

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Everything written below in italics is an extract from my diary dating seven years ago. I rewrote it in a better way without all the grammatical errors and the weak vocabulary.

"Today is Sunday, our favorite day of the week—family day. My parents always take my younger sister Todea and me on a new adventure to explore the beautiful places we haven't seen in Lebanon. As we set off, our parents refused to tell us where they were taking us, only that it would be a long drive from Bikfaya (our village). We played games along the way, like the name game, to pass the time. The name game consists of saying a name that starts with the last letter of the name said by the person before you. My parents always used hard Arabic names that my sister and I were sure they were inventing. However, we never commented on it because we always laughed so hard playing this game that our stomachs hurt. When we finally arrived at "Shallalat Al Zarka" restaurant, we were starving! I ordered a sandwich, but didn't like it. My dad immediately noticed and ordered something else for me. To my surprise, he ate my sandwich along with his. I couldn't believe how much he could eat!"

Starving? If only I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have used such a detached term to describe my own hunger. Starving are the people I see every day while walking to university, scouring the garbage cans for their next meals with desperate hands and despair-filled eyes. Eyes that have made contact with mine numerous times and have only reflected heartbreaking pain and resigned souls. I see parents sift through each trash bag with their children watching from a distance, their eyes downcast with embarrassment. Other kids, their sunken cheeks and frail bodies bearing witness to their hunger, dig vigorously through the wastes, making their search for anything edible or warm a matter of survival. Each time I see the exhaustion etched onto the parents' faces and the given up look in these kids' eyes, I feel this gut-wrenching feeling and numbness crawl all over me. As the situation worsens, the number of people struggling to survive keeps growing. It's a painful reality that's becoming all too common in Lebanon. Why isn't the government doing anything to help these people?

I often find myself yearning for the days when our family would take long road trips and laugh together without a care in the world. Looking back, I wish I had appreciated those moments more. I wish I had been more grateful for the food on my plate, knowing that there were others who would give anything for just a single bite. I miss the days when we could travel without worrying about the cost. Things have changed a lot. Gas prices have skyrocketed, and we're forced to think twice before using our car to go anywhere. Every time we fill up the tank, we feel the weight of the expense bearing down on us. It's become a source of constant stress, knowing that a large chunk of the income will be eaten up by transportation alone.

"On the way back, the car's gentle hum was so cozy and lulled me into a peaceful daze. Beside me, Todea was snoring softly while I struggled to stay awake. Despite my fatigue, I felt comforted by the soft murmur of my parents' voices as they chatted in hushed tones so as not to disturb us. I could hear dad whispering jokes and making mom laugh so hard. I didn't understand most of them, but their laughter was infectious, and I found myself grinning along with them. Then, to my surprise, my mom started singing along to the Frozen soundtrack "Let It

Go," which she had initially been reluctant to let us play. Her voice was sweet and melodic, and I drifted off to sleep with a warm feeling in my chest."

I miss the sound of mom's laughter. It's been a while since she's laughed so freely. Now, her laughs are tuned down, and I can tell that the stress of her job as a teacher has taken a toll on her. I hate to see her struggling. It's not just my mom—it feels like everyone around me is weighed down by the pressures they are facing in Lebanon. The rising dollar rate, the uncertainty of the future in this country... it's all taking a toll. I worry about my own future in Lebanon, too. First, I worry that, with the rising costs, I won't be able to complete my studies at the university. Secondly, I worry that even after graduation I will not be able to find a well-paying job to repay my father for all the sacrifices he's made for me. How will I ever be able to support my parents the way they've supported me? I'm scared of having the roles reversed. I cannot comprehend how they stay motivated throughout the economic crisis Lebanon is facing. How will I ever be able to withstand the pressure and stress they go through with their heads held high? Only looking at them exhausts me.

"I felt the car stop, and dad woke me up to visit one of their friends, عمّو Tarek. As soon as he opened the door, he enveloped Todea and me in a huge hug. He gives the best hugs in the world. He is one of these people who always radiate warmth and kindness, and he always greets us with a smile and a stash of chocolates. He always makes sure Todea and I are having fun while he and my parents talk. We had been to his house so many times that we knew it like the back of our hands. We had played hide and seek and tag in every nook and cranny of that place. Todea doesn't know this, but he was the one who gave me my top two hiding spots—the ones where she could never seem to find me."

عمّو Tarek was killed in the devastating explosion at Beirut's port on August 4, 2020. The mere thought of it brings tears to my eyes and ignites an intense anger deep within me. The explosion, caused by heartless murderers, has left our community shattered and bathed in grief, yet those responsible have not been held accountable. They roam free, unfettered, among innocent people, and the mere notion of it terrifies me. Who will be the next victim of their wickedness? Will it be me, my loved ones, or perhaps even you? It's a haunting question, but one that must be asked. I refuse to let their callous disregard for human life go unpunished. They may continue to evade justice, but I refuse to remain silent. Despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to the responsible culprits, the government continues to conceal their identities, shielding them from the justice they deserve. We must stand up for what is right and ensure that justice is served, for the memory of عمّو Tarek and all the other innocent souls who perished that day.

"As the sun began to set, we went to the supermarket to get our weekly groceries. This was always a special occasion for my sister and me, as it meant getting to choose our favorite snacks for school. We took turns pushing the shopping cart, racing to keep up with our parents and competing to see who was the better cart pusher. We also played a game where we could only step on tiles of the same color or else we would lose."

The supermarket used to be a fun place to shop, and we always ended up with more items than we needed. But nowadays, the moment you step foot in the store, it feels like everyone's down. People are glued to their phones' calculators, frantically trying to buy as few things as possible

because they simply can't afford it. Last month, I overheard a husband talking to his wife on the phone, saying that they couldn't afford any more expenses for the month, but he still wanted to plan a small gathering for their daughter's birthday. I watched as he scrutinized multiple brands of the same item to buy the cheapest one. And at the checkout, my heart sank as I saw him struggle to pay for the items in his cart. There had been some confusion with the prices, and the total was much higher than anticipated. The man had to embarrassingly remove items one by one in front of a long line of people until he could afford the new total. As he left with his small bag, I couldn't help but feel the weight of the situation. As everything became more expensive, Lebanese people cut back on going out, then started buying cheaper groceries, followed by limiting their spending to special occasions only, and finally staying at home to save on gas. With the constant rise of the dollar rate, we're constantly having to adapt to a new lifestyle. When will this end?

Lebanon of my dreams is a far cry from the current reality which has left me feeling suffocated and trapped. It has been a living nightmare that has extinguished our dreams and potential. I yearn for a Lebanon where basic human rights are respected and where hard work and determination are rewarded. Sadly, our corrupted rulers are more interested in money and power than the welfare of their own people. It is heartbreaking to witness how the government's corruption and greed are destroying this country. Every day, I see more and more people giving up on this country and leaving in search of a better life. The writing is on the wall, and it's only a matter of time before we are all forced to flee. I refuse to leave and give up on my country. I will stay and fight for a better future, a Lebanon where our dreams and aspirations can thrive. I know I am not alone in my desires for a brighter tomorrow free from fear and uncertainty. Every Lebanese person yearns for a Lebanon that we can be proud of. So why should it remain just a dream? The Lebanon of our dreams can be made a reality. Alexandre Nehme, M.D., dean of Saint George University of Beirut Faculty of Medicine, said: "Lebanese people are resilient. ... We're acquainted with dealing with uncertainty and traumatic events. We find ways to be happy despite misery in our proximity.", and I believe this to be one of our most wonderful qualities. We can, together, fight for our dream and make Lebanon live up to the potential it was always meant to achieve.