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# Debate

## *Kaldone G. Nweihed: Vida y obra*

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# Snapshots of Kaldone G. Nweihed's Early Youth

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Debate

## Abstract

This article is based on selected excerpts from Kaldone Nweihed's diaries about his childhood and adolescence in Palestine during the British Mandate. Main topics include Kaldone's education in German, English and Arabic schools; his trips with his father inside and outside Palestine; his trips with his family and classmates; his first job in Barkly's Bank. In addition to other subjects scattered beneath the various selected items, such as Kaldone's analysis of personalities; comments on events; mental or psychological correlation, or both, between the events of his early youth and events that took place decades later in his life.

**Keywords:** Jerusalem; Sultan Pasha al-Atrash; Sr. Shukry Haramy; Dr. Walid Khalidi; Barkly's bank.

## Instantáneas de la juventud temprana de Kaldone G. Nweihed

### Resumen

Este artículo se basa en extractos seleccionados de los diarios de Kaldone Nweihed sobre su infancia y adolescencia en Palestina durante el Mandato Británico. Los temas principales incluyen la educación de Kaldone en las escuelas alemanas, inglesas y árabes; sus viajes con su padre dentro y fuera de Palestina; sus viajes con su familia y compañeros de clase; su primer trabajo en el banco Barkly. Además de otros temas dispersos debajo de los diversos artículos seleccionados, como el análisis de las personalidades de Kaldone; comentarios sobre acontecimientos; correlación mental o psicológica, o ambas cosas, entre los acontecimientos de su primera juventud y los que tuvieron lugar décadas más tarde en su vida.

**Palabras clave:** Jerusalén; Sultán Pasha al-Atrash; Sr. Shukry Haramy; Dr. Walid Khalidi; Banco Barkly.

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## 1. Introduction

*“Kaldone G. Nweibed wrote this part of his diaries about his early youth in English. He finished the last episode on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and he concluded at the end of the last page: Mission is done.”*

At 84 I feel that this is the last stage of the journey. Grandfather, Father, Uncle Jamil, Uncle Ali, Uncle Nasry, all packed up and took the last train in the ninth decade. What about my Mom? She was 87. That’s great... Thanks God, one million times, I’m still at the helm facing the screen of this computer. Others - from my generation - aren’t with us to tell the story of their lives... My three brothers -in -law are gone: Fuad Halwani, Zuheiral-Aajlouni, Shafiq al-Hout. My best friend, almost exactly my age, Neddy Jouzy, has also departed. He did not pick up the phone when I called him on his last birthday, as I’ve been always doing for years and years.

Let me start my Diary with this question: “who am I”.

May be I need to say that I am actually three different persons in one: the Arab, the Venezuelan and the Citizen of the World. The three engendered their own ramifications.

I lived my childhood and adolescence in Jerusalem. My parents sent me to Western Christian schools, German and English: a Catholic school run by nuns and a very qualified school under the aegis of Lutheranism. Then came al - Ummah, an Arab school totally secular where Moslem and Christian boys had nothing to do with differences. It was like a university. I was the student who read the graduation speech in 1947 at the Orthodox Club.

Later on, you add Venezuela and Latin America - Portuguese and Spanish - and pour the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea with its races, colours, languages and pageants.... so you will never be able to retrieve neither the Arab boy, nor the Venezuelan lad as such, separately. You’ll get somebody who came to know how to think, how to feel, how to love... but never how to hate or despise. A social democrat, never a Marxist, a man who was taught to feel the Arab World but to think Western, specifically Venezuelan and Latin American; thence to the endless horizons of Universe.

## 2. Jerusalem, my home city

*“Kaldone’s parents were Lebanese. His father was born in the mountainous village of Ras el Maten, where the family’s house originally built by his grandfather still stands to this day. Born to a reputable doctor, his mother came from Jebaa village.”*

*"In the early parts of the last century, his maternal uncle Fuad Sleem joined the Arab Revolution and held military posts in Syria and Jordan. In due time he moved his two younger brothers, Aref and Nasri, to Jordan, where they joined the Jordanian Army. Fuad fell as martyr in the battle of Majdal Shams against the French in 1925, in today's still Occupied Golan Heights in Syria. Aref remained in Jordan and his descendants live there to this day. Nasri returned to his native Lebanon."*

I was born in Jerusalem, capital of British-mandated Palestine, at five minutes to two in the morning of Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929. Alerted by his wife when she felt her first child was struggling to start life, my father hastily dressed and went out to look for a cab and fetch Mrs. Townsend, the British midwife that had been controlling the pregnancy process. Everything went fine and smooth.

The baby was less than two months old when political issues began to interfere with his life. According to my mother, one of her brothers –both Jordanian army officers at the time- came on a visit to Jerusalem. Happy to “meet” his first nephew on his younger sister Jamal’s side, he carried the child in his arms and strode out to the balcony for some sunshine, fresh air ... who knows? Immediately gunfire started to explode and, though not in the area, the young mother shouted at her brother to come inside at once. The first bloody clashes between Arabs and Jews were on their way. It was the “Revolt of the *Buraq*”. That must have been the first concert.

