

# Memories of My Childhood in Jerusalem



By Raymond Haddad

I was born in Jerusalem in 1936, to a family in which circumstances, laws of nature, and natural affinity led to marriages beyond the confines of Palestine. Exposure to European educational institutions enhanced or influenced some of the cultural aspects and traditions of the family. I look at it as perhaps contributing to the quilt or mosaic of the country.



Raymond Haddad with his mother Maria Haddad (née Nicodeme) on the upper balcony of their West Jerusalem home in the German Colony on Khanania Street.

My father was Gabriel Haddad, born in 1889, the eldest of six children of Hanna Habib Haddad who worked at the printing press of the Franciscan fathers in Jerusalem, and Regina Nicodeme. He was eleven years old when his father died and was taken in, along with his brother, by the German Lazarist priests so that the boys could continue their education. As a result, he became fluent in German, and at age 16 started work at the Deutsche

Our house was in the German Colony, part of what is known as Al-Baqa'a al-Tahta. Our phone number was 3426.



A 1946 Renault Juva 4, purchased by Ferdinand Haddad, parked in front of their German Colony house.

Palästina-Bank. In order to support his family, he supplemented his income by selling religious souvenirs made of olive wood obtained from Mr. Batarsi's souvenir shop in Bethlehem. He also guided *suwwah* (tourists) who were visiting the Holy Land.

During the Second World War, my father was honorary consul of Spain in Jerusalem. Also, with a partner, he had a building-materials business, Haddad, Hallac & Co., with a branch in Haifa and a storage yard in Upper Baqa'a, a neighborhood in southern Jerusalem.

My mother, Marie Nicodeme, was born in Jerusalem in 1899. Her mother, Esther Laurella, was born in Beirut, the daughter of George Laurella, consul of Tuscany, and Catherine Ajamian, the daughter of the Persian consul in Aleppo. My maternal grandfather, Ferdinand Nicodeme, met his wife Esther when she came on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Ferdinand became the pharmacist at the Austrian Dispensary in Tantur which was run by the Order of Malta. He later worked at the Italian consulate and became director of the Italian Catholic Association.



Raymond Haddad's first communion portrait.



Raymond Haddad with his maternal grandmother Esther Nicodeme (née Laurella).



Family portrait that includes Gabriel and Maria Haddad with four of their five children, Ada Kalbian (née Haddad), Roger, Jean, and Raymond Haddad.

My parents married in Jerusalem, at the parish church of St. Saviour in the Old City, in 1920. Their reception was held at the Fast Hotel. I was born at the Italian Hospital and baptized at St. Saviour. At age 6, I started preparations for my first communion at the Reparatrice Sisters whose convent was across from the French Hospital, not far from my father's office on St. Louis Street. Occasionally I would stop there after school which was a short walk away.

My brothers and I attended the Collège des Frères, located in the Old City, adjacent to New Gate. I would take bus number 4 to and from school, with my lunch in a container called *matbakie*. I dreaded the disciplinarian Frère Epiphane, who roamed the school with his *mastara* (ruler), and prayed not to be hit on the knuckles. My dad got a kick when I told him how I was taught to write numbers in Arabic, especially 7 and 8 (أ, ي, *inzil wa itlah*, lit. move down and move up). I had not

finished the fifth grade at the Frères school when we left Jerusalem in 1948.

We lived in a two-story house that was built in 1932 and designed by the German architect Bäuerle. A large terrace led to the front door. The first floor included a large *liwan* (visitors' room), living and dining rooms, a kitchen and adjacent pantry called *odet il- moune*, where we stored food staples, such as sugar, flour, *samne* or ghee, and dried goods such as rice, lentils, and beans, as well as canned food and homemade jams. Next to the maid's room, a door led to the basement. The second floor included a central sitting area leading to four bedrooms and a bathroom. All the second-floor rooms opened onto a wrap-around balcony. The entire house had beautiful floor tiles imported from Lodi, Italy, by my father who had a building-materials business.

