

Chapter No. 7:

FAMILY REUNITES IN KHARTOUM IN AUGUST 1962

When I returned from KTI on Wednesday August 8th I found Beshir busy with cleaning the flat as never before. He told me about a message he understood as that Madam and Vesna are due to Khartoum instantly. As I could not believe what he just had said I drove back to town to talk to Halim who should know about ship arrivals in Port Sudan. In truth it was the m/s “Jelsa” that tied up in Port Sudan but my family I expected on m/s “Varaždin” to dock in a week later. Beshir was shaken with my report so he just stopped working right away. Thus I got another week to complete the painting of furniture that I ordered few weeks ago. Halim helped me to the carpenter and I paid a reasonable price for 3 long shelves and 3 bedside tables as well as a work-table (125x70cm) for Vesna and another one but a little bit more “sophisticated” for me.

I brought the bed frames to the same workshop that made them though of too small steel angle profile. Also the spring filling was too weak for our European weights. The workshop manager agreed to replace them (Halim had a strong word with him before that!) taking a stronger steel profile for the bed frames. The spring filling was also made stronger and improved adding a rectangular grid to. I fixed a long mirror 125x70cm at the bathroom so Ljiljana would a better view of her tailoring achievements. Also I found a smaller drawing board that fitted well onto my new table. A purchase of a T-square completed my measures needed for new design works that would come up soon. I bought a second-hand bicycle of mid size that should the surprise for Vesna. After adding a few minor parts to it the bicycle stood repaired and repainted waiting under cover for Vesna’s return.



The flats’ attendants take a siesta on the greens between blocks – Beshir is at right

During the past weeks I had completed the construction drawings for the KTI new block under construction already. Now I could start compiling the lists of items and equipment that would be needed for KTI’s Material testing laboratory eventually. Lesser temperatures around 35°C became more bearable as rains closed in on Khartoum in the last week of July. For me was undesirable the humidity that went up to 50% days and nights causing more heavy breathing cum coughing for days now. Some friends consoled me saying that these difficulties are quite common with newcomers particularly at wet seasons.

The asthma symptoms are common and quite frequent then. At first I did not consider the possibility that my childhood asthma could come up to me back. Only a year later I became aware that be the reality. The strong perspiration had some more unpleasant effects like eczemas and skin irritations at places where the sweat could not evaporate. Thus I had to get used to the prickly heat nasty goings-on too.

By the end of July tenants of the flats in Hai-el-Matar four blocks returned from their holidays and the life in returned almost normal. This has awakened me from my lethargy as there was a lot to talk about including fresh news from Yugoslavia. Our neighbor Mr. Fatouh, a colleague of mine and lecturer at KTI, returned with his family too. His pretty wife Bahiga invited Maurice and me for the lunch always on Fridays. I often visited other neighbors to hear their stories moreover I was invited to stay for a long drink and sometimes for a lunch or dinner.

One day I went out to Khartoum railway station several times to see when the elderly couple Radojčićs would arrive from Wadi Halfa. They were supposed to board the train at Wadi Halfa to journey through the Nubian Desert. Radojčićs came traveling trough Egypt starting from Alexandria to Cairo and then boarding the ship at Shellal to sail Nile upstream via Luxor up to the last docking at Wadi Halfa. Unfortunately the train had been delayed by sand storms and as they did not arrive until 23 hours I went back home. Next day I went to see them at their house so they were telling in a long story of their adventures along this route.

The Yugoslav officials and workers came back to Khartoum early in August. Also a new Yugoslav ambassador took over his duties. Was it a new broom? The political meetings intensified including more political indoctrination referring to new stern measures on the private enrichments and unpaid taxes etc. The proposed new statute of the Communist Party and Marshal Tito's speech in Split stirred up a lot of bad spirits. One wanted that we discuss about additional amendments to the new constitution though the Parliament in Belgrade had approved it already. This was an absolute nonsense but nobody dared to say that!



The yellow Laburnum anagyroides tree in full bloom at Khartoum Botanic Gardens

Later Ljiljana would tell me all about these insupportable news and the difficulties she had to extend the visa for Vesna and herself as well. I abhorred the frustrations she had to get through initiated by that red-haired officer of the passport office. Ljiljana had to

call on her UDBA liaison officer for help. He was her “guide” alias link when she worked as a translator in the Hungarian Pavilion of Trade Fair in Zagreb. His help was more than rewarding as the visas were issued within a short time and Ljiljana could go on with her holidays at Starigrad in peace of mind.

There were many changes in the Yugoslav community and the dramatic political issues at home would bring new problems and intimidations. Some of them had serious effect on my judgments regarding our security and wellbeing in the future too. The Embassy intended to open a school for Yugoslav children that did not go to the local schools as they could not speak English. Their parents were too lenient to take care about this so the Embassy wanted to open its own school. About 15 children that would attend the one class only had to pay a fee of 3£S per months. They would be learning the writing in Cyrillic and the computation for the 1st grade of a Primary school. Later they should have to pass the examination in Yugoslavia later where certificates would be issued. Such a scheme was a pure nonsense considering that the school was supposed to be held on Fridays only - the free day one had here. Vesna passed the 1st grade already so we planned that she would sit for the 2nd and 3rd grade exams in Starigrad next summer what had been arranged for already.

