp of sewage and filth on Rue Sabra, or flood the grassless burial ground of the mass grave (the camp residents named it Martyrs Square -- one of several so-named memorials now in Lebanon) where you once told me that on Sunday, 19 September 1982, you watched, sickened, as families and Red Crescent workers created a subterranean mountain of butchered and bullet-riddled victims from those 48 hours of slaughter. Some of the bodies had limbs and heads chopped off, some boys were castrated, crosses carved into some of the bodies.

As you later wrote to me in your perfect cursive:

"I saw dead women in their houses with their skirts up to their waists and their legs spread apart; dozens of young men shot after being lined up against an alley wall; children with their throats slit, a pregnant woman with her stomach chopped open, her eyes still wide open, her blackened face silently screaming in horror; countless babies and toddlers who had been stabbed or ripped apart and who had been thrown into garbage piles."

Today Martyrs Square is not much of a memorial to the upwards of 1,700, mainly women and children, who were murdered between 16-18 September. You would not be pleased.

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A couple of faded posters and a misspelled banner that reads "1982: Saba Massacer" hang near the center of the 20-by-40-yard area which for years following the mass burial was a garbage dump. Today, roaming around the grassless plot of ground is a large old yellow dog that ignores a couple of hens and six peeps scratching and pecking around.

Since you went away, the main facts of the massacre remain the same as your research uncovered in the months that followed. At that time, your findings were the most detailed and accurate as to what occurred and who was responsible.

The old seven-story Kuwaiti Embassy from which Ariel Sharon, Rafael Eitan, Amos Yaron, Elie Hobeika, Fadi Frem and others maintained radio contact and monitored the 48 hours of carnage with a clear view into the camps was torn down years ago. A new one has been built and they are still constructing a mosque on its grounds.

I am sorry to report that today in Lebanon, the families of the victims of the massacre daily sink deeper into the abyss. Nowhere on earth do the Palestinians live in such filth and squalor. "Worse than Gaza!" a journalist recently in Palestine exclaimed.

A 2005 Lebanese law that was to open up access to some of the 77 professions the Palestinians have been barred from in Lebanon had no affect. Their social, economic, political, and legal status continues to worsen.

"It's a hopeless situation here now," according to Jamile Ibrahim Shehade, the head of one of 12 social centers in the camp. "There are 15,000 people living in one square kilometer." Jamile runs a center which provides basic facilities such as a dental clinic and a nursery for children. It receives assistance from Norwegian People's Aid and the Lebanese NGO, Popular Aid for Relief and Development. "This whole area was nothing before the camps were here and there has been very little done in terms of building infrastructure," Shehade explained.

Continued misery in the camps has taken a heavy psychological toll on the residents of Sabra and Shatila, aid workers here say. Tempers run high as a result of frustration from the daily grind in the decrepit housing complex. In all the 12 Palestinian camps in Lebanon tensions and tempers rise with increasing family, neighborhood, and sect conflicts. Salafist and other militant groups are forming in and around Lebanon's Palestinian camps but not so much here in the Hizballah-controlled areas where security is better.

In Sabra-Shatila schools will run double shifts when they open at the end of this month and electricity and water are still a big problem. According to a 1999 survey by the local NGO Najdeh (Help), 29 percent of 550 women surveyed in seven of the 12 official refugee camps scattered across Lebanon, have admitted being victims of physical violence. Cocaine and hashish use are becoming a concern to the community.

There is some new information about the Sabra-Shatila Massacre that has come to light over the years. Few Israelis but many of the Christian Lebanese Forces, following the national amnesty, wanted to make their peace and have confessed to their role. I have spoken with a few of them.

Remember that fellow you once screamed at and called a butcher outside of Phalange HQ in East Beirut, Joseph Haddad? At the time he denied everything as he looked you straight in the eyes and made the sign of the cross. Well, he did finally confess 22 years later, around the time of his youngest daughter's confirmation in his local parish. Your suspicions were indeed correct. His unit, the second to enter the camp, had been supplied with cocaine, hashish and alcohol to increase their courage. He and others gave their stories to *Der Spiegel* and various documentary filmmakers.

Many of the killers now freely admit that they conducted a three-day orgy of rape and slaughter that left hundreds, as many as 3,500 they claim, possibly more, of innocent civilians dead in what is considered the single bloodiest incident of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a crime for which Israel will be condemned for eternity.

