

# MEMORIES OF BEIRUT AND TEHRAN

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# Chapter 1

## THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

### 1.1 Medicine and bacteriology

My father, Bennett Franklin Avery (1901-1977), and my mother, Margaret Scales Avery (1901-2003), were born in Michigan. They came from middle class families, but both families had been hit by disasters, so money was very scarce during their childhoods. My grandfather on my father's side was a physician, but he died at 35 from typhoid fever, leaving a family of seven children with no source of income. In my mother's case, the disaster was the early death of her grandfather, and the subsequent mismanagement of the family affairs by his surviving widow. But nevertheless, both my parents managed to attend the University of Michigan, and that is where they met. Here is my mother's description of how it happened:

*Ben and I met when we were students at the University of Michigan. He had come to the university from the big Ann Arbor high school, and was already known to many as a member of the football, basketball and track teams. It was also known by many that he had left high school in the fall of his senior year to serve in the Red Cross ambulance corps in France in World War I. Because of his excellent academic record, he was admitted to the university without completing high school. His first semester there he earned all A's in addition to playing on the varsity all-frosh football team.*

*Our first date was to play tennis one fine spring morning. Most courts were at dormitories for women or at segregated athletic fields. So, it being Saturday and early, we decided to play at the men's athletic field. The gate was locked, so we climbed a fence high enough to keep tennis balls from going out of bounds.*

*After a few sets, we decided to take a ride in Ben's old Model T Ford. It had no mud guards, no windshield, no radiator cap and no top. Every time we turned a corner, a fountain of water rose up from the radiator. Ben wore his freshman "beanie", and I was unable to cope with my long hair in the wind as we drove. The first person we met was Ben's older brother Cordon - a senior in the engineering school - who was out road-testing an experimental car. Then we met a car full of girls whom I knew who were on their way to Detroit to shop. All of them had a good laugh.*

*At the end of the school year, in June, we drove across Michigan to a house-party in Saugatuck. There were two cars - Ben's Ford and Don Douglas' little Saxon. One starry night, Ben and I were coming home from a late picnic on the dunes and we ran out of gas - really. We didn't make it home until 2 AM. Our chaperon was furious, and made us promise not to go out alone together again.*

*During the summer I had to prepare myself for a teacher's examination, as I already had a job to teach in high school in a little town called Davison. Madeline (Aunt Maddie) and I had both been at the university together, but this was a heavy load for our parents. So first I taught for two years and helped her finish, and then she did the same for me. Davison was about seventy miles from Ann Arbor, and Ben sometimes borrowed a motor cycle - the old Ford was sold to Cordon - and sometimes even rode his bicycle up to see me.*

*We both graduated from the university in 1923, and Ben went on to study medicine. I obtained a job at the university hospital as a bacteriologist, and we were married at the beginning of his junior year. At the end of his senior year he received an invitation to become the professor of Anatomy at the American University of Beirut. He completed his preparation for this job by teaching Anatomy for one year at the University of Michigan and studying comparative anatomy the following summer at Woods Hole.*

My father had always been very talented in physics, and he had spent some time doing research in an area between physics and medicine at the University of Chicago. This research had been supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, which had a great interest in developing the American University of Beirut. It was his friends in the Rockefeller Foundation who persuaded my father to go there.

## 1.2 Marriage

When my father and mother were married in 1923, they spent their honeymoon on a cruise around the Great Lakes. They were anxious that no one on the

ship should know that they were newlyweds. However, when they opened their cabin door the morning after departure, they saw a big wreath on the door with ribbons and a caption, “Just Married!”. From the wreath a ribbon lead down the gangway of the ship, up the steps, and through the lounge. So much for secrecy! The wreath and ribbon had been placed there, with much amusement, by my father’s brothers Cordon and James.

### 1.3 Swimming across Woods Hole

There are a few stories to be told about my parents’ stay at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory: The first story is about lobsters. One of their friends was doing a series of experiments to determine the basal metabolism of lobsters. He put them into a tank and let them breath for a few hours, measuring their oxygen use and carbon dioxide production. At the end of the measurement, the lobsters looked just as delicious as they had at the start. Of course the lobsters were not wasted, but enjoyed to the fullest.

The second story is about swimming across Woods Hole: The Marine Biological Laboratory and Oceanographic Institute are on a bay called Woods Hole, a part of Cape Cod. Several miles away across the Hole is an island, and the arrangement of land and water is such that the tide running through Woods Hole is enormously swift. When the tide is running, it tips over buoys marking the passage so much that they are nearly horizontal. My mother saw this swift tide as a challenge, and she decided that she wanted to swim across the Hole to the island. The idea was not totally foolhardy because it was possible to start swimming half an hour or so before the tide was due to change direction. The swimmer would then first be swept out to sea, and afterwards back again. This is what my mother did, with my father rowing in a boat beside her in case she got tired. But she didn’t get tired; she reached the distant island.



Figure 1.1: *My father played football for the University of Michigan All Frosh Team. The result was a broken nose which bothered him all his life.*



Figure 1.2: *My parents set off on their honeymoon cruise around the Great Lakes.*



Figure 1.3: *Their first home (Ann Arbor, Michigan).*

## Chapter 2

# OFF TO BEIRUT

### 2.1 What shall we take with us?

After their summer at Woods Hole, my parents left for Beirut. As they packed for the trip, they wondered what to take with them. In those days, Beirut was extremely isolated, and they took with them some things that they were not sure they would be able to buy there, for example a quart bottle full of ink.

As they were packing, Grandmother Avery pulled a revolver out of her dresser drawer. “You’d better take this with you”, she said, “I doubt if it’s loaded”. She pulled the trigger, and a shot fired into the wall not far away from my mother.

Here is my mother’s description of the voyage to Beirut:

*In the fall we set out on the French liner Canada. It took twenty-eight days to reach Beirut. The trip was like a private cruise, as there were so many people on board who were going to Beirut. The port calls were most interesting. At the Azores we swam at sunrise from a small boat which the captain put out for us. While the ship stopped for five days to take on coal at Marseilles, we took the train to Grenoble and hiked in the Alps. We were accompanied by my sister Laura, who was to attend the university as a freshman.*

### 2.2 The American University of Beirut

The university community in Beirut was a very close one. There were a number of American families that had been associated with the AUB for several generations, so that they really regarded Beirut as their home. Many of these families had originally gone to the Middle East as missionaries, teaching at the Syrian Protestant College, which was founded in 1866. The college grew

into a university and in 1920 its name was changed to the American University of Beirut; but the old academic-missionary families (Blisses, Levitts, Closes, Smiths, Crawfords and Wests), now much intermarried, were still there.

Besides the American professors and staffites, the AUB had many distinguished professors from various countries in the Middle East. For example the Professor of Philosophy was Charles Malik (a good friend of my parents), who later helped to draft both the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and who also served as President of the United Nations General Assembly.

The President of the AUB, during the time that my father taught there, was a tall, thin, shy, aristocratic man named Bayard Dodge. He belonged to a wealthy New York family, the owners of the Dodge-Phelps Copper Corporation. President Woodrow Wilson was a close friend of the Dodge family, and it was in the library of their New York home that Wilson wrote the famous telegram in which he proposed an armistice to end World War I. Bayard Dodge had an identical twin, Cleveland, who ran the family business, earning money for his twin Bayard to use in philanthropies. The wives of the two brothers, knowing how shy they were, sometimes used to embarrass them by kissing the wrong twin, pretending not to know which was which.

Agatha Christie and her archaeologist husband were friends of President Dodge and his family, and the couple often visited the Dodges in Beirut on their way between England and Egypt. Probably it was on these trips that Agatha Christie gathered background material for her books “Death on the Nile” and “Murder on the Orient Express”.

When my family lived in Beirut, Lebanon was part of Syria. At the end of World War I, Syria had become independent of Turkey, only to be made a protectorate of France. In general, the Arab world, although liberated from the Ottoman Empire, was carved up into protectorates that were awarded to England and France. Nearby Palestine became a protectorate of England. The word “protectorate” was really a new name for “colony”, the only difference being that in principle protectorates were supposed to be temporary arrangements.

President Bayard Dodge had great natural skills as an administrator and as a diplomat. When he became President of the American University of Beirut in 1923 (at the age of only 35), he made himself fluent in both Arabic and French. He realized that a knowledge of French would help his staff to have good relations with the authorities of the protectorate, and he encouraged them to learn the language thoroughly. For this reason my father became a member of an AUB group that performed plays in French, and throughout his life he was able to remember and quote long passages from “Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme”.

One factor that made Bayard Dodge especially successful as President of the AUB was his understanding and appreciation of the culture of the Near East. Whenever he could spare a little time from his administrative duties, he worked on translating Al-Fihrist, a 10th century Arab encyclopedia. His monumental and scholarly translation of this work, over a thousand pages in length, was published shortly before his death. It is an important work in cultural history, since it documents the way in which the achievements of ancient Greek civilization were preserved by the Arabs and thus transmitted to western civilization. The book might also symbolize what the American University of Beirut became under Bayard Dodge's administration - a channel of communication between east and west. By 1939, the student body included representatives from thirty-eight different countries and sixteen different religious sects.

Remembering Beirut many years later, my mother wrote:

*The American University of Beirut campus is beautifully located on a hilltop which stretches along the shore of the Mediterranean for more than a mile. The sparkling blue sea is below, and the ever-changing Lebanon mountains are on the right, snow capped in the winter, lavender at sunset, blue in the haze of the day. At this writing, the university is well over a hundred years old. The buildings are substantial, often making use of the Moorish arch, and the grounds are beautifully landscaped.*

*At the time of our arrival, the faculty was about half American, and half from the countries of the Near East. Among them were Moslems, Druze, Bahais, Jews, and Christians, both Catholics and Protestants. The students likewise were of many faiths and from many countries. The college was non-sectarian, supported by a large endowment obtained partly in England but mostly in America. The Rockefeller Foundation gave generous sustaining funds to the medical school.*

*Under the leadership of President Bayard Dodge, there was a most welcome feeling of sophistication, combined with perfect simplicity. Our salaries were only 3000 dollars per year (1926) but in Lebanon at that time, this went a long way. Houses were large and attractive, with locally made furniture and Persian carpets. Everyone had one or two maids and other help, such as a weekly gardener and laundress. There were no drains on money such as we have in this country [America]: movies, theater, car fare, lunches out, drinks, clubs, cars. It was possible to live graciously - dinner jackets for parties, maids to pass around the tea, etc.*

*The students at the university were very highly selected, many sent by their governments. All were academically superior. The faculty - both American and Near Eastern - were of equally high caliber. All were well educated and*

*motivated by a desire to be of service in the area, with fewer academic resources available than was general in the western world. Service and tolerance were the watch-words of the university. The slogan of the student Brotherhood society was "The things on which we agree are vastly more numerous than those on which we disagree".*

*The student body had a service club, with night classes for poor boys, and a summer program of village welfare. This consisted of a summer encampment near a village, with road building, construction of sanitary facilities, classes in hygiene, infant care, and medical treatment as a summer-long project.*

*In spite of the seriousness of our purpose in going to Beirut, and Ben's dedication and success in making the Department of Anatomy an effective teaching unit, our hearts were young and gay, and we did a few things that kept the community somewhat more than usually interested. Now and then we went to the Kit-Kat - a night-club. My sister Laura was dancing at such a place with a young attaché from the British Embassy when, to their surprise, they were presented with a live goose for being the best dancers on the floor. They tied it to a table leg and continues to enjoy the evening.*

*The nights were so beautiful - the stars so big and radiant in the dark sky - that we often sat in our garden until late at night singing with the young staffites (unmarried instructors) who came to call on my sister. Swimming at night in the warm phosphorescent sea was also one of our moonstruck activities.*

### **2.3 Tabbouleh for the medical students**

When my parents arrived in Beirut in 1926, the AUB was not coeducational, but only for young men. During his presidency, Bayard Dodge gradually began to admit women. Nevertheless, my father's students were predominantly young men from various parts of the Near East. Realizing that many of these students were far from their homes and families, my parents used to invite them to parties in our garden. One of the dishes they especially liked was Tabbouleh, a salad prepared from cracked wheat and mint. It reminded the homesick young medical students of the Tabbouleh their mothers and sisters made.

Besides entertaining the medical students, my parents participated in the active social life of the campus. Often they entertained, and were entertained, not at full-fledged dinner parties but with "bridge and desert". According to this custom, people ate dinner at their own houses. Afterwards they gathered in groups of twelve or sixteen for three or four tables of bridge. At the end of the evening, they ate desert, thanked their host and hostess, and went home - a very easy and sensible way of entertaining.

My father was a really excellent bridge player. Aided by his acute memory,

his middle-of-the-road attitude, and his sound judgement, he usually won. My mother was a good player too, but she had a tendency to over-bid whenever she drew a good hand. She became excited and went for the limit. Over-bidding was part of her enjoyment of the game, and she justified it by saying that “a large failure is better than a small success”.

President and Mrs. Dodge held staff teas once a month, and on New Years Day, it was the custom for the men at the AUB to go calling, while the wives remained at home to receive them. Maids served Arab coffee and sugared almonds. Calling was hard work, but at the same time a gracious way of communicating within the university community.

