

# In the midst of war

*Editor's note:* The world has watched in horror as warring factions in Israel and Lebanon destroyed homes, public buildings and industries through a series of bombing attacks. A negotiated ceasefire has brought relative calm to the Middle East, but the threat of another outbreak looms large.

A former reporter with the Northern Pen, Spencer Osberg, lived and worked in the region as a journalist until he fled Lebanon last month. The Nova Scotia native, a graduate of the journalism program at University of Kings College, now resides in Germany with his new wife, but is actively monitoring the events that continue to cause unease and anxiety.

Reporter Aaron Beswick posed a series of questions to Mr. Osberg about his observations in the Middle East. The interview, conducted by e-mail correspondence, follows:

*Pen: As far as you can tell, how are non-Shia Lebanese feeling about the situation?*

Osberg: Lebanese, no matter where they are in the country, are watching the widespread destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure. Power plants, airports, roads, bridges, ports, schools, hospitals, police stations, military bases, factories, everything is being hit by the Israelis. People here went through the 1975-90 civil war and had watched their country slowly build back again. The chief of the IDF, Dan Hultutz, was quoted in

## Former Pen reporter recounts the destruction he witnessed in Lebanon during the bombing



Photo shows the destruction on a Beirut street. At right is Spencer Osberg.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Israeli papers saying the IDF will target Lebanese infrastructure and "turn the clock back 20 years in Lebanon." That's a reference to when the country was mostly rubble because of the civil war. Everyone thinks this is wrong. A lot of the other sects - Sunni, Christian, Druze, etc. - have put out calls on the radio and given out phone numbers to shelter Shia families fleeing South Lebanon and the southern suburbs. A lot of the other groups in Lebanon don't like Hizbullah all that much and think they should be disarmed, but that this is not the way to go about it.

*Pen: Are you scared?*

Osberg: No. I think worrying about one's sanity and

being horrified by what the Israelis are doing is different than fear. Actually, one thing I am afraid of is that this will spiral Lebanon into another civil war. That would be truly horrific, and the thought does terrify me.

*Pen: How is your family reacting to your being in Lebanon?*

Osberg: They wanted me out as fast as possible, and now are worried that I am traumatized.

*Pen: Is it hard not to become angry at Israel when you see the carnage around you?*

Osberg: I think I've reached a level that surpasses anger, like going from campfire hot to

white-hot steel hot. It's impossible to calculate the number of lives they've shattered, which is well beyond the official casualty toll. And if some of these people were in the way of hitting a military target, a strategic location or some sort of 'terrorist infrastructure', I could understand that there may be a debate about the morality of the attack. But so much of what they are doing is actually targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Since when did a pickup truck or minivan full of refugees become a legitimate target? I'm not sure, but the Israelis are bombing them. Since the offensive began, the

minimum civilian death toll is 330 and rising fast. Only five Hizbullah fighters have been killed. That is a telling statistic.

*Pen: When the violence ebbs, will you be coming back to Canada?*

Osberg: I have to come back to Canada before November because I need to renew my passport.

*Pen: Are there any similarities between the Lebanese and people on the Northern Peninsula?*

Osberg: Well, Lebanon is roughly the size of the Northern Peninsula. It takes about three and some hours to drive the length of the country. So if Lebanon began at Rocky Harbour and ended at Cook's Harbour, Beirut would be about where Port au Choix is. Outside Beirut and Lebanon's three other coastal cities, the country is filled with small towns and villages, and people are intensely proud from the little place they and their family are from, which I always found was the case on the Northern Peninsula. People here tend to adapt to the curves life throws at them, which I always found a character trait on the Northern Peninsula. If something happens, deal with

it - if you can't change it, accept it and move on. Don't spend needless time and energy fretting over stuff.

Now there are exceptions to every rule, but we're talking generalities here. And the Lebanese hospitality is unreal, same as if you started talking to someone in Flowers Cove and the next thing you know you're having a meal at their place and sharing a drink. Go to almost any of the towns and villages in Lebanon and people will almost force you to come to their house and have a giant meal with them and offer you everything they can muster.

Arab hospitality is fantastic and the food here is better than almost any place in the world.

*Pen: What, if any, plans do you have after the violence?*

Osberg: I have to go back to Lebanon. I left too many people there. I left all my stuff there, I left my life there. And I need to take pictures and talk to people and gather evidence of what the Israelis did to Lebanon, because it is simply a crime against humanity. They treat Lebanese lives as worthless, and then turn around and justify what they do by tacking a adjective 'terror' onto absolutely anything they want, and so many people buy their story and are scared to speak against it because somehow they've managed to get questioning Israel policy equated with being anti-semitic.

## X-treme Impact held on Limestone Barrens

The Port au Choix Green Team hosted the 'X-treme Impact' Dirt Bike Rally on Aug. 9.

The rally was organized to raise awareness among the local ATV and dirt bike users on the damaging impact these vehicles can have on the Limestone Barrens habitat.

The event was made possible through a partnership

involving the Port au Choix Green Team, Parks Canada, Limestone Barrens Habitat Stewardship Program, Youth Justice Committee and the RCMP.

Parks Canada interpreter Shirley Alyward says "the event emphasizes the need for community support to reduce vehicle damage to the limestone barrens and protect

Fernald's braya, a threatened species, as well as 46 other rare plant species that grow here at the Port au Choix National Historic Site of Canada."

She adds, "By working together with local partners we can increase local participation in ongoing stewardship and conservation efforts."



Port au Choix Green Team members display information on Species at Risk. They are: (l-r) - Lindsey Payne, Krista Reid, Sheri O'Keefe and Breannah Tulk.



Const. Danny Murrin of the Port Saunders detachment of the RCMP informed riders on how to safely and legally operate their vehicles.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Limestone Barrens interpreter Shirley Alyward explains why there are regulations prohibiting off-road vehicle use within the Port au Choix National Historic Site of Canada.



**Labrador-Grenfell Health**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**Dental Clinics**

**Labrador South Health Centre — Forteau**

Labrador-Grenfell Health will be holding dental clinics at the Labrador South Health Centre in Forteau and at the Community Clinics in St. Lewis and Mary's Harbour on **August 21 - 31, 2006**. Members of the public who are interested in obtaining an appointment for dental treatment on any of these dates are advised to call the L-GRHA dental clinic at Forteau at (709) 931-2450 and leave a message.

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