

Women of BEIRUT



Photo stories by: Sara Hteit



Mary / 30 years old, Ethiopian worker, Karentina

“I carried my son on my back and walked over the wreck”

I still don't know where I got the strength from. We were standing against a wall when the first explosion happened, and after the second one, I opened up my eyes to a scene of blood and corpses. My feet were hurting too, but I pulled myself up together and, barefooted, walked towards "Al Saydeh" Church. Back then, I told myself it's either we live together, or die together. I just wanted to protect my child.

I came from Ethiopia to earn some money. I ran away from my sponsor's house because I was afraid that she would send me back to my country before I have saved a sufficient amount of money. Later, I fell in love with a Lebanese man and gave birth to my baby. He is all I have; my only hope. All I think about now is returning to my country and starting a new, safe life.

“Weeks have passed but it feels like yesterday”

I still can't believe that this hospital turned into rubbles within a few minutes. I had just seen the smoke from Room 410 which overlooks

the harbor, and suddenly, it felt as though it was the end of everything, the moment of death.

I ran to lift off the debris of my colleague and then headed to the children's rooms. I saw a mother rushing, carrying her diabetic child. I grabbed her and ran towards the stairs to get to the emergency room. The girl was bleeding and couldn't afford to lose any more blood. I pressed the wound with a piece of cloth until the mother could manage to go to another functioning hospital.

I lost sense of everything, even my bleeding broken leg. I then started moving between the wounded, trying to save more lives, and I saw a man take his last breath. Even though I tried my best to bring him back to life, he was gone. It hurt me a lot that I wasn't able to say goodbye to him. I currently feel a huge void in my head and I am currently undergoing therapy in hopes of continuing to lead a normal life...



“I felt blood covering my face and every part of my body ached”



Clara Chammas / 32 years old, Achrafieh

I was visiting my new house on the 4th of August. I was with my fiancé and my mother, and we were arranging the furniture before our big day with a lot of excitement. Seeing the smoke from afar, I sensed something bad was about to happen, and I suddenly found myself on the stairs of the wrecked building, with my mother next to me, mumbling my name and repeating the name of the place we're at. I felt blood covering my face and every part of my body ached; I even thought that I lost my memory. I was petrified as I arrived to the hospital, and hundreds of questions crossed my mind: "Will I ever be able to walk again? Am I paralyzed now?" I learned later on that my injury was limited to minor fractures in the cervical spine, cracks in the head and a fracture in the spinal cord. The doctors told me that the wounds will soon heal and I will return to my normal physical movement, and for this I'm grateful. I am a strong woman and I know that I will get over this. I filed a lawsuit against the Lebanese state, and I will not give up my right to find out who did this to us. I never asked for anything from this country, but I certainly don't wish to die.

I will not talk about my physical wounds, or about the crutches that now accompany me while walking. I just know that I will never heal, nor get rid of the excruciating inner pain. I'm hurting in silence, looking but not seeing, with scars ripping my flesh. I ask myself if I am where I belong, and why did all this happen. On the 4th of August I was in a coffee shop near the explosion, writing my thoughts, hoping they would change a part of our lives, and suddenly the ideas scattered, and so did I. The shattered glass penetrated my body and my foot was bleeding. One of the passing people carried me and took me to the hospital. I looked around, I saw a dying man taking his last breath, and another woman screaming of pain. I was silently waiting for someone to cover my wounds.

I am now afraid of everything, even the sound of glass. I hide under the sheets all the time. No, I don't deserve this experience, and no, I will not forgive those who did this to us! I want to finish all my projects, and achieve all my goals quickly, because this time I survived, but I don't know if I'm going to make it the next time.

**“I am now afraid of everything,
even the sound of glass”**



Ruby Ramadan / 22 years old, University student, Ashrafieh

Sama's mother (5 years old), Mar Mkhael



“I want my eye back”

Sama is the apple of our eyes. I tried to protect her from the explosion, but I couldn't. She fell into my lap, but the glass splinters got into her eye nonetheless. Her eye was put off forever and so was my heart. She always wonders why did this happen to her and not to all of us. I have no answer, I get confused and words suffocate in my throat. There is nothing I can say that can ease her pain.