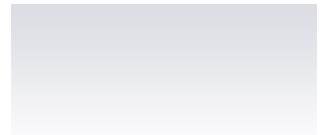
Your friend, Um Ahmad, still lives in the same house where she lost her husband, four sons and a daughter when Joseph, a thick-set militiaman carrying an assault rifle, bundled everyone into one room of their hovel and opened fire. She still explains like it was yesterday, how the condoned slaughter unfolded, recalling each of her four sons by name, Nizar, Shadi, Farid and Nidal. I asked Joseph if he wanted to sit with Um Ahmad and seek forgiveness and possible redemption since he has now become a lay cleric in his parish. He declined but sent his condolences with flowers.

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Do you remember, Janet, how we used to walk down Rue Sabra from Gaza Hospital to Akka Hospital during the 75-day Israeli siege in '82, as you used to say, "to see my people?" Gaza Hospital is now gone, occupied and stripped by the Syrian-backed Amal militia during the Camp Wars of '85-87. Its remaining rooms are now packed with refugees. One old lady who ended up there explained how it's her fourth home since being forced from Palestine in 1948. She survived the Phalangist attack on and destruction of Tel al-Za'atar camp in 1976 fled from the Fatah al-Islam Salafists in Nahr al-Bared camp in May of this year and wore out her welcome at the teeming and overwhelmed Baddawi camp near Tripoli last month.

Most of your friends who worked with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PCRS) are gone from Lebanon. Our cherished friend, Hadla Ayubi has semi-retired in Amman, Um Walid, Director of Akkar Hospital, finally did return to Palestine following Oslo, still with the PCRS. And its President, Dr. Fathi Arafat, your good friend, passed away in December of 2004 in Cairo less than a month after his brother Abu Ammar died in Paris. They both loved you for all you had done for their people.

That trash dump near the Sabra Mosque is now a mountain. Yesterday I did a double-take as I walked by because I saw three young girls -- as sweet and pretty as ever I have seen, maybe seven to nine years old -- in rags picking through the nasty garbage. Their arms were covered with white chemical paste. Apparently whoever sent them to scavenge sought to protect them from disease. As I climbed through the filth to give them my last 6,000 LL (\$4 USD) they managed a smile and giggle when I slipped on a broken thin plastic bag of juicy cactus fruit skins and plunged to my knees.

In some areas of the camps there are mainly Syrians selling cheap "tax free" goods. Still some Arafat loyalists, mainly among the older generation. Palpable stress among just about everyone it seems. One young Palestinian explained to me his worry that with the upcoming parliamentary election to choose a new president scheduled for 25 September, there may be fighting and his 6 October SAT exams may be cancelled and he won't be able to continue his studies.

When you and I last spoke, Janet, it was on 16 April of that year and I was en route to the Athens airport to catch a flight to Beirut to be with you, you told me you were working on evidence to convict Sharon and others of war crimes. Twenty years later, lawyers representing two dozen victims' and other relatives attempted to have Ariel Sharon tried for the massacre under Belgian legislation, which grants its courts universal jurisdiction for war crimes.

There had been great expectations about the case among the Palestinians and their friends, since as you remember, Sharon had already been found to bear "personal responsibility" in the massacres by the Israeli Kahan Commission of Inquiry that concluded he shouldn't ever again hold public office. But hopes were dashed when the Belgium Court, under US and Israeli pressure, decided the case was inadmissible.

I regret to report that all those who perpetrated the massacre at Sabra-Shatila escaped justice. None of the hundreds of Phalange and Haddad militia who carried out the slaughter were ever punished. In fact, they got a blanket amnesty from the Lebanese government.

As for the main organizers and facilitators, their massacre at Sabra-Shatila turned out to be excellent career moves for virtually all of them. Ariel Sharon resigned as Minister of Defense but retained his cabinet position in Menachem Begin's government and over the next 16 years held four more ministerial posts, including that of Foreign Minister, before becoming Prime Minister in February 2001. Following the 2002 Jenin rampage, US President George W. Bush anointed him "a man of peace."

Rafael Eitan, Israeli Chief of Staff, who shared Sharon's decision to send in the Phalange killers and helped direct the operation, was elected to the Knesset as leader of the small ultra right-wing party Tzomet. In 1984 he was named Agriculture Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in 1996. He currently serves as head of Tzomet and is jockeying for another cabinet position in the next government.