In the front yard there was a large eucalyptus tree, a variety of flowers, and a hedge of *husulban* (rosemary).

The side had several fruit trees, including apricots, plums, *askidynia* (loquats), green almonds that I enjoyed by dipping them in salt, and an artichoke hedge. The backyard had jasmine plants and honeysuckle, and was bordered by a stone wall.

A well or cistern under the house and a front yard spigot allowed for watering the plants.

I would periodically see sanitation workers spraying the area around the septic tank, at the front, for mosquitoes to prevent malaria and dengue fever, both prevalent in those days.

My favorite room was the dining room for several reasons. Since it had a large *soppa* (heating stove), it was the warmest. In one corner was the record player I made use of. Every year at Christmas, a tree would stand tall, next to the nativity creche which we brought down from the attic. They were displayed until the day of Epiphany on January 6. In the Catholic faith, May is the month of the Virgin Mary. We would gather as a family in this room to say the Rosary and sing "It's Mary's month, it's the most beautiful month." What impressed me also in this room was a portrait of my maternal grandfather whom I never knew, in his uniform emblazoned with several



Raymond Haddad's maternal grandfather Ferdinand Nicodeme.



Group wedding portrait of Marie and Gabriel Haddad at St. Saviour in the Old City.

decorations. Finally, a Madonna and Child portrait hung on another wall. When the house was ransacked in 1948, the picture was saved and found its way several years later to my sister's house in East Jerusalem.

Every year or two a *mnajjed* showed up to fluff up pillows and mattresses. He did the job on the front terrace using a rudimentary instrument that looked like a bass with two metallic strings. Another annual ritual was rug beating and cleaning before storage for the summer, using what looked like a tennis racket followed by spreading the rug on the floor

and rubbing it with the cover of a *tanjara* (a cooking pot) to get rid of the last bit of dust. For some reason I have kept a vivid memory of these activities.

As I was growing up, our daily routine included taking cod liver oil and drinking Ovaltine. Homemade apricot or quince jam was part of the breakfast fare. After school, I enjoyed an *asroune* (snack), eating bread with *halawe* or chocolate. Mother always made *labne* (partly dried yogurt) balls; they were stored in jars filled with olive oil and eaten with *za'atar*.

I was the youngest child in the family. My sister Ada was seven years older, and my brothers were already in high school when I was born. My playmates were neighborhood kids. Next door lived an English family with a daughter, Ann, with whom I played the proverbial doctor and nurse. Across the street lived the Vincentes, an Italian family. Their daughter Renata and I played catch on our wrap-around balcony or climbed the eucalyptus tree. Her brother, Vittorio, who had asthma, could only participate in low-key activities.

So, with him we played marbles or other games, such as snakes-and-ladders, pick-up sticks, or Lido, that were effortless. With the Awad boys next door I played soccer in the street or hide-and-seek. When my sister Ada and her friend Aida Farah played house on the balcony, I would stop and sample the goodies. I had built the outline of an automobile on the ground and pretended to be driving using rudimentary make-believe instruments from sticks and stones. I was allowed to go to the Regent Cinema now and then to watch Tarzan movies.

When mother was going places, she often took me with her. We would go grocery shopping – to Kaloti the butcher, Freij the grocer, Spinneys for specialty items such as cold cuts, and the Old City for spices and *bakala*, a dried fish that we ate especially during World War II. We would also visit friends or relatives. Some of those we visited had balconies from which one could be entertained just by watching the surroundings and the people strolling by.

Like many of her friends and relatives, my mother had *jour de reception*, a certain day of the month when people knew she would be home. She would serve refreshments – tea, coffee, lemonade – and homemade cake or cookies. She enjoyed cooking. She prepared dough for flat noodles called *taliarini*, gnocchi, and bread. For holidays she prepared *ma'amoul* and *ka'ak* (special cookies filled with dates, made with semolina and flour, respectively), and sent them out for baking at Frank's German bakery nearby. At Easter she made *karabij halab*, a cookie covered with *natef* (meringue).