Sama tries to look in the mirror every single day, but I stop her. I removed all the mirrors except for one, which she constantly places a chair and tries to reach. I always stop her, so she resorts to removing the piece of cloth covering her eye and using the mobile phone's screen to see her reflection. Sama went through several panic attacks because of the way her eye looks, and this is why I get terrified when she insists on seeing it. I can do nothing but try to soothe her and to console her tragedy.

I asked her once if she wanted new toys, but she loudly answered: I want my eye back.

Sama is my infinite pain. The explosion took a part of her, but it took away every part of me.”

“This is how I look now”

My face hurts and I have scars all over my body, and they told me that it won't be a year before I finish my treatment. I feel perplexed; sometimes I laugh, but on the inside I am grieving. My son refused to see me through the screen of the phone when I called him. I told him that I miss him, that he shouldn't be scared of me. “I am your mother” I said, but he can't handle seeing me like this.

I felt that I lost my sight at the exact moment of the explosion. I was terrified, and I thought that I will never see my son again. I just couldn't believe what happened. My family is sad for me, but I always comfort them and say: “Don't worry; I'm fine; I can hear, see and walk.” Despite this disaster that has shaken us all; I am still joyful even though I'm worried about having these scars on my face forever. “Real beauty is that of the soul”, I then console myself.

Kawthar / 31 years old, Karantina



“I can’t take it anymore”

Lena Lteif / 62 years old, Karentina



My brother was killed in the civil war, and we were forced to leave our house in Chouf. We moved to Beirut in 1978, and during that period, we lost many relatives in Ain Al-Remmeneh explosion. We then moved to Karantina. It's as if disasters insist to follow me wherever I go. Look at the miserable Karantina now after Beirut's explosion! Our corrupt authority destroyed it and killed what was left of me. What have I done to deserve all this? I don't feel safe living anywhere in Lebanon. I am overwhelmed by fear. Every time I remember the explosion, and the scene of the port, I feel petrified.

Forty years of war, chaos and destruction. Isn't this enough? The memory of the war still haunts us, and now this explosion came to refresh our dire memories even more. When I heard the explosion, I automatically pushed my daughter into the bathroom, just the way my mother used to do whenever she heard the sound of missiles during the civil war. I have nothing left, the house turned into rubble. Should I endure more? No, I will not stay. I don't want to stay here.

“I went through hell and back”

On the 4th of August, I walked over the debris. I got out of my destroyed house and walked to the street. I lost track of everything, and the trauma had my subconscious control me. I wasn't present. My entire body was bleeding, my shoulder ripped and my waist was split in two. I didn't find anyone to take me to the hospital; everyone was injured and they were struggling to stay alive. I picked up myself and looked for someone to help me. I ran to this girl on the motorcycle, who was also trying to rescue another wounded girl, and asked her to help me because I was dying. I knew that if I surrendered, I would lose what is left of my blood.



The doctor was amazed that I had survived, especially with a torn stomach like mine. He told me that in such cases, people would bleed to death; they won't be able to walk like I did. I knew then that I was strong. I won't let this defeat me, and despite my distorted body, and the scars covering it, I will live with what is left of me, in a better way. I believe that I resurrected.



“I have been having severe heart attacks since the day of the explosion”

I was born in Karantina. I migrated with my parents at the beginning of the civil war and then we came back in the year 1990. This is my hometown, I love it. There isn't much damage done to my house, only the windows. On August 4, I heard the sound of the fireworks. I felt terrified and called my husband. After the second explosion, I fell on the ground. I felt numb. Up until this day, I still suffer from the same symptoms: ringing in my ears, shortness of breath, and involuntarily falling to the ground. I always tell my family that these are my last days. I don't think I can continue any longer.

“The 4th of August was the day that Beirut changed forever”

When we arrived to the place of the explosion, the scene was horrific. The sound of sirens resonated as the sound of death, and looking around me, I could see blood and dead bodies everywhere. I even saw people taking their last breath. I was terrified and I felt numb looking over the scene of people lying on the ground screaming for help, but I was determined to help as many people as I can. We rescued that man stuck beneath a car and picked three severely injured people. It ached me that the ambulance couldn't accommodate a larger number and the fact that we had to leave people behind. The tasks I did on that day were the most difficult and challenging since I started volunteering in the Lebanese Civil Defense in 2018. It was a whole new, but painful, experience that strengthened me and gave me the courage to save people, despite the agony.



Mira Kawas / 21 years old, volunteer at the Lebanese Civil Defense