

# Dr. Nazek Saba Yared

## Renowned Lebanese Writer

By Myriam Sfeir

Dr. Nazek Saba Yared is author of several books and novels. Some of her books have been translated into English, and one went into the second edition which is very rare for an Arabic book. She is a member of the Baalbeck International Festival Executive Committee and the Lebanese Association for Women Researchers (Bahithat). She has assisted in starting the movement for the protection of battered women in Lebanon. In recognition of her "exceptional initiatives and activities in the field of culture and development, she received in December, 1998 the Prince Claus Award. She was given the award for her "commitment to Lebanese culture and society" and her "belief in inter-human and intercultural communication."

Yared was born in Jerusalem of a Lebanese mother and a Palestinian father. According to her she was very fortunate to be brought up in a family where values such as honesty, integrity, independence, and autonomy were highly regarded. She asserts: "My father was a very straightforward, honest and patriotic person, and I inherited these qualities from him. My mother, on the other hand, encouraged us, my sisters and I, to be economically independent. It was she who insisted that we should be professionals and never depend on a man. She was an exceptional woman."

Yared's childhood years were spent in Palestine where she attended a German school for three years. When the war broke down the school was closed, but she continued to take private lessons at home in

Arabic and English. Upon finishing her school years she had to leave Jerusalem having received a scholarship to pursue her studies in Cairo, Egypt. She majored in Philosophy and received her "License" from the Fuad the First University. She recounts: "While in Cairo I was cut off from my family who in 1948 were displaced by the Israelis." Her mother moved to Lebanon with her brother and three sisters, after her father died of a heart attack. It was in Cairo that she first met her husband, and since he was Lebanese, they moved to Lebanon.

Yared asserts that her husband was very supportive right from the start. He had great respect for her and was very understanding: "I really can't complain for I've been very lucky





with my husband and in my family life. My husband stood by me and I must admit it is really thanks to him that I was able to fulfill my dreams. I believe that since my husband was brought up by his mother and only his mother made him respect women."

Since she has always had a job, Yared was never a full-time house-wife. She taught Arabic for 32 years (1950 - 1982) at the "College Protestant". She asserts: "Those years were the nicest in my life. I was very happy. I love Arabic Literature and managed to transfer this love to my students. if anything, I can say that I am a very good teacher." Together with a full teaching load, she was studying for an MA in Arabic Literature at the American University of Beirut (AUB). After she got her Masters degree, she decided to go for a Ph.D. which she received in 1976 when the war had already started. She asserts: "I owe it all to my husband. It took me seven full years to finish my Ph.D. To have a man sitting there, without going out, or receiving, staying there with a wife who is immersed in books was very unselfish of him."

Coping was not easy according to Yared yet she managed. She had hired help at home to take care of the house work, and her husband looked after the kids in the evenings: "Given that teaching is a flexible job, I was able to fix my hours in such a way that I would feed my child in the morning, go and give my classes, come back at noon for their noon meal. In the afternoons and evenings my husband took over while I was away teaching and attending my classes. I can't say it was easy, it was very difficult."

Yared admits that she always had a guilt feeling about neglecting her children. So she would make up for lost time with her children during holidays and the summer vacation. According to her there were many advantages in teaching particularly the three whole months of holiday during which she spent a lot of quality time with her children. However, she asserts that she never felt that her children were deprived because she was a working woman. She holds that it is very important for women to work because idle married women feel emptiness after their children go off to school. Yared maintains: "Being lonely they try to pass the time visiting others, playing cards, etc. and I don't think their children turned out better than mine. It is my conviction that a mother who is really willing to put an effort to bring up her children will never sacrifice them no matter what her job is. So this is how I coped. I strongly believe that cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. can be done by anyone. It is mainly the children that need to be looked after, and I definitely looked after my children and never sacrificed them for anything in the world."

Dr. Yared goes on to say: "In 1978 I left the 'College Protestant' and took another job at Beirut University College (BUC presently LAU). At that time Arabic courses were given either as electives or as college requirements, so it was more difficult to make students experience the pleasure one derives from reading Arabic Literature. At the Baccalaureate level things were different. I managed to really influence my students by making them love and appreciate our beautiful Literature."

Yared admits that she always dreamt of becoming a writer. She explains: "To me writing was always a dream. Being a writer was the most wonderful thing in the world." She wrote her first novel in 1983 after her children were off to college. She holds: "Yet, prior to writing novels she concentrated on literary criticism because, in her opinion, it was less time consuming and didn't need as much concentration as creative writing."

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Her latest novel *Al-Zekrayat Al-Mulghat* (1998) deals with the status of Lebanese women. It touches upon gender relations, economic need, violence against women, the war, prevalent discriminatory laws, etc. According to Yared, "the events take place during the Lebanese war. The novel traces the life of a married couple who owing to a lot of external

and internal factors get divorced. The book highlights the moral abuse that women are subjected to, patriarchy, the oriental mentality, the status of women in the personal status laws, as well as the damaging impact divorce can have on the children.

Yared is one of the first who talked openly about domestic violence. She holds that there is dearth in statistics on battered women in Lebanon and collecting such data is very difficult. She recounts: "I didn't know that the problem even existed until I met a lady called Tina Naccache. The problem gripped me since no one around me had ever faced such a situation. Tina and I worked together for some time collecting information, and we discovered that there were quite a few battered women (physically, psychologically, emotionally, etc.) in Lebanon."

Yared is currently working with one of her colleagues at the Bahithat on a project which entails a full bibliography of Lebanese women writers from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century. Many of them are women who nobody have heard of or who only wrote in journals." She maintains: "What is interesting about my work with the Bahithat is that I got to know intellectually active women working in different fields of research. To me what is enriching about it is that we come from different educational and intellectual backgrounds. We meet once or twice a month and discuss our current projects. I enjoy being with them."