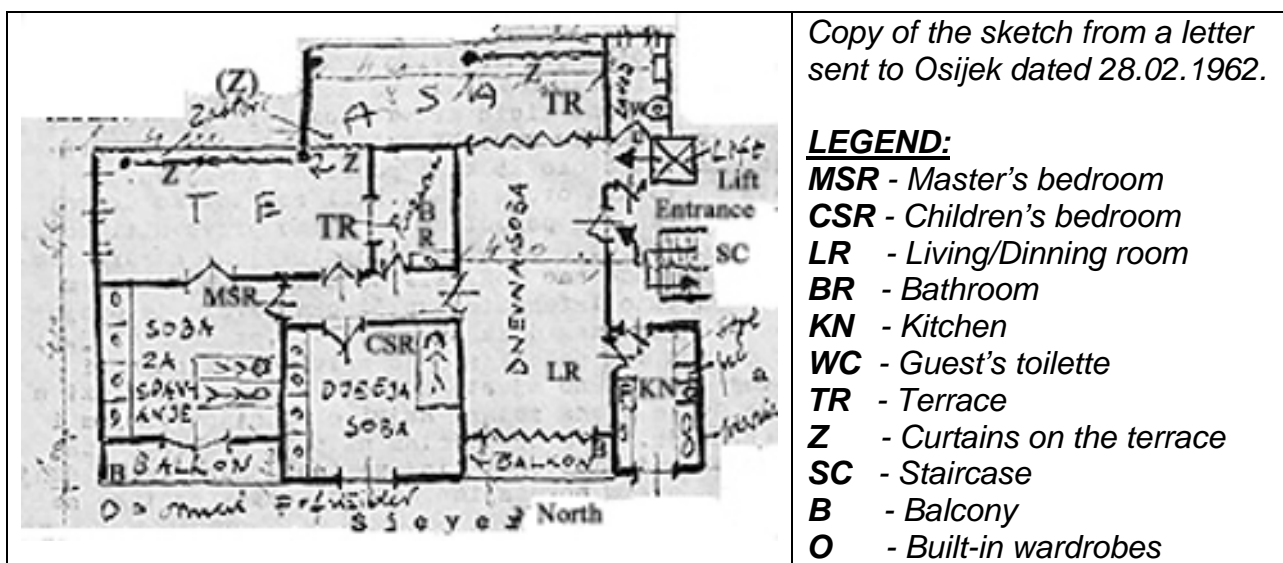


## Chapter No. 4:

### HAI EL MATAR – our domicile in Khartoum since 1962

There was nothing to stop my beloved Taurus wife to view the assigned flat. The building site was at Hai El Matar that was close to Khartoum's airport (hence its name). We went to the appropriate Office where an officer gave us a bunch of about 100 keys only after I signed several papers and a deposit for certain of Sudanese Pounds. This was a standard procedure when ever anything the Government handed over either for my personal use or any goods like say the car for my temporary usage. Over the past few weeks I had signed several deposits and checks for purchased goods like a refrigerator etc.

A total of six houses were built for the American officials originally but they did not arrive because of the military coup d'état in 1958. Now, General Abboud's Government offered these houses to the ex-patriot officials seconded or working for it. Our new flat was in the middle of three house blocks where at floor were two flats had a fourfold access to each. There were three entrance doors to each flat from the staircase: one to the kitchen, second straight into the living room and the third one as an entrée for the guests. The later one opened to a small lobby to that opened the elevator shared by both flats. The blocks were built so that each flat had natural ventilation in north-south direction. Our flat was on the east side at the top 4th floor.



*This sketch is a copy from a letter sent to my parents in Osijek on 28.02.1962 soon after we visited the allocated flat for the first time.*

The measurements are not too well visible in the above sketch thus here are the overall dimensions: the width 11.6+3.0m and the length 4.0+11.5m. Thus the total gross floor area was about 180m<sup>2</sup> of that some 43m<sup>2</sup> was the terrace only. The house itself has been constructed as a reinforced concrete frame structure with floors of cast in situ concrete. The building external walls were clad with imported prefab Italian red firebricks that had cavities and thin walling. The internal walls were of prefab concrete blocks where as the walls and ceilings had been plastered with whitewashed mortar. Some areas of walls in the kitchen, bathroom and toilette had finish of Italian tiles. The terrace floor had a finish of reddish and large clinker tiles imported from Italy too. All internal floors had Italian artificial marble cast in light grey coloring. Generally the finish was to a rather high standard including steel frames of doors and windows made in a local workshop. Later we would

find out that these steel doors and windows were best to seal off the sand storms that were too common in this climate. Two wide doors with sliding panes were fixed in the living room only. The doors and windows had glass panes of smaller sizes in case of breakage and very useful during rather abrasive sand storms which caused considerable scratching on any exposed surface.

