

Chapter No. 11:

OUR LIFE IN KHARTOUM IN SECOND HALF OF 1963

Despite several hours delay and tiredness we were all in good spirit when friends drove us to Hai el Matar. It was a rather long 23-day track from Zagreb to Khartoum sailing across the Mediterranean and upstream the Nile, travelling part by train and on board of an old Nile steamer. It was a real adventure we would never be able to repeat but the memories of that voyage would stay with us life long surely.

Beshir was waiting sombrely in front of the block and his face smiled widely when he saw us getting out of the cars. Maurice has made sure that Beshir cleans and sweeps the flat thoroughly and Ljiljana acclaimed his efforts later that made Beshir to smirk happily again. Mrs. Diklić staffed our refrigerator with all necessary ingredients that would enable Ljiljana to visit the souk on Wednesday. On this day she was expected by her favourite vendors and a number of boys to carry baskets to her car. Tomorrow on Monday Maurice would take me to pick my car at Halim's office. Later we went to the KTI to see our timetables for the school year 1963/4. First Ljiljana started unpacking our toiletry and then getting out the dirty clothing that had accumulated during our long journey. Two large heaps of white and coloured cloths would be washed during the next day or two. The washings' drying would not create any problem as it was still rather hot – as usual in Khartoum. Beshir got a bit concerned seeing the mount of clothes he would have to iron but few gifts Ljiljana gave him prompted a smile on his mostly sombre face.

On Monday Vesna stayed at home and invited her friend Amal, a Sudanese doctor's daughter, and together they opened a "shop" in Vesna's room that was in a real chaos soon after. For some time Ljiljana did not bother much about that as she was too busy placing various things to their right places. Before I went on leave I moved everything into Vesna's room in hurry without any particular order. I had to prepare our flat for a temporary occupant at short notice. Ljiljana was perspiring heavily running to and fro the many rooms including the veranda where she had started arranging pots with plants to her likeness. She was sad about how many plants that did not survive the heat and haboob season.

After a few days she got everything organized that made our life comfortable in Khartoum again. I took some time too to find my papers and utensils that I had stuck away securely. We got several short lasting rains that were quite unusual by late September as this caused a higher humidity and sleeping sweaty for many hours at night. So far also the Sudanese noticed certain climatic change and complained about dampness and more perspiration as they were used to.

A few days after our return Vesna joined in the 4th Primary class at Comboni Sisters School the same as year before. She did not miss too much out the two weeks of school that had started two weeks earlier. So she had a test right away on the next day. Vesna did not complain about the test as other new colleagues in her class although she was more disgruntled about the heat and perspiration. Few weeks later she run with her new bicycle into Christ's thorn bush and came home in tears and pains. She had endured bravely and with great patience the painful procedure of Ljiljana using pincers to extract one after other thorn from her legs and back. Vesna did not use ever her bicycle after that accident and stuck to her decision for many months after.

Some time later Vesna steered up some bad feelings in the Yugoslav community as she denounced her class colleague Vesna Vidas whose father was the Embassy's secretary. The Italian Sisters were distributing prayer-books to pupils as a preparation for a recital at the School's Christmas celebration. When Vesna Vidas turn came to pick up the prayer-book our dear daughter said aloud: "There is no purpose to give her the prayer-book as she is a communist who do not believe in God". The éclat was perfect despite the fact that our Vesna was quite correct in what she said. We learned about this affront when comrade Vidas confronted us making some nasty remarks about our Vesna's behaviour also.



Vesna had many stories to tell about like sitting on a scarab-bee or Pharaoh's lap

The first week upon my return I had to supervise the re-examination in few classes. This was not too bad as I could open and read part of the voluminous accumulated post in almost 4 months of my absence at the standby time. KTI got an Englishman as the new V. P. Technical that was good for the school as one could expect a better discipline and the organization. He showed me a letter of complain from H.M. Printing House because KTI did not order any new books for the current school year. However a large number of books from SCHAUM PUBLISHING CO, NEW YORK have arrived that were ordered on my recommendation. These books covered most all subjects taught on KTI and even more. I have checked their content and was sure that they would be of much better use in each discipline I lectured on.