Major-General Yehoshua Saguy, Army Chief of Intelligence, found by the Kahan Commission to have made "extremely serious omissions" in handling the Sabra-Shatila affair, later became a right-wing member of the Knesset and is now mayor of the ultra-rightist community of Bat-Yam, a little town near Tel Aviv.

Major-General Amir Drori, Chief of Israel's Northern Command, found not to have done enough to stop the massacre, a "breach of duty," was recently named as head of the Israeli Antiquities Commission.

Brigadier-General Amos Yaron, the divisional commander whose troops sealed the camps to prevent victims from escaping and helped direct the operation along with Sharon and Eitan, was found to have "committed a breach of duty." He was immediately promoted Major-General and made head of manpower in the army, served as Director-General of the Israeli Defense Ministry and Military Attaches at the Israeli Embassy in Washington. He is currently working for various Israeli lobby groups as a scholar in "think thanks."

Elie Hobeika, the Chief of Lebanese Forces Intelligence, who along with Sharon masterminded the actual massacre, fell out with the Phalange in 1980s under suspicion that he was involved in killing their leader, Bachir Gemayal. He defected to the Syrians, acquired three ministerial posts in post-civil war Lebanon governments, including Minister of the Displaced (many thought he know a lot about this subject) of Electricity and Water, and in 1996, Social Affairs. On 24 January 2002, twenty years after his involvement at Sabra-Shatila, he was blown up in a car bomb attack in East Beirut. Two of his associates also rumored to be planning to "come clean" regarding Sharon's role were assassinated in separate incidents.

A few days before Hobeika's death he stated that he might reveal more about the massacre and those responsible and according to Beirut's *Daily Star* staff who interviewed him, Hobeika told them that his lawyers had copies of his files implicating Sharon in much more detail than had become public. These files are now in the possession of his son who following Sharon's death may release the files.

They still remember you in Burj al-Burajne camp. A few weeks ago one old man told me, "Janet Stevens? No, I didn't know her." He paused and then said, "Oh! You mean Miss Janet! She spoke Arabic ... I think she was American. Of course I remember her! We called her the little drummer girl. She had so much energy. She cared about the Palestinians. That was so long ago. She stopped coming to visit us. I don't know why. How is she?"

And so, dearest Janet, I will be waiting for you at Sabra-Shatila, at Martyrs Square, on Saturday, 15 September 2007.

You will find me patting and mumbling to that old yellow dog. He and I have become friends and we will pay our respects to the dead and I will reflect on these past 25 years and we will watch and wait for you. You will find us behind the straggly rose bushes on the right as you enter.

Come to us, Janet. We need you. The camp residents need you, one of their brightest lights, on this 25th anniversary of one of their darkest hours. You were always their mediator and advocate -- and until today you are their majorette for justice and return to their sacred Palestine.

Forever,

Franklin

Janet Lee Stevens was born in 1951 and died on 18 April 1983, at the age of 32, at the instant of the explosion that destroyed the American Embassy in Beirut. Twenty minutes before the blast, Janet had arrived at the embassy to meet with USAID official Bill McIntyre because she wanted to advocate for more aid to the Shia of south Lebanon and for the Palestinians at Sabra, Shatila, and Burj al-Burajneh camps, stemming from Israel's 1982 invasion and the 16-18 September massacre. As they sat at a table in the cafeteria, where she had planned to ask why the US government had never even lodged a protest following the Israeli invasion or the massacre, a van stolen from the embassy the previous June arrived and parked just in front of the embassy, almost directly in front of the cafeteria, containing 2,000 pounds of explosives. It was detonated by remote control and tons of concrete pancaked on top of Janet and Bill, killing 63 and wounding 120. Remains of Janet's body were found two days later, unidentified in the basement morgue of the American University of Beirut Hospital, by the author. She was pregnant with their son, Clyde Chester Lamb III. Had he lived he would be 24 years old. Hopefully taking after his mother he would, no doubt, be a prince of a young man.

Franklin Lamb's book on the Sabra-Shatila Massacre, International Legal Responsibility

for the Sabra-Shatila Massacre, now out of print, was published in 1983, following Janet's death and was dedicated to Janet Lee Stevens. He was a witness before the Israeli Kahan Commission Inquiry, held at Hebrew University in Jerusalem in January 1983.

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