

## Never Can I Write of Damascus: When Syria Became Our Home

**Gabe Huck**

**Theresa Kubasak**

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As Islamophobia grips America and Europe, *Never Can I Write of Damascus* comes like a godsend to banish ignorance and illumine the richness of multiculturalism.

Teacher and activist duo Theresa Kubasak and Gabe Huck recount their years in Iraq and Syria amid the turmoil of the US invasion and civil war engulfing the region. Initially part of a delegation of peace activists, the authors fall in love with the Fertile Crescent and its diverse history and cultures. They eventually land in Damascus and spend seven years there, helping Iraqi refugees gain admission to US colleges.

This is a sweeping, multisourced memoir, integrating history, criticism, and anecdote. The book is highly critical of US policy in Iraq. The toll of American militarism on civilians and refugees is never out of sight. Israel also gets a fair amount of criticism. The book's polemics could be described as anti-imperialist, though not anti-Christian. The memoir's invocation of diverse religious experiences is its greatest strength. Among the majestic mosques and cathedrals of Damascus, "peoples of the book" peacefully coexist and worship God together, respecting the interrelatedness of each other's prophets and spiritual teachings. In this way, the pluralistic cosmopolitan setting of Damascus refutes the Western notion of the Middle East as hate-filled and eternally divided. As protests and state violence break out in Syria in 2011, the interfaith community of Deir Mar Musa initiates a "spiritual jihad" calling for reconciliation and nonviolent reform.

Photographs and breakout texts from notable writers, poets, and students enrich the authors' own anecdotes and build layers of historical perspective. Both the old city and new city of Damascus come to enchanting life before the authors leave the country in 2012. As beautiful as it is provocative and urgent, *Never Can I Write of Damascus* is an enlightening travel memoir that packs a powerful moral punch.

SCOTT NEUFFER (Fall 2016)

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