

# Unforgotten Memories of My Home in Palestine



By Munir Zacharia

Not a day goes by without my being visited by bittersweet memories of Lower Baqa'a, the quiet Jerusalem neighborhood where I was born in 1940. My family – my parents Elias and Elizabeth, my brothers Basim, Nadim, and Amin, and I – lived in a modest two-bedroom apartment on the first floor of the Zacharia Building (now 62 Emek Refaim Street). My grandfather Ma'touk lived on the ground floor with his son, my uncle Makhael, Aunt Margaurite, and cousins Hanna, Helen, and Suhail. My two other uncles, Esa and Tewfic, lived in a second apartment. We had a small yard in front of the house with a vegetable garden, a pistachio tree, a big swing, and a doghouse for Uncle Esa's dog Rex.

We were surrounded by relatives and friends: the Shiber, Fattaleh, Fasheh, Muna, Kort, and Faran families lived next door or nearby. With their children, we would play hide-and-seek or ride our bikes and scooters in an empty lot next to our house.



The Author in Jericho 1943-43 to The Author in Jericho 1943.



The Author's mother and eldest brother at Lake Tiberias.

The last stop of Bus #4a was in front of our house, and the driver would sometimes get out to have coffee with my *sido* (grandfather) and *khoury* (priest) Khalil Hakim, while we played inside the bus. The bus drivers would often give us a free ride home from school. I attended the Bishop Gobat School, where my teacher was Miss Marmoura. She once complained to my mother about me because I chased her, throwing little stones at her, in protest of the first day at school.

One of my happiest memories is of my cousin Nabil's baptism at St. Simeon Orthodox Church. Located in a wooded part of Qatamon, the church had a circular courtyard with a fountain at the front and a wide, arched doorway. The service was attended by the entire family, and many relatives and friends. As we were exiting, Uncle Makhael threw a bunch of Palestinian coins in the air and all the children scrambled to catch them or pick them up once they had hit the ground.

On many mornings we would wake up to the sounds of village women from Malha and Lifta carrying on their heads trays loaded with fresh vegetables and fruit; we would go downstairs with my mother and she would bargain and select the best of the fresh produce. A villager would also come, riding his donkey that carried two big cans of milk. He would fill a pot of milk which my mother immediately boiled – and a lucky one amongst us children would get the *ishta* (froth). Another regular visitor was a man riding a cart and yelling "Kaz, kaz," from whom we would buy kerosene for our Primus stove.



Jericho picnic with relatives and friends.



Cousins Hanna (John), Helen, and Suhail, as well as the author and his brothers Basim and Nadim near their father's Opel car.



Bandali Shiber with his nephews and nieces. The first person standing on the left is Helena Zacharia, the author's grandmother.



Uncles Esa, Tewfic, the author's father Elias, grandfather Ma'touk, aunt Nabiha and uncle Makhael.



A picture of the author's parents' wedding at Mar Elias in 1935.



The author being carried by his father Elias with his mother Elizabeth and brothers Nadim and Basim.



Bishop Gobat School, 1947. The author is standing, the first on the left, next to Michael Nuzha.

We often accompanied my mother on her shopping trip to Spinneys, and from there, we would walk a short distance to my father's auto shop on Mamilla Street. Sometimes we would continue to Barclays Bank, with its revolving door, and visit Uncle Sami Khadder.

I enjoyed our visits to our aunts and uncles in Upper Baqa'a, Qatamon, and Talbiyeh. I still remember picking and eating Uncle Basil Shiber's delicious sweet peas. I also have fond memories of trips to Jericho, Ain el-Sultan, the Mount of Temptation, Mar Elias, Yaffa, and Tiberias, where I collected seashells that mother made into a necklace.

My saddest memories are watching Uncle Sami move his precious Persian rugs for storage to a safe place in the German Colony, and my father emptying his store of batteries and tires, bringing them to the safety of the empty lot next to our house.

On the day we left Jerusalem in April 1948, I hid my brand-new scooter behind the sofa. I was seven-and-a-half years old.

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The author's brother Basim (wearing a tarbouch), Jerusalem Airport, 1955, on his way to the United States.



The author's aunt Nabiha carrying Basim, with cousins Hanna, Suhail, and Helen.



Nadim, Munir, and Basim.



The author being carried by his cousin Hanna, with Helen, Suhail, Basim, and Nadim.