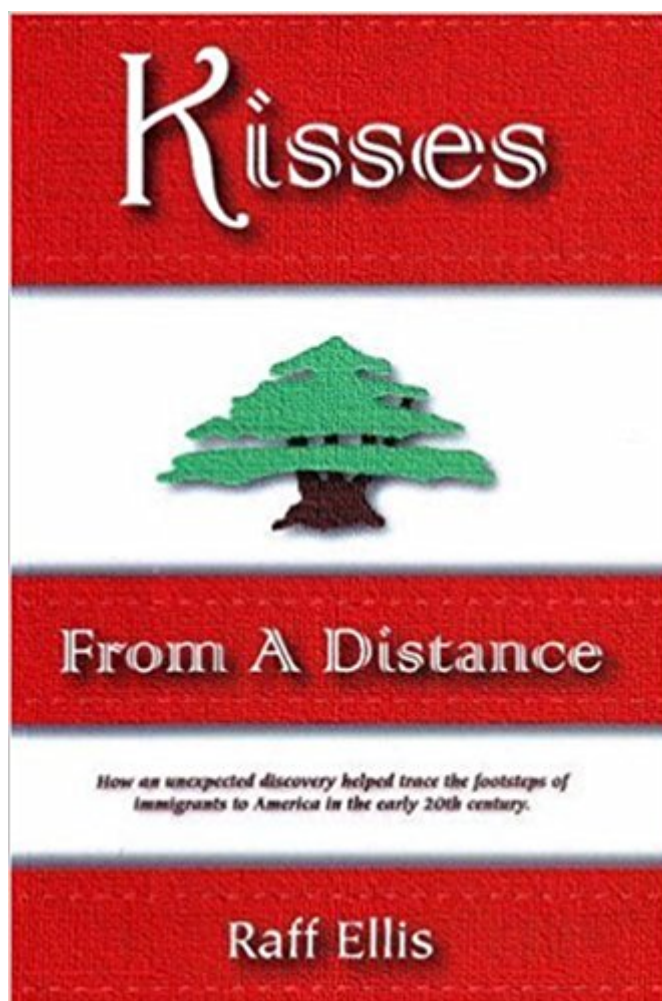




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Kisses From A Distance (Bridge Between Cultures Series)



Synopsis

"Kisses from a Distance" chronicles a Lebanese immigrant experience - based on a cache of more than 200 letters discovered after the death of the author's mother. The tale begins with the kidnapping of the author's grandmother from a remote convent in 1895. It chronicles her subsequent unhappy marriage and her husband's tragic attempt to find success in America. Their particular story plays out against the struggle and suffering of the Lebanese people through years of oppressive Ottoman rule and the ravages of World War I. Employing traditional Lebanese proverbs and folk tales, "Kisses from a Distance" weaves the author's extensive research and visits to Lebanon into a compelling narrative.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Journey through the quintessential immigrant's tale Raff Ellis' 'Kisses from a Distance' delves into the lure of migration, a subject that resonates deeply for nearly every Lebanese family today. Lebanese-American author Raff Ellis' "Kisses from a Distance" unfolds like a quintessential immigrant's tale. It follows a Lebanese story that is as relevant and familiar to today's Levantine audience as it would have been 100 years ago. Over the book's 311 pages, which are peppered with relevant and exhaustively researched history, Ellis tugs readers along on a journey down the snow-capped mountains of Lebanon, over land, across seas and oceans and into many strange and distant ports. The story anchors in New York and allows readers to experience the anxious excitement of the wide-eyed immigrant as he steps off the boat and sets foot in a new country for the first time. The genesis of Ellis' family epic came after the death of his mother, when he

discovered more than 200 letters among her personal affects. The letters from friends and family span 60 years, starting in 1925. They begin with traditional Lebanese greetings, and many kisses: "Kisses from a distance ... We kiss your cheeks ... I kiss you many times from this distance," thus inspiring the title of the book. The real-life dramas unfolding between the pages of these letters, especially in the last half of Ellis' book, make for a very compelling read, turning "Kisses from a Distance" into a veritable page-turner. The author's visits to Lebanon, his meticulous research and his tenacious quest to trace his family's roots - and those of all the characters involved in this complex story - further enrich the narrative. The well laid-out book, which is Ellis' first full-length effort, is divided into 41 chapters ranging from four to 12 pages. As expressed in "Kisses from a Distance," the subject of migration resonates deeply for nearly every Lebanese family today, more so than at any time since WWI. Once again, many of Lebanon's youth are seeking work in foreign lands to escape the instability and uncertainty in their home country. And one suspects that when and if they return, they too, like Toufic [the author's father], will be both disappointed and dismissive.

-- -- --Hani Bathish, Beirut Daily Star

Raff Ellis' book *Kisses From A Distance* brought tears to my eyes. It is beautifully written and the story of every family whose members courageously left their homes and families in the Middle East before and at the turn of the 20th century as did my parents. In a way it is every immigrant's story, seeking a better life for their families, enduring incredible hardships. Ellis traced his heritage and found individual greatness and kindness. I wish there would be less demonization of the Arab world today and more understanding of its great people. I know Ellis' book will help that bridge. -- -- --Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers columnist

By describing the odyssey of his Lebanese immigrant forebears to the United States in the early twentieth century, Raff Ellis has prefigured the saga of all immigrants of that era and thereafter. Change the name of the country of origin, or the date, or the variety of hardships in steerage encountered en route or the societal prejudices that were waiting in America, and you have what every immigrant of those years would instantly recognize. Regardless, Ellis has created not an exercise in nostalgia but a serious and disciplined historical study. This book has something for all whose personal or family history includes immigration. And, since we are a nation of immigrants, this includes all of us. -- -- --Dr. Sam Hazo, International Poetry Forum, Pittsburgh