The books contained a sizeable number of questions cum answers after each chapter that could enable the students to understand better what they were taught about. In regard of my explanations the new V. P. Technical took the books' sample to check on their content. He promised to consider my objections regarding the very outdated books that KTI was getting from H.M. Printing House UK. About a week later the new Technical boss called for me to announce his agreement to use SCHAUM books in my lectures as they are certainly more modern and proper for the subjects thought for. Less good news was that KTI cannot get any financing for the Laboratory for testing of materials that I was trying to organize. Bad luck for them – I thought. Malesh!

The lecturing on KTI started on 1st October and I got the same number of classes and subjects to teach as the last school year. As a surprise I got two young Sudanese who had just graduated from the Khartoum University. I was supposed to tutor and supervise them at their work in my classes. I hoped that they would take care of checking the tests at least that I still had to prepare for them though. Students did not come to their lectures during the first week. When I started my lectures a week later the troubles started with the two young lecturers instantly. The young lecturers did not stay on KTI for too long mainly as

they did not like my way of lecturing and the precise discipline I asked for. They just did not want to work hard and sabotaged my efforts from the very beginning.

I was happy about the new part-time contract at the University appointing me to hold the exercises with students in the structural designs using different building materials. Their professor was Dr. Turabi who graduated in England and he was teaching the Theory of Structures and Theory of Elasticity now. We have discussed often the discrepancy in teaching subjects like say the Theory of shells in a country where the development was limping well behind the contemporary techniques. The students of the Faculty of Civil Engineering certainly had better education than their slightly younger counterparts at KTI. My efforts were almost the same to explain the essence and the understanding of any particular problem. Later here I would write two of the many anecdotes to describe the way of thinking and acting of my students at the Faculty. They did not differ significantly of my students at the Khartoum Technical Institute.

Of course we had to attend meetings at the Yugoslav Club in regular intervals though these were getting more and more on our nerves. It was really irritating having to discuss about amendments and our likely proposals to the new Constitution that passed the Parliament in Belgrade already. The next item was the signing of bonds for victims and damages caused by the earthquake in Skopje in spring of 1963. The idea was to get more foreign currency from compatriots working abroad. Some of the Yugoslavs signed bonds up to Din 300.000 but I did not want to cause too much of "dust" for not signing so I paid Din 25.000 in the name of my father. I knew that I would not see that money to be paid back to me after all so it was just to smoke "a peace-pipe" with the Club's political (read commissary) members. In addition to it the entire Club moved to new premises that included the membership fee increase of 1% of personal income at same time. Not a very popular measure at all particularly for me as I was supposed to collect the fee from all lecturers.

Despite these disagreeable happenings in the Yugoslav Club we received invitations to parties like on a never ending band. It was obvious that we should give to them tit for tat in most cases. That kept Ljiljana rather busy in making plans and organizing gatherings in our flat too. She started her ice-cream "production" that became a real attraction to all visitors including our neighbours. Often one of our good neighbours seeing Ljiljana in the kitchen called aloud from across to ask if the ice-cream is ready already. Sayed Farah resumed his visits that occurred mostly on Fridays enjoying his palavering with Vesna as well as helping himself to Ljiljana's ice creams. I believed that Farah's visits could be essential for my future plans when it comes to it deciding how leave the Sudan for good in the best possible way. Almost all the households in blocks were plagued by zillions of ants and in particular by cockroaches (much bigger by our home standards) that came out of the litter opening in kitchens. The long parade of these ugly insects had been markedly disgusting although that our kitchen was at 4th floor in the house block.

While there were still few rains in October the haboob season has ceased after all. It was a good time to start fixing photo slides into frames as they came back from the developer. It was a rather tedious work to keep tiny glass panes free of any dust particles in currently hot and humid ambience that contained an airborne fine dust. Later in October we gave a big party for 12 guests and all had worked hard to produce a perfect dinner. Here one used 0.5lt glasses for various drinks to fill them to about one third with ice cubes. Most guests had brought ice cubes in large thermo-flasks to help the host. One would buy big chunks of ice-bars and placed them in a bathtub to cool there bottles of 0.5lt of soft drinks like Coca-Cola, Tonic-water etc.