### 3. Discovering the science of “Fronterology”

*"When he paid his first visit to Lebanon, his parents' home country, Kaldone was four years old. He sat in the rear side of the car between his mother and father, while his elderly cousins Fuad and Raouf sat in the front beside the driver."*

*"Even at that early age it seems that the child was aware that there were two different Mandates over Palestine and Lebanon: the British and the French."*

The following story did not stick to my memory due to my own credit: it did so because Mother kept repeating it in order to show how “intelligent” her son was. I vaguely remember on my own how on our way we had to stop at the English Naqoura, the last point under British control, and, ten minutes later, we were under the wings of another flag: dark blue, white and red. The French custom officer that had been standing near it opened our suitcases as if they were his own. The short drive along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, which I had already seen for the first time from the Palestinian side between Haifa and ‘*Akka* (Accre), I do recall,

especially a lonely, dust green bush right after a curve as we entered into that no-man short strip on our brief road to Lebanon. It was my mother who recalled the dialogue:

- Mom, how long does it take one to travel from Palestine to Lebanon?
- Well, you can see it by yourself, around six or seven hours and that depends on the time we've got to spend at the *hudud* (borders).
- Sorry, Mom. It's not that much. It's only ten minutes. It's what we covered from British Naqoura to French Naqoura.

According to Mother, everybody, including the driver, was surprised. She told the story time and time again. That's the reason why I can relate to it as faithfully as my mother had done. Father joined as well. As for me, I kept the seed hidden in my inner mind during fifty years until I was able to sow it in a new field of knowledge, here in Venezuela, together with a dear colleague who is no more, and call it "Fronterology": the study of frontiers and borders. It came out in a book that has gone for three editions.

#### 4. First visit to Bethlehem

*"Ajaj Nuwayehed, Kaldone's father, was a renowned writer, orator, lawyer and politician (he was one of the founders of the "Istiqlal" Independence Party in 1932); due to his work he used to travel to most cities in Palestine and was keen to take his son along whenever he could."*

*"Kaldone remembers his visit to Bethlehem at the end of the year 1936, he was between his seventh and eighth years."*

I cannot say exactly when was the first visit I accompanied my father and under what circumstances. What I do positively recall is my visit to the Church of the Nativity (*Kaneesatel mahd*) in Bethlehem. It could have been in December 1936.

The most things I remember about this sacred historical church: The entrance, the altar, candles, silence, maybe that was all I could engrave in my memory, the church from inside, but not the trip and its circumstances. After all, when I was still a little boy I was studying at a school run by German nuns who taught us a lot about the Church of Nativity.

In November 1959, I returned from Argentina to Venezuela. I had stayed for quite some time in Buenos Aires, where I had written the articles on Emir Emin Arslan, and where I had witnessed birth of my second daughter

Zulema. On the way, I stopped for a week at Santiago de Chile where I paid a courtesy visit to the Jordanian ambassador, 'Issa al -Bandak, a good friend of my father, mayor of Bethlehem when the Palestinian exodus started. Can anyone imagine that he remembered that day. Apparently, it was al-Bandak himself who sent me with a relative of his to visit the Church of Nativity while he and Father conferred on who knows what matters.

## 5. Sultan al-Atrash Farewell Festival in Amman

*"Sultan Pasha al-Atrash (1891 - 1982), commander-in-chief of the Great Arab Syrian Revolution that swept across the Syrian lands in the mid-twenties, was a leader known for his courage, toughness, resolute will, and wise decisions. Among the most prominent of his national stances is his constant rejection of the establishment of a Druze statelet."*

*"However, in spite of the extraordinary heroics in this revolution that lasted until 1927, it eventually did not succeed, compelling its leader and companions to take refuge in Jordan, returning to Syria only after The Syrian-French treaty was concluded in 1937."*

I can proudly afford to give you the exact date of a short trip to Amman with my father, Amman was then the capital of the Emirate of Transjordan, *Sharq-al-Urdun* in Arabic, which, nine years later became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This short trip was on Tuesday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1937.

Why could I recall the exact date and be so sure? Well, because it was not a family or a personal trip but one of a public nature inscribed in the pages of Arab contemporary history. It was on this day when Sultan Pasha al- Atrash, along with other leaders of the Syrian Arab revolt against the French Mandate, was able to break is refuge under the aegis of Prince Abdullah and go back to *Jabal ad- Duruz*. On that day, my father, called for renaming it *Jabal-al-Arab*.

This fact is stated in Father's Memoirs: *Sixty Years with the Arab Caravan* with mention of the year – 1937 – but not the day. How can I be so sure of the date? Sixty-eight years later, I was Venezuela's ambassador to Turkey. My colleague, the Syrian ambassador, Dr. Khaled Raad, came back to Ankara from a short holiday to his hometown Suwaida with a special gift: a book on the Memoirs of Sayyahal- Atrash, one of the foremost companions of Sultan Pasha, written and inscribed by its author, Dr Abdi el- Atrash, Sayyah's son. A very valuable reference indeed since Sayyah had recorded every single detail, almost day by day, of that forced sojourn in Transjordan and Wadi -as -Sirhan in the desert of the Saudi borderland. The warrior Sultan Pasha, his close companions, associates and fellow fighters,

the *Mujahideen*, had to stay there. The scholarly Sayyah was one of the most prominent among them, and so he was there at Petra Cinema when the brave guests were being honoured at that farewell day: May, the eighteenth.

