

6-30-2009

Homecoming

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

"Homecoming" (2009). *News Releases*. 1428.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/1428

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Homecoming

06.30.2009 | Faculty Can you go home again?

A man of deep faith, Provost Joe Saliba found the answer in the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who never hesitated when she answered the call of God.

It's a resounding yes.

"It was like I never left. Nothing has changed, and everything has changed," said Saliba after recently returning to Lebanon after 28 years. "In my heart and brain, I knew that this is still my home. All the memories kept tumbling down at once. My adrenaline level must have been skyrocketing."

Saliba's story of how he fled war-torn Lebanon in 1976, enrolled at the University of Dayton with self-described "atrocious" English skills, rose up the academic ranks and returned to his homeland is featured in the June 29 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

For Saliba, the University of Dayton became home when he couldn't return home.

"It's my home away from home, it's my family, it's my small village I grew up in. It's all of that," Saliba described the University of Dayton to *Chronicle* reporter Peter Monaghan.

During Lebanon's civil war, Saliba's father, a master winemaker in the rugged, mountainous village of Bteghrine, persuaded him to flee over the mountains. His Uncle Joe helped him escape on a journey that took him from Brazil to France to eventually the United States. When he enrolled at the University of Dayton, he spoke little English, but amazingly earned three engineering degrees in six years.

Today, he's struck almost speechless when describing his first trip to his homeland since 1981, when he returned briefly to marry his wife Dorothea.

"There are no words that can describe it. It was truly emotional, truly inspirational, just unbelievable," he said.

His large, very spiritual, tight-knit family — "64 cousins on my father's side alone and maybe 20 on my mother's side" — embraced him like the prodigal son. His parents, two brothers and two sisters all eventually emigrated to Dayton.

"I lost two generations, yet the connection was still there," he said. "I was seeing their parents in them, their grandparents in them. I hadn't seen my cousin Adib's son, Mousa, yet I knew him inside and out. I hugged him like I knew him all my life, though that was the first time I laid eyes on him."

University of Dayton President Daniel J. Curran accompanied Saliba from house to house in the small village, where he reunited with cousins, aunts and uncles. During the weeklong trip, they hosted an alumni reception on the Mediterranean seashore in Beirut that brought together 65 alumni, spouses and children for a menu of nostalgia and Lebanese shawarma and falafel. They also met Michel Suleiman, president of Lebanon, and visited secondary schools and universities to recruit students and establish academic exchanges.

And 40 of Saliba's high school classmates got together for an impromptu gathering.

Saliba didn't see any guns on the street or hear of car bombings and assassinations — all part of the landscape during the 15-year civil war. Instead, he returned to a stunningly beautiful mountainous land along the Mediterranean Sea that spoke to his past and a new future.

"It was more beautiful than my memory could recall," he said. "The scenery, the music, the noise — it envelopes you with all your five senses."

"You can't exist on the margins there. Lebanon takes you over."

For a week in May — a month fittingly devoted to Mary — Saliba made the overdue pilgrimage to his homeland. "I was filled with apprehension and hope. You wonder why it was you who was able to leave and not them? Why was God's dream different for you? Many in my family are poor, but unbelievably happy. They opened their hearts and minds. ...When I showed up, they were so proud of me. They couldn't get enough of me. I couldn't get enough of them."

Yes, you can go home again.

Joseph Saliba, provost, at 937-229-2245.