Our guests were delighted with Ljiljana's set up but found that the home-made peach-brandy was especially good though rather strong in that local climate. The hard drinks certainly contributed to the party's excellent spirit including a few dancers who defied the heat also. On one occasion the guests endured viewing about 200 slides that I had taken during our recent holidays. Often guests left at wee-hours but Beshir stayed put always to wash up and clean the flat a bit. Such parties took mostly place on Saturdays so we had enough time on Sundays to tidy up and bring the normal order into our home again. Beshir was rather happy with the baksheesh he received from our numerous guests too.

In the wake of many parties held at our home Ljiljana became famous as the perfect maitre-de-chef who prepared would various cold platters and salads including also broiled or roast meat. Many dozens of "tchevaptchichi" we had to broil them on two grid-irons – we had to borrow one from Mrs. Diklić always. However the combination of home made egg-nock and coffee became the crown of Ljiljana's achievements. Ljiljana continued her sewing activities and dress-making but she found enough time to tend flowers in the many pots on veranda that kept her rather busy all day long. Ljiljana was making a number of new light clothes for growing up Vesna 9+ now as well as few for herself. She located a few shops where she could search through mounts of light materials of cotton, silk or synthetics she never would dream of finding in Yugoslavia.

In the meantime Vesna and I had to perspire heavily enduring the heat in our classes. The free afternoons we would go swimming in any of the pools when ever possible as the heat and humidity was still rather oppressive during October. We almost forgot the sun intensity in Khartoum so we got all sun burnt at first and then followed an inevitable skin peeling. As for Ljiljana she could not fully enjoy the swimming as she got some problems with her ears since the return. Few days later she decided to visit Dr. Branko Khartoum's most asked for throat specialist. He rebuked her strongly for coming so late for the needed treatment of her sore ears.

Peter Gadiant, the manager of SWISSAIR in Khartoum, invited me to play tennis with him early in October. The tennis court was a few minutes from our block so we decided to get there at the first daylight. This did not please the keeper but we solved the problem giving him a weekly baksheesh in exchange for the key. We played from about 6 to 7:30 AM after that the heat became so intensive making the playing on very strenuous. After 10 AM it would be murderous to start any kind of sports except swimming. The high humidity set off skin irritations and the prickly heat was the most annoying of. Now I had my asthma under control using the ASMAC pills when needed. With the dry mouth and the constant thirst could be copped with by drinking some 5lt of tea or lime juice or any non-sweet liquid daily.

By end of October I caught a cold for that I was not ready at all living here for almost two years now. I felt quite badly having a severe cough and my nose catarrh was quite unusual in this climate. I had to excuse myself of lecturing and decided to stay at home for 3 to 4 days at least. On the second day a car full of students appeared in front of our block and Beshir guided them ascending the staircase to the 4th floor. Ljiljana was so astounded when five students appeared in our living room that she stared at them in disbelief for few moments. After that she could ask them who they are. After their explanation she called me from my bed informing that my students want to talk to me. By Jove, what a marvellous meeting it has been!

First we offered to them Coca Cola and Fanta for drinks but the available bottles were gone soon. They wished me getting better quickly adding that I should not hurry to come

back to the class too soon. What a nice thought! Of course they descended using the lift what was for them the first time in their young life. After a while the same group appeared at our lift door and after a quick look at us left smiling promptly. A few minutes passed as another group of five students came up with the elevator to repeat their greetings and good wishes and left after they had a Coca Cola. Beshir was sent to get some Coca Cola bottles from our neighbours otherwise our visitors would stay for ever. Certainly I was too pleased with their visits and their attention. I suppose that their intention was to view the house having 5 storeys, a high staircase and an elevator leading straight into flats. They were used to live in one storey buildings where either a staircase or a lift was not needed.