You may ask why I am writing so much detail about our new domicile. Our new home in Khartoum deserves this extensive description considering our previous flat in Zagreb. We managed to furnish our new abode within say six weeks making it pleasantly habitable in that different and completely unfamiliar surrounding. In Zagreb we stayed one room of 20m<sup>2</sup> for us within a 4-room large flat where we could use the WC and draw the water from a tap only. We stayed in this room from 1951 until Vesna was born in 1954 then moved to another house in 1957. There we got a small flat of 52m<sup>2</sup> for us only that was at high ground floor but had a tiny bathroom and kitchen next to the two small rooms. This flat was rather cool and humid at first as we moved in this house soon after it was finished. It took us almost 10 years to enough furniture and other utensils. And here in Khartoum we arrived few months ago and found a large flat with quality fixtures needing us to add only our personal touch to it.



***Zvonko enjoys resting in the new rattan furniture at eastern end of the living room.***

A few weeks previously Abdel Halim Shawki, now our good Sudanese friend, had 3 steel-frame beds for us from a workshop in Khartoum North instead buying the local ones that were made of wood. The reason for steel bed frames was an anecdote that was a matter of chatter in Khartoum about a Yugoslav couple who bought wood-framed 4-leg beds with hemp-woven cord filling at the local market. After a few days the rather bulky buyer returned the beds because the frames broke under their weight - the couple was of a strongly built. The salesman offered to replace the bed-frames and added another pair of legs to each of. So these were the first and probably only wooden beds in Khartoum which had 6 legs. Soon we would find out that the family Diklić got a flat in the adjacent building of ours on the 3rd floor in the adjacent building of ours. Their daughter Marina was four years older than Vesna. Mr. Stevo Diklić worked for the Ministry of Irrigation as Senior Engineer of hydromechanics and they came from Zagreb too. We became good friends especially the two ladies.

We did not need any wardrobes or cupboards in our flat as all were built-in type in the sleeping rooms, the corridor and in the kitchen. The bathroom was spacious and had quality fittings as one would expect of an American standard. The kitchen had modern fittings too and there was a trapdoor for the trash down pipe through which one emptied

the rubbish into trash cans on ground floor. We had ordered a table lined with steel sheet to suit as there was no table in it. Water heaters were installed in the bathroom (soon we did find that we do not need these) and in the kitchen where 2 gas bottles were delivered already. We fixed our larger imported gas stove and gave Maurice the one that was there as he did not have one. We ordered a large refrigerator of 240lt which was three times the size of the one we had left in Zagreb.

For the terrace we purchased a set of rattan arm chairs with tables and two long chairs had been purchased: the latter became our favorite relaxing place. Ljiljana bought materials and started making cushions for all of them. We found a nice long dining table and eight chairs with leather upholstery which fitted nicely in the living room at our new friends in Khartoum North. Actually the friendly lady took care of my girls whenever they stayed in Port Sudan traveling with ship to and fro of the Sudan.

Six picture frames for our ARTA graphic collection were acquired and soon after the pictures decorated pleasingly the living room. There was no end of buying things and paying for the various equipment and utensils as an addition to the ones that came with 6 crates still waiting at Maurice's garden. I had to watch my bank account constantly as the balance was almost close to zero before my next monthly pay would be transferred to it. Good for me was that all the electric lights fixing were installed on ceilings as well as at the other utility places. So we needed bed stand lamps and few movable point lights on tables only.



***Another rattan set at the corner of terrace in front of dining/living room.***

At Maurice's house we started opening and unpacking the many boxes. Piece by piece was moved to and up with the elevator to our flat. At first there was a complete chaos of too many paper wrappings, boxes and bowls, files and books that rested disorderly around everywhere. Gradually all these pieces were placed onto correct shelves Ljiljana had wrapped with colored plastic folios. Only now was it possible to inspect transport damages in details that mainly consisted of broken knobs on washing machine, stove etc. A list for replacements was mailed home including several spare parts we might not find here. Some items were a complete breakage so the insurance would have to pay for their value where as the value had still to be established for a few spoiled although useable items.

Most of the February was Ramadan when Muslims are not allowed to drink and eat as from sunrise at 5AM until sunset at 6PM in the Sudan. During night hours they may enjoy their usual human habits in drinking and eating almost all the night but they hardly slept. The teaching hours lasted 30 minutes only so I was "home" at 1PM. Thus we had ample

time to start the great move from Maurice's house to our new dwelling. During the Ramadan one often had to queue at Khartoum's Post Office as one clerk worked on a counter at rather slow pace. To get fast access to any kind of a counter one would have to ask a good lady to dispatch the letter at the Post Office or to buy tickets for a cinema or similar. In general the Sudanese had respected the ladies much not only during the Ramadan but in general in other "queuing" occasions granting them the precedence.

