

Memories of Tripoli

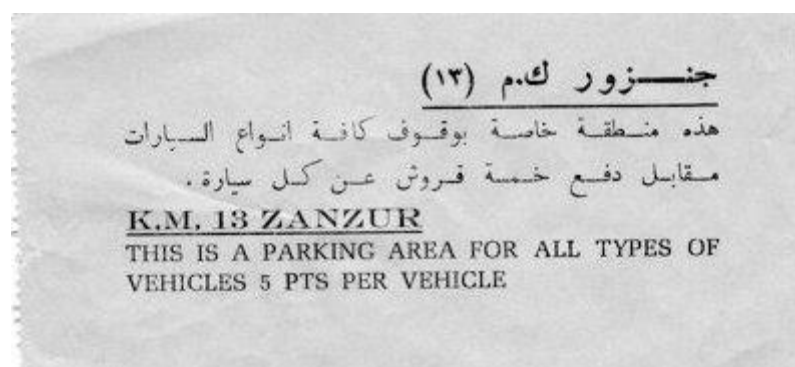
I lived in Giorgimpopoli in 1966 (when I was 9 and 10). My happiest childhood memories are there. And in fact my sister and I both cried the day we left Libya. We vowed one day to return. We still talk about that sometimes, even though Libya was more than 40 years ago. Last night I clicked on a website for Wheelus High School. I didn't go to school at Wheelus at all, but I laughed out loud when I read on the website about memories of the hard hamburger buns at Guy's and Joe's. I lost a tooth there. It turned out to be financially advantageous that I did, as the Libyan tooth fairy was more generous than the American one. I received 10 piastres (28 cents, as opposed to a dime) for my tooth--and I still have that 10 piastre note to this day.

We weren't connected with the military at all, although Wheelus opened their gates on the 4th of July that year. Anyone with an American passport was allowed on base that day. There were carnival rides and camel rides (my one and only experience riding a camel), followed by fireworks shot over the Mediterranean. It was a 4th of July to remember.

Our one channel of TV also came from Wheelus AFB. Channel 8. We watched old American reruns (some of which were new to me, as I had been too young to remember these programs in the US), as well as old British reruns (all of which were new to me). I fell in love with British comedy that summer. To keep programming on the hour, there were the 5-minute filler programs, to make up for the time not devoted to commercials. 'Fact or Fiction.' We loved those little trivia programs, and tried to imitate the sound effects that came with it. There was one Libyan variety show program that we watched, too: Caravan. The show always started off with the Libyan National Anthem. My sister and I always stood for the anthem. The anthem was played on a trumpet, if I remember right. And one note was consistently played flat. We didn't know the words to the anthem, so we made up our own. We sang whatever phrases we had learned in Arabic (most commonly, 'khoobs wa zibdah'). And we always sang the one note flat, just like the trumpet played it. Our summer of Libyan television was the one and only summer my siblings and I didn't fight over TV. Channel 8 was the only channel. The only options were Take It or Leave It. We always took it without complaint.

Since TV was limited to evenings, we read a lot, too. With great anticipation, we awaited the 'Sunday Ghibli' newspaper each week. Every week there was a new submission of handy hints from Mrs. Mavis B. Stoneham from Garden City, and a joke submitted by Peter Fabian Stanley from Gargaresh. In most cases, both were so inane, that we couldn't resist reading their contributions each week. To this day, I still have several issues of the 'Sunday Ghibli.'

Other diversions included trips to Leptis Magna and Sabratha. And swimming at Kilometer 13. Driving was an experience, too.



There were no street signs on the sandy roads of Giorgimpopoli. To the best of my knowledge, the streets had no names. You learned everything by landmark. Addresses of houses were determined by the oil companies, I think. I lived at Oasis 238, but the house next door had an Esso address, I believe. We had wild morning glories growing on our fence. Twice a day the sheep were herded past our house. They lingered long enough to grab a bite of the morning glories.