## 2.4 Climbing Mount Sannine in the winter

My father once climbed the tall radio mast on the campus, and my parents also climbed Mount Sannine in February. Remembering this event, my mother wrote:

*When winter came, the high peak of Sannine, an [8,500] foot mountain, was white with snow, a spectacular backdrop for the sparkling blue of the sea and the green shoreline of the campus. It became a daily challenge - especially for Ben, who always wanted to climb everything. It was a bad time of the year, as the sun was very strong and there was a good deal of melting during the day. It was a smooth climb up, but people had been killed there by snow slides.*

*The road up to the take-off village was perhaps more dangerous than the mountain itself. It was a single-track dirt road, and some of the hairpin turns were so sharp that the driver was forced to back several times to get around. We spent the night in the village, and set out before dawn for the climb. We had a revolver in case of wolves, but we carried it in a knapsack, and if we had met a wolf, we would have had to request him to wait a minute before attacking.*

*It was a slow, steady climb going up, but coming down we sank up to our hips in the deep snow. Eventually we got to less steep slopes, and as we neared the village, the people came out to meet us with bread and water, and rang the church bell to let everyone know that we were safely back. We had such deep and painful sunburns that some could not come to work the next day.*



Figure 2.1: A map of Syria as it was when we lived there. Tyre, Sidon and Byblos are ancient Phoenician cities.



Figure 2.2: *The campus of the American University of Beirut.*



Figure 2.3: *AUB President Bayard Dodge and his family in 1930 (From Grace Dodge Guthrie's book "Legacy to Lebanon").*



Figure 2.4: *Climbing Mount Sannine in the winter.*



Figure 2.5: *A Lebanese man serving coffee.*



Figure 2.6: *An old Roman aqueduct and water wheel.*

## Chapter 3

# CROSSING THE DESERT

### 3.1 Reza Shah and the automobiles

Shortly after my parents arrived in Beirut, they were presented with the chance for an adventure: Reza Shah (the father of the Shah of Iran who was later overthrown by Khomeini) had ordered some automobiles. These had arrived in Beirut by ship, but they had to be driven across the desert to Teheran. Some young staff members at the AUB, my father included, were presented with the chance to drive the cars across the desert to Iran. Of course they said yes.

My mother's recollection of the event is as follows:

*Our next memorable adventure was crossing the Syrian desert in the summer, when the solar heat climbs to 165 degrees Fahrenheit, to Baghdad and then on to Teheran. Ben and five young men had a chance to deliver Essex cars to the Shah of Iran. This was in 1927, and conditions of travel were completely different than they are today. Ben took me as a passenger, and Harry Foote invited Lillian Lippencott, his fiancé. Besides Americans, there were several Arab drivers. Habib was the leader of the party. We could not speak Arabic, nor they English, so we were pretty much on our own in making preparations for the journey.*

*Damascus was our staging area, and we spent several days there getting ready. It was really a hazardous journey, as there were no roads at that time, and a broken axle or engine failure could result in a long wait in the desert, with hunger, thirst and attacks from marauding bands of Bedouins, all dangers to be reckoned with. We had to carry a good many five gallon tins of gasoline and water for the radiators and to drink. For drinking, we rinsed out an empty five gallon gasoline tin and inserted a rubber tube long enough to reach the front seat of the car, so we were equipped to quench our thirst without stopping.*

## 3.2 Stone-like bread and melted chocolate bars

*We bought wicker baskets in the bazaar, and a good supply of high-caloric foods: raisins, loaf sugar, chocolate, and long loaves of French bread, unwrapped of course, and sticking far out of the baskets. We also adapted our clothes to the occasion (as we thought), light summer things because of the heat, and pith helmets to guard against the sun.*

*At that time, the streets of Damascus were filled with Arab pilgrims returning from Mecca, sitting and sleeping on their rugs, waiting for a way to get across the desert. They wanted rides in our cars, and Habib wanted to take them, but it was several days before this could be arranged with the police. We had one pilgrim in our car, and we felt sorry for him, dressed in his thick camel's hair robe and a head cloth that reached below his shoulders. Also he had nothing to eat except a few loaves of Arab bread and some cucumbers.*

*About two o'clock in the afternoon we finally left Damascus and drove out into the wide burning Syrian desert in our open cars. We were a long caravan of cars driving one behind the other, and each charged never to lose sight of the car behind us. Our first stop was the desert fort of Rutba Wells, where it would be safe to rest for a few hours during the night.*

*The hot desert wind blew more fiercely than we had ever conceived of. It was so hot that that it hurt to take a deep breath, and our skin burned as though we were standing close to a furnace in an iron foundry. The dust came up in clouds and stuck to the cold cream with which we had plastered our faces. Our helmets sailed back on their chin straps, and it was useless to try to keep them on. The chocolate melted and ran all over and through the openings in the wicker baskets. Later we discovered that the bread was so hard that we could only break it with a wrench.*

*Our Arab pilgrim sat cross-legged on the back seat, wrapped in his heavy robe, with his head cloth up to his eyes, effectively conserving his body moisture and insulating him from the hot desert air. His thin bread became crisp, like a delicious cracker, and his cucumbers quenched his thirst. Now we envied him.*

## 3.3 (Almost) lost in the desert

*Eventually the sun went down - a wonderful relief from the almost unendurable heat. As dusk came on, it became less easy to keep track of the car behind, and when it was dark and the lights were turned on, we discovered that two cars were missing. All cars were stopped and parked in a big circle with headlights facing out, so that the lights would shine out in all directions and guide the missing cars to us. We waited a long time before they finally came in, and it was after midnight before we reached Rutba Wells Fort. We could only rest a*

few hours, as it was Habib's plan to take advantage of the cool morning hours for as much of the drive as possible.

The next day was torture, and one of the drivers collapsed from heat prostration. Lillian drove his car the rest of the way to Ramadi, a quarantine station on the Iraq border. We went to the local caravansary to spend the night, and found it hopping with fleas. As there had been a widespread plague epidemic, we declined to stay there, although the manager snatched the soiled sheets off the beds, popped them in the garden pool to wash them, and said that they would be dry in a few minutes. We went back to the quarantine station and slept on the roof - afraid of the beds even there.

### 3.4 The palace of the Parthian kings

The next day we arrived at Baghdad. We went directly to the YMCA, which was run by two delightful Englishmen, who had had earlier connections with Beirut. They made us most comfortable. We were forced to stay in Baghdad while we were immunized for plague. One evening we were surprised to be called upon by the American Consul. He invited us to go to his club for dinner. None of us had proper clothes, and we were extremely reluctant to go. He was so gracious and persuasive that we finally accepted - all except for poor Ben, who had already sent his good suit out to be washed.

The club was delightful, and the evening was a great success. We were introduced to a member of the Italian Embassy, who got it into his head that I was a divorcee, perhaps because all the others were unmarried. He invited me to go to see the famous Ctesiphon Arch the next morning. As he intended to include the others, they kept making surreptitious signs to me to accept. So we all went out the next morning to see this wonderful old ruin. It was a huge ancient palace, with an arched roof so vast that the RAF used to fly through it. It was the palace of the Parthian kings in 250 B.C., and later the capital of the Sassanians.

AUB students also called on us and invited us to a motor boat ride on the Tigris, and a wonderful fish dinner, cooked over an open fire, Arab style. We also visited the ancient city of Babylon. The heat was intense, but Harry Foote had his Breasted along and read the history as we viewed the remarkable remains.

In Baghdad we also saw the Shiite Ramadan procession, M'harem. It is a torchlight procession of men stripped to the waist beating themselves with chains to the rhythm of a chant. They beat themselves until the blood flows in mourning for the murder of an early saint, Hussein. Religious fever reaches a high pitch, and it is dangerous for foreigners to be on the street. They usually

*look on from a balcony or other secluded spot.*

### 3.5 Lunch at Reza Shah's summer palace

*The rest of the way to Iran was mostly through the mountains. We stayed at the mission in Kermanshah and saw the famous Behistun Rock with inscriptions which recorded the feats of the great king Darius the First. The Assyrian text made it possible to study the history of ancient Mesopotamia. Then we climbed the long ascent to the 8,000 foot high pass at Hamadan, the ancient Ecbatana of the Medes and the Persians. We were now on the high plateau where Teheran is located, and two days later we found ourselves at the beautiful ceramic arched gate to the city of Teheran.*

*The cars were successfully delivered, and the Shah arranged a luncheon for us in one of his lovely little palaces in the mountains. He was not present, and we never saw him. This was Reza Shah, the dictator who ruled with an iron hand, and whom everyone feared. But everywhere we saw signs of progress, for which he was largely responsible.*

*Al Tompkins and Phil Du Boise went on to Russia. Erv Sheets and Butler Tompkins went on a donkey trip with missionaries over the high Elburz Mountains to the Caspian. Harry Foote and Lilian Lippencott traveled through southern Iran to India. Ben and I returned to Beirut over the same route by which we had arrived.*

Erv Sheets, who was a handsome young staffite at the American University of Beirut, was soon to marry my mother's younger sister Laura.



Figure 3.1: *Roman ruins at Baalbek.*



Figure 3.2: *Baalbek, on the road to Damascus. Here we see a Roman temple, built on top of an ancient temple to Baal.*



Figure 3.3: *An extremely large stone near to Baalbek. It is hard to understand how the ancient people of the region moved it.*



Figure 3.4: *Damascus - the Street Called Straight.*



Figure 3.5: *At Damascus, preparing to start across the desert.*



Figure 3.6: *Still at Damascus, loading supplies of water and gasoline.*



Figure 3.7: *The convoy of cars on their way to Reza Shah.*



Figure 3.8: *A breakdown in the desert. The photo shown my father standing beside the car that he was driving.*



Figure 3.9: *Uncle Erv standing beside the old desert fort at Rutba Wells.*



Figure 3.10: *My mother in the garden of Nebuchadnezzar.*



Figure 3.11: *A café in Baghdad.*



Figure 3.12: *The Tigris.*



Figure 3.13: *Entering Tehran. The beautiful old gate of the city has unfortunately been torn down to make way for traffic.*



Figure 3.14: *The gate of Reza Shah's summer palace.*



Figure 3.15: *Lunch in the garden of the summer palace.*



Figure 3.16: *Reza Shah (1878-1944)*

## Chapter 4

# BANYAN TREES AND A STORK

### 4.1 Patterns on the wall

My parents moved into their house on the AUB campus in 1930. In 1931, after Gordon was born, my father built a summer house in the mountains. I was born in 1933. Here are my mother's recollections of these events:

*After the first years of our untenured stay were completed, we built a lovely home overlooking the sea, where we could sit at our dining table and see the big steamers coming into port, and the small boats loaded with watermelons etc. making for the harbor. About a year later Gordon was born. We had waited eight long years for him, and were full of joy and delight. He was a chubby little fellow, and looked like my side of the family. I could not get over the feeling that a little relative had come to visit.*

*Most families went to the mountains in the summer, but we never felt it to be necessary, and had kept cool with a long daily swim and sleeping on the roof. As soon as we had our baby, we decided to build a house in the mountains. We secured a piece of property with a good view of Mount Sannine in Shweir, one of the highest resorts. Ben went up in the spring vacation, and with the help of local workmen laid the foundation of our cabin. Right after the June commencement, he hired some students to help him, and they built an attractive cabin of wood - green on the outside, and forest brown on the inside, with a big window looking out towards Sannine. For good measure, Ben built the furniture too, making use of the trees that we had cut down for the house - bunks for the three tiny bedrooms, and rustic furniture. It all turned out beautifully, and mattresses made locally from beaten cotton were conceded by our guests to be top notch.*

*Gordon was a fine healthy baby, and when he was eighteen months old,*

*John was born. John was longer and thinner, but also very strong. Both our house in town and our cabin were well screened, with good water supplies, so none of us was ever sick.*

*After a series of so-so maids, Elmast came and stayed with us for many years. She was an Armenian woman who had escaped from the Turkish massacres at Marash, and who had lived through many years of hardship and insecurity. She was intelligent, efficient, and industrious, and we became very fond of her. We have kept in touch with her, and had her as a guest in Washington many years later.*

*Our two boys were the center of our lives, and they grew up in a most satisfactory way. Our big shady garden was a lovely place to play; the big banyan trees a perfect jungle gym; the birque a small swimming pool; a slide; a sand box. They were always good little boys.*

One of my first memories is the shadow of a pine tree outside the window of our house in Beirut, and the sound of the tram turning the corner by the gate of the American University, just up the hill from our house. The light from a street lamp passed through the branches of the pine, and cast a changing pattern of shadows on the white bedroom wall.

Our house had white walls, both outside and inside, and like many houses in southern Europe and the Middle East, it had a red tile roof. It had once been an old and somewhat decayed Beirut house, but with the help of an architect named Russell Larken my father had rebuilt and enlarged it. Among their additions was a living room with high French windows and a fireplace. Above the fireplace was a heavy, ornate iron panel (the invention of my father and Russell Larken) whose function, besides being decorative, was to conduct heat from the chimney out into the room, so the heat would not be wasted.

