

The nightingale of Mosul: *A nurse's journey of service, struggle, and war*

Constance R. Chu

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Book Review

The Nightingale of Mosul is a poignant memoir about a life dedicated to service and to improving the health of others, set against the backdrop of the current Iraq war. From the Peace Corps to an inner-city school to a psychiatric hospital and finally in combat, Colonel Susan Luz has kept the well-being of others as her foremost priority. She has not swayed in her dedication or in her humanity, even in the face of personal injury, duress, or the most inhospitable settings. This is an inspiring read about a remarkable woman whose story provides a stirring reminder to those of us in the health professions about the true meaning of selfless service. The book is a page-turner that begins when Luz receives the orders for overseas combat duty in Iraq, and it details her physical and mental preparation with great insight and humor. One immediately grasps her humanity and her basic belief that every patient deserves the best she has to offer. The first section ends with the startling image of the devastation and human toll of war that faced Luz in the aftermath of an enemy mortar attack that welcomed her unit's arrival in Iraq. The second section, entitled "How I came to Iraq," flashes back to the author's journey from a nursing student she describes as "a [...]"

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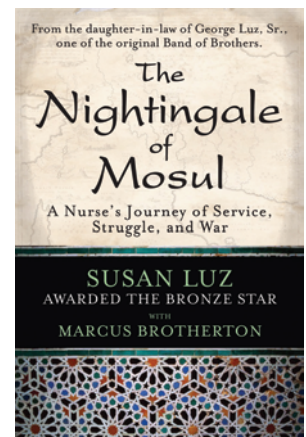
The nightingale of Mosul

A nurse's journey of service, struggle, and war

Susan Luz and Marcus Brotherton
Kaplan Publishing. New York, New York, USA. 2010.
256 pp. \$25.95. ISBN: 978-1-607-14631-5 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Constance R. Chu

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.
E-mail: chucr@upmc.edu



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The second section, entitled "How I came to Iraq," flashes back to the author's journey from a nursing student she describes as "a chubby young Catholic schoolgirl . . . wanting to do something important with her life" to a Peace Corps volunteer. As the daughter of a highly decorated World War II

veteran, she had dreamed of becoming an Army nurse until her father crushed the idea. Her subsequent service with the Peace Corps proved to be all that she hoped for in experiences, lifelong friendships, and relationships, but it also permanently scarred her and tested her belief in humanity. She experienced the hospitality and gratitude of the indigent populations that she served, but also fell victim to atrocities, including a vicious gang rape that left her unable to bear children. Nursed back to health by her best friend and the local community, she courageously returned to the same town and completed her Peace Corps assignment.

Upon returning home years later after a near marriage to a wealthy Brazilian suitor, the author next signed on to become a school nurse. Far from a mundane assignment, she chose an underfunded inner-city school rife with adolescents who lacked appropriate guidance, making a positive difference in the lives of many. She also became a doting aunt; in part to compensate for her inability to have children, she lived with her parents and worked two jobs so she could contribute to the education of her nieces and nephews. It was during this period that she realized her dream to become an Army nurse and joined the reserve, this time receiving her father's blessing and instruction to "make sure you always take care of the people under you."

Steeped in work, marriage was but a distant dream until she met George Luz, an

aspiring actor who supported himself selling fire extinguishers. Mr. Luz shared her connection to the armed services, as the son and namesake of a member of the original World War II paratroop unit featured in Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers*. The relationship's slow start led to a deep love and respect that has stood the test of time.

The final section, titled "The Nightingale Sings," details Luz's life in the war zone. From combating her own and her unit's battle stress to enduring weather so extreme that eggs literally fried on the sidewalk, Luz's vignettes serve as continuous reminders of both the fragility of life and the indomitable strength of the human spirit. The intensity of the US military surge in Iraq was matched by the surge in casualties. Luz earned a Bronze Star for her work in Iraq. On her first Veteran's Day after returning home, she paid tribute to the fallen at their grave sites and heard a bird sing in the clear, brilliant tones of a nightingale.

Luz summarizes her beliefs as clearly as the nightingale's song: "My aim always is to give myself to the people I meet, to serve others in wholeheartedness. Serving others has been my life's priority, and the blessing has been mine. The more you give, the more you get." She has been true to this mantra and to herself. Her story serves as a shining example of what it means to serve and is a must read for those who strive to heal.