The Embassy got hold of a Yugoslav student who learned Arabic at the University. One believed that he could teach all subjects except those of natural sciences to a few elder children like Vesna and Marina. For them the fee would be of 15£S per semester and with lectures again on Fridays. Why should not the engineers take care about natural science subjects? I refused bluntly this idea as had enough of my own lecturing at KTI and probably I get a chance as a part-time lecturer at the University too. It was obvious that I was onto a war path with the political minded countrymen or commissaries.

To letters from my families back home were delayed for more than 6 weeks since. I was rather interested of any news about was happening home that increased my anxiety as well. The political situation in Yugoslavia became somewhat obscure and difficult to be understood far here in Khartoum. My divergences towards the more politically oriented compatriots were getting to be intolerable. I got rather edgy with Embassy’s intention to open a school for Yugoslav children. The Yugoslav Club charged a fee of 1£S/month for all grownups though the club did not have any other facilities except a place where one had to endure the political indoctrination. It was time that Ljiljana and Vesna come back as I was getting rather irritated and worried about the Embassy’s intentions dearly. My health was not too good either and I had problems to get rid of the nasty coughing and eczemas or other unknown “eruptions” on my skin. Luckily soon I got the notice that they left Rijeka on m/s “Varaždin” on 3rd August due to arrive in Port Sudan probably on 15th August, Insh’Allah.

I went to Halim’s office on Wednesday 15th where I learned that the ladies disembarked in Port Sudan. They would arrive by Sudan Airways plane to Khartoum the same day early afternoon. I rushed home alarming Beshir to clean the flat fast and then I drove to Maurice to tell him about their arrival so soon. Diklićs with daughter Marina, Maurice and me congregated at the airport so I had time to explain about the short notice of their arrival. My excitement prevailed over when Ljiljana and Vesna came out from the exit lounge. Ljiljana looked exhausted and she obviously lost some weight of her normal 56kg whereas Vesna was brisk alive and happy to be back “home”.

At first the new arrivals wanted tell us all about their sea voyage that was rather calm without waves or wind either. However it was terribly hot with temperatures over 44°C and humidity exceeding 50%. Thus the cabin was baking hot and sticky just not well for sleeping at all. They went of board in Port Said to make a sight seeing tour in a hackney coach despite the very heat. At the next stop in Port of Ismalia they did the same and got more pleasure in that multi national town than it was in Port Said. They could not get of the ship in Jeddah but the port's pilot was rather intrigued seeing Ljiljana's pock-marked upper arm. As the best explanation she could give him was that these scars her "tribal marks". That satisfied him fully. The pilot was probably more interested in the pale skin of Ljiljana and her features than in the scars really. They were met on board by Mr. George Malgarinos, Lillian's brother-in-law, when the vessel arrived in Port Sudan early morning on August 15. He arranged all the official formalities remarkably fast for the Sudanese circumstances and took them straight to the airport where just being on time for the flight to Khartoum on that Monday.



An ancient and large palm tree in bloom at the Khartoum Botanic Garden

My two girls were too happy being back to our spacious flat again. They admired the new painted furniture as well as the state of cleanliness as Beshir's achievement that proved that he can work fast too. Vesna was too happy with her new bicycle and wanted to go down to try it instantly. We suggested a delay as it was still very hot and without any breeze to rid of the afternoon's humidity. Ljiljana started unpacking and presented Beshir a new "galabia" (white linen men's attire with wide sleeves worn locally) and dark glasses that he found very fashionable putting them on immediately. Soon after Beshir went down to join other servants resting in building's shade on the lawn to show off his new dark glasses. It was almost a ritual that the servants would take a nap and talk for hours relaxing on shaded lawn beside a house block. The "ammass" with children caring for congregated a little bit further of male counterparts mostly during the "white hours". One day in a week the lawns were flooded and the water stood there few inches deep while the next day the grass was dry enough that the congregation would take place again.

In the second half of August followed a few scattered rains that did not cool down the air at first but the humidity increased making our life even more miserable. I did quite a lot of “moon-lighting jobs” back in Yugoslavia to better our financial conditions there. Now this approach got hold on me here again. I got a translating job of text from German into English that was the Technical specification about saving the Sudanese ancient temples and memorials. These ruins would be flooded once the Aswan dam would be completed constructed upstream and near to Shellal. The new dammed in reservoir would create a wide and long Lake of Nile reaching far to South of Egypt and into the Northern Sudan. There were several antique shrines that had been marked for removal and transfer to Khartoum where they should be re-erected in the new Museum. Next chances for me were to offer my structural engineer’s experiences when looking for a reasonable design work that I could get hold on. In the meantime I started with design works for family houses so the new table with a drawing board was the right provision for such jobs. My problems consisted in the fight with my perspiration and the fine dust that amassed on drawings or papers.



