

Editor's Note:

You may recall a feature in the October 2006 issue of *WDJ* written by Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha about her evacuation during a visit to Lebanon with her children and cousins. Dr. Samaha's cousin, Reema, was the youngest of 32 people killed April 16 at Virginia Tech. The *WDJ* family sends the Samahas, loved ones of victims, and survivors our deepest condolences.

— Dr. Sheri B. Doniger



Reema Samaha
1988 - 2007

Forgiveness



by Lisa Marie Samaha, DDS, FAGD



Omar, Joery, Reema, me, Mona, and Randa Samaha
Christmas 2006 — My last time with Reema.

My cousins Omar, Mona, and Reema were with my two children and me amid the war in Lebanon this past summer. Beautiful Reema, who loved Lebanon so deeply, wanted to stay. We escaped to encounter terror in our own backyard. Now, we are celebrating Reema's life.

Like anyone who knew her, I can speak of her love and purity, her vibrancy and humor, her integrity and compassion, her gentleness and strength, her faith and creativity, her inward and outward beauty, the twinkle in her exotic black eyes, and the sparkle in her brilliant white smile. She loved yellow, orange, pink, green, perfume, and dance. She was our star.

To know Reema was to love Reema, for she knew how to love. She was conceived in love, born into love, and living in love. Reema was an annointed



child. I cannot even begin to feel what her parents, brother, and sister are experiencing.

We all feel like waves of sorrow are drowning us, but we trust that great love will overpower them. We are mindful of the Lord's promise as expressed by theologian Thomas Merton, "And I will come and be your noonday sun and make your shadows palaces of moving lights."

My family has expressed this love during recent interviews. In better knowing her family, you will better know Reema.

Reema's dad and my cousin, Joey, has been like a brother to me. He always caused me so much laughter that I couldn't contain myself (or my bladder). May he soon regain his lightness of heart and gift of humor. That day will come because it defined him for Reema.

How proud I was to see my cousin Omar honor his little sister in front of the world with words of praise, affirmation, and gentleness. From Reema, he learned to choose friends wisely and lovingly.

And Randa, young woman of faith and Reema's adoring big sister, will not give up on loving simply because she now knows loss. Her memories of Reema will prompt her toward that love.

Mona, Reema's mother, will always grieve but be consoled in knowing that Reema will never leave her side. Reema adored her mother. Mona will dance again because Reema will dance through her.

God bless my cousins. The most important way we can counteract evil is to love more deeply, broadly, gently, tenderly, elegantly, profoundly, and powerfully than we have ever loved.

As we pray for our own consolation, we pray for God to bless those suffering from emotional pain, anger, and loneliness. We pray for our own sensitivity to recognize and effectively aid

those who live in a mental hell on earth. Joey expressed this during Reema's memorial service five days after her murder. He explained that our last name, Samaha, means forgiveness. Reema's family remains in prayerful support of Seung-Hui Cho's family as they face the loss of their son and the reality of his heinous crimes.

Everyone killed was a precious child of God, including Cho; he just never knew it.

Joe had told me about our last name when we were teenagers. Clearly, he brought it up because it impressed him, and he knew it would impress me. Now I see the power of our name. Growing up, I never really knew how to pronounce it. We pronounced it one way, strangers pronounced it another way, and my extended Lebanese family pronounced it two other ways. Up until I learned what it meant, our name caused me to feel self-conscious, even embarrassed. It just seemed like a weird name to a little girl living in Southern Maryland during the early '60s. There were no other Middle-Eastern names in my Catholic grade school. Once Joe told me what it meant, I loved it. Samaha became a noble name to me. I had never been so proud to own the Samaha name.

Now, in some supernatural way, the power of our name has infused itself into the consciousness of my family. I am proud and humbled to witness and be a part of the power of forgiveness.

As people of faith, we are reminded of the words of Solomon in the Song of Songs, "Great seas cannot extinguish love, no river can sweep it away." We shall continue to pray for every person affected — for all of us. For as our family's Christian faith upholds, when one suffers, we all suffer; the entire body of Christ ... or humanity, if you will. There are many things we will never know, but we know Reema's last breath on earth was her first breath in heaven. ■

Memorial scholarships to perpetuate the memory of Reema J. Samaha have been established. For further information, please e-mail Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha at samahadds@pvdentalarts.com.