

My Life in Jerusalem

A Personal Account
from Pre-1948



By Emile Jouzy

I was born in Jerusalem on July 24, 1935, to a Palestinian Christian family, the youngest of three boys; Neddy was the eldest, and Raja the middle one.

My father, Saliba Costandi Jouzy, was a Palestinian scholar. At a young age, he became a member of the nationalist movement led by the Grand Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, for whom, among other things, he acted as an interpreter in the latter's meetings with the British High Commissioner. Later, in the 1920s, my father was employed by the British Mandate government where he held senior positions in various departments (the secretariat, public works, and education). He was also the secretary of the Palestinian government's employees' union, and in that role, he negotiated equal pay for Muslim and Christian Palestinian employees of the British Mandate to that of Jewish employees, with the payments going through the newly founded Arab Bank rather than through Barclays Bank. As a result, he helped this important Arab institution and also became friends with the bank's owner, Abdul Hameed Shoman. In 1936, my father founded the National Orthodox School in Musrara, Al-Madrasah al-Wataniah al-Orthodoxieh. In addition, he and his brothers, Nasri, Jamil, and Farid, formed the first Palestinian acting troupe: they wrote plays and acted in them. Many of their plays were broadcast on *Huna al-Quds*, the Arabic section of the Palestine Broadcasting Service which started operating in 1936.

My mother, Augustine Tlil, was a loving homemaker who also supported my father in his national work. When the Arab resistance began in 1947, she volunteered as a nurse's assistant at the Beit Safafa hospital.



Emile's parents.

Emile with his dog, Peek. Standing behind him are his parents and his eldest brother, Neddy. In front of their Qatamon apartment.



At first, we lived in Lower Baqa'a. Our nearest neighbor, across the street, was Shafiq Mansour, the secretary of the YMCA, whose son Nabil was my very first friend when I was three years old.

For the first couple of years of my education, I joined my brothers at the German school, located near the railway terminal in the German Colony. When it closed at the outbreak of World War II, we continued our studies at Al-Ummah School, the director of which, Shukri Haramy, had been a classmate of my father's. I remember fondly some of my teachers: Mr. Jacir, who taught us Arabic (after 1948, the school moved to his family mansion in Bethlehem); Mr. Sidawy, our art teacher; and Miss Abu Dayeh (who later married Mr. Haramy). However, my memories of school lunches are not so nice. On one occasion, I was caught dropping my food on the floor and ended up at the headmaster's office, bent forward on the chair, with the stick coming down enough times to ensure that I could not sit for a few hours. To this day, I cannot eat *yakhni bitinjan* (eggplant stew) or *kousa* (zucchini). But I am still in regular contact with some of my classmates: George Bahu in Ramallah, Dr. David Hanania in Amman, Hanna Dadoush in Rome, and Shukri Zaki Dajani in Geneva.

In the early 1940s, we moved to Qatamon, renting the first-floor apartment in a three-story building. My mother's cousins, Sliman Tlil and his sisters, Cocone, Ellen, and Virginie, lived only doors away; their brother, architect Daoud Tlil, with his own family, was another two doors down the road, opposite Khalil Sakakini's house. The Iraqi consulate was also located one street away from us. On one occasion, when Princes (later to be Kings) Faisal and Hussein visited the consulate, I was invited to play football with them.

My father also owned a villa in lower Talbiyeh, near the municipality gardens, but we never got to live in it. George Salameh rented it until he left Palestine for Lebanon in 1946, at which time he left his dog in my care.

My father wanted us to move to the villa then, but the founder of the Arab Bank, Abdul Hameed Shoman, wanted his son, Abdul Majid, to marry and live in the villa. Given their friendship from earlier days, my

father could not refuse his request so we never got to enjoy it. When I visited Jerusalem in 1995, the villa had sprouted two floors.

The dog I “inherited,” a German Shepherd named Peek, became my constant companion and playmate. My friend Theodore Awad and I would go “skating” through the streets, holding on to the leash, as Peek pulled us all the way to Lower Baqa’a.

As a young child, I felt that life in Jerusalem was like one long feast day. On Christian feasts my mother would help me put on my suit: “We’re going to wish Happy Christmas to our family and friends.” On Muslim feasts, the scene would repeat itself: “Let’s put on your suit. We’re going to visit our Muslim friends to wish them Happy Eid.” Jewish feasts were no exception. “Let’s put on your suit. We’re going to visit our Jewish friends.”

At Easter, my maternal grandfather, Mikhail Tliil, would secure us a room on the fourth floor of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where we would enter on Thursday afternoon, with the Primus, food, and mattresses, and come out again on Sunday afternoon, having attended all the services.

Christmas was spent at home. My mother with her cousin Cocone would make the *knafeh* (fine pastry with white cheese in syrup with rose water) and all sorts of other delicious festive foods. We would also visit relatives on both sides.