The camp of dismantling crew at the Naga Temple site in Nubian Desert of the North Sudan

The St. Francis Sisters’ pool was the walking distance of Hai-el-Matar compound and with a little intervention we could pay the annual family’s subscription of 4£S. After that we had to pay 5PT each at any visit to this large and nice pool. The ladies had to wear full size swim dress that my girls did not like too much. When I had time we would visit the University swimming pool that I had visited during my aloneness often. My visit on August 25th was not to be under good auspices accompanying my family shivering a bit despite heat and stickiness. I got a nasty influenza including laryngitis and bronchitis symptoms. My coughing and difficult breathing returned making my life even more wretched. Friends advised that should take DAGRAVIT pills regularly that were the combination of 30 minerals and vitamins. I was drained out of these ingredients during the past weeks of extreme heat and intense perspiration. Somebody suggested putting drops of lime juice into nostrils that consequently caused severe burning of my mucous. The convalescence progressed well under full care of Ljiljana and several concerned friends we have made in Khartoum.

By the end of August started rather intensive and strong rains day after day that turned Khartoum’s roadwork into a quagmire resulting the begin of a dangerous driving period. One had to drive a very slow slalom like avoiding wide cracks or hidden deep pits in the sludgy road surface. Almost all traffic came to a standstill and offices were deserted so

any work or enquiry had to wait for “bukra” or “bado bukra” or for never - Insh’Allah. The soil here was the clayey sand containing very fine clay minerals that needed some time to absorb the water. That process caused an extreme swelling turning the soil into a real slime at end. The temperatures dropped significantly to around 32°C at daytime and to 25°C at nights. This weather “spook” lasted for about 10 days that turned the barren desert in a flowering carpet. Regrettably the ceiling wet marks in our bedroom widened considerably too. The re-examinations started at KTI on September 3rd but fortunately I did not have any student to sit for it. The lectures were supposed to start on September 10th but rumors spread that student might go on strike before the Day of Revolution due on 17th November.

According to the KTI Lecture Board I got a new subject of “Theory of Structures” to teach in two final classes. I had to continue with lectures of “Strength of Materials” in two fore-last classes as before. Thus I had 21-hour week of lecturing to that one had to add more for preparations, home works checking etc. It was to be a very busy in the 1962/63 school year for me. Thus I should have look after how to make the best use of days to come. We got up normally at 06:30 to leave the house at 07:15 driving Vesna to her new school of Comboni Sisters first and then to KTI to be there in time. I had a few free morning hours Wednesdays so we drove to the “souk” (the central market in town) where Ljiljana made her weekly purchases. She would get the best prices if she was the first customer at any of places to buy vegetables or fruits etc. A few young boys were waiting at the parking lot and came running to meet her. The first one or two of grasped the large baskets of woven palm leaves. They followed Ljiljana to the appropriate stands and when Ljiljana finished the purchases brought baskets to the car. She would pay them the usual “baksheesh” that had been settled before unanimously.

Ljiljana took over the household chores and our meals improved considerably getting Beshir’s and mine full appreciation for. Of course Ljiljana turned her uppermost care to the plants on verandah as they went through a rather rough time during past 3 months of extreme heat and dryness, sand storms and strong rains now. We sold for a good price our NORGE fridge of 240lt that did not work well at all and bought a secondhand one of SIEMENS 210lt for less money though. The new fridge worked fine and Ljiljana started almost a permanent production of ice creams that became an attraction to our neighbors soon. An exhauster has been installed on top of the shaft for kitchen trash discharge to diminish the odor but it did not help trash splattering at lower floors. The shaft turned into a highway for the cockroaches and luckily for us our kitchen was a far way up it.

When two of us were alone Ljiljana started telling about the discourses she had been involved or she of overheard conversations of fellow citizens who were “lucky” being able to work abroad. These people were called “pechalbari” at home that is they worked in “tribulation” but do earn more than those staying at home. Those staying and working at home had the health insurance and the life pension, enjoyed the socialistic “right” on work or employment and could not get a notice unless it was out of political reasons. It was absolutely ridiculous the way to compare say my income and prices in the Sudan with those ones in Yugoslavia at an exchange rate of 1£S for about 2.200 Yu-Dinars. According to such a (mis)calculation I would be a multimillionaire with my present salary in Yugoslavia. Save for one easily forgot the facts that our annual expenditures here in Khartoum also were millions of Yu-Dinars. Thus we had to rationalize and economize our living in Khartoum in the best possible way. I was obliged to accrue an amount to

pay premiums for my life and invalidism insurances arranged by a Swiss broker. I found that too important as to safeguard for my family in case something happens to me as the sole earner.

I was really getting upset with the political development in Yugoslavia that all turned into the very dissatisfaction for Ljiljana and me. Two of us had to keep our thoughts and feelings in a strict secrecy. The seed had started to germinate that would lead us to destroy all bridges for an apparent return home for good and ever. We were aware that the result of such a decision would lead us onto the way to emigration where we hopped for to find a more promising future for all of us.



The reunited Ljiljana and Zvonko visit the Botanic Garden's Desert plants section

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