Every intersection was a blind intersection, and right of way was determined by who honked first.

Tripoli, of course, had paved roads. Streets had cool names, like "24th of December Street." In the U.S., that simply would have been 'Independence Street.' I also loved road signs which, instead of simply saying 'slow down,' read: 'Papa, do not hurry. We are waiting for you.' You had to slow down, just to read the whole thing. I marveled at the fact that the population spoke Arabic, the street signs were in English, and the cops spoke Italian. My dad got pulled over a couple of times in Tripoli. One time he got pulled over for not using his signal indicator when he made a right turn. My mother was the one who deciphered what the cop was saying in Italian. From the one word 'flecha' (arrow), she figured it out. Another time my dad got stopped, the cop was simply wanting my dad to give him a ride. Apparently, once the orange gloves came off, the cop was no longer on duty.

Despite the hard hamburger buns, we enjoyed eating out regularly at Guy's and Joe's. One time my brother's french fries were served with a french fly. He was undaunted.

"GUY & JOE"
Restaurant Snack Bar
GIORGIMPOPOLI

«جاي وجو»
مطعم وسنيك بار
جورجينوبولي

Table No. 33 المائدة رقم Date التاريخ

2 Hamburg	2.50
1 Hamburg	1.50
1 Ham steak	4.00
1 Pizza (no top)	6.00
3 Potato	1.50
2 Almonds Tort	4.00
1/2 S/Drink	2.00
1 Ham	50
Total البكون	22.50
Service خدمة	3.20
Total الاجمال	25.70

No 0233

Far be it from us kids to refuse an American style hamburger and waiters who spoke English, simply because the meal was served--as it were--on the fly. I got quite good at recognizing the word 'Pepsi' in Arabic. 'Beepsi, min fadlak!' We also went to The Metropol in Tripoli a few times. I believe it was a Greek restaurant. The English was more halting there, and they didn't serve hamburgers. We kids much preferred Guy's and Joe's.

I was never taken to the Tuesday Market. I think my parents considered it to be too wild for a kid of age 10.

Every morning in Libya, we awoke under a thin layer of sand which floated in through the

windows at night. Shaking the sheets and sweeping the floors were daily rituals. When we returned to the States, a thin coating of sand accompanied my clothes in my suitcase. I carefully poured my suitcase sand into a jar, and saved it. To this day, I still have my jar of Libyan sand. I also still have old bottle caps of 'Beepsi.'

Our first night and our last night in Libya were spent at the Uaddan Hotel in Tripoli. On our final night in Libya, we toasted our stay with one last glass of Idris Squash. As I said before, my happiest childhood memories were in Libya. A part of my heart was left behind.

Despite our relatively brief sojourn in Libya, we kids experienced reverse culture shock upon our return to the U.S. Suddenly we were back among paved roads without sheep, a telephone in our home, several channels of TV, pre-sliced bread, and water could you drink from the tap (no more Halazone tablets). And we were miserable. I was never fully American again after that.

Almost all of my photos of Libya are on slides. I need to get them digitized.

After returning to the U.S., I went to the library and checked out a book entitled, 'Children of Allah,' by Agnes Newton Keith. She lived in Giorginpopoli for a while. I read her book repeatedly, to savor her memories of Libya. I recently found a copy of it on the internet, and purchased it. Although my own personal book on Libya would be a short one, it nevertheless will always be a treasured chapter in my life.

Thank you for indulging me, to allow me to share my favorite memories.

Sincerely,
Monica Grant

**Ms. Grant supplied a scanned copy of, what might be, the only surviving receipt from Guy's & Joe's Restaurant and Snack Bar, Giorginpopoli, Tripoli, Libya 1966. Giorginpopoli is now called Hay Al Andalus (Andalucia district), an affluent suburb of Tripoli.*

<http://www.tripolitania.com/memories/mem2/index.html>