Cune Press and its editors literally fell in love with *Kisses from a Distance*," and that is why we took it on. We value the book highly and feel it is among the very best we have published. The writing is at the very top in quality and Cune has no hesitation in boasting about this book to all its friends around the world. This book is not the normal nostalgic reminiscences of a memoir writer but an

important historical document told in an engaging non-historical style. There are no dry recitations of dates and events but instead an interestingly woven tale of events as lived by the principal characters in the story. The reader is taken on a rewarding journey that has taken advantage of rare documents to relate the story in the characters' own words. Cune Press is proud to add Kisses from a Distance to its Bridge Between cultures Series, which include: The Road from Damascus: A Journey Through Syria Steel & Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria 1900 - 2000 A Pen of Damascus Steel: Political Cartoons of an Arab Master Scott C. Davis, Publisher Cune Press Seattle, Wash. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Kisses From a Distance filled some of the "blanks" about my immigrant family who came here Lebanon in the early 20th century. Like the book, my own grandmother was left by her mother in a convent at age 2 with an aunt (the mother superior) to enable her mother to immigrate to America. At age 14 my grandmother also was "kidnapped" against her aunt's wishes from the convent by relatives who brought her down from the mountains to the port of Beirut for transport American. Grandmother had been promised in marriage to my grandfather, a peddler, who she literally met at the altar. Although the harshness of life here caused them to lose two of their nine children, many of their offspring became millionaires and philanthropists who helped create St. Jude's Children's Hospital together with another Lebanese man named Danny Thomas. When I brought my daughter some homemade "hummus" the other day at school here in Illinois, I told her of the author's reference in his book to his father on his deathbed, who was awakened by his son's kiss on a morning after the son had consumed large amounts of garlicky hummus---his father opened his eyes, saying: "John, too much garlic". That sums it up. It's a close book about immigrants: their industry, simplicity, focus, humor, criticisms, and dream, The American Dream. Bill Haddad

Beautifully written. My ancestors came here during the famine in Ireland and the book reminded me of the hardships and struggles immigrants go through and yet they made it, worked hard, and raised their families here. A very worthwhile read and enjoyable.

i come from Lebanon so i found the book very entertaining and nostalgic

Raff Ellis's story of his family's immigration experiences can be read as if it is an engrossing novel in today's market of published written works. Combining his miraculous discovery after the death of his mother, of a cache of over 200 letters, extensive research and visits to Lebanon, the author is able

to tell in narrative form the family's trials and tribulations. I found myself continually referring to the family trees to keep track of all of its members and their interactions. The highlight of the story for me was in the fact that I discovered more about one of Raff's brothers, Al, (like how he got his name) with whom I worked for 5 years in our parish in Andover, MA. This past June I also visited him in South Africa where he is pastor of a mother parish with three "outstation" Zulu parishes. I came to realize that we all have family and personal backgrounds that make us who we are. Don't miss this fascinating tale of one family that journeyed to America, becoming a part of the whole of our nation of immigrants. You won't be able to put it down. The story will be circulating in Andover and wherever else it finds its way. Pass it on, for that is what storytelling is all about!

I teach a course, Writing Your Memoirs, in which I not only encourage and instruct students in writing their own stories, but to read the stories of others. I read a lot of published memoirs---in fact, it is one of my favorite genres---and provide my students with bibliographies of Recommended Reading. Raff Ellis' "Kisses from a Distance," the life stories of his immigrant parents who came to America from Lebanon, is a book I'm definitely adding it to my Recommended Reading list. It's a good story, very readable. It is obviously a long labor of love, good writing, and much research. Especially interesting is the way this author interweaves the past, the lives of his parents, and the present, his commentary on the research, talking with relatives and others in Lebanon who knew his parents. I hope he will now write of his childhood growing up Lebanese-American, and bring the story up to the present. I highly recommend "Kisses from a Distance" to everybody who likes to read memoirs, is interested in the immigrant experience, and who appreciates history and good research.

I loved the colorful detail of Raff Ellis's family history. Such knowledge of before and after emmigration is rare. A bonus to the story is his family being from the former fuedal lords and their story being told from a view point rarely seen. Well written, it speaks to the immigrant experience of the late 19th and early 20th century in America for any ethnic group. As a descendent of Lebanese immigrants from the same period I am proud that our story is now fully presented better than I ever think it has been before. The afterword portion at the end was a treat as Raff discusses full on the racial prejudices that face arab Americans and his experiences with these prejudices. It was true vidication for me and my familie's upbringing here as Arab Americans. Only the highest praises, I strongly recommend his book for any students history class! Thanks Raff!

This book is both fascinating and thought provoking. As an Arab American I found this detailed account of the Ellis Family's journey to America especially interesting, but it's also certain to appeal to readers whose family came from any land. Raff Ellis captures both the history and traditions of Lebanon while describing in detail the trials and tribulations his family encountered trying to immigrate to America to make a new home. Although "Kisses From a Distance" is a very personal account which obviously is a labor of love for Ellis, he does not sugar coat the story. It's well written and rich with detail. I enjoyed this book very much and I highly recommend it.

"Kisses From a Distance" was recommended by a friend and I'm thankful to her for that! It's a very readable memoir, touched with humor and filled with first-hand stories handed down to Raff Ellis. His narrative flows easily and the photos add much interest. I drew many connections to my own Irish great-grandparents' experience. They immigrated to NYC during the Irish Potato Famine. I just wish I had the treasure trove of letters and photos that Raff has. They are priceless. All Americans are descended from immigrants, so we can all identify with "Kisses From a Distance," no matter our ancestors' ethnicity. Kudos to Raff for this labor of love.

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