The living room had a flat roof, which served as a balcony; and on warm summer nights we sometimes slept there. Once, my father and mother had given a dinner party for which they had used their best silverware. When the guests had gone, they were so tired that they went to sleep on the balcony without clearing the silverware from the table. In the middle of the night, my father was wakened by a noise, and looking over the edge of the balcony he saw a burglar climbing up the French windows, only a few inches below him. My father gave a sudden huge shout, which frightened the burglar, so that he fell to the ground and ran to the end of the lawn, where he fell again, this time into a ravine. The burglar hurt his leg in the second fall, and whenever the story was told, I always felt sorry for him because of his injured leg.

Beirut has always been known as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Our house was in an especially beautiful position, with a view out over the sea wall to the Mediterranean and the Saint George Hotel. From the hotel,

the bay makes a long curve to the north, and much of the older part of the city looks out over the bay (near which, according to legend, Saint George killed his dragon). Behind the city are snow-capped mountains, where the famous cedars of Lebanon once grew in the days of the Phoenicians, and where a few cedars still survive. South of our house were the Pigeon Rocks, where the shoreline became steep and rocky, with sea-filled caves which we sometimes explored with a boat, and within which we found sea urchins, starfish and sea anemones.

Our house was on the campus of the American University of Beirut, and the wall which surrounded the campus passed by it, separating our house from the street. When I was four or five years old, I sometimes sat on the wall and shouted bad words in Arabic (whose meaning I did not understand) to people in the street, and learned even worse words from their laughing replies. I then tried the new words on the next people who passed.

Our garden, and in fact the whole campus of the university, had a special smell which I associate with Beirut - a smell of cyprus trees and of semi-tropical flowers and plants. Among the trees and flowers were outcroppings of rock, on which my brother Gordon and I climbed, and on which we sometimes were able to catch small lizards. Occasionally the lizards escaped by dropping their tails, and we were left holding a twitching tail while the lizard went off to grow a new one.

We also climbed in the banyan trees that grew in our garden. Long hair-like roots grew down from the banyan trees, and whenever a root reached the ground, it thickened into a new trunk. In this way, the banyan trees extended themselves, each tree becoming almost a small forest, with hundreds of trunks.

The largest of our banyan trees surrounded a pool, where our pet stork lived. We gave it freshly-caught fish, bought from the local fishermen. The stork lived happily in our garden for a long time, but finally it died after swallowing a ping-pong ball.

My mother had a wonderful helper, named Elmast Gurgouzian. Elmast was a refugee Armenian girl, whose parents had been killed in the Turkish massacres. She cooked and helped with cleaning the house. She also cared for Gordon and for me, and taught us to sing many songs in Armenian. I still remember how to sing "London Bridge is Falling Down" in Armenian. Even after leaving Beirut at the start of World War II, my parents kept in contact with Elmast. Very many years later Elmast visited us in Bethesda, Md., bringing with her as a gift a beautiful hand-embroidered tablecloth.

One of the special features of living in Beirut was that we were not allowed to drink milk for fear of getting undulant fever, (sometimes called Malta fever). Instead we drank imported milk powder mixed with water. The particular brand that we used was called "Klim", which is "milk" spelled backwards. For



Figure 4.1: *My parents, standing in front of their house in Beirut. It had been an old and somewhat decayed Arab house. My father had it rebuilt and enlarged with the help of an architect named Russell Larken.*

many years afterwards, I liked powdered milk better than the fresh kind.

Every year a big wooden box arrived by sea from the Montgomery Ward mail-order firm. It was always exciting to see the box opened, and to try on new shoes and new clothes, ordered from the United States.



Figure 4.2: *Newborn.*



Figure 4.3: *Gordon, 1936.*



Figure 4.4: *John, 1936.*



Figure 4.5: *One of our banyan trees. Long, hair-like roots grow down from the branches, and when they reach the ground, they develop into new trunks.*



Figure 4.6: *Some photos that my mother took of Gordon and me in our Beirut garden.*



Figure 4.7: *More of my mother's photos.*



Figure 4.8: *Our house in Beirut, into which my parents moved in 1930. The bouganvillia was planted by my father when it was only a stick about eight inches long. Many years later, in Washington, a friend was showing us photos that he had taken in Beirut, and he showed us this one, not knowing that it was the house where we had lived. He had just taken the photo because he liked the bouganvillia!*



Figure 4.9: *The garden of our house in Beirut..*



Figure 4.10: *The living room of our house in Beirut. The carpet was very old even when my parents bought it in 1930. We still have it today.*



Figure 4.11: *The dining room, with its high French windows.*

## 4.2 Swine of Syria

I am extremely grateful for the rather unusual upbringing that my parents gave to Gordon and to me. My mother and father were both strong believers in rationality and in science, and therefore our upbringing was not at all authoritarian. We were never told, “Do this because I say so.” If we were told to do something, we were always allowed to ask for the rational reason behind the command. For example, Gordon and I were told that we had to learn to eat every kind of food regardless of whether we liked it or not. What was the reason for this? We had a right to ask, and we did ask. “Suppose you one day marry a girl who likes nothing but beans”, my mother answered, when I protested that I hated them. This seemed like a good answer, so I submitted to a rule that required me to eat one bean for every year that I was old, in those days not a very severe requirement.

Gordon and I were also required to follow conventional table manners when eating our food, and the rationality of this requirement was explained to us in the following way. In life, they explained, it pays to have good conventional manners, and to eat peas with a fork, even though a spoon would be more efficient. My mother elaborated on this concept by pointing to the example of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was then President of the United States. “Roosevelt is our great American revolutionary”, my mother told us, “He has achieved great social reforms. How did he do this? By having excellent conventional manners!” (My father said nothing at this point, and in fact he completely disagreed with my mother’s admiration of Roosevelt. My father believed that the social security system introduced by Roosevelt had undermined the traditional American principle of self-reliance.)

Gordon and I were still not completely satisfied. Of course, we understood why we should use good conventional table manners when we were guests at another house, but why should we use them at home when no one was watching? This protest was again quelled by a rational answer: If we only used good manners when we were guests, they would not come naturally. On the occasions when we were guests, our whole attention would be focused on eating correctly, and no attention would be left over for the conversation.

The weight of all these rational answers forced us into a mold that we found uncomfortable, but we followed it six out of seven days during each week. My parents decided that on the seventh day we ought to be allowed a little relief, so one day each week we were allowed to eat our food in any way that we liked. Gordon and I did so very happily, with exaggeratedly bad manners, and we were more contented to follow a strict regime on the other six days. Other families on the campus had similar systems, and in fact the AUB children formed a club, the “Swine of Syria”, dedicated to sloppy eating, and originally

started by the Dodge family.

There is a story about the Swine of Syria: The Rockefeller family contributed very generously to the American University of Beirut, and of course when Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller visited President Dodge and his family in Beirut during the 1920's, the Dodges were anxious to entertain them as nicely as possible. However, at breakfast, when Mrs. Rockefeller opened her soft-boiled egg, she hit it with her knife in a clumsy way, causing the contents of the egg to spill out over the table cloth. One of the Dodge children immediately cried out jubilantly, "SOS President!" Despite the efforts of President and Mrs. Dodge to prevent her from finding out the meaning of this, Mrs. Rockefeller eventually discovered that she had been elected to the Presidency of the Swine of Syria.

Besides allowing us to challenge orders, demanding a rational explanation of them, my parents also were enormously patient in answering questions that Gordon and I asked. One day when I said "It's exactly two o'clock", my father answered, "It cannot be exactly two o'clock. It must either be a little before or else a little after." A long conversation followed, as I asked him to explain what he meant. He answered that if a moment in time is chosen at random, greater and greater magnification of the time scale would always reveal that it is either a little before the hour or a little after. A randomly chosen moment can never be "exactly two o'clock". I then asked, what about a needle, can it be infinitely sharp, or will it appear blunt at some very high magnification? My father answered that needles cannot be infinitely sharp because they are made of atoms, and at some magnification one would see the atoms, so that the point would appear to be blunt. The image of the blunt needle point still stays vividly in my imagination more than 70 years later.

I remember another effort by my father to educate Gordon and me: He brought home from his laboratory a semipermeable membrane and explained how it functioned. Then, with the help of the semipermeable membrane, my father demonstrated for us the phenomenon of osmotic pressure. He also explained the role of semipermeable membranes in the human body. I remember afterwards having a dream in which I constructed a small, functioning model of a human being using semipermeable membranes.

When we were three or four years old, Gordon and I had some interesting plans for the future. We realized that at some point in the future we would have to get married. Our plan was that to save money, and also for the sake of comradeship, we would only have one wife between us. We would share her. In spite of the merits of this plan our lives did not work out that way.

I feel grateful for the early indoctrination in rationality that I received from my parents, and I think that Gordon feels the same, although the world, as it revealed itself when we became older, proved to be far from rational.

### 4.3 Scorpions and frogs

During most of the year, the weather in Beirut was very pleasant, but during the summers it became too hot and humid to be comfortable. Usually the families of the Americans who taught at the university spent the summers in the mountains, while the men stayed in the city and worked despite the heat. My father had designed and built a cabin for us near to the mountain village of Shweir. It was on a rocky slope, surrounded by pine trees, with a view across the valley towards Mount Sannine. President Dodge's family had a summer house 200 feet down the mountain slope from ours. I can remember the pleasure of leaping from rock to rock during our summers in Shweir, and the wonderful smell of the pine trees.

When we opened the Shweir cabin after a winter's absence, we had to be careful of scorpions. We sometimes found them behind the cushions of chairs, and sometimes they fell on us when we opened a door. However, the most dramatic scorpion incident didn't happen to us, but to a friend. The lady in question put on her shoes one morning, and felt something inside one of them. After wiggling her toes a bit, she took off the shoe and looked inside. She found that by wiggling her toes, she had killed a scorpion. The confined space of the shoe had prevented it from swinging its tail around to sting her.

The story about frogs has to do with Grandma Avery (my father's mother, Lavancha Walker Avery). She stayed with us in Beirut for a while, and traveled up to the mountain cabin in Shweir with the family. However, before leaving for Shweir, she became worried about the tadpoles living in the pool in our Beirut garden. Would they get enough to eat while we were away? Would they be safe? To be sure that the tadpoles would be safe, Grandma Avery caught them all and put them into a large glass jar with water. This jar she took with us to the mountains, and she released the tadpoles into a pool near to our cabin. After caring for the tadpoles the whole summer, Grandma Avery was very pleased with the spectacle of hundreds of tiny frogs hopping down the mountainside. Hopefully the frogs were as happy in their new home as they would have been in Beirut.

When I was two years old, I ran away from home (home being the Shweir cabin). I ran away because I had been threatened with a haircut, which for some reason I did not want. I think that I was afraid that it might hurt. I decided that the best plan was to walk from Shweir down to the city of Beirut, and I was well on the way before anyone noticed that I was missing. My mother and father called out the Boy Scouts to help in the search for me, but I was finally found by a man who watered the dirt roads to keep the dust down. He brought me back in his horse-drawn watering cart.

The cabin in Shweir had a terrace where we sometimes sat and listened to

records, played on a mechanical gramophone which we wound up with a hand crank. Although Gordon and I were only a few years old, we had received the gramophone as a gift from our parents. They hoped that we would not break it, and we never did.

The terrace of the Shweir cabin was also a place where a lady from the village came to bake bread for us. She made a fire from pine branches, and then above the fire, resting on some stones, she placed a sheet of iron on which she baked enormous thin sheets of Arab bread one at a time.

## 4.4 Mippy goes and hides

Sometimes we visited the mountain villages Shimlan and Alleh, where the families of other American professors at the AUB had their summer homes. The Kerrs, Dodds, Smiths, Crawfords, Wests, and Levitts had children roughly the same age as Gordon and myself, and therefore we greatly enjoyed these visits. The American families had joined together and bought land on the top of a mountain above the village of Shimlan. In the center of their mountaintop community was a tennis court, and every summer the court was the scene of a tournament or “tennis ladder”. Near the tennis court was a place for a fire with a circle of stones for sitting. In the summer evenings, the families in Shimlan usually gathered there and sang around the campfire. Among the pine trees that surrounded the tennis court, the Shimlan families had built summer houses of stone and cement. Since there was no water on the mountain top, the houses were arranged so that rainwater was collected on their flat roofs and stored in cisterns. Near to the Shimlan community was a flat field where the various families usually celebrated the Fourth of July with a baseball game, horseshoe pitching and fireworks. At one of these celebrations, I remember seeing the adults fill a large home-made tissue-paper balloon with hot air so that it floated off into the sky.

Behind the Shimlan mountaintop was a valley where the American families often went for hikes. At the bottom of the valley was a deep, quiet pool, where they went swimming. They nick-named the place “Tom Sawyer’s”. Another favorite place for walking was the gun road, where artillery pieces had been placed during World War I, so that they could fire down at ships in the harbor. I remember walking along the gun road with the family and finding, not old artillery shells, but old spent shotgun shells that had been used by hunters.

Near the village of Alleh, we children used to play various games in the Levitts’ large yard. One of the games was called “kick the can”, and another “Mippy goes and hides”. “Mippy” was our nick-name for Alan West, the son the chemistry professor. I’m not sure why it was always his turn to hide.



