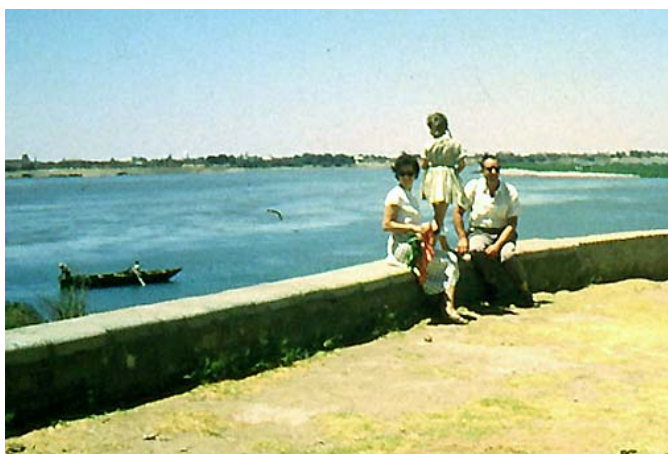


Chapter No. 6:

FIRST LEAVE HOME IN SUMMER 1962 - I STAY BACK!

The April days passed fast and the local or home exams were over. Thus I could start to check the test papers of my classes. I found the results to be more than disastrous and did not know how to censure the papers after the first pass. I knew about the “golden rule” of giving the notice to say 30% of papers so that students would sit for reexamination in August. Still contemplating what to do with my students’ papers I was told to check the papers of another lecturer who went on leave already. Only at this moment I understood my students’ appeals to stop lecturing and to concentrate on repetitions of the “standard” questions that would come in the examination paper. The other lecturer made it simple for his students and himself too by having a certain number of questions in his papers that were worked through and repeated during past few weeks over and over. Almost all his students had solved 3 questions unerringly and amazingly in the same manner – they learned the answers by memorizing the exact figures. In this way students didn’t have to make any reflections and no calculations were needed to solve a problem at all. My approach to correctness and objectivity of a lecturer was badly shaken and taught me a very bitter lesson. Put down your growing hope and “Don’t try straight-up the twisting Drina” (a Croatian proverb).



We rest at the Mogrem atop of confluence of the White (left) and Blue Nile (right). One could clearly notice the dividing line of lighter and darker water’s colors.

We did not get a voucher or cash for my girls’ voyage yet that have not improved my financial situation either. It was paid into my bank account about net £S150 at month’s end. My loans’ repayments were for the car £S24, the furniture £S17 and the flat-rent was £S29 that make a total of £S70. The flat-rent was wrongly calculated as it had to be £S12 only for a KTI lecturer but it took several months until I got the difference paid back. We were spending about £S50 for petrol, water and electricity supplies, gas for cooking and servant’s fee - thus we could not make any saving at the beginning of our stay at least. Ljiljana has developed her talent of bargaining at shops and market (that was expected from any good shopper!) and turned over every piaster (1£S = 100 Piaster tariff or P.T.) in her hand before spending it.

There were some improvements too so we got a proper home address that read HAI EL MATAR, Block No.3 Flat No.7 including the drawer P. O. Box 1805 in our block. From then on the post was delivered to the drawer placed next to the house entrance. Before that delivery system worked properly I had to go collecting our post at the KTI office. During

school's holidays in June and July this was a rather wearisome task for me. The travel preparations progressed well and it was time for Vesna to see a dentist too. She spent most of her free time now reading children's magazines sent from Zagreb and books in Croatian although she could well read English scripts and comics already. Vesna has been collecting paper serviettes and their number was increasing continuously but she never made any use of her collection after all.



Zvonko and Vesna enjoy the coolest place in the living room for reading

When the northerly wind stopped the life became unpleasant with temperatures fluctuating around 42-45°C even getting close to 48°C in shade at white hours. It was impossible to write a letter by hand so Ljiljana started using my typewriter but its tape was overused already. The tape was of 16mm width so I could not use one of ½inch English make that used the Arabic typewriter here. The fine dust spoiled keys and mechanism so it had to be cleaned within a short periods of using my typewriter with Croatian keys. For a brief time we borrowed Maurice's typewriter that he kept well wrapped in a plastic sheet when not in use. Another lesson we learned that is to wrap any sensitive appliance in a plastic sheet or put in a tight sachet or box. Also it was decided that Ljiljana would take our brand new transistor radio back home because it could not be used here in Khartoum as its waves' scale had not fit the local radio broadcast's wave lengths.