When we arrived at Petra cinema in Amman Father entrusted me to the care of somebody who was attentively shielding me, close at my side in a back row. Sayyah describes the solemn entry of a huge Palestinian delegation led by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Ameen el Husseini, and composed of Izzat Darwaza, Subhi el Khadra, AkramZu'aiter, Abdul Hameed Shumann and Ajaj Nuwayhed. The latter took the floor and, in a resounding speech, proclaimed that *Jabal ad-Duruz* should be called, from then on, *Jabal el Arab*, adding – I mean Sayyah – that the proposed denomination spread large and wide as it acquired official and popular recognition.

In his Memoirs along sixty years, Father reminds us that the term *Jabal ad Duruz* was an imperialist French strategy to divide and rule, for the region that had never been in a similar situation before. It was known as Hauran. (Horan, depends on the accent).

Let me add a corollary pertaining to my Venezuelan life. There was an Arabic language Sunday morning radio programme run in Maracaibo by three faithful friends who now are no more: Haseeb Israwi, Saleem Jawhari and Shafeeq el Faqeeh. I used to contribute with a 10-minute talk in Spanish on Arab affairs. One of them, read in 1963, was about Syria when in 1924 General Gouraud attempted to found (and nominally did found) four puppet republics on Syrian soil: Damascus, Aleppo, *Jabal ad Duruz* and *Jabal al -Alawiyeen*, plus the Sanjak of Iskandarouna (Iskenderun), which was annexed by Turkey later in 1939 on the basis that part of its population was Turkish. Behind French and British support to Turkey's policy to annex the Sanjak lay the strategic scheme of avoiding the rebirth of the German-Turkish alliance in the forthcoming war. The Sanjak was considered to be another nationalist Arab issue when Ajaj Nuwayhed in his speech – according to Sayyah – called for its defence.

I was eight years old when I attended this festival. I remember two specific moments. The first one was when I entered the hall of Petra Cinema in Amman, which was crammed with people—men, of course, not a single lady. The second one was when Father walked right up to shake hands with Sultan Pasha, who, single handed, had jumped over a French tank, opened its casket and did away with the driver.



## **6. My first class in Geopolitics**

Our family trip to Jordan in 1941 was the longest. Quite probably he and she decided a safe transfer to our uncles' territory, uncle Aref Sleem and uncle Nasri Sleem. I may label this trip as the longest and probably the most instructive of them all. It was also diverse: places, attitudes, discoveries and fresh memories to store. It covered most of the summer holidays of 1941 from July to September. Its destination: Transjordan with Al-Mahatta of Amman as headquarters and two side trips, one northwards to Irbid, the other south to Karak.

That was our first and only whole summer vacation to be spent abroad. Father was fully committed to his new job as the Director of the Arabic Section at the Palestine Broadcasting Service, unable to arrange for a good summer holiday.

One more point from that extraordinary Amman mental diary. In mid-September Father and Uncle Subhi el-Khadra, both came together from Jerusalem to Amman on a short visit. I sat down in the shade of a tree while Uncle Aref, Father and Uncle Subhi, were discussing politics and how the raging war could affect the region.

Barely a few months earlier, Rasheed Aali al-Keylani had seized power in Baghdad before he was toppled by the British military reaction that followed. On the eve of that talk, the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlevi, had been forced to abdicate by a joint British-Soviet invasion of Iran on both sides. His son took charge while he was deported to South Africa. The sage elders mentioned the name of the Pact of Saadabad which I attentively caught. For a while I thought it related to Saad Zaghloul, the Egyptian leader, whom my father deeply respected. No, it was something else. A regional pact among Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan named after the Teheran palace at which it was signed. My elders were saying that was the end of the first pact to be conceived among Moslem states of the area. As a 12-year-old boy, I recall the gist of all that was said. It was my first class in geopolitics.

I don't believe it's really necessary to include in these Memoirs a coincidence which I came across more than sixty years later, but why not? During that same week of September 1941, a child was born in the Anatolian city of Afyon, officially Afyonkarahisar. They named him Ahmet Necdet. Becoming President Ahmet Necdet Sezer of Turkey at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I presented him my credentials as ambassador of a far- away country that had nothing to do with that talk at all. Nobody, absolutely nobody, could have thought of it. Much less myself.

## 7. The village of *Nabi Samueel*

Our summer holiday – 1944 - was more auspicious and better remembered than other holidays, though the village of Daddy's choice this time was even more modest than *El Bireh*. Perhaps because of the lonely and rural environment of that village, which could be distinguished right from the Ramallah highway by its lofty minaret perched atop a prominent hill, or because of the Biblical ring of its name, the vineyard village of *Nabi Samueel* or *Shamuel* (as pronounced in Arabic) or Prophet Samuel (as in English) appealed to us in spite of the lack of practical, public transportation. Famous because it houses the tomb of Prophet Samuel who is revered by the three religions. In fact, the mosque is built over the tomb with its tall, wide minaret as the most outstanding feature of *Nabi Samueel*. We all needed to be in such a secluded place: good weather, dry mountain air and out of the way of the summer visitors' mainstream. We took the upper flat which was used as an open guest house devoid of interior partition: a steel balcony surrounded its facades, an outdoor staircase suggested it was used as a guest house by the *mukhtar*, its owner.

