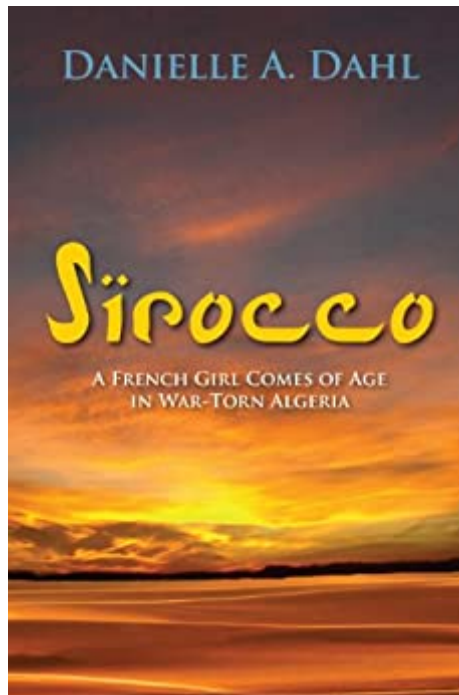




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Sirocco: A French Girl Comes Of Age In War-Torn Algeria



Synopsis

On All Saints Day, 1954, the Algerian War of Independence from France begins, forever changing the lives of ten-year-old Nanna, her family, and a million-and-a-half French settlers. As Arab rebels carry out terrorist acts against civilians, hatred and bloodshed permeate the fabric of European and Muslim lives. A safe bus ride to town means keeping an eye out for stray shopping baskets containing hidden bombs. A day trip to the beach requires the protection of a military convoy. But life goes on, and Nanna's loving mother, mischievous but good-natured siblings, and kind grandfathers provide plenty of adventure and humor. Nanna worships her Papa, who provides for his family and keeps them safe, but, growing up, she begins to understand that he is also a braggart with unyielding views of right and wrong, who believes that attending a supervised party with boys will compromise a girl's virtue. Nanna defies him and falls in love, thus setting the stage for an ongoing clash of wills. As Nanna watches her beloved country torn apart by terrorism, she grieves for the French targeted by the fellagha and for the Arabs they slaughter because they are seen as pro-French. Ultimately, Nanna watches in anguish as the French generals, betrayed by De Gaulle, make a last stand for a French Algeria before laying down their arms. In the end Nanna's family, like all the other French settlers, must choose between the suitcase and the grave.

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Customer Reviews

. . . was not a safe place, but it was the place Ms. Dahl grew up with experiences that matured into deep understanding of the ways love, hope, fear, and desperation combine to produce betrayal and loyalty, cruelty and compassion, all the extremes of human behavior one finds in a location inhabited by diverse cultures, cultures that fail to discover and value the things they have in common. And the story is told from inside a large family by a girl gradually maturing into a young woman. And the story is told in clear, picturesque prose by a fine writer intent on helping us discover what we have in common with her experience. And it is a lot, we find, as the sirocco strips away social facades and carries us a journey alternating between domestic familial hijinks and violent social upheaval.

Naturally, the title intrigued me. Danielle Dahl's *Sirocco* starts out with the day-to-day recollections of an adolescent girl growing up in Algeria during the early 1960s. Her French parents and four siblings are happy with their lives. While having to be frugal, they are respected members of the community comprised of other Pieds Noirs (all French expressions are made beautifully clear throughout the book), as well as their Arab neighbors, friends and colleagues. When Algeria's desire to self-rule rears its head, it all changes. The family is given a choice: To leave their home with a suitcase; or to stay in a coffin. Such is the heartbreak behind any revolution; the price to pay by those who had made a foreign country their home. Ms. Dahl's writing comes straight from the heart, yet without sentimentality or rancor; in short, it is delightful, insightful, humorous and sad all at the same time - a wondrous window into a world most of us knew little about. I highly recommend this beautifully written memoir. Inge H. Borg, Author of *Sirocco*, *Storm over Land and Sea*

The author adeptly takes the reader into war-torn Algeria where a family is seen struggling to survive the horrors of fellagha's attacks. The small children have to duck while the father is driving as the family is being attacked, is quite frightening. I was shocked how Nanna's school friend, Saalima who played 'piggy back' with her just days before, was taken out of school to marry a sixty-five year old man. Nanna's cultured father told her, when she queried such conduct, that it was part of the Arab culture. I found the father and family adorable. Danielle Dahl has written her

memoirs in such a fascinating way that it transcends a reader's expectations. It's an exceptional book which leaves the reader desiring to know more about the area and its people. It's very well-written and well-edited. My final remark is that I found how similar the turmoil caused by terrorists has not changed. A must-read!

Danielle weaves her early life story in an incredible tale that depicts her normal family life, that to the reader, is anything but normal. The first 18 years of her life is spent in the unrest and and turmoil of war torn Algeria. She gives you vivid descriptions of her family and it's unique dynamics. There are incidents that we can all relate to and then there are other events that most of us can not even imagine. I got a sense of her joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, heartaches and triumphs. Danielle gives you an inside glimpse to a world that is foreign to our way of thinking. This book is an autobiography as well as a great history lesson. Good work, Danielle! I look forward to your sequel, *The Mistral*.

Even though the conflicts of war were apparent, families tried to live each day as normal as possible. The author's thoughts and feelings were described so vividly that it was hard for the reader not to relate. A father ingrained in tradition, opinionated, gruff and distant; her mother, somewhat subserviant, yet still an intrical part of the family and the children doing what children do was documented with clarity. Until it is evident that they can no longer exist due to the pressures of the oppressor, they regretfully take leave. Leaving one's homestead, the home holding so many memories, good and bad, with only the minimum of essentials, heading to the unknown, they begin their exodus.

An interesting story, but has not been able to hold my attention thus far.

I just finished Danielle Dahl's memoir concerning her youth in war-torn Algeria. I have been interested in learning about Algeria during this time period and Dahl's experiences were both enlightening, while at the same time very touching. I felt for her and her family being forced out of their home and starting a new life in France. I highly recommend this book. I have to say that Ms. Dahl is a talented writer, and I enjoyed reading her book!

It was a very moving book. The personal saga of the characters needed to be told in order to highlight the hard times of this (almost) forgotten war, "the events of Algeria" 1954-1962. Merci, Danielle Dahl, un devoir de memoire.

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