Figure 4.12: *Our summer house in Schweir.*



Figure 4.13: *A lady from the village made Arab bread over an open fire.*

## 4.5 Another war

Concerning the start of World War II, my mother wrote:

*In 1935 we began to be aware of Hitler's oppressive measures in Germany. The Rockefeller [Foundation] rescued two distinguished scientists and sent them to Beirut. Dr. Albert Oppenheimer was a Jew, a radiologist, and Dr. Otto Kraye was a German who had protested [against] the dismissal of Jewish colleagues. Dr. Kraye later became the head of the Department of Pharmacology at Harvard University, and upon his retirement, his picture was on the cover of Life Magazine as one of Harvard's most loved professors.*

*As the years passed, international tensions increased, and in 1937, the French began concentrating troops in Lebanon - at that time a French mandate. Shore guns were mounted not half a mile from our house. We all began to store supplies - 100 pound bags of rice, sugar, flour, etc. As war became more of a certainty, we decided that it was reckless and unnecessary to subject our little boys to the hazards of probable fighting in that region. During the First World War, starvation had been widespread in Lebanon, and American families lived in tense and uncertain circumstances. Several mothers with small children escaped through Turkey, making the journey over the mountains (where the Baghdad railway was still unfinished) with horses and wagons. So Gordon and John and I took a steamer home, and I went back to the University of Michigan as a bacteriologist.*

*The war got off to a slow start, and there was still transportation through the Mediterranean in 1939, when Ben's furlough was due, [so] he decided to join us in Ann Arbor for six months. During that time, the war became intense, and it was uncertain whether the university could stay open or not. President Dodge asked all those who were already in America to look for jobs to wait out the time of uncertainty.*

My mother, Gordon and I sailed from Beirut in 1938. I was five years old at the time. I remember standing on the deck of the ship that was taking us out of Beirut's harbor. Flashes of light came from the mountains, where our friends were signaling to us with mirrors. The ship had a wonderful smell of tar and fuel oil. Lifeboats lined the upper deck, and the railings were sufficiently open to make my mother nervous. She feared that Gordon or I might slip through the openings into the sea. I also remember looking out of the porthole of our cabin at a volcanic mountain, perhaps Vesuvius.

## 4.6 Ann Arbor again

In Ann Arbor, we lived in an apartment on Church Street, together with my cousin Margaret Avery (Uncle Gordon's beautiful daughter, named after my

mother) who was studying at the University of Michigan. Margaret liked to eat everything that happened to be in the refrigerator, and knowing this, Gordon and I prepared an April Fool's joke for her. We made what looked like a desert, but the whipped cream was really foam from soap powder, whipped up with an egg beater. To make us happy, Margaret pretended to be fooled by this fake desert, and she told us that she had taken a big bite of it.

My mother energetically arranged a French class for a few of the pupils at the local school, so that Gordon and I could continue with the language, which we had begun to study in Beirut. I remember playing games in French, and learning some French poems for children.

I remember Gordon telling me one day, "Did you know that there is a man who can jump over houses?" When I did not believe him, he took me to the local drug store and showed me some Superman comic books. The Printed Word was there in front of me, confirming Gordon's astonishing assertion.

Gordon and I enjoyed the cold Michigan winter, and built snow forts for snow-ball battles with the local boys of our age. Gordon was the leader of one gang of small boys, and someone called Moyer Bleakman was the leader of the rival gang. However, when the snow-ball battles were not going on, we played happily with Moyer Bleakman and his set of electric trains.

## 4.7 Pine Lodge

During this period Gordon and I also had some wonderful times with our cousins Roger and Stan Sheets, the sons of Aunt Laura and Uncle Erv. The Sheets family had a summer home called Pine Lodge on the shores of Lake Michigan not far from Grand Haven, and we stayed with them there for some months, both in the summer and in the winter. On winter mornings we took turns getting up to build the fire, and then all sat in front of the fireplace wrapped in blankets.

In those days, Lake Michigan was so full of fish that Aunt Laura sometime said to us "Let's have fish for supper tonight. I'll need about 20 perch." and we replied, "OK, we'll be back with them in an hour". When we fished off the pier, we could put down a line with two or three baited hooks, and pull it up a minute later with a fish on each hook.

At Pine Lodge we also made our own root beer by boiling the roots of small sassafras trees that we had dug up, and we played endless games of Molopoly.

On the beach not far from Pine Lodge there was a roller-skating rink, where we worked as "skate boys", putting on the skates of customers. Usually the tip was only five cents, but in those days that was enough to buy a candy bar.

## 4.8 World War II comes to Beirut

Meanwhile in Beirut, the situation was serious. Wartime regulations and black-outs began in 1939. After the fall of Paris in 1940, the Vichy government was in control of Lebanon, and Beirut was full of Italian and German troops.

Describing this period, President Bayard Dodge wrote:

*The Vichy régime in Beirut lasted from the early summer of 1940 until July 15, 1941. Prices rose, as petroleum products, sugar, rice and all sorts of imported goods became rare. Large supplies of grain disappeared and newspapers were filled with pro-German propaganda [which gained steadily in intensity. By May, 1941], the Germans had control of the entire region between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. Everybody took it for granted that the German conquest of Greece and Crete would be followed by a similar invasion of Lebanon and Syria...*

President Dodge stayed in Beirut but most of the American and European members of the AUB faculty left for British-controlled Palestine with only a few hours notice. The students from outside the French mandated territory were sent home, but the university remained open for the remaining students. For thirteen months there was a virtual blitz, with bombardments night after night.

In her book, “Legacy to Lebanon”, Grace Dodge Guthrie has described her parent’s experiences with the following words:

*On June 12, 1940, a very ill soldier whom [my mother] had seen in the morning, died in the early afternoon. At 3:15 the next morning my parents heard planes flying low, severe antiaircraft attacks and machine-gun firing. Three large pieces of flying shrapnel, streaking red in the night, dropped in the garden, the porch roof, and extensively in the AUB grounds. When she visited the prisoners and the wounded in the military hospital, ambulances were arriving with badly wounded Lebanese, Colonials, and two British dead bodies.*

*A year later, at 4:15 a.m. on June 16, 1941, [my parents] were roused by loud but distant gunfire off the point out at sea. Soon the sky glowed with bright flares, and the air was rent by rapid firing. Two French destroyers were repulsing an attack by five British boats off the point, and guns were firing on shore. Later that morning, most trucks, busses and cars were commandeered. It was becoming increasingly difficult for people to find transport to evacuate...*

*On 23rd June, Mother reported “the biggest battle yet: flares, machine-guns, antiaircraft guns, reconnaissance planes and big guns on shore. British*

*are attacking villages, Abeih ([our] first summer home) etc. Much negotiation is going on between General Dentz and the British... One of our soldier patients told the doctor that many of his regiment went over to de Gaulle in South Lebanon."*

*On July 1st, a common occurrence during the war years, water and electricity were cut off all day. After bad raids all night, the Beirut radio went out. A shell burst on the AUB campus. Bombs and guns continued to shake the houses with earsplitting noise for six straight nights. Stores were burned and houses demolished. Masses of people were escaping to the mountains and the campus filling up at night with people seeking safety.*

*On the morning of July 10th the French scuttled an old British ship near the St. Georges Hotel. A second ship was blown up at noon and a third British oil boat burned in the afternoon. My parents visited the port and watched the enormous clouds of black smoke and flames. The French High Command were burning papers and packing to go north.*

The end of the fighting in Beirut came on July 14, 1941. President Dodge wrote:

*In the middle of the night the university watchman picked up a piece of green paper, dropped from a British plane. He woke up the Director of Grounds and Buildings, who brought it to Marquand House. The paper was an ultimatum, which stated that unless General Dentz should stop his resistance before daybreak, the Free French and British would bombard Beirut.*

*When Consul General Engert<sup>1</sup> saw the ultimatum, he called on General Dentz, who, clad in his pajamas, talked with him for two hours and finally agreed to make an armistice.*

*The armistice was signed at Acre on July 14, 1941... On July 15th the Australian troops entered Beirut, and the next day the French and British Generals, Catroux and Wilson, made an official entry. When General de Gaulle reached the city, he and General Catroux very courteously called at Marquand House.*

Mrs. Dodge wrote to her daughter Grace;

*We'll never forget the day de Gaulle came for a tea party in our garden!*

Through General de Gaulle's influence, Lebanon obtained its independence, not only from France but also from Syria. In 1943 the first Lebanese elections were held. At the time the majority of Lebanese citizens were Christians, but Muslims formed a large minority. Government posts were carefully balanced to give representation to both groups.

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<sup>1</sup>Cornelius Van H. Engert was the American Consul. He was living with the Dodges at Marquand House because his own house was exposed to shelling.



Figure 4.14: *Professor Douglas Cruikshank, one of my parents' friends in Beirut, discovers some Roman artefacts.*

# Chapter 5

## DEAN OF MEDICINE

### 5.1 Pill hill

Regarding our move to Boston, my mother wrote:

*Without anyone to intercede for him, Ben obtained the position of Dean of Medicine at Boston University. The only bit of outside influence was that Mr. Clarence Avery, also a descendent of Christopher Avery, was a trustee of the university. So, after a brief stay at New Haven, where Ben was invited as Visiting Professor of Anatomy at Yale, we went to Boston and lived on "Pill Hill" in Brookline. Here we were neighbors of Drs. Chester Keifer, Bill Castle, Pratt of the Pratt Clinic, Shields Warren, and other medical luminaries. We purchased our house in Brookline from Mr. Gorham Dana, an old line Bostonian. Mrs. Dana gave a reception for us, and we were most warmly taken into their circle of friends - top drawer New Englanders.*

*One of the most cherished experiences of that time [was] coming to know the strength and depth of the New England character. They maintained their decorum down to the last detail. Evening dress was the rule at dinners, and even at our five-handed eucre parties, and the Shakespeare reading circle. But their sense of civic responsibility was more than skin deep - it was bone and sinew deep. They served year after year on hospital boards, as trustees of educational institutions, and in civil offices. They gave money with equal conscience and dedication.*

*We also had a warm and rewarding relationship with President and Mrs. Marsh, of Boston University. Ben was a successful dean, and had fine rapport with students, faculty and administration. We also found the public schools to be excellent, and our boys made outstanding records there.*

My only memory of the time that my father spent lecturing at Yale is a nearby Atlantic beach, where we saw many thousands of horseshoe crabs

crawling onto the shore to mate and lay eggs. My parents explained that horseshoe crabs are an extremely ancient life-form. They certainly looked strange, with their long spike-like tails and leathery shells.

When we moved into the house at 41 Allerton Street in Brookline (a suburb of Boston), I had recurrent dreams of returning to Beirut. Our house had a large garden, with many paths. In my dream, I could find a path leading back to our garden in Beirut. We often saw our old friends from Beirut, the families of American professors who had returned to the United States because of the war.

World War II was raging in other parts of the world, but it did not affect our lives very much. I remember the adults listening with serious faces to the radio reports of Pearl Harbor and Roosevelt's declaration of war, and I remember my father saying, "So now we are in it". There were also blackouts and shortages, but beyond that, life went on in a very normal way.

The hill where our house in Brookline stood was nicknamed "Pill Hill" because of the many medical doctors who lived there. At the bottom of the hill was Fenway Park, a long park that followed a stream all the way all the way to central Boston, past the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, finally ending at the Charles River. It was also possible to follow Fenway Park upstream from Brookline. It ended at a lake, where we sometimes went ice-skating in the winter.

Our house had three stories and a basement, and it was built of wood in the New England style. The house had been built at a time when it was common for people to have servants. There was a button in the center of the dining room floor. The idea was that the hostess could reach the button with her foot, and ring for the maid to bring the next course. Also, the third floor was designed to be the servants' quarters; there was a back stairway to be used by them, and there were speaking-tubes in the walls for communicating.

From the third floor, we could go up still higher, because on top of the roof of the house there was a porch with railings, called a "widow's walk". Old houses near to the New England coastline sometimes had this feature. The name "widow's walk" came from the idea that the wife of a seafaring man could pace up and down on this rooftop porch, gazing out to sea and hoping for a glimpse of the sail of her husband's returning ship.

Gordon and I greatly enjoyed the basement of our house because my father made a workshop there. I used the workshop to manufacture slingshots for the local children out of twisted coat hanger wire and rubber bands. Everyone agreed that my slingshots were the best, and they came to me whenever they wanted one. I was flattered by this recognition, and I gladly made as many slingshots as the others wanted.



