

01. ARRIVAL TO MOMBASA AND BAMBURI

We departed from Khartoum on August 5, 1964 at 4AM on the British Airways early morning flight to Nairobi. A few persons knew the time of our departure -- definitely nobody of the Yugoslav community. Our good friend in Khartoum, Abdel Halim Shawki, arranged with a police officer to take care about us the moment we arrive there. The flight had a delay so we landed safely at Nairobi International Airport a bit later that morning. We did not have to wait for too long for the flight connection to Mombasa thus.



Ljiljana and Vesna view the distance display signpost at the Nairobi International Airport Before we flew to Mombasa on August 6, 1964.

Short before midday we arrived at the Mombasa airport where Mrs. Mandl was waiting for us already. We stayed in the Nyali Beach Hotel that was the traditional boarding house situated at the main land Nyali peninsula south of City of Mombasa. Mrs. Annie Mandl, Managing Director's wife, left us soon wishing us a good rest needed badly after the past rather exciting 24 hours since departing from Khartoum. The next morning it would start the seriousness of the new segment in our life but in an entirely different surrounding. In Mombasa we have expected more security and safety for our future considering the hazards of furtive departure from the Sudan. We were on the best way to demolish the ties with our home country that was Tito's totalitarian state definitely from now on.

The next day a factory driver picked us up leaving me out on at the factory the way out from Mombasa town northwards where as Ljiljana and Vesna continued on to view the house that company bought recently. First I went to see Dr. Mandl in his office in Head building and he introduced me to all senior staff members. Later he took me to a room that would be my office for a short while at least. According to the talk with him in May 1963 at Khartoum airport one anticipated that I would stay at Bamburi Portland Cement Company's (BPCC) Works for about 3 to 6 months at maximum. However later it turned out that they kept me for almost three years. At midday Dr. Mandl invited me to his house for lunch where Ljiljana and Vesna were waiting already. My two girls were so excited about the house they had inspected in the morning. Ljiljana asked our host if we could move into it as soon as possible. The house was almost fully furnished and company's skilled workers were to complete the refurbishing in no time after all. Thus our host promised to fulfil Ljiljana's dearest wish and two days later we moved in to our new residence.



General view of the OCEANIC Hotel as seen from the approach road.

The house had been built on a coral head outcrop and had a wide veranda overlooking the Bamburi Beach some 100m far out only. Dr. Mandl's house was situated next to the coast and it was some 40m right down from our new domicile. From our veranda we could see the coral reef clearly and hear the quite loud surf on it some 400m away only. Beyond the reef stretched the openness of the Indian Ocean in all its wideness and splendour that colours changed all the time with tidal movements and daily lights.

Our new domicile was a 6-year old dwelling erected on a plot of about four acres of almost pristine land not fenced in at all now. There were a few large trees and several papayas growing along the northern plot's boundary. Beyond the later one there was the virgin bush in that probably lived some number of wild animals including a large variety of "dudus" (= insects or anything that creeps). Ljiljana would have a lot of work to make the garden to her likeness that was a huge free space around the house now. For the time being there were two grassy level surfaces only and below the balcony a coral rock face that still needed gardener's attendance.



The west front of the house viewed from the access road.

After lunch another surprise on that first day was waiting for me at the factory. I got from the company's a second-hand VW "Beetle" Model 1951 for our personal usage. The car was of the same type like the "Rat" we have had in Khartoum - except for its colour that was beige now. The car had some 75.000km on its tachometer but well kept by the

former owner. The Works' garage looked after its maintenance and I could draw free petrol from plant Petrol station. The old "Beetle" served us well throughout the whole time of our stay in Kenya. We had used it on many safaris some of with rather long driving of 5.000km and with some dramatic troubles – about these I may write later.

My new job asked for all my awareness and attention as it differed entirely from the one I had in Khartoum. Already on the second day I had to fly to a construction site of the new Cement works some 30km north of Dar-es-Salaam city. I took the commercial flight from Mombasa via Zanzibar to Dar-es-Salaam lasting some 2 hours – quite a waste of time. Passengers were not allowed to get out during the only stop of some 30 minutes in Zanzibar. Clove seeds stuck on small plastic balls were the goods that one could buy on board only. Smuggling of cloves from Zanzibar was strictly forbidden and stood under severe penalties then. At that time Zanzibar had a totalitarian communist like regime under the guidance of DDR (= German Democratic Republic). Late evening I was flying back to Mombasa where the driver had waited to take me to the hotel.



Ljiljana and Vesna (left) and Zvonko (right) on the day we left the OCEANIC to Bamburi.

On the third day we moved to "our" house and the daily routine started for all three of us. We were expected by five members of the old household staff: a cook, a house servant, a "nanee" (children's nurse) and two gardeners. All of them had inhabited in a small house build of concrete blocks and covered with corrugated asbestos sheets situated next to the access road some 30m from the main residence. Seeing their awaiting and rather uncertain looks Ljiljana has made her decision fast: we would not need the nanee and the cook. She kept Mgandi as the house servant and the two gardeners named Mwachiro and Ngoa. Mgandi was a good worker but he did return from his brief home leaves usually with a delay of day or more. After some Ljiljana's stern warnings that he would be dismissed next time - Mgandi introduced on his own replacement Karissa some time later.