We used to walk -my sisters and I - to a hill covered by ripe grapes that looked so much like the grapes of *al-naqba*, next to my grandfather's house in Ras el-Maten, my native Lebanese village. Nobody stood in between. We were trusted. The grape harvest was so abundant that Mother cooked grapes to make a sort of a loose marmalade.

Father was about to resign his post as the director of the Arabic section at the PBS (Palestine Broadcasting Service), well known by "*Hunal-Quds*" (This is Jerusalem Calling). As he mentioned in his Memoirs, once the general trend of the war pointed to a sure Allied victory, British policy tilted again to the other side. He still had the right to use the rented official car: in the hot season the summer resort becomes home.

Frankly speaking, I don't think *Nabi Samueel* had any intentions of vying with Ramallah as the prime summer resort of Jerusalem's surroundings. Watermelon was plenty and available. None among the family fasted during that period. On moonlit nights the waves of a battery radio filled the air while we were enjoying a special dinner: bread, cheese and water melons (*batteekh*). Besides Father's programmes from Queen Melisinde Street, we used to listen to *Huna al Qahira*. In the deep hours of the night there was always a good talk from Cairo.

## **8. How old are you?**

Of much clearer memories was a one day visit with my father at the early 1940's to Ramallah. We had lunch at Grand Hotel Odeh, which Father said it reminded him of a similar place in Broummana - Lebanon, probably on account of the pine trees that lined the entrance to the garden. Cars would pass through on the right, stop at the entrance of the building, leave or take passengers, make a turn to the left and speed off, surrounded by those tall aromatic trees that knew how to whisper into my father's ears.

A friend of his came along and took us to a terrace were lots of tables under colourful sunshades spread, overlooking the neighbouring hills. It was a hot summer afternoon. I associate that place with the surname Nazzal: I wonder whether it was the owner's name, that of my father's companion or that of one of the two gentlemen sitting at a nearby table to the one which Father asked me to sit at all by myself, evidently because he had something private and important to discuss with his friend.

Now, why did I have to remember that place and moment so faithfully? While I was sipping a soft drink and looking around, I overheard a talk between those two gentlemen next to me. One was saying to the other: (Abdullah, George, Jameel, whatever): By the way, how old are you? And the other calmly replied: Thirty five. I was stunned. I stared at that man from head to heels and again from heels to head in order to discover what it meant for a young man to be so old. *T h i r t y f i v e y e a r s...* Unbelievable I thought. When shall I be that age, if ever? I asked myself. Ahead, there loomed more than twenty years to beat that record. Oh, no!... That's too much. Well, He the Almighty has already decreed five folds those 15 years and a ticket to go through the sixth. It still holds. Thanks Him.

## **9. Visits to Jaffa and Haifa**

The cities Father most frequented in his law practice were Jaffa and Haifa. Once on our way to Ramleh and Jaffa we stopped at Sarafand, where we walked in front of the concentration camp he had been kept in during the 1936 rebellion. That day I have never forgotten for a marginal reason. It was Sunday, June the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1944. June! Yet the sky turned grey as it started to rain. For a short while and lightly, but it did. I promised myself not to forget that on a June day on the plains of Palestine there fell an extemporary, light shower. This is exactly what I am doing now.

When I was granted the privilege of writing a prologue to the Memoirs of Ajaj Nuwayhed published in 1993, I related the occasion on

which, after a session at the court in Jaffa, I made him disclose the name of his closest Palestinian friend, though he had stubbornly resisted because he insisted they were all great, noble, generous, worthy, excellent, on the very same level. I understood he did not want to distinguish one – any one of them – at the expense of so many whom he had met, befriended and shared public life and national action with, in the same trenches, from the same podia.

That was at a restaurant of the Ajami seaside of Jaffa, after a long session at the court. He wouldn't budge. Finally I modified the question by demanding whom he considered was his closest one with whom he felt at personal ease (*raf'eltakleef*), I said. Then he confessed: Hamdi el Hussein.

Uncle Hamdi was the Gaza man of the *Istiqlal* Party, a linguist and the first Arab Palestinian who visited the Soviet Union after the October Revolution. He was nice to us, we the children, so he used to throw a joke on us and then go to the father to talk to him about various matters, God knows how much of its material entered into father's Diary.

Our trips to Haifa were more often when Father was practicing law, but this visit took place in July 1946 after he had closed his law firm, it was an important visit for him, so he arranged to meet his faithful friend and party colleague Rasheedal -Hajj Ibraheem.

We were having lunch with him at our hotel on Kingsway when the big news broke out: Zionist terrorists had just bombed King David Hotel in Jerusalem for a huge amount of lost lives and injuries. The first thing Dad did was to put a trunk phone call to his home to make sure all were safe. Anyhow, that happened on Monday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1946, i.e. during the summer holiday when my sisters were at home. It has been regarded as one of the most lethal attacks in 20<sup>th</sup> century terrorism: 92 dead (half of them Arab workers, the British government officers and a few Jews), 46 injured and the frontal half of the southern wing of the stately hotel reduced to rubble. My father's comment: "This will do nothing to change what will follow: the British will always favour them".

