

The Washington Post – PostGlobal – “[Struggle for Humanity in Jerusalem](#)” By *Daoud Kuttab* - July 23, 2007

Struggle for Humanity in Jerusalem

If you have been following the news over the past few decades, Sari Nusseibeh's autobiography "Once Upon a Country" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007, 542 pages) definitely fits the category of learning material. It would only fit the category of escape if you have not followed the news, or have no interest in Arab, Islamic or Middle Eastern issues.

In his book, Nusseibeh provides a rare view into the life of a member of a well known Palestinian family in Jerusalem, who after the occupation and the intifada suddenly found himself battling huge rats in an Israeli jail. While this book is certainly a profile of a Palestinian patriot, it is not anti-Israeli. In fact, this book shows a real struggle by a civilized individual to deal with issues of violence and occupation while seeking to stay above water and refuse to react instinctively.

"Once Upon a Country" provides a glimpse into a true Muslim Jerusalemite, one whose family has lived for hundreds of years in the holy city and has been awarded the privilege of holding the key to the holy

sepulcher, because of trust in the family from the various Christian denominations.

Nusseibeh's power is in the way that his humanity shines through in his effort to be loyal to his people and nation while also trying to stay committed to his humanity. The way he deals with others, namely the Israelis, is his strength. While he put his energies to teaching and later to running Al Quds University, he never hesitated from pushing his students and his peers into accepting and relating to their Israeli neighbors. Despite his mother's powerful narrative of losing their land in Ramla, he is able to differentiate between the right of return and the need to find alternatives to practicing this right.

Though this book may be heavy (both physically and metaphorically), it is an important document on the history of the Palestinian plight told in a readable and fascinating narrative.