

## Two UNCONVENTIONAL JOBS HELD BY ONE WOMAN

by Myriam Sfeir, Assistant Editor

**H**ala takes my brother to school everyday. She also works on the petrol station my family frequents. The two unconventional jobs she holds prompted me to interview her for this issue of *Al-Raida*. Her husband was present during the interview, so I had a chance to hear what he had to say.

Hala graduated from high school and got married soon afterwards. Prior to her marriage, she had never worked for she was busy taking care of her home and family. The deteriorating economic conditions in the country forced her husband to take up two jobs at the same time. At a certain point, her husband, discouraged by the prevailing situation, gave up attempting to make ends meet in Lebanon and decided to try his luck outside the country. Hala was tremendously affected by her husband's absence: "I was miserable and lonely and felt burdened with the responsibility of brining up our four sons all by myself. So I asked my husband to return to Lebanon where we could work hand in hand." At first her husband was opposed to the idea of his wife taking up a job; however, the need for "the extra cash" finally convinced him to allow her to work.

Hala started off by running their vegetable store, while her husband worked as a school bus driver. Two years later her husband decided to sell the bus and work as a taxi driver, but Hala advised him not to sell it and offered to do the job herself - driving the children from and to the school. At first, he opposed the idea since he did not want her to overwork herself, but she finally managed to convince him to acquiesce. When asked if any of the students' parents complained about the change in drivers the answer was negative. Hala affirms, "Mothers were in fact very pleased for their children were content with me because I am more patient with them." Her husband admitted: "The students enjoy going with her to school. Sometimes when Hala is unable to take the students to school and I go instead I often sense disappointment on their faces." Some time later her husband rented a petrol station and started a taxi company and

Hala began working at the station since her husband was very busy driving to and from Beirut.

According to Hala it is important that women help their husbands for nowadays living conditions are harsh, and both spouses should work to ensure a decent living. She maintains that "work has changed my life. I feel productive and active and would rather work than stay at home, visit friends and socialize. Yet, I still believe that women should work only when in need and that their top priority should be their families."

Hala's schedule is very busy. She wakes up early and leaves the house at seven to drop the students off to school. After that she goes straight to the petrol station and rarely gets back home until late. I asked her how she manages to cook her meals everyday, and she explained that she cooks part of her food at home and the rest she prepares at the station. She tidies things up during the week days and on weekends, she cleans the house, does the laundry, and attends to all the household chores. Hala asserts that her husband and four sons are very supportive and helpful: "None of my children was negatively affected by my work. When my youngest son was a toddler I used to take him with me to work. I could do that because I'm my own boss and my hours were flexible." Hala maintains that her children often help her out both at home and on the petrol station: "My boys fix their beds, clear the kitchen table, throw the garbage away, etc. They sympathize with me and realize that I can't cope without their help. My husband also pitches in when he is free."

Hala affirms that their relatives and friends appreciate her work and encourage her to keep it up. According to her husband, "our children look up to their mother and are proud of her and so are many of our friends who want their wives to do likewise and assist them in their financial responsibilities." Hala asserts: "Most of the customers whom I serve at the station are shocked by the fact that I am a female. Some encourage and congratulate me, whereas others wonder if such work embarrasses me. I am not embarrassed not even one bit."