## 10. Jericho and the Dead Sea trip

I shouldn't miss a one-day trip I took with my classmates to Jericho and the Dead Sea, most probably in autumn of 1946. We were about to finish our studies at al-Ummah school and wanted to celebrate it by floating over the dark waters of the Dead Sea. That was done on the same day.

A few weeks later, on exactly the same place, a Palestinian Bedouin discovered the first of what came to be called the Scrolls of the Dead Sea. As is publicly known, the Jordanian authorities kept them safely at the

Rockefeller Museum which we had once visited with Professor Haramy. After the 1967 war, Israel pulled them out and placed them somewhere else. Jordan still disputes them, though vainly, without any avail.

### **10.1. *Beit Hanoun and Nogales Bey***

There was another memorable trip which had a lot to do with my literary life, fifty years later in Venezuela. It was late autumn in 1946 when Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, founder and president of Bank al- Umma, the second bank in Arab Palestine, invited my father on a two-day trip to Gaza, most probably related to Hilmi Pasha's activities in pro of the protection of Arab land property. I was lucky to join them, basking in the front seat next to the driver while the two wise men kept talking and planning. That was the time when brand new American cars were pushing out those fatigued vehicles torn and worn out during long years of war austerity. The car that took us to Gaza was a brand new wine colour Ford 1946...to be envied.

Hilmi Pasha owned a productive citrus grove (*bayyara*) in Beit Hanoun, close to Gaza. Already alerted on the owner's visit with two guests, the people in charge had taken all measures to make us comfortable. Such was the service that I was allotted a room just for myself.

I was not able to appreciate the beauty of what surrounded me before dawn broke on the next day in the midst of a pool of green citrus. From a distant streak on the edge of the dormant sky, the feeble rays of the rising sun could only peep through the lines and lines of oranges and lemons. A little bit later they would become more aggressive and open their own lanes among that green paradise. I stayed leaning on the window and admiring the scene in an absolute silence hardly disturbed by early birds. That awakening was like a blessing. It was the good earth that spoke and a young fellow that listened. He never thought it would be the last chance, not only his, but that of a land and a nation.

Half of a century rolled on those groves and their memory. While I was gradually absorbing the life and deeds of a Venezuelan soldier-writer who fought for the Turks just before their rule over those lands was coming to its end, I read that he too had passed one night at Beit Hanoun, in the company of some German officers. I had already spotted two or three instances in which that man – Rafael de Nogales – had been in places and circumstances I had lived through and remembered. Beit Hanoun made the difference. It was in the cables and news: heavily pounded by bombs from deadly planes just because it became a stronghold against foreign occupation.

Hanoun sounds like “mercy” -*Hanan* – yet Beit Hanoun was mercilessly punished. It turned to be one more reason – and a strong one – for me to write Nogales Bey.

## 10.2. *Farewell to my school*

What a privilege it was to spend seven years, practically the period a boy requires to mature into a young man, at a school that was worth a university, in Jerusalem, just before it delved into another uncertain cycle of its immortal history. It was there where I read Baron Bulwer-Lytton’s master piece *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

ShukryHaramy, founder, owner and headmaster, was also our professor of history. With his B.A. from Louisiana State he was an expert on the Middle East. One day he came in with his own note, printed and assembled in a booklet to which he gave the title: “The Cradle of Western Civilization”. Somebody dared ask him how come Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent were “Western” and his crisp answer was: “Study this booklet and ask me afterwards”.

Shukry – as we called him among us, devoid of titles and with all our respect – was more than forty when we started at al-Ummah: NeddyJououzy, Anwar Atallah and I, the *émigrés* from the German school. Single, formally dressed, practical, immune to flattery, well organized and available to students he considered worthy, he never hesitated to take any hard decision when the need arose.

Mr Haramy was an educator *par excellence*. Also a sound manager, a reasonable administrator and a moderate thinker. Above all, a layman who criticized fanaticism and mocked exaggerated religious ceremonials. His favourite prey were the Greek Orthodox priests, probably because he felt that being an Orthodox himself that would grant him a sort of immunity to criticize others. No local politics were allowed but, after all, Arab youth in general did not care about supporting this or that party. The feeling was that there was a common enemy sitting on the other side of the fence.

While I was probably in the seventh (final) year of primary level, it was announced that our headmaster would visit our classroom in the company of a very important guest from Lebanon. He showed up with a certain Dr Anis Fraiha who, having been given my surname, addressed me individually over all the rest by proudly declaring that the Fraihas and the Nuwayheds were neighbours. How and where on earth could that be, I respectfully waited for the explanation. “Ask your father”, he retorted with a wide smile. Father indeed was glad to know Dr Fraiha was in town. “A

formidable linguist he is. Yes, he comes from Ras-el-Maten as I do. You're lucky to have met him”.