By Friday February 23rd we finished transferring of most the goods using our VW car that Maurice named the "Rat" instead of official the "Rabbit" as it was smaller than his grand Ford. As the last we used "rat" to move Vesna's bed frame of was fixed to the car's roof and Ljiljana holding it and me droving very slowly to Hai El Matar. We placed the frame and up went with elevator to our floor where it was placed on the terrace as Vesna was used to sleep outside here. Thus ended all the actions in good fortune after four 4 weeks since my girls arrived here. **We slept in our own beds for the first time on Saturday February 24, 1962.** It was nice to get away from Maurice's burning icons and effigies of saints. We were still young enough to start a new life abroad joined together at last. Now we felt much more contented and happier, believe me!



*Amal, Vesna's friend and Beshir at right*

At first we were not used to such a large domicile with all the comfort it provided after times of living in Zagreb in rather tight and a small room or flat. Maurice allowed Beshir to work for us half time so we had a permanent household servant for the first time in our life too. Only after Beshir moved into a quarter provided in the house at ground floor Ljiljana could not be sure which day Beshir would appear working for us. The staircase well and the elevator were at building's centre surrounded by eight servant quarters at ground floor. The rest of ground floor area was for the residents' parking lots their cars kept in shade under the building. Above the 4th floor was the roof verandah from that one had a splendid view all around and to the nearby airport. Also at the centre of it was a massive hut with cloth washing rooms and the house own high fresh water tank.

Soon after we were settled Ljiljana started making curtains of light materials bought in a shop she knew well by now. Subsequently I fixed the curtains on living room doors so that neighbors would not have a free view into. That we still did not like at all - past experience

still dominated. All other windows and doors in bedrooms had aluminum blinds with small perforations that enabled darkening the rooms nicely. The darkening was essential during the “white hours” that were the hottest ones from 11AM to 5PM and lasting almost through 9 months per year.

We needed heavier curtains to close the two wide openings of terrace too. A bale of multi colored material “Indanthrene” was found as a leftover of the German exhibition. The thick material had to be cut into strips that Ljiljana stitched first and then saw together producing four large curtains and a smaller one for the narrow passage on terrace. The difficult problem was how to fix the curtains (see ‘Z’ on the sketch) at the two wide openings. I accomplished this perilous task by fixing the round guide rails to concrete columns at both aperture sides. Work accomplished I was too relieved finishing this unsafe work 12m above ground. I perspired heavily throughout as the daily temperatures were getting over 40°C by early March already. Soon we would find out how important these curtains to shade the terrace during the daily white hours were.



*In Omdurman Vesna watches the potter making a pot trial form for Ljiljana's scrutiny*

Early in March Muslims celebrated the end of Ramadan with the festivities of Id-el-Kebir or Kurban Bairam that lasted a few days. The normal lecturing started on March 10 and the school year was due to finish on April 22, 1962. Some days later would start the exams meaning that I would have to work hard lecturing for the coming 6 weeks. First of all I have to finish the syllabus as I came too late to KTI. Also I was not ready for the lecturing based upon an antiquated study program. At the same time I would have to compose questions for the exams about organization and practice of I was not acquainted yet. In meantime Ljiljana was achieving fantastic results making our new adobe pleasingly habitable. The first guests announced their arrival or just bumped in mostly evenings. In the two adjacent buildings moved in new tenants that meant for us more visits to and fro soon.

After Ljiljana completed the production of curtains, bedside covers and cushion slips there was nothing to stop my Taurus woman to look after the plant life for the terrace. Maurice took us in his big car to Omdurman so we crossed the White Nile Bridge for the first time. He knew a potter there who manufactured any kind of pots for a customer wanted to buy. Inside the pottery was pleasantly cool as outside was so hot with the air temperature well over 40°C since early mornings already. Within few minutes the potter formed a pot and if it was not acceptable to Ljiljana he destroyed it and started a pot of wanted size instantly. Soon Ljiljana was happy with the sample and not wanting more pots to be destroyed ordered 15 pots to be delivered “bukra”. True few days later we collected the pots. The next step was to fill 10 of them with sandy soil from Blue Nile's bank being the easier task.

To fill the other 5 pots was not so an easy task because we had to collect the goats “mini-balls” (their droppings) to be mixed with the soil that is not fertile enough.



***Abdel Halim Shawki and Maurice Neirouz help Ljiljana to choose plants at the Garden Exhibition***

My poor “rat” had to provide the transport for all pots including the perspiring coworkers in a process to make our terrace blooming with green plants and shrubs. Well, we did not know at that coming months were the hottest one. The hot breezes influenced badly plants grows that would be amplified by the “haboob” alias sand storms due to start soon.

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