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Revolution to Evolution: My Nursing Journey

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My nursing journey commenced with a profound sense of compassion, coupled with an unwavering desire to impact the lives of others positively. Little did I anticipate that this path would lead me to a lifelong adventure filled with continuous learning, formidable challenges, and moments of profound joy. My fascination with the healthcare world was kindled during my childhood, as I became actively involved in medical missions from the tender age of 12. I was raised in Nigeria and the Ivory Coast from the age of 4 to 14, then relocated to Istanbul, Turkey, and eventually Lebanon. I got my start with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which is an organization that collaborates with many local religious churches and mosques in different communities and countries in the Middle East and Africa. These missions left an indelible mark on my young mind, introducing me to healing stories and comforting those in need.

My parents, recognizing my passion in caring for others, encouraged me to pursue medicine and become a physician. Despite starting medical school, I realized nursing was my true calling. This decision to move from medicine to nursing was met with resistance from my parents, who, as Middle Eastern individuals, had different cultural expectations. There was a period where my parents did not talk to me after I chose nursing over medicine. Nevertheless, I persisted because nursing offered me a better fit

and the unique reward of making a difference in people's lives, providing me with a profound sense of purpose and a continuous challenge that I eagerly embraced.

I joined the Red Cross at 16 years old and trained for first aid and basic life support (BLS). This allowed me to take a more hands on approach during the medical missions I was involved with. I furthered my healthcare career while attending University and became a paramedic with the Red Cross. Paramedics and nurses have a different scope of practice in Lebanon than here in the United States, which facilitated my transition into a role as a trauma nurse upon earning my bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) in 2015.

My nursing education in Lebanon proved to be a unique and transformative experience, one for which I am eternally grateful. It was a journey marked by countless trials and triumphs. There were so many barriers to overcome, from late-night study sessions to navigating my way through road closures due to explosions so I could attend my clinical rotations. The training was demanding and filled with multiple barriers for success that could have easily dissuaded my path. Challenges included extended hospital shifts, providing adequate patient care during blackouts, limited supplies and equipment, and a wide variety of care depending on the hospital system. The lessons learned from limited resources and shortages were genuinely eye-opening. With time, I found my true



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calling in critical care and trauma nursing, and I pursued advanced certifications and training to become an expert in this specialty. I also took on roles as a preceptor and trainer at Clemenceau Medical Center in Beirut which is affiliated with John Hopkins Medicine. My childhood in Africa, where English was my primary language, prepared me well for my studies in Lebanon, where using English, Arabic, and French languages were interchangeable and very common. Fortunately, my Arabic language skills proved beneficial during my training and improved significantly during my schooling and nursing training in Lebanon.

Working alongside nurses in Beirut and rotating through the various hospitals, I discovered that the scope of practice varied significantly. For example, American hospitals like Lebanese American University and American University of Beirut adhered to set guidelines and policies. In contrast to local hospitals in Beirut, French hospitals such as Hôtel-Dieu de France-Saint Joseph University Medical Center, were well-organized. Lebanese hospitals, on the other hand, operated more chaotically. However, it was within these Lebanese hospitals that I encountered the sickest patient population and I found myself performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as a nursing student more times than a nurse in the United States may encounter over the course of their entire career!

I was hired by the Red Cross as a trauma mobile nurse and the experiences I encountered in this role left me with lasting memories and a degree of post traumatic stress (PTSD), but the memories also provided a degree of post-traumatic growth making me more resilient and robust. I rode in the ambulance as a first responder and was exposed to the casualties of war in Syria and in the Bekka Valley in Lebanon. I can honestly say I almost died more than 50 times while working as a trauma nurse. Despite having a white flag and riding in an ambulance, the military did not care. The memories of this time are seared into my brain. I witnessed babies buried in rubble, organs exposed, missing limbs, and so much more. It is

a humbling experience to respond to these atrocities and lack the ability to offer life sustaining therapies. One of the most distressing experiences I had involved my ambulance getting bombed and buried under the rubble of a building. Fortunately, my colleagues and I were not in the ambulance at the time. We were unable to communicate with anyone and I lost my phone, wallet, camera. The city itself was a dead zone due to all the bombings and we spent 6 days walking the city with no means to communicate to the outside world, no electricity, food, or water. My family and friends thought I had been killed. On the 7th day, we found a small local hospital that helped us connect to the Red Cross and we were able to return to the border and back into Lebanon. These experiences helped me transition into my subsequent position in the ICU at UCSDH which brought a unique blend of excitement and anxiety, while providing a different sense of safety.

In 2018, I moved to the United States to further my education, becoming the first applicant from the Lebanese American University to apply for a nursing license in California. The California Board of Nursing posed a formidable challenge, particularly about the mandatory clinical hours' requirement. I had to persistently navigate the system to ensure that my completed clinical hours during my nursing school were recognized. While awaiting my license, I began teaching BLS, advanced cardiac life support (ACLS), and pediatric advanced life support (PALS) to healthcare providers in San Diego, which ultimately led to my introduction to UCSDH Health. I met a UCSDH anesthesiologist and one UCSDH medical director and they convinced me to pursue a career at UCSD Health.

I am currently in my fifth year at UCSDH, and it has proven to be one of the best decisions I have made in my nursing career. Over time, I assumed leadership roles within UCSDH, precepting numerous new graduates, nursing students, and new hires. I also became a faculty member at San Diego State University Nursing School, passionately advocating for nursing students and the advancement of the nursing profession. In my first year at

SDSU in 2020, I received the honor of being named the Outstanding Undergraduate Professor of the Year for all schools at SDSU. The following year, I was awarded the title of the Most Influential Faculty at SDSU.

Nursing is a field that is in constant evolution, and I am deeply committed to lifelong learning through training the next generation of nurses and participation in conferences, workshops, and the pursuit of additional certifications. Staying current with the latest research and healthcare technologies motivated me to pursue my DNP focusing on Adult and Gerontology. Now, as a nursing educator at San Diego State School of Nursing, I can attest that my nursing education in Lebanon was incredibly hands-on, providing me with a solid foundation to offer nursing students a broad viewpoint and understanding of nursing practice and cultural awareness.

My nursing journey started when I became involved in medical missions and volunteer work, a commitment that remains steadfast to this day. I am honored to have been gifted with international experience and exposure that reflects my nursing pathway. I recognize the profound impact early exposure to helping people and being in the middle of an active war has had on my life and the privilege I have had to care for others. My aspirations for the future include mentoring the next generation of nurses and advocating for healthcare policy improvements. There are times that feel surreal when I compare my nursing experiences in the Middle East to the care I am able to provide at UCSD Health. I remain grateful for a health system where our daily safety is not compromised, our supplies are readily available, and we are not deprived of the daily necessities of food, water, and shelter. My nursing journey is an ever-evolving narrative characterized by empathy, dedication, and a steadfast commitment to improving the lives of others. It is a journey that I am honored to continue, one patient, one day, and one story at a time.