The Madonna and Child painting saved from the Haddad house in the German Colony by Mr. Talvi as the house was ransacked.

Like most Palestinians, we had the usual fare such as *mujaddara* (lentils and rice served with fried onions), *mahshi* (stuffed zucchini or eggplant from the village of Battir), *warak inab* (vine leaves wrapped around spiced rice and minced meat), and *malfouf* (cabbage rolled around spiced rice and meat), all kind of stews with rice, meat, and vegetables. Once or twice a year we had snails, boiled in their shells from which we pulled them out using a needle. A *deek habash* (turkey) was prepared once a year for Christmas. Tahini sauce was used as a dip with *dibs* (molasses). Besides hummus, mother used tahini with fish dishes and meats. *Moloukhiyeh* was a festive meal: one item was piled on top of another, such as crisp bread, onions, vinegar, and meat, all drenched in that green herb boiled into a sauce.

Mother and father were pious and attended early morning mass almost daily at St. Therese Church, near the Semiramis Hotel. On Sundays we often went as a family, or just my parents and I, to neighboring towns for relaxation or to visit relatives. I enjoyed sitting in the garden of the Odeh Hotel in Ramallah sipping a *gazoz* (fizzy soda) and taking in the breeze. Ramallah was only a few kilometers away but always cooler than Jerusalem. Bus trips to Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ein Karem, and Emmaus were equally enjoyable. The German Lazarists had a convent in Emmaus where Father Zonnen, my father's teacher, lived. A cousin of my father owned the St. Julian Hotel on Julian Way, near the King David Hotel. It was a strategic place from which to watch parades a couple of times a year.

My oldest brother, Ferdinand, worked at the Spanish consulate in Jerusalem. Jean, my second brother, worked in my father's office across the street from the Ottoman Bank. Roger, my third brother, graduated from high school in Jerusalem and then went to Beirut to study pharmacy. In high school he played soccer. The interscholastic games often took place in a field near us. I would carry his cleats as we walked together to the game. Roger liked to tease: He used to call me *Ajouz* because I enjoyed sitting by the stove in winter and *Abu Dama'a* (father of tears) because I cried easily.

My sister Ada attended the English Miller School with other Palestinian girls before moving to the Sisters of Zion's school in the Old City. Girls there suffered some discrimination based on their social standing or tuition exemptions, which prevented social interactions. She was glad to leave for the school of the Sisters of Nazareth in Haifa, where she remained as a boarder for a year or two.

But political events started to change our lives, my life. After the partition was announced, we were glued to the radio wondering, "What next? Will things get worse?" Curfews became common. Jerusalem was divided into zones: A, B, and C. We were issued identity cards showing the "zone" we lived in. The King David Hotel bombing catastrophe of 1946 was compounded by that of the January 1948 Semiramis Hotel bombing in which we lost close friends.

The civilian population became more terrified, and that led to our departure on April 26, 1948. Like others we were duped into thinking this was a temporary issue that would end soon after the end of the Mandate on May 15, 1948.

Two of my siblings were abroad while Ferdinand, the eldest, stayed behind, in the house, with the Spanish consul, hoping to protect our home. Dad had arranged for two taxis from the Alamein Company to pick us up and take us to Beirut, via Amman and Damascus. After months of moving around in different sections of the city, we settled in an apartment in Ras Beirut. We used UNRWA ration cards for provisions. I started school at the Collège de la Salle in fifth grade, following the French system leading to the Baccalaureate and eventually attended medical school. In 1963, I immigrated to the United States.

My wife Pat and I are proud parents of three sons and grandparents of six boys and a girl who live in Virginia and Connecticut.

I went back to Jerusalem in 2014 and 2017 for short visits with family and managed a brief visit to our house. I left Jerusalem and Palestine but they remain in my heart.

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