

Rediscovering Lebanon through letters long forgotten

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Special to The Daily Star

Friday, October 23, 2009



BEIRUT: Reading an excerpt from his award winning book for the first time in front of a live audience, author of "Kisses from a Distance," Raff Ellis, gave an informative and insightful lecture Thursday evening at The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC), in Notre Dame University.

Inspired and conceived by over 200 letters found following the death of his mother, "Kisses From a Distance" tells the story of an eight-year journey that sets out to discover the truth of stories the author had been told about his family in Lebanon.

Introducing the guest speaker, moderator and Fullbright fellow, George Abdelnour, described Ellis as a veritable Renaissance man, who managed to "blend together a historian's touch for accuracy and an anthropologist's touch for narrative."

Focusing his 30-minute lecture and Powerpoint presentation on the Lebanese emigration between 1881-1914, Ellis touched on the reasons for why and how his ancestors abandoned their homeland for the great unknown and explained that the principle reason for the first wave of exodus was the rampant poverty affecting the Lebanese.

Ellis took the audience through the challenging and at times amusing journey of his family's travels and cracked jokes about old stoic family portraits. Claiming that it was hard to cram so much rich material into only a 30-minute talk, Ellis concluded the lecture by saying that what he had learned through all of his research, is how extremely resourceful and adaptive the Lebanese people truly are.

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