My father, as part of his work, would go on inspection tours to government offices all over Palestine, from Safad to Gaza. I consider myself fortunate that, as I was the youngest, he would often take me and my mother with him. As



Emile (standing on the right) with his friends Michel (son of neighbor Stepho Awad) and Nabil (kneeling, son of lawyer Anton Attalah).

a result, I had the privilege of getting to know all of Palestine from top to bottom.

On Sundays I would walk with my father to Malha and sometimes even all the way to Ein Karem. We would take Peek with us (when I had him), and we would pick *za’atar* and cyclamen on the way. These walks developed further my love for our land.

Sliman and Daoud Tliil each owned a car. They’d load the family – aunts, uncles, and cousins – and take us on picnics to the beach Shatt al-Arab in Jaffa. Barely would the cars come to a halt, when we children would scuttle off to the water, not to emerge again before evening.

Costandi Salameh, my mother’s uncle, owned a large orange grove near Jaffa where we would be invited to spend the day on special occasions. I remember playing around the orange trees with his children who were my age. As



Emile (back, right) with Guiguite and Cicile, (daughters of Uncle Daoud Tliil), and Richard Tear (son of Aunt Olga), in Uncle Daoud’s garden.

One New Year’s Day, my father’s uncle Shukri Deeb, whose birthday was on that day, invited family and friends to celebrate with him on a sailing cruise on the Dead Sea. He owned boats for transporting salt from the mines of Jabal Usdum (Mount of Sodom, as mentioned in the Bible). We sailed all the way to the river Mujeb and back.

But this happy phase of our lives wasn’t to last long. With the outbreak of hostilities, our activities and outings were restricted for a while, and I found other adventures. When Commander Abu Dayeh and his *mujahedeen* arrived to take charge of the security of Qatamon, his headquarters was in the basement flat of our relative Sami Jouzy. On weekends I became a delivery boy, distributing lunch to outposts all the way to Mousalabieh Monastery.

Inevitably, our time in Jerusalem came to the same tragic end that so many Palestinians suffered. A few

months after the Haganah blew up the Hotel Semiramis on January 5, 1948, barely a kilometer away from our house, and on the wake of the Deir Yassin atrocity on April 9, my father decided that it was no longer safe for us to remain in Jerusalem. On April 24, 1948, we took the bus to Egypt. It was not till 1995 that I was finally able to walk again on the same streets of my childhood.

In the intervening years, my family and I lived first in Egypt where my father worked for the office of the ex-British Mandate until it completed its operations. He was in charge of pension and compensation payments to the former employees of the Palestine government who were living in Egypt and Gaza.

In 1955 I went to London to study at the London Battersea College of Advanced Technology. After the 1956 Suez Crisis, my parents moved to Beirut, where my father volunteered to manage the Palestine Media Office set up by Dr. Izzat Tannous. Due to the Lebanese crisis in 1958, my parents joined me in London for two years. They returned to Lebanon only to leave again in 1976 with the outbreak of the civil war, once more joining me in London. My father died in London in 1988; my mother moved to Amman the following year to be close to family, where she passed away peacefully in 1994.

My eldest brother, Neddy, received a PhD in civil engineering from Purdue University in the United States and worked for a time for the Jordanian Ministry of Public Works. When our middle brother, Raja, graduated from the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom, also in civil engineering, the two opened an engineering consulting practice, first in Beirut, then in Amman, and



Emile after swimming at Shatt al-Arab, Jaffa.



Emile and Theo Awad undergoing training on the use of a Tommy gun and Enfield rifle, spring 1948.

eventually in Dubai where Jouzy & Partners became the third largest Arab engineering consulting firm in its field. Both my brothers are gone now, but their firm was taken over by a Palestinian engineer, so the name Jouzy & Partners lives on.

As for myself, I studied hotel catering and tourism management, specializing in the functional design and equipping of hotels. I worked in the industry for sixty years beginning with projects in the Jordanian side of Jerusalem until 1967 and after that continuing my involvement in the construction of close to 200 hotels on four continents.

My dear wife Nelsy and I have three children. Thanks to my eldest son, Sarry (named after Khalil Sakakini's son), I am the grandfather of three girls – the youngest having arrived just this year. My son Ramsey is currently training to be a lawyer, while my daughter Soraya and Sarry are running the company I started so many years ago.

It is gratifying to watch the new generations of Jouzys thrive, and I am thankful for the opportunities life

has afforded me despite the many losses and upheavals. However, the biggest piece of my heart remains in Jerusalem.

Emile Jouzy, a native of Jerusalem, moved with his family to Egypt in 1948. He studied hotel catering and tourism management at London Battersea College (which later became the University of Surrey) in the United Kingdom and worked in the hotel industry for sixty years, participating in the outfitting of nearly 200 hotels all over the world. In 1981 he married Nelsy Thomas with whom he has three children. In the past two years he has been assisting Yusef Daher, the chief editor of the Palestine Tourism magazine (published by PALAID).



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