Figure 5.1: *Our house on “Pill Hill” in Brookline, a suburb of Boston.*



Figure 5.2: *My father's mother, Lavanha Walker Avery, lived with us in Brookline. She was an old lady at the time.*

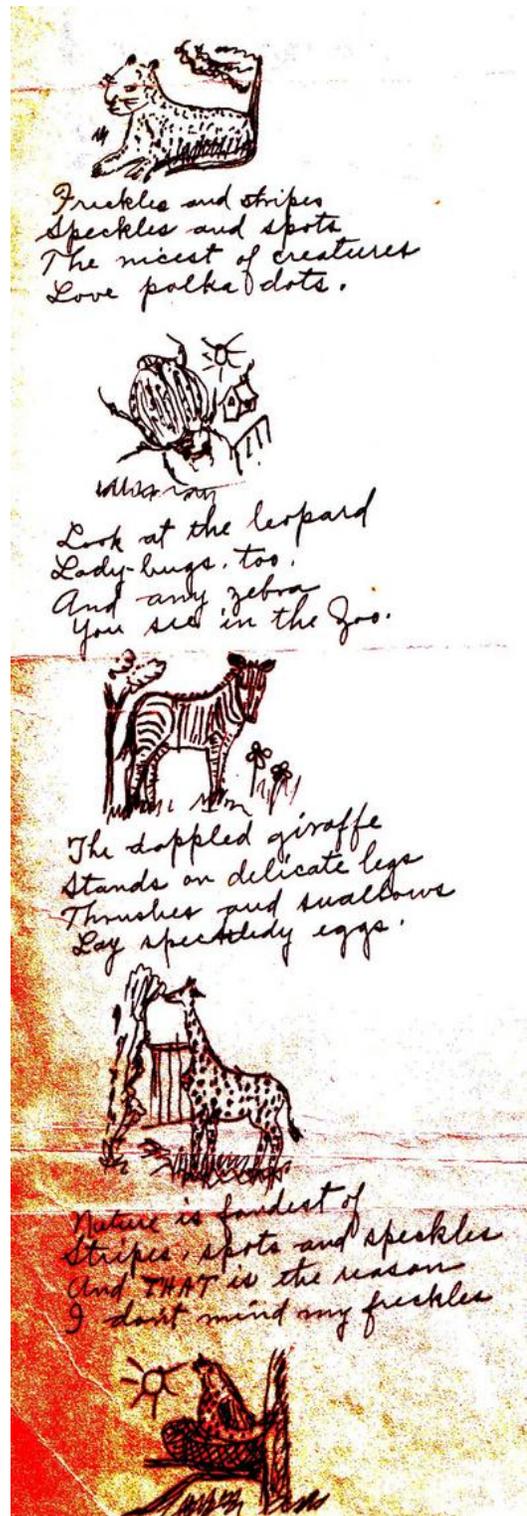


Figure 5.3: Here is one of the many poems that Grandma Avery wrote for children and illustrated with her own drawings.

GLOBE—JANUARY 5, 1941

# Sheiks and Skis in Syria

Dr. Bennett F. Avery, New Dean of B. U. Medical School, Says Americans Are Tops in Near East—Weygand's Influence Kept French Armies in Syria From Joining de Gaulle



B. U. MEDICAL SCHOOL'S NEW DEAN  
Dr. Bennett F. Avery.

By K. S. BARTLETT

A youthful-looking, thinish man with a shy, friendly manner and most eager eyes behind inconspicuous, rimless glasses sat at an old desk in a small, crowded office and rather nervously tried to answer the questions fired at him by reporters.

It was, clearly, a much worse ordeal than crossing a possibly sand-dusted desert had ever been for Dr. Bennett F. Avery, newly appointed dean of Boston University's 92-year-old medical school. Deserts and sandbars, potential or actual, must be more or less familiar to a man only recently returned from 14 years in the Near East. American reports are much tougher, although

before the collapse of France, but from what he saw himself and from what he has since heard from friends he is convinced that it was the influence of Gen. Maxime Weygand which prevented the French Armies in Syria from turning to the "Free France" organization of Gen. Charles de Gaulle. Weygand was in command of the Allied forces in Syria until recalled to France to replace Maurice Gamelin as commander-in-chief of the Army in France.

#### Anxious For Independence

"The Syrians are very anxious for independence," Dr. Avery told the Globe reporter last week. "They don't like the French mandate, not because of prejudice against the French but because they don't want any mandate at all. Still I don't think they would hit France even if she is down. Very few of the Syrians are pro-Nazi and those only because they have been convinced that the Nazis would give them their



#### DEAN AVERY'S FAMILY

Mrs. Avery with John 1 1/2 (seated) and Gordon 9 (standing).

largely due to the French mandate.

"The larger cities now have sewerage systems and the water supplies of the larger towns and villages have been improved," he said.

"There still remains the problem of almost complete lack of sanitation and hygienic knowledge in the mountain villages and some of the more remote villages in the plains. The result is that infant mortality is very high. One of the best surveys made recently in the organization

one would probably pick them up in the collection of Oriental antiquities as his favorite recreation, but—

"Yes, I have one hobby," he said with a smile. "It's athletics. When I was in high school I played football and basket ball and I was on the all-treatment football team at Michigan. Harvard? Yes, indeed, I've seen him. I saw him play in California last fall and he scored several touchdowns, one from the kick-off."

Figure 5.4: An article in the Boston Globe.



## 5.2 Trying to make explosions

Using the basement workshop, my father showed Gordon and me how to make a model water wheel, and how to revive used-up batteries by filling them with a new solution of electrolyte. I also had a chemistry set with which I unsuccessfully tried to make explosions. The reason for this lack of success (I discovered later) was that the makers of chemistry sets for children purposely omit the ingredients necessary for explosives - for example, there are no nitrates. However, with the help of the neighbor's boys, Gordon and I finally had a little more success.

Our best friend was called Gardner Smith. His parents were both physicians; in fact they were co-directors of the Woman's Free Hospital which was not far away. In the hospital was a laboratory with a far less restricted range of chemicals. With Gardner's help, we obtained some nice iodine compounds with which we made some quite good explosions.

The two boys who lived immediately down the hill from us, Charlie and Tommy Thompson, were even more help. Their father was also a physician (like most fathers on Pill Hill), and for some reason he had a jar of metallic sodium in his basement. The jar was filled with oil to keep the metallic sodium away from moisture, and in the oil were slugs of the metal - soft enough to cut with a knife. We did cut it with a knife, and obtained tiny pieces of sodium. When we threw these crumbs into water, they zoomed around and burned in a dramatic way; if they were large enough they finally produced a small explosion.

Driven onward by these successes, we threw larger pieces of metallic sodium into water. Finally we threw a whole slug of the metal down a manhole into the water a few yards beneath. I put my eye to the hole to look, and just at that moment there was a large explosion, and a tiny piece of sodium flew up into my eye. I ran screaming to my mother who was luckily at home, and she bathed my eye in vinegar to neutralize the sodium hydroxide formed by the reaction of the sodium with water. Because of her prompt action there was not much harm done. I had to wear a patch over my eye for a few weeks, but I liked the patch and thought it looked pirate-like.

Gardner Smith had a younger sister called Nancy whom I used to carry around on my back. She called me "Oxel" because, as she said, I was as strong as an ox and as dumb as an ox. Another girl whom I also liked at that time was called Ishbel Kiefer. She was the daughter of my father's friend Chester Kiefer, who lived at the top of the hill. Nancy, Ishbel and I sometimes used to sit in the branches of a tree talking. We called ourselves "The Eagles Club" because we imagined ourselves to be rather eagle-like as we perched in the tree. Nancy had brown hair with bangs. Ishbel looked like an eight-year-old

version of the actress Betty Davis.

Ishbel's father, Dr. Chester Kiefer, was director of the Massachusetts General Hospital, and during that period he had the responsibility of administering the very limited supplies of penicillin that were then available in the United States. Since there was very little penicillin available, only extremely severe but not hopeless cases could have it. It was Dr. Kiefer's responsibility to decide in cases where there was a doubt. Whenever he was traveling, he gave this responsibility to my father.

One of my mother's ideas at that time was that Gordon ought to study the cello, while I ought to study the piano. Then, according to my mother's plan, we could play classical music together. The problem was that Gordon was ten times more musical than I. Our studies went on for a year, and at the end of that time Gordon could not only play the cello - he could also play the piano much better than I could. My parents wisely realized that I might get a complex from losing so heavily in a contest between siblings. They stopped my piano lessons and sent me instead to study sculpture in a class for children at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The classes there were a pure joy. The room where we worked on our sculptures was entered by "secret" door from the main galleries of the museum. A sky-light covered the entire room, and it had a huge heavy table where we worked. I made some statues that everyone admired - a standing lion and a bas relief showing a Paleolithic scene - and my self-esteem was restored.

During this period my mother read to us several good books. I especially remember "Farthest North" by the polar explorer and humanitarian, Fritjof Nansen. In the book Nansen described his plan to reach farther into the arctic than anyone else before him. He constructed a ship called the Fram, with a rounded bottom and especially strong hull. He and his crew sailed the Fram as far north as possible, and deliberately allowed it to be frozen into the polar ice as winter approached. Because of its rounded bottom, the Fram was lifted up by the pressure of the ice instead of being crushed. In his book, Nansen describes how, during the arctic winter, he played the Fram's organ to drown out the booming sounds of the pack-ice outside. Meanwhile ocean currents carried both the ice and the Fram farther and farther northward.

A particularly interesting passage of Nansen's book describes the results of an experiment that he and his men made when the weather improved. They drilled holes through the ice to the sea beneath, and studied samples of the water that they drew up through the holes. They were amazed by the richness of life under the polar ice, since they could hardly imagine that it could be supported by photosynthesis. The ice was too thick to allow penetration of the tiny amount of light that was available during the polar winter. Some other energy source must be supporting the rich plankton, Nansen concluded. But

what was that source? This question haunted me, and many years later, when I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I wrote a paper about it. I showed that in a cooling solution, chemical reactions could be driven by the fact their equilibrium was farther to the right at a lower temperature than at a higher one, but the paper was never published. The concept agrees with some current ideas about the origin of life: Some of the earliest life forms, predating photosynthesis, seem to have evolved in undersea volcanic water jets, the free-energy source being changes in chemical equilibrium during cooling.

Another book that I hugely enjoyed was Paul de Kruif's "Microbe Hunters". This I read myself. I re-read it until our copy of the book was falling to pieces. "Microbe Hunters" describes the lives of the early pioneers of bacteriology and modern medicine: Semmelweiss, Jenner, Pasteur, Menchnikov, Koch, Ehrlich and so on<sup>1</sup>. Inspired by the lives of these heroes, I spent hour after hour peering through the lenses of a good microscope that we happened to have at home. The microscope had high powers of magnification available, including an oil immersion lens. There were also blank slides and cover glasses. I especially enjoyed looking at the rich variety of organisms in samples of pond water.

### 5.3 Cereal stories

Every day when Gordon and I came home from school, we turned on the radio to listen to a number of programs that came on the air between 4 o'clock and dinner time. Typically each lasted only 15 minute per day, and most of the programs advertised breakfast foods. I heard people call them "serial stories" and misinterpreted this to mean "cereal stories". First in the day was "Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy". In this program Jack, Betty, Billy and Uncle Jim were always flying over the jungles of South America. Jack Armstrong advertised Wheaties, Breakfast of Champions. Then came "Tom Mix and his Ralston Straight-Shooters" which advertised another breakfast food, Ralstons. "Little Orphan Annie" advertised Quaker Puffed Wheat Sparkies and Quaker Puffed Rice Sparkies. "Captain Midnight" was an exception since it advertised Ovaltine, a chocolate milk drink.

Finally, if we had time for it, there was "The Lone Ranger", which lasted half an hour. The program always started with an announcer saying dramatically: "The stories of his strength and courage, his daring and resourcefulness, have come down to us through the generations. From out of the past come the thundering hoof-beats of the great horse Silver. The Lone Ranger rides again!" Then one heard the loud voice of the mysterious masked man himself, "Hi-Oh Silver! Away!", followed by a more subdued exclamation by his faithful Indian

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<sup>1</sup>Birthe tells me that she also read and re-read "Microbe Hunters" when she was young.

companion, Tonto, “Get um up Scout!”

Earlier in the afternoons there were some radio programs that Gordon and I would never have listened to, even if we had been at home. These were the original soap operas, designed for housewives to listen to as they ironed shirts: “Mary Noble, Backstage Wife”, “The Story of Helen Trent”, “The Road of Life”, “Life Can Be Beautiful”, “Lorenzo Jones and his Wife, Belle”, and so on. Most of these programs advertised some form of soap, for example “Ivory Soap! Ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths percent pure! It floats!” - hence the name “soap operas” which these programs acquired.

In the evenings there were programs designed for the whole family. One of our favorites was “Charlie McCarthy”, featuring the famous ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his two dummies, Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd. In his nostalgic film “Radio Days”, Woodie Allen asks how it could have been possible for a ventriloquist to be successful on the radio. I don’t know the answer to this question, but so it was. Edgar Bergen asked “Mortimer, how can you be so stupid?” Mortimer answered “It’s easy once you get the hang of it”, and we all laughed.

Another favorite program was “I Love a Mystery”. There were various stories which continued for a number of weeks; then another unconnected story began. One story that we especially liked (although it was rather horrible) was called “Blood on the Cat”. Another favorite was “Stairway to the Sun”. It was about a mysterious high plateau in South America. It was thought to be unclimbable because of sheer cliffs on all sides. But a secret ancient Inca stairway was discovered, cut into the rock. By ascending this stairway, explorers discovered dinosaurs still living at the top of the plateau.

## 5.4 A huge hole

One day, for some reason that I do not remember, I started to dig a hole in our garden. It was in an empty part of the garden, near the line where our property bordered on the Thompson’s garden. When I dug a little way down through the topsoil, I came to a layer of sand. This made me want to know whether I would come to a different kind of soil if I dug deeper. For some reason my parents allowed me to do this. I continued to dig but found only sand although the hole became very deep and big. Finally Gordon came to watch, as well as Charlie and Tommy Thompson, and also the Thompson parents and my parents; and they began to help me. In the end, we hit on the plan of making the hole into an underground clubhouse. We all did this together. We made a small underground room, whose sides and roof were made of boards. The roof was covered over with earth, and the underground clubhouse contained a card

table, chairs and a lantern.

