

Hand written essay for school by 8th grader **Katie Jo Shada** (married name Ramsey) around 1976, an autobiographical capsule of her beloved *Sita* (grandmother), **Helen George Abood Kuram Shada**, born in 1891 in Lebanon. She was wife to John W. Shada, son of Whebbeh and Nora Shada, also of Fih. *Transcribed by Marci Duryea exactly as written, August 2000.*

A NEW LAND

"Toot, Toot" the whistle pierced through the air sending an excited chill over my body as I thought of what that sound meant, a new life, a dream come true.

On a dark day in Beirut Lebanon I woke to hear a despairing cry, one so quiet I could barely hear it. It was my father. Lying beside him was a lifeless body. I was shocked as I realized my mother's life had ended.

My father was remarried later to a person I really hated.

My stepmother and father put me through hell. She was younger than I and I had to do all of the work and take care of my sisters and brothers.

I left home and was married to a wonderful man and had a baby boy at the age of sixteen.

My husband had left me then to go to the United States and get things settled and I knew I and my baby would meet him soon in a wonderful new world. Now as I look back over my life I realize I have already been through many experiences some could never have in a lifetime.

In June of 1911 my small baby and I boarded a huge ship with some very dear friends. The captain of the ship welcomed us, although I could not understand him, for I understood no English.

We got our cabin and the ship was off.

After a few days I was beginning to wonder if I would ever reach the land of great hopes.

I can remember always getting bloody noses during the night. I could not ask for help though, because I did not know what to say.

Finally one day I was nursing my baby when I heard a commotion outside my cabin. I looked to see what was going on but I could not tell. Then my friend told me to look out my window. As I glanced I felt my heart beating five times faster, for there beyond the cutting waves I saw it, it seemed to be rising higher and higher. It was the Statue of Liberty.

Finally we stopped, the ship had landed, I was halfway home.

Later I would board a train in New York and go to Kearney Nebraska, but, my friends and I would go separate ways.

Then I had to face the fact that I would be alone until I met my husband.

We got off the ship and I remember having a few hours before my train would leave, so, my friends and I said our farewells to each other as they boarded their train, then I sat, my baby and I, we were alone but I did not care. Right then so many thoughts were racing through my head wondering what my new life was going to be like. Then I must have fallen into a deep peaceful sleep for when I awoke I saw a very kind face next to me. She had evidently taken Nick, my son, out of my weak and weary arms. She then said something to me but I could not understand. I took my baby from her, thanking her, and I left to board my train.

I can remember feeling weak and nauseated so I decided I should get something to eat. I walked a ways and saw a man dressed in shiny, fancy clothes with a cart full of fruit. I could feel myself walking faster. When I finally reached him, I remember getting out one dollar. I handed it to the man and he handed me back one banana. I knew that was wrong but I did not know how to ask for more or for change. So I walked away hungrily devouring my lunch.

As I boarded the train I made my way through the crowded aisles and finally got a seat. I felt like I had walked a mile!

My days on the train were very long and boring. I had no one to talk to and people stared at me as if I was some deformed thing.

I was really getting excited as I thought more about my new home, I began also to think of my family I might someday raise.

Then I heard a voice come over the train, "Next stop Kearney Nebraska." My heart was beating rapidly. Just a few more minutes, I thought, then I would be home.

As I heard the train wheels screeching and felt the train come to a stop, I looked out the window and saw a small crowd, but nowhere, nowhere was my husband. A sudden shock went through my body. Terrible thoughts were racing through my head, something must have happened, something dreadful. But then a new feeling came over me, one of hope for I now was in this great land, my home.

I grabbed my luggage, what little I had, and carried Nick off the train. Once again I scanned the crowd and then something caught my eyes. There in the midst of the people was my husband. What I saw surprised me so. He was dressed in cowboy boots and wore a black hat that was like a derby. He had already obtained the English attire, the man I was so used to seeing in robes, turbans and sandals.

Well I finally made it, I had a family of eleven children. I had a great life in this country. I am now eighty-three years old and still living in Kearney. My children are all married with children of their own.