When I returned to KTI after my short illness I was informed that the two young Sudanese lecturers had given their notice. As for the reason for their decision they said that could not carry on with the amount of work I was asking for. The students were not happy with their performance either but had accepted with grinding teeth the hard way of my lecturing. That former working setup asked for more lecturing hours of me totalling to 14 normal hours at KTI and 12 hours of coaching the two younger lecturers – the later I did not miss at all. At the University I had been appointed as an assistant on two cathedras that asked for 9 lecturing hours. The later ones were better paid than the evening hours at KTI instructing students' for their re-examination in November. Well so much about the advantages of a Yugoslav ambitious lecturer who needed some extra money.

Mira Diklić went to Omdurman often to search through native shops. So it happened on one occasion that she found in an insignificant shop dozens of dessert python skins. About the same time the Yugoslav sponsored leather manufacturing plant in Khartoum went into production. The purpose of this plant was to process cattle's rawhides for leather crafts. Later one would find out that rawhides were not good enough because of many bruises, cuts or other defects caused by the harsh environment for a cattle's domestication. Thus the expensive equipment stood idle for most of time when Mira got the brilliant idea to try tanning of python skins there.

I was somehow intrigued by the large number of dry python skins that the old trader had kept in large crates in a mud-house shop at Omdurman. The trade with python skins came to a standstill when the industry started producing skin imitations out of synthetics. I asked him how one catches such a large snake without damaging the skin with scratch marks or similar. All python's skins were cut along the snake's belly bottom keeping thus leaving the upper part of undamaged. The desert python lives in deep pipe like pits recognized on the surface as a round hole through that the snake comes out when the outside air is cool enough.



Seldom Ljiljana wears now the coat she produced of python skins in Khartoum 1963

The trader spoke passable English and told me the story seriously and sincerely how the hunters catch a python. The python's exit hole has to be widened enough so that a slim man's legs could fit up to his hip into the pipe. The legs are to be bare and smeared with animal lard up to the short pants. The python gets up to man's legs crawling up from the tube of its hiding pit. The snake smelling the fat and heat would start swallowing in both legs as to ascend to the opening. Once python's wide gaped jaws reach man's hip it has no strength withstand to be pulled out to the surface by hunters who stood by next to the bait-man. The snake has no power to wind up when stretched to its full length so it is an easy task to cut it open all the way up along its belly killing it simultaneously. Subsequently the bait-man is released from the clamped jaws unharmed and the python's skin can be peeled off without any scratch or damage.

Both ladies decided to venture to the shopkeeper at Omdurman to return with a dozen of dry python skins rolled in though rough and not scoured of properly. The tannery plant specialists were happy to help and took care of skins scouring them properly first. Then the skins were tanned and wet stretched fixed onto flat large glass panes to dry. The result was a really perfect product for forming and sewing a lady's coat. The ready skins were 4 to 5 meters long and had beautiful markings at their middle sections of a width say 40 to 50cm. After the two ladies started in joint effort to tailor, cut and sew skin parts together to get a fine looking long lady coat. To their flawless team work my only suggestion was to use UHU glue in the seams making them staying flat. Both coats were completed before Christmas and the ladies were mighty proud of their achievement. They would not put on their python coats in this climate for sure. Nevertheless there was a lot of admiration from other less active ladies.

Ljiljana being very price conscious complained that prices went up for a number of general goods. Also I noticed a slight change in the mood of my Sudanese students that I could not explain as well. Some of them were friendly to me last year but now they would not like to talk to me or just turned away even without any word or greeting. Was it something to brew up in local the social and/or political scene – I could not guess. Early in November the wind changed its direction to north after a longer period of oppressiveness without or hardly any wind for few weeks. We slept at the veranda and used light blankets as the air became chillier as the sunrise closed in. We have returned to our daily routines and chores but in our spirits we were somehow at a low level. Was this because the passed holidays had contaminated our pioneering courage? Who would know it? Was it there a "bacillus" that started some of our thoughts linked with our intentions intended in future?

