

## A sister from Lebanon (7)

Marie Bond  
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*Lebanon*

Leaving Egypt in 1996 was a dramatic move for us as a family. We already were building a foundation for our church there other than only working at the newspaper. We were educating two Egyptian women who were found by the Japanese sisters and who participated in matching by pictures. They attended the blessing ceremony locally which was performed by the Kim's couple.

Also few brothers came from Sudan and they were staying with us. Egypt was the center of the Middle East in that time. Cairo was a cosmopolitan city. A lot of foreigners were working there. English was the second language as well so Larry could interact with a lot of people in the community specially by working at the American University in Cairo, he could communicate with English speakers in a daily base.

Lebanon use to be the Switzerland of the Middle East attracting tourists to his beautiful sceneries and ski resorts as well his Mediterranean climate. The center of banking and business, Lebanon played an important role in building a bridge between East and West. But when the war started in 1975, Lebanon became isolated from the international community and a lot of Lebanese immigrated to Canada and Australia seeking refuge.

So moving to Lebanon was hard for Larry as suddenly he found himself isolated from English speaking community as the Lebanese spoke French mainly and there were no expatriates living there in that time. He also needed to finish his yearly contract with the American University so after a sudden move to Lebanon, he went back to Egypt and took Donald with him to work there for another two months.

Finding a job in Lebanon was also not an easy task especially for an English speaker who doesn't speak either Arabic or French.

We rented a furnished apartment in suburb of Beirut and luckily Larry found a job in a weekly English newspaper called Eco-News as a copy editor. He worked as well for a Japanese security agency as a monthly reporter writing about Lebanon economy and security for Japanese visitors and investors.

We start settling down and reconnect with the church members there. Adel and Pauline already had three children and Vera with her husband in Iran having her first child Sara. Also another couple came from Germany, Thomas and Hermine Schellen and their two kids. We welcomed them in our house for two months.

My parents were thrilled to have the grandchildren near by and they really enjoyed them so much but not for so long.

When I became pregnant with my fourth child Scott, Larry fell sick with Pneumonia. When the doctor was checking him, he heard a heart murmur. He asked him to check his heart when he recovers and so he did. The doctors found out that Larry had a valve deterioration from birth that he didn't know about it. So he needed to start a regular check up to follow up with his condition and sooner or later he needs a heart operation to replace the valve. Larry called his parents to let them know about his heart condition but they were traveling out of state. Within few days we received a call from Larry's mom and sister. While they were traveling, Larry's father had a heart attack and died. He was only 65 years old and just retired. Larry left Lebanon and attended his father funeral. And when he came back, he shared with me his intention for us to move to the States in order to follow up with his heart condition and to be beside his mom who already lost a son earlier and now a husband.

We agreed to wait until Scott was born, May first 1997.

Within two months, Larry again traveled to the States and he took Donald with him as it was too much for me to take care of all of them by myself specially with having a two month old baby Scott.

My parents tried to help us as much as they can specially after Larry left, my mom use to come every weekend and stay with me and help me with the kids. Anne was 4 years old, Paul was 3 and Scott was only two months old when Larry left in the end of June 1997.

Also one major issue came up after Larry left. There was no American Embassy in Beirut in that time so I needed to go to Damascus to apply for Scott's American passport. In the Middle East, the children take the father's name and nationality so in Egypt the children got their American passports but in Lebanon I needed to take Scott with me to Syria and apply for him. It was a difficult journey.

The border between Lebanon and Syria was safe and opened in that time. So I took a taxi one morning with baby Scott and left to Syria. The distance is not too far, around five to six hours. But to avoid the traffic specially all kind of trucks importing and exporting goods to both countries, we needed to leave very early. But in the border of Syria, the Syrian army stopped us. They start asking us all kind of questions and they refused to let us go. It was a nerve racking. I didn't know what was their intentions. A mother and a baby going for an appointment at the American Embassy and coming back in the same day. After few hours of struggling and waiting, they let us go.

But it was too late. The American Embassy was closed when we arrived. So I needed to stay one night in the hotel and go back in the morning. Thanks God, the American Embassy agreed to see me the next day and I could finally apply for American passport for Scott.

When I told my family about what happened, they told me probably they wanted money to let you pass. Somehow, it didn't occur to me that this what was the case.

Four months had passed while Larry was in California with Donald looking to find a job and renting a place for us to move in.

Finally, the time has come. The end of October , I said a heart breaking good bye to my parents and left Lebanon with Anne, Paul and baby Scott to start a new beginning in California after living in Lebanon for less than two years.

And a new journey had began in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

To be continued