Certain comments in articles read in newspapers sent from home made me nervous and pensive about our eventual return to Yugoslavia. Most of these articles pointed towards the "unlawful" personal enrichments and the payments evasion of income and customs dues. It "smelled" too much of a prosecution of the private property in a country where the proletariat was the ruling class of socialism alias communism. Nonetheless my travelers were getting ready and the itinerary has been finalized. My girls would fly with the Sudan Airways from Khartoum to Port Sudan. There they would stay with Lillian's sister until they could board the m/s "Varaždin" the same ship they came in 5 months ago. Captain Mifka's wife was on board this time the vessel sailing to its home-harbor. Thus Ljiljana would have a pleasant company during the homeward journey. Everything went on well and so they left the very hot Khartoum on May 28th and landed safely in Port Sudan afterwards. They boarded the ship on May 30th that put to sea on the same day. The ship was scheduled to visit Trieste and Venice before getting to Rijeka around June 10, 1962.

For me began an expatriate bachelor's life the moment Ljiljana and Vesna left. Majority of expatriates left Khartoum that was probably the most expensive town worldwide at my time there. The exception of were those ones who came here on short and well paid assignments like the officials from USA or UNO. Khartoum itself was like an oasis in the

vast sea of sand of the Nubian Desert. There were 5 reasonably good restaurants one of them was in the Grand Hotel that mostly used the visitors. There were two night-clubs providing programs far below a reasonable passed European standard. In 3 or 4 open-air cinemas one could view at random any movie brought in by Airway lines. The English synchronized pictures would change when a particular airliner was due say in a week or so. A number of national Clubs provided various facilities for few sports like tennis or had a swimming pool. Meals were served with specific national specialties on appropriate days. On certain days one could attend a dancing party in one or the other club but the visitors mostly came in just to “kill the time” during day’s cooler night hours. By midnight all clubs closed including the night clubs whereas cinemas ended their programs around 11PM.

The climate became almost unbearable particularly when the wind was about to change its direction from north to south causing an unpleasant stickiness paired with the fine dust suspended in standing air. Beshir helped me moving in all the furniture from the terrace and stored it in Vesna’s room. It was locked then as it would not be in use for two months or more. All the pots were moved against inner terrace walls thus being out of the reach of scorching sun. It also make easier to water the plants and spray water on walls and floor too. The evaporation helped a little bit to humidify the standing air – for a short while at least. The curtains had to be drawn in and wrapped fixed by cord to the columns. Thus the plants and curtains were out of the way of hot wind laden with fine dust now. When wind force increased it carried dim small grains of sand that had an abrasive power too. When I was out of the flat all doors and windows had to be kept closed by bolts and locked to prevent any accidental unleashing by wind blows. At nights I pulled out my bed to the terrace and slept there sweaty and restlessly being ready to jump up at somebody’s first bellow from far echoing: HABOOB! HABOOB!



The sandstorm called HABOOB comes in from the Airport at south direction

It so happened about midnight of June 6th that I had just enough time to pull in the bed into our bedroom locking the door tight. Turning the ceiling slow rotating ventilator I was ready to lie down when the wind got stronger and howling rather loud. Then I heard some strange din and flapping on the terrace. Heavily perspiring I run to the living room and in switched on the terrace lights. Then I saw that on the curtain wing got loose and fluttered wildly under wind blows. There was not much time for any contemplation and I opened the meander-door just a bit to get outside into that fury of a sand storm. It took me sometime to get down the curtain pipe-rails first to gather the curtains fixed onto. I bound the curtains hasty and placed everything close to a lee-side wall. I was sweating very much dressed in swimming trunks only so felt sand grains stinging me all over the exposed skin. Little by little a dusty layer created all over my body from a mix of sweat and fine dust. At last it was time to get inside after I had accomplished that rather difficult task. To my great dismay the wind closed that small gap left in the meander-door shut. There were no handles to pull it open. What to do now?