Gradually I was getting frustrated with my teaching job and intimately hankered after a more reasonable and interesting engineering career. My attempts have faded away to teach subjects of civil engineering in a modern and practical way. It seemed to me as if I am talking against an impenetrable wall dulled with not responding faces. Somebody has told us about the first year abroad to be fine and good because most of things seemed to be new and interesting. In the second year one knows most of the matters so chores get boring and it is getting difficult to endure steadily the social life and an oppressive climate. During the third year living abroad one gets progressively nervous and easily irritated by anything. Thus the best way is to stay away from anybody – just keep whatever thing for you. Probably this description would be most appropriate for our present frame of minds particularly in the respect to considerations of our future moves and plans.

One should mention also several positive aspects that developed since our return here. The building of KTI that I helped to redesign had been completed and used by the Arts

department already. The reinforcing steel drawings have been put on display for students as nobody has seen something alike in the Sudan yet. The raw construction work on Abdel Halim's house in Khartoum South has been finished but the local builder did not start with interior work. Thus I had some hard time using Halim as the translator explaining where and how to proceed. Halim had the feeling that the 2-storey building looks "smaller" than he envisaged when we discussed the interior's arrangement. It was not easy to describe that the open floor space cannot give a proper impression about the interior without walls, openings etc.

The "rumour" spread about my structural engineering skills so I was invited to UNESCO's design office in Khartoum. Several architects and engineers from seconded from Germany designed projects for schools and accompanying buildings for countries in Western Africa. Structural simplicity and prefabrication of building elements was imperative so I could bring in my sufficient experience gained during 10-year work in Yugoslavia. This job turned out to be a rather profitable for me and we got in good friendships with several Germans some of whom being our neighbours in the adjacent blocks at Hai el Matar.

One day Abdel Halim took me out to see a few houses built in the traditional way in using sun dried clay tiles in walls to be joined with clay mortar "stretched" with slaked lime. Some of corners of these houses had large diagonal cracks looking as if that corner would fall off the building. It was obvious to me before long that these cracks were caused by regular garden irrigation. The clay swells up and shrinks when drying out. This continuous swelling and shrinking process caused cracking and fracture to building corners. All these building did not have a proper foundation as well an external wall circumferential drainage did not exist either. I have made some simple and functional suggestions for repairing damages and averting such occurrences in future. The good and straightforward advices spread fast that gained me several important Sudanese acquaintances too.



The President Guard in the Independence Parade November 1963

The time in November passed fast as it included several holidays and free days. The 5th Independence anniversary was celebrated on the 17th November with a great parade. We got seats in the first row so I made many perfect pictures during the long march by of all kind of units from the army, police, fire-brigade, red moon (= Red cross) and others. The Yugoslav community celebrated the State's Holiday on 29th that consisted of 3 parts: for both children and grownups in the Club and the reception at the Ambassador's residence. Vesna has participated in the children's program but got problems with Embassy's plan for its own school again. Vesna was supposed to attend her class from 17 to 19 hours on all Mondays and Wednesdays. One had to use books sent from Belgrade that differentiated significantly from the ones used in Croatia. It was hard for us to explain that there is no point for Vesna attending that tutoring as she passed her exams for 3rd class already. We

promised to the YU-school directorate that we would look after that Vesna passes the 4th class on our return home - that we did not have in mind at all!

I should tell few more anecdotes linked to Vesna's daily chores. Drawing was not a subject at Comby Sisters School so we arranged for a subscription with Famous Artists Course for Talented Young People. Once monthly Vesna got a lesson's papers she had work on and to send her sketches or drawings to the FAC reviewer for check up. Few weeks later she received the reply containing few suggestions or amendments and her success' note. Vesna got an enticing idea how to improve her financial means and produced numerous sketches and simple drawings for sale. Then she and her friend Dominick went from flat to flat in our neighbourhood offering Vesna's matters of art for sale. Everything worked fine and together they collected quite a sum until Ljiljana got a call from a lady of our Egyptian good friends. The lady was shocked by Vesna's trading practice and asked Ljiljana how she could tolerate that our daughter goes around asking for a few coins. We should give her more pocket money instead the lady suggested earnestly. Thus the adventure had to stop but the friendship with Dominick endured until our departure from Sudan.