My husband has left me again, this time he took Nick with him. They have gone to another wonderful world, and again I know I will meet him there soon.

(Added sometime later, in similar handwriting)

Sita, you're with them now in a different peaceful world but you'll always remain in our hearts—we love you!

SOCIAL HISTORY, MRS. HELEN KARAM SHADA, OCTOBER 18, 1980

Written and signed by Sister Ann Mary Schmidt, Social Service Administration, at Mt. Carmel nursing home in Kearney, Nebraska.

Transcribed by Marci Duryea exactly as originally typed, August 2000.

Mrs. Helen Karma Shada was born near Beirut, Lebanon on August 15, 1890 of George Karma and Mary Simon. Helen was the second youngest of seven children, four boys and three girls. Of these only one of Helen's sisters and brothers is still living; her home is in Lebanon. Helen's mother and Father went to South America when Helen was about two years old, leaving the children in the care of their paternal grandparents and the sister-in-law. They were hoping that sufficient money could be made and then return to Lebanon and raise their family.

However, Helen's mother died while in South America. Helen's father returned to Lebanon, married again and returned to South America. He had another son by the second wife. The children grew up in their grandfather's home. Helen was about age seven when her mother died. Her paternal grandfather lived to about 120 years. Helen was already in the U.S. when he died. The grandfather made a living by farming.

Helen never went to school. Not being able to read and write has been keenly felt by Helen. At age 16 Helen married John Shada. John made a living by having a herd of goats. He came to America when the first child was 40 days old. Helen followed him to America when her baby was seven months old. They came directly to Kearney from Lebanon. Here in Kearney was the first Arabic speaking Orthodox church west of the Mississippi River. The Shadas took up farming, especially the growing and selling of vegetables.

Eleven children were born to John and Helen Shada. Two died in infancy and one died as an adult. Two of the living children reside in Texas, two in Grand Island, one in Ansley Neb. and one in Brighton, Colorado, the rest live in Kearney. Beside her large family, Helen also raised some of her grandchildren. When her son died in a truck accident he left two children which Helen raised. Five of her sons served in World War II and all came back alive. Her children tell of the daily walks Helen took from her home to the Orthodox Church many blocks away in all kinds of weather. There she undertook praying for the safe return of her sons. Her faith was rewarded and they all returned safely.

Life was hard for Helen and her husband to raise that numerous family. Side by side she worked on the farm with her husband and growing sons and daughters. This resulted in a very close family bond that is very evident now for the children never fail to visit their mother daily or as often as possible.

Helen's husband died of a heart attack in July, 1955. Helen continued to live in her home and enjoyed good health until about 1975 when she began to suffer from Gall bladder problems and high blood pressure and the effects of diabetes. Some months ago she began to have problems with a badly infected heel. Hospitalization became necessary. She remained in the hospital for some weeks. The doctor advised the family that she not return home until her heel is completely healed.

Helen was admitted to Mt. Carmel Home October 3, 1980. She is congenial and cooperative. She is quite alert, walks to the bathroom with help, comes to the dining room in a wheel chair but due to her infected heel is limited in her activities. Her children, as stated above, come daily to visit her. Helen intends to return to her own home as soon as her foot is completely healed.

Helen belongs to the Syrian Eastern Orthodox Church. She is a woman of deep faith. She is very proud that she is an American Citizen and proud that five of her sons served their country in time of War. One of her sons has a job as mailcarrier in Kearney.

Helen belonged to the ladies society of her church; the VFW auxiliary and enjoyed sewing for her numerous family, crocheting, embroidering, etc. Her regret is that she is illiterate.

Mrs. Shada is doing very well. Her bad foot is almost healed and she is able to walk to the dining room by herself with the aid of a walker. Her family is very devoted to her and some one or the other come every day to visit her. Mrs. Shada enjoys TV and visits with the other guests. She participates only in some activities. We anticipate her leaving for her own home as soon as the doctor declares the foot completely healed.

(Handwritten, at bottom): Mrs. Shada passed away at Good Samaritan Hospital, surrounded by her loving grieving family on June 27, 1981.

She is buried in Kearney Cemetery.