## 5.5 Judy and the dragon

For several years my mother's cousin Judy Smith lived with us on Pill Hill. She was the daughter of Grandma Scales' younger brother Benny, who had been killed by a horse leaving four children. Judy had been brought up by my mother's parents, and she lived with us while she was studying in Boston.

Judy was an extremely pretty girl of eighteen or so when she lived with us. She liked to dance, and taught me to do the "basic Jitterbug". Judy was also very talented as an artist, and she painted a dragon on our kitchen wall. The dragon was so enormous that it covered all four walls of the kitchen. In later life, Judy became quite famous as an artist, and she was able to sell her paintings for prices in the \$50,000 range.

Judy was not always called Judy. She was named after Grandma Scales, and thus she was originally called Fanny. However, by the 1940's, "fanny" had become a slang term for the part of one's anatomy on which one sits, and therefore Judy changed her name. Knowing this, Gordon and I tortured Judy when her boyfriends came to call, threatening to reveal that she was really called Fanny. But a bribe of 10 cents or so was usually enough to buy our silence.

Judy had many boyfriends. I remember one who entertained us by swallowing a live goldfish. Finally she met and married a fantastic person, Foster Lindley, who was studying theology at that time. My parents always said that Judy had wonderful luck, because on her first date with Foster, a black-out occurred, which helped them to overcome their shyness and cement their relationship. Judy and Foster were married in the living-room of our house. Foster later became the head of the philosophy department at the University of Connecticut, and also Dean of the Faculty for the University.

## 5.6 Grandma Avery

Another person who lived with us for a while was Grandma Avery. She was quite old at that time, but she still had a lively sense of humor. As proof of this I present you with a book of poems that she gave to me and to Gordon. The book was called "Darn Fool Ditties". Here are two that I happen to remember:

**We're lost!**

"We're lost!" the maiden shouted,  
 As she stumbled down the stairs.  
 "It's nearly half-past three A.M.,  
 And I haven't said my prayers!  
 My maiden heart has turned to stone,  
 My feet are turning too!  
 Tell Mother dear my last words were,  
 'Three cheers for the red white and blue!'  
 Yes three cheers, Rah! Rah! Rah!  
 For the red, Rah! Rah! Rah!  
 White and blue, Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!  
 Three more beers, Rah! Rah! Rah!  
 Two for me, Rah! Rah! Rah!  
 One for you, Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

**Dog eat dog**

Bowery corner - foggy night,  
 Passing crowd - 'lectric light,  
 German chef - can of tin,  
 Sausages are boiled within,  
 Yellow dog nearby prowls  
 Smells the sausage - softly growls,  
 Clumsy man - wooden leg,  
 Upsets boiler with his peg,  
 Spills the sausage - scatters wurst,  
 Yellow dog gets there first,  
 Grabs the sausage - splits the fog,  
 'Nother case of dog eat dog.

Would Grandma Avery have chosen such slightly unedifying poems for the consumption of her grandchildren if she had not kept her sense of humor?

**5.7 Director General of Public Health in Iran**

In 1943 my father was asked to go to Iran to serve as Director General of Public Health for the Allied Occupation Government. He was chosen for this position because of his knowledge of the Middle East and his fluency in French. Also, many of the leading physicians in the region had studied anatomy with

my father at the American University of Beirut, and were thus old friends.

This was the end of our stay in Boston. My mother wrote:

*In 1943 Ben was called to Washington and asked to go [to Iran as Director General of Public Health]. Supplies were being shipped to Russia via the southern Iranian ports, and transported overland. There was a typhus epidemic of such huge proportions that it was feared that this line of supply could not be continued. Most of the doctors on "Pill Hill" were already serving in some capacity, and Ben was eager to go. In no time at all, he was flown to Iran via South America and Africa. His orders were signed by Cordell Hull<sup>2</sup>.*

*The boys and I were left alone in the big house. Fuel was scarce, so that we were forced to keep our furnace at 56 degrees. The snow was deep, and the boys' school far away. So we decided to sell the big house and go to California. John, age ten, sold the house one morning, when he was home alone, to the first people who looked at it.*

*Packing and getting to California under wartime conditions was something of a nightmare. Uncle Don and Aunt Madeline Falconer took us into their home, or I am sure that we would have had to sleep on the street, as housing was so scarce. I finally obtained war housing by... getting a job at Cutter Laboratories - making tetanus and diphtheria antitoxins. We lived in California for two years.*

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<sup>2</sup>Cordell Hull was Roosevelt's Secretary of State from 1933 to 1944. He later received a Nobel Peace Prize for his leading role in establishing the United Nations.

# Chapter 6

## TEHRAN

### 6.1 Humming birds and sunshine

My mother's twin sister Aunt Madeline had married a promising young law student named Donald Falconer, the son of a state senator. After graduation, Uncle Don had specialized in cases involving inheritance, and had become quite wealthy. Early in 1944, when my mother, Gordon and I arrived in California, we stayed at their beautiful Spanish-style house on a hillside in Berkeley. The view looked out over San Francisco Bay and the garden was filled with flowers and hummingbirds. We had left Boston in the middle of winter. Remembering the Boston streets filled with dirty snow, and comparing these with Aunt Maddie's garden, I wondered why everyone did not move to California.

Soon Aunt Maddie and Uncle Don moved to an even larger and more beautiful house farther up the hill, and we moved with them. Their kindness and hospitality to us were really wonderful. They had two sons, Don Jr. who was the same age as Gordon, and Robbie, who was quite a bit younger. Aunt Maddie used to play the piano while Don Jr. sang. The result was very beautiful. Sometimes we played Monopoly with Uncle Don. During the game, he loved to make deals, and these always turned out in his favor, so he usually won. We also played ping-pong and Ma-Jong. Besides being good at Monopoly, Uncle Don was also extremely good at golf. His golf club in Tilden Park offered a Thanksgiving turkey as a prize for winning their yearly competition, and Uncle Don always won it. Aunt Maddie was confident that he would succeed, and she never bothered to buy a turkey.

After a while, my mother got a wartime job making vaccines at Cutter Laboratories, and we moved to a flat near to the University of California campus. I often took walks past the large Berkeley cyclotron where my two cousins, Avery Kerns and Quenten Kerns, were working. One day I found some pieces of graphite discarded outside the fence that surrounded the cyclotron.

I asked my two physicist cousins what the graphite was and what it was used for. Their answer was quite mysterious. They talked about ships that could cross the ocean using only a single lump of coal as fuel. I realize now that they were talking about nuclear power, since at that time the cyclotron was being used to separate the two isotopes of Uranium, U235 and U238.

Since we lived near to the University of California football stadium, the war sometimes entered our daily lives more than it did in Boston. This was because War Bond rallies were often held in the stadium, and for this purpose there were exhibitions where artillery pieces and tanks fired blank rounds, producing a deafening noise.

Looking back to that time, I realize that I was affected by wartime hysteria as much as everyone else. We all thought that Germans and Japanese were somehow less than human, and that the more of them that were killed the better. Today I am ashamed that I ever had such feelings, but it was a universally shared wartime mania, and as a young child I knew no better. Probably during the war, everyone in Germany and Japan had similar thoughts about the Allies.

## 6.2 The United Nations Charter

Regarding the founding of the United Nations, my mother wrote:

*The Founding Assembly of the United Nations was held in San Francisco during this time. I went with the boys and their cousin Don to have lunch at the St. Francis Hotel to rub shoulders with the distinguished guests living there. We had many friends among the delegates from the Near East. Forty-five of them were graduates of the American University of Beirut. Madeline and Don and I gave a reception for them in the Falconer's beautiful home in Berkeley. They came with the flags of many nations on their cars, and we were proud of them and of [the] AUB.*

I vividly remember the reception for the Near Eastern delegates, given by my mother, together with Aunt Maddie and Uncle Don. To especially honor Charles Malik and the American University of Beirut, there was a large cake bearing the Lebanese flag with its cedar tree emblem. Dr. Malik and his wife later sent a gracious note thanking us for the reception.



Figure 6.1: *Charles Malik, who attended our reception for Near Eastern delegates during the San Francisco Conference establishing the United Nations. My parents knew him well when he was a professor of philosophy at the American University of Beirut. He later helped to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also served as a chairman of the UN General Assembly.*

Hotel Mark Hopkins  
NORTH HILL  
San Francisco

June 6, 1945.

Dear Mrs. Avery & Mr. Falconer,

This is a late note, but it has been in my mind every day ever since we had the lovely tea-party at your home. Everybody, I find has enjoyed it very much and it certainly was most kind of you both to entertain us. My husband and I still feel sorry we were not able to enjoy it more fully by being there on time. But, we feel that it has all worked out very nicely.

Please, give our best regards to Mr. Falconer and best love to you & your children,  
over  
Sincerely yours,  
Eva Malik.

Figure 6.2: A thank-you note from Mrs. Malik.

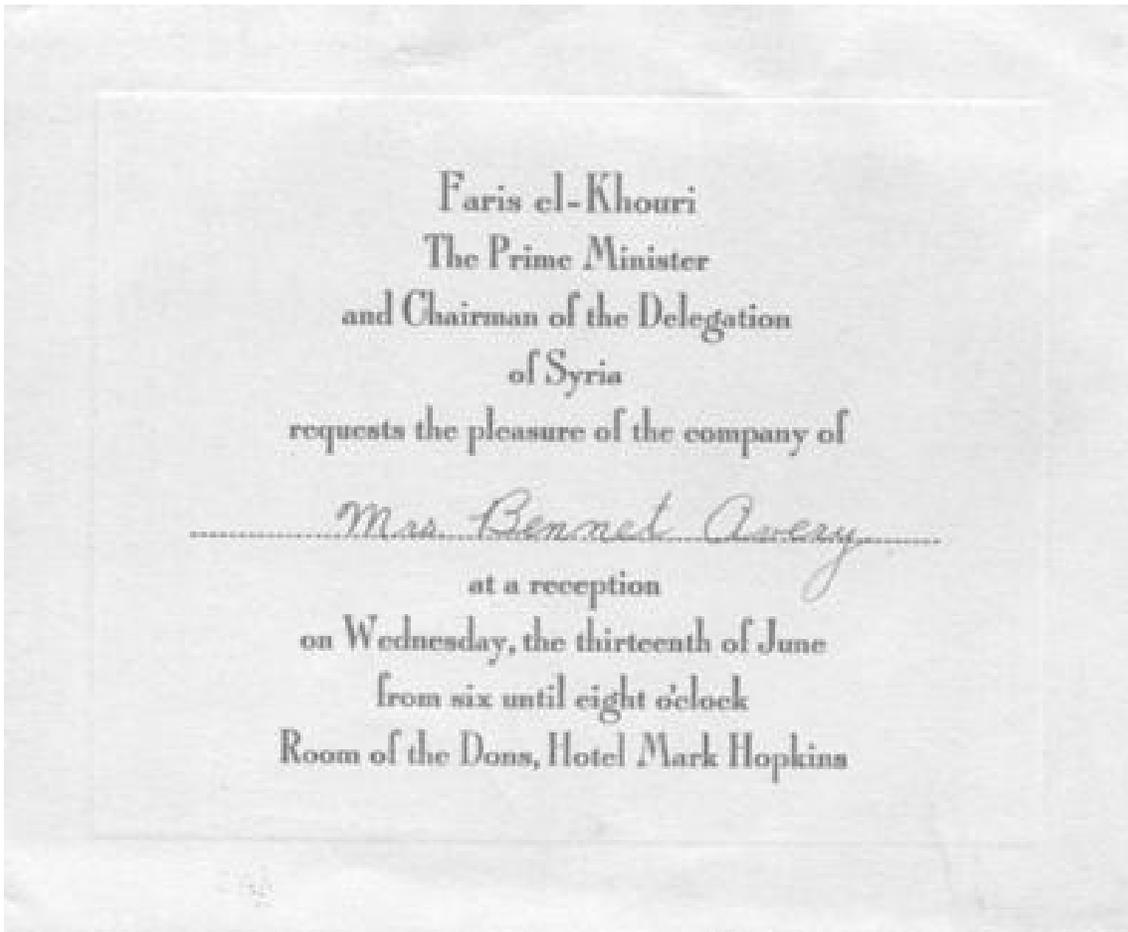


Figure 6.3: A reception given by the Prime Minister of Syria.



Figure 6.4: *Some of the delegates to the San Francisco Conference in front of Aunt Maddie's house*



Figure 6.5: A photo of Charles Malik with Eleanor Roosevelt, with whom he worked to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### 6.3 We sail on the Gripsholm

In 1945, we were allowed to travel to Tehran to rejoin my father. My mother wrote:

*The victory over Japan made it possible for us to join Ben in Iran. We sailed on the Swedish liner Gripsholm, which was chartered by the State Department for special use for relocating personnel and families. In Naples and Piraeus, we saw some awful consequences of war. Both harbors were full of sunken ships; docks and warehouses in ruins. Our destination was Haifa, where we took the Nairn bus to Baghdad. Then the boys and I traveled alone in a station wagon through the high mountains of Iran to the high plateau and the city of Tehran.*

My father had sent a list of things for my mother to buy and bring along to Tehran. Some of these things were quite difficult for her to find, especially under wartime conditions. Among the especially difficult items were a kerosene-burning refrigerator and a top hat for visiting the Shah. However, my mother finally found both the unusual refrigerator and a high silk hat large enough to fit my father, who had an especially large head.

