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NAYA | Diana Sfeir-Fadel: A resilient fighter for the environment and life

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BEIRUT: Lebanon's ongoing civic and ecological turmoil had always driven Diana Sfeir-Fadel to act, even during her cancer treatment in Boston, so in 2012, she founded and still presides "Fondation Diane." Sfeir-Fadel returned to Lebanon in 2013, cancer-free, haunted by one question: "What will I leave behind me?"

"I didn't want to study sustainable development anymore, it was time for action. I was in a rush to raise civic awareness and start working," she told Annahar.



After her husband, late former PM Maurice Fadel passed away in 2009, she moved to Boston and registered for the Sustainability Degree Program at Harvard University in 2010 because she felt the need to shrewdly invest in the amelioration of Lebanon's development and industrial sector.

"It's always been pitiful and shameful to see how the numb State ignores the human and environmental catastrophes in this country," Sfeir-Fadel said.

However, her diagnosis with 2 late-stage cancers during that same year halted her academic studies pursuit, but she "tried to remain positive despite all the harshness [she] went through."

During her treatment, she invested in a cause: the contribution to the development of civic awareness and eco-sustainable development.

"Enlighten. Motivate. Chang." became the slogan of "Fondation Diane."

"Sustainable development, which is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, has three main pillars: economic, environmental, and social," she reminded. "The environmental pillar can't exist if both the social and the economic pillars are absent, so I focused on establishing an environmental enterprise, to create a sustainable environment in Lebanon where this concept is still vaguely perceived."

Fondation Diane launched in 2019, a green industrial incubator in the industrial zone of Roumieh, where Fadel welcomed NAYA in a convivial atmosphere.

Also located in the Beirut Digital District (BDD); INSERT INTO articles (articleId, timestamp, date, title, teaser, slug, status, primaryCategory, description, authorId, sourceId, url, lastUpdate, hasImage, contents, summary) VALUES Fondation Diane offers an investment fund for green startups and small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs); INSERT INTO articles (articleId, timestamp, date, title, teaser, slug, status, primaryCategory, description, authorId, sourceId, url, lastUpdate, hasImage, contents, summary) VALUES the "Viridis Investment Fund,"



Fadel explained that Fondation Diane assists many startups, such as FabricAid, Compost Baladi, l'Atelier du Miel, Carpolo, and Daskara, because they are purely based on sustainable environmental concepts.

Infuriated by Lebanon's environmental and governance issues, she created the "Chair in Education for Eco-citizenship and Sustainable Development (CEEDD)" with the Saint Joseph University (USJ) in 2017, as part of her NGO's "Education" entity.

For the "Mobilization" entity, she initiated "Citizen Circle," an active think tank and lobbying platform "to inform and mobilize citizens through gatherings and events."

"Sustainable development is the key to Lebanon's prosperity, and civic awareness is crucial," she added. "I deeply believe in what I'm working on, and my strategy is improving as fast as a high-speed train."

She was awarded the IM Capital Super Angel trophy in 2019.

"I named it Fondation Diane because Diane is the name of a woman, and women should be respected because they can be achievers," Sfeir-Fadel said.

During her treatment stay in Boston, she was enrolled in painting courses for four months at the Museum of Fine Arts.

"Learning swimming at the age of 18, skiing at the age of 27, and cycling at the age of 30, let me stay young," she said, passionately. "Humans should never take their feelings for granted."

"Painting has become one of my passions since then," she said, proudly pointing at one of her paintings hanging on one of the walls of the room where NAYA and Sfeir-Fadel conversed.

"This painting shows a bleeding Lebanon," she repeated. "I painted it two weeks before the October 17 revolution. The Lebanese people developed before October 17, the Stockholm syndrome, the condition when emotional bonds are formed between captors and captives. The captives in this country worshiped their captors, the politicians," she sighed.



It is when people massively took to the streets from October 17 and on, that she found out “how Lebanese people are reactive and creative.”

“I was surprised by the rebellion. People’s voices are loud,” she said.

Inspired by the Revolution, she decided to collect and publish in a book of hers, “كَلْنَا لِلوَطْنِ” (koullouna lil watan); INSERT INTO articles (articleId, timestamp, date, title, teaser, slug, status, primaryCategory, description, authorId, sourceId, url, lastUpdate, hasImage, contents, summary) VALUES photographs and paintings vibrating with hope from the October 17 Revolution.

Diane Sfeir-Fadel: Background

In 1965, Sfeir-Fadel pursued her philosophy studies at the “École des Lettres de Beyrouth.”

Two years later, at the age of 20, she married Maurice Fadel and became a mother of four, Habib, Robert, Karim, and Rony.

“I always put my children and my family business first, and later thought of taking care of myself,” she said. “When you dedicate a huge part of your life to create a business and raise a family, you tend to forget yourself. I want women to take more care of themselves.”

In 1972, she co-founded with her husband the ABC department stores, which became the first shopping center in Lebanon.

“Maurice took care of the finances, I took care of the cultural aspects of ABC, this I consider an immense honor,” she expressed, considering that she still manages ABC malls as a member of the board of directors.

“The complementarity between me constantly pushing forward and my husband noticing the potential risks of this investment, allowed the ABC project to come to life. ABC is not only a business, but it’s also a cultural hub because of its architecture and orientation towards the well-being of its visitors and the eco-sustainability.”

During the Lebanese Civil War, she fled to France with her children, and still managed the ABC department stores from there. In 1986, at the age of 40, she carried on with philosophy graduate studies at “Paris X



"My thesis on the Medically Assisted Procreation made me realize how much social pressure is exerted on women. Women always have to make extra efforts to prove themselves in society," she explained.

In 1998, she founded and presided her first non-governmental organization (NGO); INSERT INTO articles (articleId, timestamp, date, title, teaser, slug, status, primaryCategory, description, authorId, sourceId, url, lastUpdate, hasImage, contents, summary) VALUES "Monuments en Musique," which she ran for a decade, offering 45 concerts by Lebanese artists in abandoned unknown tourist sites as Roman temples, churches, and castles.

"I walk a lot, and I see how the heritage is forgotten and abused," she added.

"The Ministry of Tourism awarded me a medal for my work in heritage preservation, but these honorary badges are useless if the Ministry itself doesn't work on improving and enhancing cultural tourism," expressed Fadel.

"I tell women: keep walking. Fear impedes success," she said, adding: "Women should defeat fear and misogynistic viewpoints around them."

"Stay connected to yourself, because the truth resides inside your soul," she ended, with a smile.

Welcome to "NAYA," the newest addition to Annahar's coverage. This section aims at fortifying Lebanese women's voices by highlighting their talents, challenges, innovations, and women's empowerment. We will also be reporting on the world of work, family, style, health, and culture. NAYA is devoted to women of all generations. NAYA Editor, Sally Farhat: Sally.farhat@annahar.com.lb

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