The other doors to the terrace had small panes just next to the lock. I used the rail as a lever and broke in that small windowpane. Removing rubbles I easily unlocked the door and got inside to safety. First I had to close that opening by layers of cardboard fixing all tight with sealing tape. The almost unbearable warmness and constant perspiration made me feeling rather awful so I decided to take a shower before getting for a long drink. In the bathroom long mirror I saw a strange person in a dark brown coat from head to feet with whites where his teeth and eyeballs were. The water in the tub was pleasant not too warm so I started scrubbing down the dirt first. After that I used a soap to wash my hairs and to remove the fine dust from all pores. I hoped that the sewage would not clog of that rinsing slurry of clayey particles. It was not necessary to use a towel as with intense perspiration my skin became wet in no time. Now I could fulfill my longing for a very long drink.

Next morning Beshir had helped me sweeping the terrace from layers of deposited dust and sand rather thick at certain places. I had to repair the broken glass pane again as my last night fast work was not too good. The fine dirt got through even smallest door cracks say in the corridor wardrobe. There I kept my cameras and other sensitive equipment in plastic bags. To my amazement on cameras' leather cases there was a very fine dust layer too. Plants showed very signs of being dehydrated or even scorched where the hot wind caught on the leaves. I went over to check Diklić's flat and found a window that had opened during last night furious haboob. I left perfect footprints on floor going around and closing that window. A day after Beshir told me that our fridge is not working properly so I had called the repair serviceman. I transferred its content to Dr. Peter Illes' one as he was our neighbour on the floor below. Dr. Illes was a professor of law on the University in Budapest but he had to leave Hungary after the political turmoil in 1958. He was a Senior lecturer of the Laws on Khartoum University now. We liked him much as a good neighbour and political escapee too.



The construction work started for the foundation of Block 12B at Khartoum Technical Institute

My daily itinerary was a rather simple and governed by high temperatures particularly on days without any breeze or for strong winds laden with fine sand. The real sand storms known as “haboob” occurred almost every second day or so now. It was essential to keep tight closed all windows and doors before leaving the flat. Normally I got up mornings rather early to fulfil a task ask for by the V-P Technical Sayed Kamal. I had to check the structural calculation and to produce working drawings for KTI's newest extension of Block 12B on Plot 5. Kamal prepared the architectural drawings for it and the contractor was supposed to build that block using them. A dispute erupted between the parties (of course

in Arabic!) so Kamal asked me to prepare the proper working drawings for the contractor. It was obvious that it was a good chance for me to show how to design project drawings to a reasonable standard. However it was not to be an easy task under the toil and moil of excessive perspiring. I had to drink a lot and very often taking any liquid straight from the refrigerator. Working on drawing board I sat under a ceiling ventilator to accelerate body's sweat evaporation thus achieving the best cooling effect.

After a few days I got an irritating coughing but I was not sure about the cause of it. At first I thought that it was because of drinking too cold liquids or sitting below the ceiling fan wet of perspiration. It could be that the environmental climate started changing now. Without any warning we got a very strong rain mid of June. It set off a real havoc on Khartoum's roads and the humidity increased noticeably to over 20%. On the way to KTI to collect my post the number of puddles on roads stunned me thoroughly. Some of these were so deep for my car so I had to avoid them carefully choosing a bypath around ... if possible. Proper road drains did not exist in Khartoum at all. I just wondered what would happen when the real rainy season starts late in July or early in August.

The terrace was flooded and Beshir needed quite a while to collect staying water as there were no waterspouts or drains fitted on. Nobody thought about that one strong rain could flood the terrace even that water would run over the doorsills into rooms. This sudden increase of the humidity triggered off more of my coughing even so I had a few sleepless nights. The temporary closure of the swimming pool just added more to my frustrations that included catching a catarrh at outside temperatures well over 40°C. I took more salt tablets because I felt tired, miserable and irritable. It was Maurice who suggested that take tablets containing reasonable doses of minerals and vitamins. Local fruits and vegetables that were available did not contain enough of minerals and vitamins one would assume as to be the case at home.

The new fiscal year started in the Sudan on July 1, 1962. Now I possibly could expect an answer to my application for the payment for family's return voyage. The government's expatriate officers had a 12-week paid leave that included the sea-fare for the trip to and fro to their country. British Government set up this home leave system for those who were seconded to duties in the Colonies considering 6-week holiday and two times 3-week needed for sea voyages from India to England at those times. The Sudanese Government still applied the same rule implying that expatriates would be returning as from mid of July. The usage of aircrafts for travels shortened them to say 3 days instead of billed 3 weeks. However one had to pay for the difference between the sea fare allowance and the actual air ticket cost. Thus it was probable that my girls would return sailing on a ship from Rijeka to Port Sudan and then fly by Sudan Airways to Khartoum as done before. They might take m/s "Varaždin" again as it was expected in Port Sudan between August 10 and 12 - Insh'Allah.