At the beginning of each school term and in every Monday morning, Mr Haramy would assemble all the upper courses' students in the large basement hall, pick up a subject, an incident, a story, a rumour, a complaint from a neighbour or from one of the parents, and deliver a sermon of mixed ingredients: information, comments, humour and mostly advice. Either in English or in Arabic.

After 1948, al Ummah School was moved from occupied Jerusalem to Bethlehem. I had the pleasure to visit it in 1960 in the company of my late, dear brother-in-law, Zuheiral - Ajlouni, while on a short holiday from Venezuela.

Another teacher we admired was NasryJouzy who taught us Arabic grammar and composition. He was short, a little bit bald-headed, sharp looks, sharp ears. He wouldn't miss the slightest mistake, whether you spoke or wrote. After he corrected our composition on a certain subject he would show up next class to order the writer of the best one to read it in a loud voice.

A young professor of history with a fresh B.A. from the University of London took good care of us during our last two years. Walid Khalidi, son of Ahmad SamehKhalidi, a prominent figure in the field of education, was the president of the Board of Directors at our school. His signature appeared on our diplomas besides Mr. Haramy's. Walid was astonishingly young for the knowledge he possessed and was able to transmit. Later, Dr Walid Khalidi became one of the most prominent advocates of the Palestinian cause both in Arab countries as well as in the English-speaking world. When I was ambassador to Turkey looking for pictures from Palestine to illustrate a book on Venezuelan Nogales Bey who had served in that Ottoman province, I relied on his book *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*.

To Dr Khalidi and Mr Haramy I owe a treasure of information on Asia Minor that helped me merge into Turkish geography and the classical history of Anatolia as if I had been raised in that country. Once while returning to Ankara from Çanakkale (Gallipoli) on a bus of the University of Ankara my Turkish hosts were astonished as I announced we would be soon crossing a stream, when there was no sign of it at all. They would not have believed me if I said the truth: I was expecting to see what my history masters had taught me about the battle on the Granicus River won by Alexander the Great in Asia Minor. Now it is called the Bega Stream.

I'll never forget the day we were taken to the recently opened Palestine Archaeological Museum on the road to Jericho. Stacked in a bus we were lectured on how to behave in a museum considered one of the richest in the area. No doubt the building impressed me for it looked half Moslem at the entrance and half Christian by its towers. Plenty of stone, metal, marble and pottery artefacts, statues big and small, bones and skulls, scrolls and engravings in strange letters. That day I made up my mind: history of dumb and cold artefacts, animal skeletons and teeth were not for me; the one I like would be the history of human beings with their names given and their addresses stamped on this huge planet.

Cheerful professors usually get a free ticket to their students' memories. So was Alex Hananiyya who taught us chemistry. His smooth black hair, bulging cheeks and wide chin fitted into his joyful personality. More often than not, he came up with stories and jokes. Explaining what "hard water" meant to a chemist, he recalled the incident of an offended father who was waiting for him at the exit of the school with a big bottle of water as he shouted: "Now you prove to me this water is hard. How dare you put such nonsense in the head of my son?"

Our geography master was a very special person: widely travelled, mature and friendly. Nikola Kattan came from Bethlehem and was well acquainted with the migration phenomenon to South and Central America. I have the impression he himself had spent a good time of his active life in one of these countries, for his knowledge of their geography, customs and society was unusually wide. Describing food habits in Colombia, once he surprised everybody by telling us that people in that country ate fried bananas. Later on I recalled his words when I found out in Venezuela how delicious is fried plantain (plátano), which is not exactly the sweet, dessert banana but the one harder and poorer in sugar fruit which can be also boiled or baked. Sometime after Jordan and the West Bank were united, Nikola Kattan became Jordan's ambassador to a Spanish American country, most probably Chile.

From a small village named Beit Rima emerged one of our best known teachers during the coming decades all over the Arab Near East. Abdullah al Rimawi, a stout fellow with a broad, serious face, had studied maths in Lebanon and taught at several high schools, ours included.

Rimawi was the principal ideologist of the Baath Party in Palestine and Jordan. He was appointed foreign minister in a short-lived anti Hashemite government a few years later. I heard the news on the radio of my Dodge pickup in Eastern Venezuela while trying to pick up a radio station ready to tell me what was going on in Gaza. Israel had attacked.



While still at primary level, Mr Haramy decided to make boy scouts out of us. I participated as a scout, as that was the best opportunity that could be offered to a boy raised among 4 sisters, 400 tales told by Mom and 4000 books displayed by Dad in a library where one could be sure to find the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Exercises, trips out of town, running, facing emergencies, tying knots and untying them, creeping on one's belly, climbing a slope and so many tricks and skills for the practical side of daily life. Should I be required to sum up in one sentence the gist of all that I gained from having belonged to Lord Baden-Powell's movement I would say that was its motto: "Be Prepared".

In winter 1947 I said farewell to my beloved school, I sat for the London University Matriculation, then started looking for a job.

### **11. Barkley's bank, 1947**

By mid-year 1947 I had been already informed I passed the London University Matriculation Exam in the First Division. To think of a university career at the time was out of bounds: financially and from a practical point of view. No one knew what would become of the homeland even within a foreseeable scope. Everybody felt the gravity of the moment; nobody dared explain how.

