

Beirut ... 1977

As the proud owner of Western Medical, now with three factories and distributors throughout Europe, the Far East and Middle East, I usually traveled from my home in London 10 out of 30 days a month. My journeys would take me to different places to stimulate sales and meet with clients. On the day of this story, I was in Beirut, which is often called "Little Paris," its namesake being my favorite city. This happened to be a good last day of the month for me, because I had concluded my business early and had a

comfortable amount of time to myself. I could simply walk along the beach road, passing by the many lovely hotels and restaurants. Although there was some civil unrest in Lebanon, it rarely came into this charming city.

My adventure began at midday. It was sunny, but not too warm and frankly I was feeling quite good about life itself. That was about to change. As I crossed the street intending to go to one of the cafés for a glass of wine, a car with three men pulled alongside me. "Nice to see you back here," one of the passengers said. I simply smiled and replied that the pleasure was mine. Suddenly the two passenger side doors opened and two young men got out. They were now not smiling. "Get in, Nigel." I backed away and said my name was not Nigel and that I had no intention of joining them. A short mustachioed fellow pointed downwards and that was when I saw he was holding a pistol. I tried to say something but the men became very agitated and grabbed my jacket. Within seconds I was in the back seat and we were speeding away. I was in good shape and still sparred twice a week at my gym on Wigmore Street, in London's West End. But common sense was the better part of valor and I just tried to make light of whatever it was that they wanted.

I was surprised that we were not taking some little drive but in fact were heading up a craggy mountain. During our trip, the men spoke on occasion to each other, but not a word in English. When I tried to say something, all I received were dirty looks. Almost two hours after we started I saw a sign in English that said "Baalbek." I was familiar with the name as a place which had a marvelous theater in the round, where concerts were frequently held.

When we reached a very rocky hill, I was told to get out. The men followed and I was ordered with a wave of the pistol to start climbing. One of the men drove off and the other two started climbing alongside me. No grass or trees, just dirt and endless stones and rocks. Halfway up one of them slipped and I automatically grabbed him, perhaps preventing him from being injured seriously. We stopped to catch our breath, and the men smiled for the first time at me. When we completed the climb we were in a very

large clearing sprinkled with some rather pleasant small houses. I then saw some women and a few children. I was totally confused.

I was taken to wash up and then a boy about 10 years old, in his best English, told me to rest up and we would eat shortly. Any thoughts of my being killed were gone, as they would have done that earlier. My only assumption was that I was being kidnapped for money. I assumed they never bound me simply because where was I going to run to? Why they had decided to take me up the mountain, I never could figure out.

For three days I lived with my kidnappers, being treated adequately, which I later learned was because I prevented the one from falling. When I asked the boy why I was being held a prisoner, he looked perplexed and said, "The money." I thought that there were certainly better targets for a kidnapping than me, and just could not figure it out. The boy then said the big boss was coming tomorrow and I better have the money. So at least this ordeal was finally going to come to a conclusion shortly. One way or another.

The next day the boy called me to stand by him for his interpretation. I heard the sound of cars and was very surprised to see a perfectly clear road behind one of the houses. Two very dusty but new cars pulled up to us. The three men who had originally grabbed me were in one and four others were in the other car. From the back seat a very sinister looking, heavyset man emerged: long hair, big stomach, a pistol in his belt, with very deep-set eyes. He glared at me and looked angrier by the second. There were harsh words between him and the first three men. He then came right to my face and said in excellent English, "Sorry, but my men have made a mistake. I had advanced hashish to a fellow named Nigel and he was supposed to come back and pay me. He never has. They will take you back to Beirut." I gave him a look and said, "That's not good enough. My clothes are ruined and I missed my flight back to England. I think you should pay these costs." Immediately after I said it, I realized how idiotic that must have sounded. Then, for the first time, he smiled and said that I was right! The mistake was theirs. He went to his car and removed a briefcase, opened it and handed me ten one hundred dollar bills. As I had already proved that I was bordering on insanity, I held my hand out for more! He

gave me five more and said that he felt that was quite enough. I then smiled and said I agreed. I had actually made a profit!

Before they took me back, we sat and had a meal with a drink called Arak that almost burned a hole in my stomach. When they offered me hashish I could only laugh and decline with thanks.

On the flight home I smiled all the way. I had not been physically harmed and had had a fascinating experience. Plus, previously I was holding a Coach Class ticket. Now I was able to buy one in First Class!