In general I have started my work in the Main office at 7AM and Vesna joined me on the ride to the factory to catch up company's school bus there. The children were driven to their various schools in Mombasa so Vesna got to the Loreto Convent Girls continuing her education without any interruption here. Mostly Ljiljana wrote down on a particular piece of paper what ever she needed in the kitchen or for the household like fruits, vegetables and other items say for cleaning etc. At lunch time I would collect all the purchases that had been delivered to my office whereas the bill went to the accounts. Ljiljana did not need long to organize our household and she got used to the local markets in Mombasa as well as too many shops and stalls around there. Soon she had

started going to town by herself to obtain what needed driving our car VW “Beetle” we got from the company.

On first few days’ two dogs visited our house playing around the coral outcrop during daylight. Ljiljana fed them occasionally and the younger one the two got her sympathy instantly. The owner of the elder dog was the former owner of our dwelling and they would leave for South Africa soon and take their dog with them. The younger of dogs was named “Knocker” and belonged to an English couple to leave soon too. They could not take “Knocker” with them due to the quarantine rules in UK. The couple stayed just for a short while in a house next to ours but on the coast and when they left Kenya for good we took “Knocker” from them. Our new household would be complete only when the dog “Knocker” would join us later. Knocker stayed with us until we would leave Kenya to an unknown place in the still undisclosed time in future.



The front of the house built on a coral outcrop viewed from the garden below.

Several days after we moved in we attended a farewell party for my mentor from Univ. Prof. Otto Werner from Zagreb. We returned home from that party in Mombasa Club short of midnight and have not checked whether all windows properly closed at ground floor level. The next morning we got the shock discovering that there had been a burglary during the night. We found open the narrow window at the ground floor for WC of that we have fixed the steel handle keeping it slightly open just for ventilation. It was obviously an easy job for a thief to yank it up and enter into the house as we did not have a dog yet. We called the police instantly but they arrived the next day only to determine what missing.

A police officer told us to be rather patient because sooner or later they would catch the thief – they promised this at least. Soon after this incident Ljiljana called on the former house owner asking to give us their dog as soon as possible. So the next day the departing English lady brought Knocker to our house with all dog’s “belongings” back to its house. Since that day Knocker stayed with us and we have not had any unwanted visitors there after. Knocker looked like an Alsatian strongly built with a fearsome looking teeth when barking or growling.

The burglar took Ljiljana’s straw hat with a decorative braided red-white ribbon fitted on and the pair of my black shoes the only I had brought here. By far more worse was the

disappearance of my beautiful lizard-skin briefcase in that I packed few office papers and the passports of Ljiljana and Vesna. The later ones I was supposed to hand over in the Head office at morning. Our Yugoslav visas were to expire in due course so we needed some kind of Kenyan official documents to enable us travelling free in the East African Union.

The Union was created by the Governments of Kenya, Tanganyika (later to become Tanzania) and Uganda. The members of the Union had joined in their transport facilities like harbours, airways and railroads, and customs. We had to apply for the document known as the "Three Partite Pass" that would be of help for me travelling to Dar-es-Salaam more often now. Of course, the loss of the two passports was a great shock for us. Fortunately Company held important links to the Kenyan Government that helped that we all got our Three Partite Passes soon after. Lucky for me I left my passport in the office after my first flight to Dar-es-Salaam in Tanganyika. Thus the procedure got through fast and we almost forgot this nasty incident.



Vesna and Knocker pose on the wall of garden access stairs to the house seaside (eastern) door.

An unexpected turn in this first unpleasant event occurred few weeks later bringing the wholly story to a humorous epilogue. Driving on the way to the town (left-hand driving in Kenya) Ljiljana spotted her light yellow straw hat on a native's head who walked right along the road. Taken by surprise she decided fast turning in the first access road that lead to a sea-side lodge. Arriving at the White Sands Lodge she asked for the manager and then explained to him that she wants to call the Nyalı Police Station for help. The manager replied smilingly that this would not be necessary as there are two guests in the lodge who would deal with her demand. The two gentlemen turned out to be the high ranking police officers from Nairobi on leave. Leaving their breakfast both jumped up getting to their car told Ljiljana to return to the main road and to drive slowly towards the incriminated person.

When Ljiljana came to the place where she saw the Kenyan he just had disappeared. She stopped and said apologizing to the police officers following her that the man has vanished. One of the officers pointed to a bush track and told Ljiljana to drive in slowly onwards. The man could not be far so she should pass him and then by a hand-wave point that this is the person they would be looking after. True, Ljiljana soon saw the man walking few hundred meters in front and he even stepped aside politely to let her pass. The approaching officers' car stopped at the man with a straw hat abruptly. An officer of stepped out and pulled the poor chap without any trouble in their car. Then both cars

continued on this bush track until they arrived to the Bamburi village and turning left followed the main road to Mombasa.

The whole scene did not last long and after a while both cars arrived to the Nyali Police Station. There the fresh captive went straight to a wall and stood there still leaning on with both hands up for the police search. One of the high rank officers pointing to the obvious burglar smilingly said: "You see, Madame, he has some experience with the police. See, he knows how to behave. He was your burglar."



This is our house seen from its south side during the dry season soon after our arrival. The burglar got into the house through the narrow window second from left at ground floor.

Several weeks later Ljiljana went to the Court in Mombasa to attend the legal action of a burglary. The accused admitted the burglary extenuating his action as being under the moon's influence. The straw hat was one of the evidences provided by the Court including my lizard-skin briefcase. Few seems of it were cut roughly open for a better carrying of other objects found in chap's possession evidently from some other burglaries he had done. The two Yugoslav passports were sold to Tanga (a harbour in Northern Tanganyika) and my shoes were gone for good too. Ljiljana did not want back her torn down straw hat. The skin of my briefcase was very much ruined and cut seems made it useless for anything except for another unfortunate burglary perhaps.

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