The Swedish ship Gripsholm on which we sailed had been converted to a hospital ship during the war. We were aboard the first crossing on which

civilian family members were allowed. There were a few young boys my own age on board, and I played many games of chess with them.

When we reached Piraeus in Greece, the sight was appalling. All bridges and buildings were totally ruined by bombing, and the population was starving. When our ship threw garbage into the harbor, people came out in small boats to pick it up for food. Garbage was better than no food at all.

We finally reached Haifa, and the boxes containing the kerosene-burning refrigerator etc. were unloaded from the Gripsholm. The next step ought to have been to take an air-conditioned bus to Damascus and then across the desert to Baghdad. We had reservations, but when we landed in Haifa we discovered that the reservations were gone. Someone had bribed someone. My mother stood there on the dock at Haifa with two young children, a pile of boxes and no transportation! She did not collapse into tears as many would have done; she somehow arranged transportation for the boxes and reservations for us on an ancient and crowded bus.

There was no road across the desert in those days. Between Damascus and Baghdad the decrepit bus on which we were traveling drove in a convoy with two others, not single file but three abreast so that the passengers of each bus would not have to breathe in the plumes of dust produced by the other busses. Nevertheless, choking quantities of dust came up through the floorboards.

The aisles of the bus were filled with baggage, so it was impossible to move from our seats. There was a water container and a single cup, which was passed around from person to person. Everyone drank from it. At one point, in the middle of the day, the bus stopped. Everyone climbed over the baggage and out of the bus. The men walked a short distance into the desert on one side to relieve themselves, and the women did the same on the other side. I was too shy to urinate in such a public way, in plain sight of everyone, so I did not participate. This was a serious mistake, and I suffered horribly for it until we at last reached a village with a urinal.

Night fell, and we continued across the desert through the dark moonless night. At about midnight we stopped at Rutba Wells. There was nothing there at all except the old fort, a huge black shape that stood out against the star-filled sky. As we stood beside the bus, we looked out in every direction, and there was nothing to see except for the fort. The desert was totally flat, and there was no house and no vegetation anywhere in sight; but in the distance we could hear the howling of the Bedouin's dogs. I was 12 years old, an impressionable age, and the strangeness of the scene remains vividly printed on my memory.



Figure 6.6: *Sailing from New York on the Gripsholm in 1945*

## 6.4 The Levant Express

When we reached Baghdad, we spent the night in a hotel. The next day my mother, Gordon and I were all sick because of something that we had eaten; but it was not possible to delay very much. We had to leave Baghdad on the next leg of our journey. We traveled on “The Levant Express”, which was just a station wagon on which we three were the only passengers. Once again we drove across the desert, this time in the direction of the Iranian border.

When we reached the border, the guards welcomed us warmly and offered us tea. They knew that we were coming because of a message sent by my father. After crossing the border into Iran, we began to drive up into the mountains. Finally we reached the place where we were scheduled to stay for the night. We had an anti-insect aerosol can with us, and we were spraying the room, preparing to settle down for the night, when there was a knock on the door. It was my father. He had been too impatient to wait for us in Tehran, and he had come to meet us. We had not not seen him in two years. He was amazed by how much Gordon and I had grown. Here is my mother’s description of our meeting:

*The boys and I arrived at Hamadan (the first city of the high plateau of Iran) at sunset. We were exhausted after the long journey, which we had begun at 2.30 that morning, so we decided to have dinner in our hotel room. It had been brought to us, and we were feeling a bit revived, when there was a knock at the door. We opened the door, and there stood Ben - our darling father whom we had not seen for two years. He was looking brown and fit and handsome - smiling his special smile and hugging us all at once. He could hardly believe that the boys could have grown so much.*

*I can't remember how we ever got to bed - there was so much to talk about. But the next morning we set off in the big Packard, which Ben had just driven up from the Persian Gulf; our station wagon followed behind.*

## 6.5 A prince of the old dynasty

My mother's narrative continues:

*When we arrived at the house which Ben had prepared for us, we found that it was a mansion. All our servants - cook, butler [gardener], house boy, and chauffeur, were lined up to welcome us. Our greetings had to be in pantomime, as we could speak no Persian, and they could speak no English.*

*We entered the great front door and stood in a beautiful long hallway, with a graceful stairway at the end. On our right was a huge gold-framed French mirror. Doors opened into unbelievable rooms. There were two reception rooms, a library, a big ballroom, [and] a dining room to seat twenty-four guests. All together there were eighteen rooms. Everything was different in concept from the lovely but more modest homes that we had had in Beirut and Boston.*

*Eventually we got used to seated dinners of twelve to twenty-four guests, served by waiters wearing white gloves, and [we] were able to make friends with people in spite of the protocol. The American Ambassador became a close personal friend, and his boys shared rides to school with our boys. Ben often conferred with the Shah, and I was on the Red Lion and Sun (Iranian Red Cross) committee of Princess Shams, and went regularly to her palace for meetings.*

*The Iranians are an ancient and cultured people. High and low, [they] have a native refinement and charm. Many forms of feudalism were still in practice. For instance, a rich man might own several villages, but often the paternalism of these men was humane and kindly.*

Were there only eighteen rooms in that house, as my mother states, or were there nineteen, as I seem to remember? No matter! In any case it was a very big house, built for entertaining on a grand scale. The ballroom had a

raised platform for an orchestra, and on the wall above the orchestra platform there was a large Rubens-like painting of naked women. The wall of one of the living rooms consisted of mirrors, and these could be slid to one side, revealing a secret stairway down to a bar, with barstools and neon lights. Next to the bar was a *zorzamine* the same size as the ballroom, with tiled a floor, a pool and a fountain. In Iranian architecture, *zorzamines* are living rooms below ground level. They are used in the summer because they remain cool when other parts of the house would be too warm. The tiled floor and fountain of our *zorzamine* aided the cooling.

The house belonged to an important Iranian land owner who was spending some time in Paris. It had been convenient for him to rent his house to my father, and the servants went along with the deal, except for our chauffeur, Mhedi, who was from the Ministry of Health. The gardener was called Abou Gassim - a pleasant man in his forties. He had a bad back, and so a few of his duties had to be performed by my father, Gordon and myself. The water for bathing etc. came from a cistern, and it had to be pumped up to a tank on the roof of the house. This was theoretically Abou Gassim's duty, but because of his bad back, the pumping was done by us. The cistern was filled with water that came from a ditch beside the road, but hopefully the dirt settled out from the water after a long period in the cistern. Our drinking water we obtained from a well at the American Embassy.

To continue with the servants, the houseboy was called Sway. He had learned his English from the American Army, and in the mornings he often greeted my mother by saying cheerfully, "Good morning Mrs. Avery! It's cold like hell outside!"

There was also a fierce German Shepard dog who went with the house. He was called Farkash. If we walked quietly from the front steps to the gate, Farkash would permit it, but he would not permit us to throw a ball back and forth in the garden.

My mother says "Eventually we got used to seated dinners of twelve to twenty-four guests, served by waiters wearing white gloves..." We not only got used to it; we began to feel that this way of life was entirely natural. With gas-like dynamics, our vision of ourselves expanded into the available space.

As a symptom of this expanded vision, my mother one day brought home a prince to play with with Gordon and me. He belonged to the old Qajar dynasty, which had been overthrown by Reza Shah, but nevertheless, a prince is a prince. He was a pleasant boy, about ten years old. His first smiling words were "Do you know jazz?" We had a good time playing ping-pong with him, and on another occasion he went with our family on a tour to the Ancient City of Ray.

## 6.6 Wealth and poverty

Our house was surrounded by a high wall, with gates at the front and rear. When one looked out of the window of the pink-marble-floored upstairs bathroom, it was possible to look down to the street outside the wall and to see a family of beggars who lived there both summer and winter. The wall was their only protection from the elements. They drank water directly from the ditch (in farsi called “jube”), into which filth from the street and sidewalk was swept. They made their own contribution to the filth, since they had no bathroom other than the wall.

It seemed incredible to me that they did not all die quickly from such a life<sup>1</sup>. It was also painful to contrast their poverty with our wealth, and I strongly wished to help them. However, poverty was everywhere in Iran at that time. The scale of the problem was huge. If you helped one tiny group of people, others would come from all sides, and there would be a danger of drowning in the widespread misery. What was the solution?

My mother, after learning farsi, worked on a few projects designed to help. There was a day care center for the children of beggars on which she worked with some Iranian girls. She also worked together with the Shah’s sister, Princess Shams, on the committee of the Red Lion and Sun, the Iranian branch of the Red Cross. Finally she tried to start industries to give employment to beggars. She went to the Tehran museum and found ancient motifs that appeared in Iranian art. These, she hoped, could be printed onto items such as place mats for dinner tables, and the output could be exported for sale in the west. My mother’s efforts with handicrafts were partially successful, and she continued to work with these projects even after we had returned to the United States.

In 1945 the population of Tehran was about 600,000. (Today it has grown into a modern mega-metropolis of more than 12 million!) The city was built on a sloping plane that led up to the base of the Elburz mountains. The altitude of Tehran was about 3,000 feet, but the northern part was of course higher than the southern part because of the slope of the plane. Today, Tehran extends right up to the base of the mountains which start at about 6,000 feet.

When we lived there water from the mountains flowed through Tehran in the jubes or ditches beside the streets, becoming progressively dirtier as it flowed southward. Therefore the nice part of the city was the north part, because the water was cleaner. Those who could afford it drank water that came to the city from mountain springs in an ancient system of underground tunnels called “qnats”. Water from the qnats was carried around the Tehran

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, the rate of infant mortality was extremely high. Those few children who did survive, however, had acquired immunity to most of the forms of dysentery.

in horse-drawn tank carts. The driver of such a cart had with him a stack of buckets, and as he drove he called out (for example) “Ab Ali! Ab Ali!” The word “Ab” is farsi for water, and “Ali” the name of a particular qnat.

Before being distributed, the water from the qnats was very pure and safe. However, the distribution system had its faults: When he found a customer, the water cart driver would place his buckets in a row on the sidewalk and fill them with water. When the transaction was complete, he would stack the buckets, one inside the other, and then drive on. Thus, because of the stacking, the contamination from the sidewalk would find its way from the bottom of one bucket into the bucket below it.

Besides not having a modern water system or sewage system, Tehran in 1945 also had some problems with electricity. There was electricity, but not enough to go around. It was decided that the best thing to do, until a new power station was built, was to share the electricity that was available among all those who wanted it. The system of sharing meant that we had electricity only four days each week. On the other days we used candles and lamps.

Our house was on a street called Hjiaban Jalleh, just across from the Swiss Embassy, in the north-east corner of the city (as it was at that time). It was on an old caravan route to China, part of the famous Silk Road. Camels passed our house, just as they must have done in very early times when the Silk Road was an important commercial artery. There were many buses and a few automobiles in Tehran when we lived there, but there were also many horse-drawn carts and donkeys, and instead of taxis we often used horse-drawn carriages called “droshkis”, just as in Russia. Gordon and I knew enough farsi to tell the droshki driver which way to go, and not to drive too fast.

As my mother mentioned, the Iranians are cultured, hospitable and charming, not only the aristocrats whom we were privileged to meet, but also the larger population. When we first arrived in 1945 to join my father, my parents were invited to a party at a house which had a large garden. In the garden there was a pool, and in the middle of the pool there was an island, on which roses grew. Not knowing the details of Iranian etiquette, my mother exclaimed “What beautiful roses!” Immediately her host called to his gardener and said a few words. The gardener rolled up his trousers, waded into the pool to the island, picked the roses and presented them to my mother.

The lesson of the roses had not completely sunk in when my parents were invited to another party, this time by the director of the Bank Melli (the Iranian National Bank). During the evening my mother noticed a silver ash tray whose bottom was an old ten Toman coin. “What an interesting ashtray!” she exclaimed. The next day a messenger from the Bank Melli came to our door and presented my mother with a box containing a set of the silver ash trays that she has admired. This time she understood: If a guest admires

something, Persian hospitality requires the host to give it to the guest!

The traditional Persian dinner party occurs late in the evening. Often in the summer, the guests are seated in the garden near to a pool. The weather in the summer is always clear, and late in the evening the temperature in a garden is also very comfortable. Hopefully for such a party, the moon will be shining, and its light will be reflected on the water of the pool. After the main course, as fruits are served, a guest will recite the first verse of a poem by one of the great poets, for example Ferdosi or Hafez. It is a game - a challenge to the next person along the table. Will he or she be able to recite the next verse? If so, the challenge passes to the next in line along the table. Another verse is recited and another. Meanwhile the moonlight shines on the pool, and scents from the garden reach the hosts and guests.

## 6.7 The Ministry of Health

Before telling you about my father's work in the Ministry of Health, I need to say a few words about the historical background of the situation: When World War II began, Iran was ruled by Reza Shah (the same Shah who ordered the automobiles which my parents helped to deliver to him in 1927).