Sudanese Cavalry in the Independence Days' Parade in front of the Main Post Office

Dominick's family came from Poland and his father was piloting a small aircraft flying a doctor to remote Provinces of the Sudan. Through him we got two unique shields one of buffalo and other of crocodile rawhide. Mr. Wujastik bought for us these shields from a tribe in the Equatorial Province at south of Sudan. Also he procured for us several other indigenous items like various long and short pipes, knives and spear's headpins. Both shields had smelled awkwardly so Ljiljana had to wash them with a detergent first to dry subsequently for many times. Nevertheless the shields continued smelling badly until they were packed into crates prior to our living Khartoum for good in 1964. This was beginning of our large item collection acquired during our stay in the Sudan. Gradually Ljiljana found many attractive items made of ivory at a reasonable price as well as several household utensils made by knitting of coloured dry palm leaves or grass stalks. One day Halim took us to the Central prison where we found a treasure of artefacts made by the talented inmates. A large carpet woven of camel hair was certainly a unique sample of their skill and proved almost non-destructive and inedible to insects too.

Early of November I received the long expected letter of invitation from Mombasa. It stirred up my hopes that we may visit Kenya in near future after all. However it did not contain

any specifics about the prospective date and the financing of such a journey. Nevertheless I got on with necessary official steps in connection with a short trip abroad that would not influence my home leave allowances. The University had a term break so I could spend the essential time going to and fro various Government offices to collect forms and data to be filled in. The main problem was to get a visa on a short notice giving least time for our compatriots to squabble about our probable journey to Kenya. The costs were very important factor as my financial means were still rather limited. There was another issue to be look after in association with turning over our minor real estate property to my parents' name that would stir up some suspicion of the Embassy's official surely.

Vesna's progress in school was improving constantly and she reached the top ten in her class promptly. She was very good in English and Italian became her favourite although she had some problems with Arabic. Ljiljana asked the teacher if Vesna could drop that subject but it was turned down because it was imperative for the school to teach Arabic. So Vesna had to learn writing in Arabic though she could not understand its full meaning. Her friend Amal helped out with translations into English or pencilled the meaning over the Arabic text too. The later was not simple at all because one reads Arabic text from right to left and the translation was marked in opposite direction.



Instantly a gang of children gathered we have stopped briefly like here at Gebel Aulia village

There was another unpleasant event that steered up a lot of dust in our block. Some kids were throwing up stones at Vesna and Dominick leaning over the handrail of our veranda on 4th floor. One stone hit the front windscreen of a car parked at the ground floor below cracking a pane. Of course the stone could be one coming from the two ones on 4th floor but they tossed down earth clumps found in Ljiljana's pots only. For weeks the dispute who should pay the damage of S£12 went on until a reasonable solution was accepted that included our two culprits too and who had to contribute one S£ each.

Our visits to the swimming pool had to be suspended because of the maintenance work for an uncertain time due – ba'do bukra or never! We continued playing tennis trice in a week that started at 5:45 lasting up to 6:50 or 7:30 depending upon my school obligation. Ljiljana would join us for a double with Peter's wife a few times though ladies did not like getting up so early. By end of November we were told that we can not play at the mornings anymore because grass turf maintenance does not allow the usage of twice a day. It was suggested that we should become members of the British tennis club as they complained about turf's quality. Even a good baksheesh did not help so we stopped playing in December for good. My body weight at average of 97kg was still too much where as Ljiljana kept her at 60kg almost constantly. I wondered how she does that. Ljiljana was rather diligent in the writing

of some 60 Christmas card in one go. We dispatched them instantly to make sure that they would reach recipients in time for 1963' Christmas.

