

EARLY BIRD WEEKLY



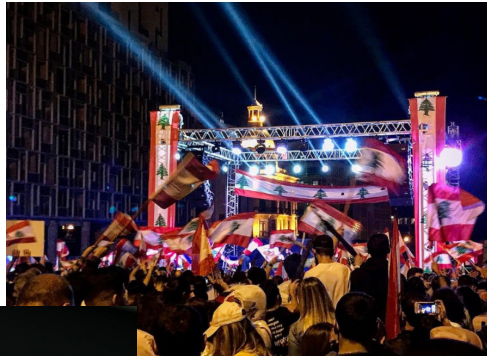
NewbergRotaryEarlybirds.org

September 3, 2020

Last Week, Josh Federwisch, spoke to us on his time in Lebanon.

As if being Rod's son wasn't enough, Josh is a RYLA participant, science teacher, traveler and amateur photographer and artist.

Josh returned recently from a year in Beirut, Lebanon leaving there July 15, mere weeks before the August 4 Beirut port explosion of ammonium nitrate.



When we think of protests, we see crazy and violent. For Beirutis, however, a protest feels more like a party with live entertainment.

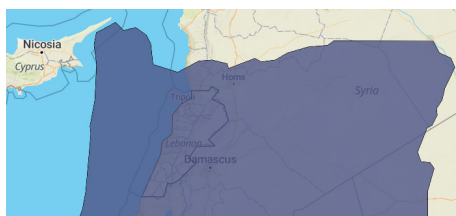
Lebanese food is among Josh's favorite cuisines. One of those favorites is a tortilla like flatbread called man'oushe and is usually covered with yogurt or cheese with vegetables.

Culturally, surprisingly to Josh, was that you don't see a lot of smoking. But you do see what we think of as hookah but known locally Shisha or Nargile.

He shared a video (Zoom would pass audio) of dabke, a Lebanese folk dance. Zoom wouldn't pass audio through the [YouTube video](#) so we couldn't hear the mijwiz and tablah (like clarinet and drum). But the energy of the dance was electrifying.



Geographically, Lebanon is about 20 x 120 miles. That's like driving from Newberg to Centralia, top to bottom.



While its civil war ended in 1991, the warlords evolved into influential, corrupt politicians. Lebanon is still considered to be "at war" with Israel.

Lebanon is home to 1.5 million Syrian refugees, many of whom live in refugee camps along the Bakaa valley, that fear death on trying to return to Syria.

Lebanon does have some agricultural product but most of the country's food and goods are imported. Fun fact, those imported goods come through that port that blew up in August.

The country's dominant religions are Muslim, Druze (Joel describes as a combination of Muslim, Buddhism, Christianity and mysticism), and Christian.

Josh moved there hoping to save money and send home. Turns out, there are two economies in Lebanon. The official and black market. The differential when he moved there began at 1,500 Lebanese Lira



per one \$US. Following the government's WhatsApp tax then COVID, by last June the black market exchange was 10,000:1.

So, by June, a \$3,000 salary would have the buying power of \$550.

Banking is so corrupt that people only use them to cash checks. They have more faith in their mattresses than the banks that meters release of savings, if any at all.

In the wake of the blast at the port, 300,000 people became instantly homeless. Power, water, cell service became sketchy at best.

One social media post summed it up pretty well. The author said the country's priority should be rebuilding, restoring services, rehoming citizens. Instead, we topple the government.

All relief efforts are being managed by the people and outside organizations.

How to help? Social Media, believe it or not, is an excellent way to donate directly to feet on the street. Large organization donations usually get bled off by local government.

<https://www.instagram.com/jarsh78/>



The shock wave of the blast made a huge mess as far as six miles out and could be felt for a hundred. With no groups claiming responsibility it is widely held to have been an accident made worse by neglect.

For many of us, myself included, the names Beirut and Lebanon conjure images of strife and destruction. All courtesy of the evening news covering the civil war from 1975-90.



Before leaving, Josh asked the friends he had made, "what would you like Americans to know about the Lebanese people and culture?"

One of the friend's responses summed it up, "Share the beauty of the country. The beauty of its people. Its rich history and culture. Its amazing food. And the Lebanese peoples' zest for life, no matter what."

Lebanon is temperately and geographically much like southern California. Historically, you can wander Phoenician ruins, dating 700 BC, and not see another person.