I don't remember by what means and through whom I joined Barclays Bank D.C.O. (Dominion, Colonial and Overseas) as a clerk at the Advances (Loans) Department where my boss was a good hearted, avuncular Armenian gentleman, Mr George Merguerian, who lived in a tidy house on the Upper Baq'a. The General Manager; Mr. Broadbent, was an old, spectacled, gentle Englishman who took a liking to me: not so his assistant Mr George Ward, younger and athletic, who just did not like me. Mr. Seedes, a Greek, was fine, neutral. All of them were "A" Signatures. The only Arab important executive, though "B" signature, was a gentleman from the WafaDajani family. Mr Garabedian, an Armenian "B" signature was very kind. The smartest among all was a young man, a well-dressed Jew named Joshua Hearn whose main concern was to conquer the heart of the most beautiful, gorgeously -built, blonde Walkiria, Zedekia Eppinger. Just before the crash in May 1948 I was told they had got married. My spy was the messenger, Ezra, a really nice chap.

At the Advances Department I had to go around those clients whose payments were due but not enough as for the bank to sue them. I was supposed to convince them to behave without an "otherwise"; solely they had to sign a fresh commitment on the spot. This monthly tour allowed

me to become acquainted with the Jewish quarters and to come in contact with Jewish customers. I never had any problem. Sometimes, we the junior clerks would make some extra money by going down to the security basement and count the packs of banknotes, just to make sure the label said the right amount. (Nowadays a machine does the same job in seconds before the customer). When the political situation started to deteriorate in April and the Jewish staff was advised to stay away, Mr. Broadbent charged me with the Foreign Exchange operations. Everybody wanted to get rid of Palestinian pounds. I tried to be strictly honest until the last days, when a Syrian merchant from Damascus, Mr M.Sukkar, offered me a good amount of pocket money if I convinced the boss (Mr Broadbent) to increase his quota. That I did. The commission I pocketed helped us on the long journey that started on April, 26th. The journey that, so far, has not ended.

My Barclays Bank period (September, 1947 - April, 1948) left its permanent impressions on me. For one, it gave me the opportunity to go around those quarters of my hometown, especially in the modern Jewish sector, little known to me. I will never forget my promenades in Zion Square with my schoolmate ZuhdiNashashibi , especially before the Partition Plan was announced, practically at the outbreak of December, 1947. Names of people I met at Barclays surfaced in a biographical novel titled *Nogales Bey* I published in Venezuela fifty years later (1997): Merguerian, Garabad and Zedekia. My own signature in Latin characters followed the style of that of Mr. Clerk, then the highest Barclays General Manager for all Palestine.

## 12. Nature's unlimited generosity

One of the most beautiful days of my life was the day I got my first pension from Barclays Bank. I felt like I was born again. I passed by a children's toy store and bought a blue car for my little sister Jinan, who was three years old.

I entered the house calling out: Jinan where are you? But I did not hear any sound, I left the gift at the entrance and walked over and found the door of the living door open with Mother and Dr Saliba Said, who was our family doctor. I approached anxiously: Mom, what's wrong with you? What happened to her, Doctor?

- Your mother is fine, but she is worried about you, she invited me to conduct the necessary checks for you.
- Doctor, I lost weight because of my work, no more.

- I hope that test results show that you have nothing to cause anxiety, but after what I heard from your mother, I can tell that you are in dire need of physical exercise.
- I don't have time to participate in any gym. After working in the bank, I study at a night school in preparation for an exam that will qualify me to study in London.
- But you can get up half an hour earlier and work in the garden, as outdoor sports are what you need, and gardening is one of the best.

Our garden is rectangular in shape and divided into two parts by a long path that starts from the garden gate and ends at the bottom of the staircase leading to our house on the first floor. Near the staircase are beautiful elderberry, pomegranate and apricot trees. As for the greater part of the garden on both sides of the path the beautiful morning glory was never satisfied by covering the soil but it would creep up the walls surrounding the garden. Oh, God, what am I to do? There isn't one single square meter left for me.

I thought for a while then took a decision no matter what effort and fatigue it takes, I will uproot the morning glory flower carpet then plant instead different kinds of roses. Weeks passed until I was able to pull out all the roots. However, what really bothered me was that none of the household followed my work or asked me with interest except for one of my sisters who accompanied me every day and helped me as much as she could, she was eight years younger than I.

Spring approached and I was waiting for news from the gardener of my friend Anwar to accompany me to purchase rose seedlings for planting when the following happened.

One Sunday morning I heard a knock on the door, so I covered my head in protest and pretended to be asleep, but the knock was repeated.

- “Who is there?”
- I am Bayan. I have a big surprise for you. - She opened the door and said:
- Please trust me and come with me immediately without any question.
- But what is the surprise?
- How would it be a surprise if I told you?

She led me by the hand to the entrance and we went down the staircase together until we reached the garden. “Did you like the surprise?”