My uncertainty rose daily as there was not any new letter from Mombasa. I slackened in my efforts to obtain needed papers for that journey. Our neighbour Dr. Illes decided to quit his contract at the University earlier even by loosing considerable part of his gratuities. He got so fed up with the increasing tendency to appoint Sudanese to the lecturer's position despite their inexperience and inaptness. The standard of lecturing was progressively going down as it was expected from the lecturer that all of his students pass the exams. We have discussed the teaching system in the Sudan often that we named the "window dressing" teaching method. It applied in particular to the technical education where the students learned by heart the problem's solutions instead to understand the essentiality of basic theory and its practical applications of. In my personal opinion this was the result of the English schooling system combined with the Egyptian superficiality, indolence and partial dishonesty or unfairness.

Now it was two years since I arrived to the Sudan. I have learned a lot about the Sudanese way of life and the characters of Northerners who were mostly of the Muslim faith. Their moods and way of humouring was not easy to define because I never had learned enough of Arabic to understand the meaning of their talking. I found that the students are good in subjects of arts and classical philosophy like literature and theology but their sense for technical matters was almost not at anything.

Mohammed one of my students got his brand new VW "beagle" car like me early 1962. Few weeks later I noticed his car trailing a cloud of smoke so I asked him whether he went for the first maintenance. Of course he was not aware of its necessity so I reprimanded him to do it instantly. At my questioning Mohammed was telling us proudly about his father and grandfather who both were camel caravan drivers. I asked him what they have had to do with camels prior to embark on a new caravan trip. I got a very thorough description of all works needed to prepare the harnesses, other gears and sheepskin balloons for water etc. After listening for some time I had to interrupt him saying: "You see, Mohammed, your parents did a good "maintenance" work to their camels otherwise they could not go on long caravan journeys, isn't? What about your new car then?" He understood and a day or so later he came and said smiling to me: "I got my "camel" maintained at VW workshop OK!"

The "winter" came to Khartoum earlier in the year of 1963. We moved our beds into room but Vesna remained sleeping on veranda behind a windshield wall though. The University students went on timely unlimited strike when the new term began. This could result in a bad blow to my finance as loosing one full term meant an income loss of S£200 to me. Though students would loose the whole year of study if their strike would continue for the whole term but I hoped that they would return on time. I got more time now to spend in the UNESCO's design office where I had advice on structural problems. This helped improving my reputation and it brought some financial benefits later too. Good collegial friendships had developed between the German staff and me that would last for many years after.

Paul Schlaefer, the only civil engineer at UNESCO's office, suggested that I should apply for a contract with this office. Although I knew that this would be a futile trial he got me all the application forms from UNO HQ in New York. We would found out later that such an application has to be supported by the applicant's State Head Office. In my case it was absolutely clear that I would never get the support from Yugoslavia's HO but for the sake of Paul's good will it was worth to study and fill in the application forms just for trial.

After some complications and suspicion the Embassy approved the Letter of Authorization for my parents to start the process of taking over our real estate property. We had to visit the Embassy several times feeling rather uncomfortable explaining our reasons of doing it. On 18th December I found a package avis in my box at KTI and went to the Central Post Office to pick it up during a break. I got the parcel sent by my parents from Osijek without any complication almost instantly despite the normal Christmas postal rush. At home we opened the parcel at once that contained a few Karl May new books for Vesna and a tape recorded at home in Osijek. Of course I had to check whether it would fit our tape-recorder PHIULIPS EL-3541 for 4-track and up to 7" dia reels. Ljiljana and I started listening to it but I had to leave to KTI for another few lecturing hours. I wondered whether Ljiljana would be a "character" and to stop listening the tape containing parents' messages and singings.

We gave up the thought of visiting Mombasa as there was no news since that letter of early November. Then "out of blue sky" we got a telegram on 21st December saying that we should arrive to Mombasa on 3rd and to return on 8th January 1964. Nothing was said about flight bookings except that we should stay at New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi for one night each way. Could anyone imagine what it meant to get all the bookings and visas on such a short notice just a few days before Christmas festivities? I envisaged that problems would arise when applying for Kenyan and Yugoslav visas too. Kenya should celebrate its Independence on January 1, 1964 and I wondered if its Embassy would be working during the holidays. With the Yugoslavs was another dilemma about how to explain the reason of our travel to Kenya. Well, I started the tedious tasks visiting offices, filling in papers and patiently waited to see the outcome in at utmost of 8 days.

