

Words and Kurds

Writer's romantic adventure marrying Kurdish rebel

By Staff Reporter

Laurie Fraser, an Ottawa teacher and healer, "fell face-flat in love" with a Kurdish freedom fighter while she was holiday in Turkey. She returned a few months later, and they married in Muslim ceremony. As she explains it, "You just don't date in a small village in Turkey, and you certainly don't co-habitate without a marriage licence. I didn't know he was freedom fighter until after our 3-day wedding, but that's natural- it's not the sort of thing you tell your girlfriend. Even his family didn't know."

It was 1995, a tumultuous time in Turkey politically. The struggle between the P.K.K. (Kurdistan Workers Party) and the Turkish Army had peaked. Bombs were going off at tourist sites and armed confrontations were a way of life in East Turkey (Kurdistan). The Kurds had been brutally oppressed since the end of World War I when Ataturk initiated violent attacks and racist policies. At the time, it was illegal to speak their language, yet 80% of the population could speak nothing else. They could be jailed and tortured at any time. Even in the 90s, villages were burned, journalists were murdered, and elected Kurdish Members of Parliament were jailed. Fraser herself met a man who had lost one arm during torture for playing Kurdish music.



Laurie Fraser

In 1996, Fraser and her husband met some Kurdish refugees near the Iraq border- 51 people living in floorless tents. It was then that she determined to write their story- to tell the world but also to prove to her husband that non-violence can win battles. The meeting is recounted in her novel, *The Word Not Spoken*.

The novel is about much more than politics. Fraser says, "Although his work was frightening, for most of our time together, it had little impact on my daily life. I remember that time as one of the happiest of my life, certainly a time when I felt very much alive. My main concerns were domestic: washing clothes by hand, managing intrusive neighbours, struggling with Turkish, learning to cook from scratch (there was no canned, frozen or prepared food where I lived- all fresh- and no microwave, oven or fridge in my place), but I drew the line at killing a chicken or lamb. My life, in many ways, was simple, and I miss it with all my heart."

Her husband was murdered in 1997. The book became more than an expose of the Kurdish situation and life in a poor Muslim village; it became a very personal record of a love that never died and a relationship that wasn't easy. Fraser's husband contributed a great deal to the book, often dictating (illegal) notes that she had to mail home the same day- notes about torture in Turkey, the inner workings of the P.K.K., foreign involvement in the P.K.K., and guerilla training camps in Syria and Iraq.

Fraser wrote the book while her husband was alive, but he never read it. It was too much of a risk to bring it to Turkey. She continued working on it while she travelled and worked in other countries, reluctant to return to Ottawa and "live a normal life again".

The Word Not Spoken is a romantic adventure that asks questions about human rights, risk and the requirements for love. Chapter one, excerpts and photos are at www.lauriefraser.com.