

Laila Shaheen DaCruz

By Rose Ghurayyib

A pioneer who took the publication of books as her career for more than twenty five years.

Laila Shaheen DaCruz was born in a happy family. Her parents had common interests. They both practiced teaching before marriage, enjoyed the company of friends and showed an interest in cultural activities beyond their school duties. After a few years' work in Palestine, the Shaheens settled in Beirut where Mr. Shaheen taught mathematics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and studied for his Master's degree at the same time. His wife took care of her three daughters, Laila, Najwa and Mona. The Shaheens rejected the old-fashioned idea that the family is incomplete in the absence of sons. They were always proud of their daughters who finished their high school and college education with distinction and honors.

Like her father, Laila was talented in mathematics and sciences. She was also interested in extracurricular activities requiring leadership. Thus, for several years, she was an active volunteer at the YWCA, where she later held a responsible post after her graduation from the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Right after her marriage to Mr. DaCruz, Laila took charge of a publishing house called «Illustrated Publications» now «Intag». A scientific mind allowed her to acquire a high degree of poise, self-confidence and administrative skills. Through the help of professional colleagues, she succeeded in producing a proper Arabic

translation of the well-known American comics, «Superman» and «Little Lulu» by using a style which attracts young people.

Faced with the high price of paper during the war in Lebanon, she decided to reduce the size of the magazine without effecting sales. Hence, the publication has gone on regularly for over twenty five years.

A fluent public speaker in both Arabic and English, she was able to travel far and wide as a delegate to the various conferences held by YWCA in various corners of the world. As a publisher, her travels offered her opportunities to find new material for translation and publication and to market the work she had already published. The latter included reading material for young people, illustrated books and postcards featuring touristic sites in Lebanon and finally reproduced natural scenery from all over the world.

What I have mentioned about Laila DaCruz reflects part of the image I have taken of her when she was my student at Beirut University College (BUC), and when she was my associate in volunteer work at YWCA summer camps and when she succeeded in producing and marketing cassettes of children's songs.

To me she represents the daring Lebanese woman who knew how to blend the values of modern culture with those of our traditional heritage •