The strike of University students went on and students left their sleeping quarters after power and other supplies were cut off. The Ministry of Education increased the starting annual salary for KTI graduates from S£280 to S£350. Thus the KTI graduates got the same starting salary as the ones of University alumni. Those graduates of the Technical Sciences who studied 6 years got S£450 the same as before. This measure was a clear slap in the face of University's students and a warning the same. Provided that University's students return to their classes on January 7, 1964 they would get the chance to complete the current school year without any loss. However they would have to attend to many additional lecturing hours in the afternoons. This would fine with me as it meant additional per hour payments not to be ignored at all. Vesna's school closed on December 21st for holidays lasting until January 11th so she would not loose anything going on the journey to Kenya. The same holiday break applied to the KTI so my only obligation was to get ready all the bookings and visas. We had decided to take Vesna with us although she was not explicitly mentioned in that telegram.

Ljiljana busied herself with cooking a limited number of dry cakes and started decorating our paper-made Christmas tree as well. On the two long strings spanned across the living room we hung on the incoming congratulation cards as we have seen at other expatriates homes. I started playing tennis again but my body weight got close to 100kg despite the many actions in connection with our travel. The daily temperature went up a little turning around 33°C but nights were cool enough to use light woollen blankets. We have expected that the climate in Kenya could be chillier than in Khartoum so Ljiljana arranged for warmer cloths and pullovers to take on that trip. The travel fever rose with every day as the end of year 1963 was getting closer. I checked my photographic equipment of two cameras a few times and bought 9 KODAK colour slide films and hopped that everything would be in best order on or first safari.

We celebrated the Christmas Eve in our decorated living room and the presents would be distributed after we sang a few chorals. At a certain moment I turned on the tape recorder out of that strange voices joined in our choir. Vesna was stunned for a moment by those peculiar tunes. Almost immediately she recognized grandparents' voices so all of us joined in singing songs recalled from our youth's times. After a while we listened attentively to the good-wish messages spoken by both of my parents. Their voices quivered of excitement and sentiments as they probably had tears in eyes the same way as we have had at that moment. Later we played recorded Croatian chorals to our friendly compatriots like the Diklićs who joined in singing. Also their eyes went wet possibly remembering the faraway homeland and the happy hours of the long past days in freedom.

Beshir was not happy at all when we told him about our journey to Kenya. He got a new long shirt aka galabia as well as white cloth for a new turban. As an additional present we gave him a light woollen blanket because he complained about the cold basement booth. Still Beshir kept on with saddened mimics despite our assurance that we would return for sure. After several days of anxiety and uncertainty including few telegram's exchanges our itinerary was fixed at last. I scrapped enough cash to pay three flight tickets from Khartoum to Nairobi and return. There was enough of it for the 3 days of our privately added stay in Nairobi. Gaston, our Lebanese friend working for SWISSAIR, flew two days earlier to Nairobi and promised to arrange our stay there in the most efficient (also meant financial) and pleasant way possible.

We were supposed to depart Khartoum at 05:15 on Tuesday December 31, 1963 on BOAC flight with the 4-turbo-engine "Comet" aircraft. The information from Mombasa said that we were booked on East African Airways flight from Nairobi to Mombasa on Saturday January 4, 1964 and to return to Nairobi on a late flight on Tuesday 7th January. Thus we would have a full day on personal disposal in Nairobi. Our return from Nairobi to Khartoum was booked on BOAC flight due to arrive at Khartoum at 02:20 on Thursday January 9, 1964. The time difference between Khartoum and Mombasa was +2 hours and we should cross the Equator on our first safari to East Africa.

We have not told much about our trip to anybody except to our best friends in Khartoum. The worse part of was to inform our compatriots that we would not attend the New Years Celebration in the Yugoslav Club. So keep your fingers crossed for the successful safari of our World travelling small family.



Pictured from left are Halim Shawki and his wife Amna, Ljiljana and Halim's cousin and wife during one of the more formal visits in Halim's former house in Khartoum South

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