I looked around and saw a scene that I have never dreamt of. I saw the garden on both sides covered with our beloved purple morning glory flowers coming out beneath their fresh green leaves as never before. How did these flowers find a way to come out after I have cut all the roots. I heard my mother’s voice from the top of the staircase as she slowly descended:

- My son, you have brought life and love to exist in the veins of this neglected flower for years, so by uprooting its accumulated roots you allowed what remained of them to breathe and find ways to come back to a better life. But I wonder how could you avoid not seeing it all the past week?
- Oh Mom, you know that I come late at night, and I hurry to my work in the morning.
- Nature is the warmest mother, and her generosity has no limits, but she needs our love and care.

Mom was a novelist and a poet. Her most beautiful poems are those describing the nature as she grew up among the fields, and in the shade of its trees.

Do I need to say that Mom was watching me all the time, but she left me alone with her Great Mother: The Nature.

### **13. Jerusalem, May, 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948**

The UN adopted a resolution on the partition of Palestine on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1947. The day of this resolution was a day of mourning for the Arabs, and a day of joy and victory for the Jews. And immediately a country - wide uprising began in protest of this grave injustice. Later, I will write historical articles about those difficult months between the issuance of the international resolution for partition of Palestine and the end of the British Mandate. My father insisted on staying in Jerusalem, whatever the results, but finally succumbed to my mother’s insistence to go with my sisters to Lebanon until the situation calmed down. On April 26<sup>th</sup>, I accompanied them to Damascus and we stayed there at Aunt Anisa’s house for four days. We then continued to Ras el-Maten, where we arrived on May, 1st at sunset. On the following day at dawn I went back to Jerusalem.

“When Kaldone read “The Last Days of Pompeii”, it never occurred to him that a day shall come in which he would be witnessing the last days of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, his Diary does not include the events of those historical days, and though he had planned to write about the 1948 “Nakba” later, time constraints and health troubles prevented him from doing so. Fortunately, his father’s autobiography “Sixty Years with the Arab Caravan”, 1993, pp. 307 – 317), includes his recorded events of those days through May 15 and beyond.”

“AjajNuwayhed used to visit on daily basis his friend Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, the top official then, at his office at the Headquarters of the Arab Higher Committee in Lower Baq`a, about 200 meters from his house in UpperBaq`a, and his son used to accompany him.”

“On May 12<sup>th</sup>, Hilmi Pasha informed Ajaj that the Consular Committee in Jerusalem, which was composed of the consuls of the United States of America, France, and Belgium, had presented a “Provisional Draft” to both sides: the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency, and it concluded that their main goal was to avoid war in Jerusalem ... Hilmi Pasha requested Ajajto deliver this document to King Abdullah in Amman. The latter immediately translated the document and his son typed it. And early on the following day they both left to Amman.” “King Abdullah welcomed Ajajbut did not accept the proposals of the Consuls Committee, announcing that the Jordanian Army would advance towards Jerusalem the following day.”

“Father and son went back to Jerusalemin a vehicle, and, by the time it got close to Jerusalem before noon on the fifteenth of May, the streets of the Old City and the surroundings were in pandemonium. With great difficulty, and under gunfire, they reached Hilmi Pasha’s new headquarters at the Moslem orphanage where he had moved the evening before. Needless to say all of West Jerusalem had been taken, and needless to say that Ajaj Nuwayhed’s house and his huge library were gone, including all his private papers. But despite his personal loss, all of his thoughts during those difficult days remained concentrated on Jerusalem and the way forward rather than on personal grief. Consequently, he stayed by the side of Hilmi Pasha, witnessed the continuous Israeli attacks on the Old City, and the brave war fought by the Jordanian Army and various Palestinian and Arab troops that was concluded by the Arab sovereignty on the Eastern side of Jerusalem.”

#### **14. Palestine, August 19th, 1947**

A Lebanese journalist asked me once during the second year of the “*Nakba*”:

- If you were allowed to go back to Jerusalem and enter your house just to find it the same as you left it, and if you were allowed to bring back with you one thing only, what would be your choice?
- I will bring my photo albums.

My answer was so quick that he did not ask further questions. I admit that photography is much more than a hobby to me, it is part of my past and MY whole life.

I still keep a very special picture from our last trip in Palestine. On the way from Haifa to *Akka* (Acre) we stopped at a strip of the bare coast, where two miserable fishing boats barely touched the sand while a local boy was looking. In the picture my four sisters in simple clothes, fit for a long car ride, looking through the camera and, consequently, at me. Except the youngest Jinan who was overtaken by the sight of the mighty sea, she turned her little head toward it. Most people from a mountainous hinterland usually remember the first time they beheld the sea.

On the back, the picture bears the date it was shot. August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1947, which fell on a Tuesday.

It was my last trip within “That Palestine”, the one prior to 1948, *Dahaim*. (Germans say *Daheimund Drausen* where they mean home and abroad.

## 15. Venezuela, August 19th, 1947

Exactly four years later, on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1951, a Sunday, the young man who took that picture was landing at an airport named Maiquetia, in a country of South America named “Little Venice”: Venezuela. It was his real first trip to start a new life and become, perhaps, a different person. A permanent man of *Drausen*.

## References

Kaldone G. Nweihed wrote this part of his diaries about his early youth in English. He finished the last episode on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and he concluded at the end of the last page: “Mission is done.”