June passed quickly although bit by bit I did not do much except going out when invited by few friends who stayed in Khartoum. The swimming pool opened again as for the next season. Maurice accompanied me as I promised to teach him swimming. He has learned fast and I had a company in the almost deserted University pool. I got quite a dark tan although I cared stay under the merciless sun for a few moments only. Yet staying in the swimming pool for hours would not prevent the burning sun to get through to the skin. At all times I kept a sunhat on my head as essential. There was a gallery around the pool hat provided a perfect shelter. Nonetheless the hot air dried the skin wetness fast and one would wish to be back in the pool soonest. The residents of the almost deserted flats in four blocks started to return as from the early July.

Maurice was glad when his good friend Mr. Sobhi Girgis returned to Khartoum from Egypt. There were good reasons to go out dining but I had to care for not put on weight like 6 months ago that made Ljiljana so angry. Mikić Bora and his wife Ljubica invited me for a dinner in their flat prior their departure to Beirut for a short leave. The temptation was always too great for me as a solitary man to accept invitations for drinks or meals by people who returned to Khartoum from their leaves. They had so many news to tell about most of them were of a lesser interest to me though. I decided to buy a radio in a local shop so that I could listen on short waves political news of particular interest to me. I found a battery driven radio made by PHILCO that had two wide short wave scales of 16m to 40m and 41m to 90m. Equipped with it I could listen to most important English speaking international stations. The noise interferences were by far less than on my previous radio that was power driven and made for European conditions. Ljiljana took it back to Zagreb anyway. I have not liked the recent news coming from Yugoslavia where Tito's regime was aiming at putting on even more restraints on the private property.



Viewing south the sky cleared after a strong rain that hit Khartoum early in the morning

During the second half of July the rains lessened for a while but the humidity got up to 50% and more. The climate became very unpleasant as it included the air-borne fine soil particles. The sky did not clear of clouds and one had the feeling that some kind of grimy fog was suspended in the air. My coughing lessened a little bit because I strictly controlled myself by not drinking anything taken straight from the fridge. Often I had some breathing difficulties that I thought caused the climatic change at first. I believed that this problem was caused by the high temperature and increased humidity of air laden with fine dust. Some time later I would find out that my breathing problem was caused by the reemerging of my childhood asthma.

There were more inconveniences to be tackled with because Beshir wanted to stay as our servant only not to be shared with Maurice anymore. With Halim's help we came to a reasonable agreement with Beshir to get £S8 per month plus food and habitation now. Beshir accepted to clean Dr. Illes' flat for that he would get paid extra P. T. 500 (half \$\$) per hour. The post from home was delayed for weeks now that I could not explain except for the Sudan Airways airplanes had some problems and the regular flights had to be cancelled or delayed for longer periods. The roof slab was leaking on few places as our flat was the top one. Several stain marks appeared on ceilings and I did report this to the Ministry of Public Works instantly. I got the promise that the matter would be looked at "bukhra" (tomorrow) and hopefully not "bado bukhra" (day after tomorrow) meaning never.

There came good news that the reimbursement was approved for the return voyage of my family. One day coming out of the Post Office I noticed another VW “Beatle” approaching my car some 20m far. At first I thought that it would park behind my car but suddenly the car swerved out on the road but its left rear door was opened and a screeching noise got to me as it scrapped along the right side of my car. I believed that the damage would be bad and rushed forward cursing nastily in Croatian at the driver who got out of his car to view the damage too. He was a handsome and tall Sudanese and started apologizing at first in English and continued in Croatian afterwards. The ice was broken! The damage was a relatively small compared to the noise produced. The rear mud breaker of my car was scratched and sagged in a bit whereas the opponent’s rear door was grazed slightly only. We agreed upon about the repair of my car speaking in Croatian as the Sudanese was a navy officer trained in Yugoslavia partly in Starigrad on Hvar Island. Starigrad was the place where Ljiljana and Vesna were spending their holidays now.



The Flamboyant tree in full bloom at the Khartoum Botanic Garden



The rainbow in late afternoon sun rays after a strong rain had stopped

#####