Reza Shah (1878-1944) started his career as Reza Khan, an army officer. Because of his high intelligence he quickly rose to become commander of the Tabriz Brigade of the Persian Cossacks. In 1921, General Edmond Ironside<sup>2</sup> masterminded a coup (financed by Britain) in which Reza Khan lead 15,000 Cossacks towards the capital, overthrew the government, and became minister of war. In 1923, Reza Khan overthrew the Qajar Dynasty, and in 1925 he was crowned as Reza Shah, adopting the name Pahlavi.

Reza Shah believed that he had a mission to modernize Iran, in much the same way that Kamil Ata Turk had modernized Turkey. During his 16 years of rule in Iran, many roads were built, the Trans-Iranian Railway was constructed, many Iranians were sent to study in the West, the University of Tehran was opened, and the first steps towards industrialization were taken. However, Reza Shah's methods were sometimes very harsh.

In 1941, while Germany invaded Russia, Iran remained neutral, perhaps leaning a little towards the side of Germany. However, Reza Shah was sufficiently critical of Hitler to offer safety in Iran to refugees from the Nazis. Fearing that the Germans would gain control of the Abadan oil fields, and wishing to use the Trans-Iranian Railway to bring supplies to Russia, Britain invaded Iran from the south on August 25, 1941. Simultaneously, a Russian

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<sup>2</sup>General Ironside commanded a British force of 6,000 men fighting against the Bolsheviks in northern Persia

force invaded the country from the north. On September 17, 1941, Reza Shah was forced into exile, and replaced by his son, Crown Prince Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Both Britain and Russia promised to withdraw from Iran as soon as the war was over.

During the remainder of World War II, although the new Shah was nominally the ruler of Iran, the country was governed by the allied occupation forces. From February, 1944 until the end of the war, my father was Director General of Public Health for the occupation government. After the war, independent government was restored to Iran, but the Shah's government invited my father to remain as Advisor to the Ministry of Health. He was working in this capacity when we joined him in 1945.

Here is what my mother wrote about my father's work:

*Ben's work with the Ministry is best described in the letters which he wrote, and which are included in the pocket folders with these notes. He succeeded in getting typhus under control, and began a nation-wide attack on malaria. This was a debilitating disease which affected a large percentage of the population. In some places 98% of the people were infected, and the crops could not be harvested because so many were sick. In re-reading his letters, I am struck by the positive approach to all the problems, and by his great energy. All colleagues seem to be his friends, and there is not a single complaint in any one of [the letters]. Gradually he shifted public health policy away from treatment to prevention by means of sanitation, mosquito control [and] public baths for the poor to get rid of lice and fleas - all vectors of disease.*

Here is a speech which my father made on **The Role of Public Health in Relation to the Seven Year Program**. The Seven Year Program to which he refers was a program for the overall economic development of Iran.

*Iran, the scene of ancient glories and achievements, is today on the threshold of tremendous economic and social advances. Following years of planning and preparation, she is about to take enormous strides forward toward health and prosperity for all her citizens. The Seven Year Program, which was recently approved by the Majles to be put into operation this year, envisages notable developments, not only in agriculture, industries, mines, roads, railroads and communication, but also in education and public health, which are basic essentials for the security and strength of any country.*

*Without intelligent, vigorous and energetic workmen, new factories, even the best-planned and most suited to the economy, cannot succeed. Great agricultural developments through irrigation of rich and previously unused lands require, first of all, sufficient capable farmers, if they are to increase the food supply and wealth of the people. A group of villagers, all of whom are physically*

*below par and with a large proportion intermittently ill and unable to work, will not show energy and ambition to better their lot. In some areas the ravages of malaria and other diseases are so serious that whole villages can be found without a living child under two years of age, and with such a tendency to decreasing population one sees, instead of prosperity and progress, abandoned ruins and desolation...*

*I have seen whole villages in the rich valleys near Shiraz where the crops could not be harvested before much was wasted and lost, because just at harvest time most of the able-bodied men and women in the villages were flat in bed with the chills and fever of malaria. Such disease-riddled farmers cannot benefit much by new irrigation. It is a vicious circle; the sick become poorer, and because they are too poor to buy food, they become more undernourished and sicker.*

*The answer has been realized from the beginning by those responsible for drawing up the Seven Year Program. Even the most completely [uneducated] and undernourished villager can be protected from many diseases which sap his strength and prevent his working and improving his condition. In spite of himself, and even without his active cooperation, desirable as that is, he can be guarded from malaria by DDTing his village, kept from having diphtheria, smallpox or typhoid by proper vaccination and provided with pure drinking water to decrease dysentery and allow his babies to grow up and become productive citizens. The vicious circle can and will be broken...*

*Just over three years ago I talked to the Iran-American Relations Society on "A Realizable Public Health Program for Iran", reporting concrete achievements of the Ministry of Health in combatting typhus-exanthematicus and relapsing fever, improving vaccination and beginning a program of malaria control. I pointed out nine major fields in which, even with our limited resources, we could make important advances. Now, every one of those projects is either in actual operation or embodied in the new Program.*

*The original Seven Year Health Program was planned to provide all the minimum needs of Iran in relation to health. It included not only the training of necessary technical personnel and the public health measures necessary for the prevention of disease, but also an extensive program of hospital and clinic development. Since its cost was conservatively estimated at over 17,000 million rials and only 1,500 million rials could for the present be counted on, a Revised Seven Year Health Program was drawn up, omitting the treatment phase, and reducing the training and "prophylaxis" to the most urgent and essential items. It had to be assumed that treatment, which of course must be provided, would be directed by an independent agency such as a National Hospital Commission and supported by special taxes or health insurance. Since the cost of treating a disease, once contracted, is many times the expense of preventing its spread,*

*it was felt that our limited funds should be devoted to measures of preventive medicine, which are, after all, the real function of a health department. Even these had to be strictly curtailed to meet the limited budget tentatively assigned to the Revised Program.*

*The most lamentable aspect of the present health situation in Iran is the lack of public health care for the 13 million villagers and tribesmen scattered through the rural communities of the osten. What few doctors and other medical personnel we have are concentrated mainly in the cities and larger villages, leaving most of the 43 thousand villages completely uncared for. Even the 300-odd clinics operated by the Ministry of Health are on the whole poorly run because, in the face of excessively poor communications and great distances, they are primarily directed from Tehran instead of being under local supervision. Finally, even the most public-spirited doctor is, with good reason, completely unwilling to live in the usual quarters available in a provincial village, where he and his family cannot find even the most rudimentary housing facilities normally demanded by an educated person. Successive health ministers of great wisdom and vision, such as H.E. Dr. Said Malek, H.E. Dr. Manoutcher Eghbal, H.E. Dr. Abbas Adham and H.E. Dr. Abbas Nafici, have continuously stressed the necessity of getting our doctors out to the provinces, but have been prevented from accomplishing their purpose by lack of living accommodations and the abysmally low living allowances provided by present government regulations.*

*To meet this situation, the first and most essential section of the health program is the adoption of a procedure already proved highly successful in numerous countries throughout the world. In every osten, from 20 to 30 local Health Areas will be set up, each one to care for a population group of about 50 thousand people. To provide a base of operations with storage facilities, preventative medicine clinic and living quarters for the staff, Health Centers must be constructed in many places where suitable buildings do not exist. These will be located in strategically situated villages, one as the principal Center and from one to four as subsidiary Centers. Construction will be of local materials and of simple type, to provide suitable facilities at minimum cost.*

*Operating from the Centers, the staff will provide complete public health care for the villagers in their section of the Area... Their first step will be to organize a local Health Council, composed of the leading citizens and government officials, to cooperate in the various activities, which in many cases will be made community projects with local participation. This was very successfully carried out as a trial measure in Khorramabad, where the Health Council gave important assistance to the malaria control project, and in fact celebrated the first Now Rooz after their organization by telegraphing and writing to Tehran to demand that the control work should be continued and expanded. At Isfahan, Shiraz and elsewhere such local participation through a Council has also proved*

*of the greatest value.*

*Under the close supervision of the directors of each Center, especially trained Vaccinator Malaria Field Workers will spend most of the year giving complete vaccination coverage to the villagers under their care. Infants and young children will be protected against , and both children and adults against smallpox and typhoid fever. During the proper season, the same personnel will carry on complete malaria control by DDT residual spraying or by prevention of anopholene breeding, as found effective under conditions existing in the locality concerned. At the same time, all clinical cases will be treated by the medical staff with one of the new, cheap and effective antimalarial drugs. One of the greatest values of the Centers will be the opportunity they offer to permanently subdue and even eliminate the sources of malaria from Iran.*

*The fact that such a large proportion of the babies born in Iran never live to grow up as useful citizens and that so many mothers lose their lives in connection with childbirth, presents a challenge which the Health Area organization can go far in meeting. The staffs of the various Centers will conduct Pre-Natal and Well-Baby Clinics and will carry on widespread education of the mothers in the villages on how to look after their babies. Because of ignorance and poverty, the problem is difficult, but the most effective approach is the direct one, on the local level, through personal advice and demonstration classes held in the villages.*

*The same holds true for the control of trachoma, the venereal diseases, tuberculosis, etc. Preventive clinics plus personal education of the villagers is the method which will bring results. The control of trachoma requires teaching the individuals that it is spread by contact, either by dirty fingers or by infected materials or water or by insects, and that to prevent it, cleanly habits and sanitary measures to prevent fly breeding are required. Treating infected eyes is important and, provided the villages are cleaned up to prevent fly breeding, it is a help to use DDT and other insecticides to kill off the few flies remaining.*

*Because of the importance of sanitation and pure supply of drinking water in decreasing not only trachoma but dysentery, infestation with intestinal parasites and infant mortality, the staff of the Centers will instruct their villagers in this regard and actively promote community projects for improved water supply and sanitation. So far as possible, these will be carried out either by the landlord or by the villagers themselves.*

*By virtue of being on hand in the Health Area, the medical staff will be able to recognize cases of contagious diseases and prevent their spread by causing them to be isolated by home quarantine or otherwise. In case a serious epidemic breaks out in the Area, such as those of typhus exanthematicus and spirochaetosis which were recently experienced by Iran, the entire staff of the Area may be called upon to control it, if necessary with the aid of staffs form*

*neighboring Areas.*

*A special need of quarantine which will be met by the Seven Year Program is the establishment of adequate quarantine stations at Tayebat and Pahlavi where they are lacking at present, to guard against the introduction of diseases from abroad such as louse-borne spirochaetosis which came over the Russian border three years ago to cause an epidemic involving 27,000 people in the one year of 1325.*

*To meet a very serious lack which now exists, a National Health Institute will be established possibly by taking over and expanding the present Pasteur Institute. This will serve the entire country as a food-and-drug testing, diagnostic and research laboratory and will provide facilities for training advanced personnel in specialized fields of public health. It will then be possible to examine drugs and foods for toxicity and the presence of infection or adulteration, to furnish expert diagnostic reports on material too difficult to be handled in provincial diagnostic laboratories and to do extensive research on problems of disease transmission which are of special interest to Iran. Without the expense of a trip abroad, doctors and other medical and technical personnel can be trained in the Institute in various public health procedures and techniques, such as entomology, malariology, biostatistics and diagnostic laboratory methods.*

*To staff the Health Centers, a large number of trained personnel will be required. The Ministry of Health now has technical personnel numbering 2020, 1544 of whom are working in the provinces. Some of these can be utilized, provided that they are first given an intensive and rapid course in public health techniques, as contrasted with the primary treatment functions to which they now devote most of their time. These will be used to staff those Centers which are complected and ready for use before additional personnel have time to be trained. The additional heb-dars, pe-zeshkiars, midwives, laboratory technicians, home-visiting nurses and vaccinator-malaria field workers who are required will be trained in two large and three small schools which will immediately be established in the provincial capitals. Students will be recruited from the ostens, in order that they will be willing to return to the region of their homes and work in a rural Health Area upon completion of their training courses. The Program also includes the training in public health fields of graduate doctors, both in the Institute in Tehran and in schools of public health in other countries...*

*In conclusion, it appears that not only is progress in public health and preventive medical care essential for the wellbeing and economic advance of Iran, but great developments are already occurring and will be enormously accelerated and expanded under the Seven Year Program, when that begins to function.*

Although this speech is in English, most of my father's work at the Ministry

of Health was conducted in French, which was at that time a language spoken by almost all educated people in the Middle East. My father's French was not perfect, but he understood everything that was said to him, and he could express himself in French with great fluency, although perhaps not with perfect grammar.

As my mother mentions, my father succeeded in shifting public health policy away from treatment of diseases and towards preventive medicine and sanitation, these being far more cost-effective. When he began his work, there were hospitals for the rich in the large cities, but beyond that little else. One of my father's great achievements was the initiation of malarial control programs which finally virtually eliminated malaria from Iran, thereby perhaps saving the lives of as many as a million children. The ecological consequences of using DDT were at that time not known, but even if they had been known, the goal was so important that the use of DDT for malarial mosquito control might still have been justified.

My father frequently met with the young Shah, and was very much impressed by his sincere wish to do all that was possible for the benefit of his country. My father told us on an occasion when he was walking in the palace garden with the Shah, who said to him, "What would you advise me to do to help my country?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps it is appropriate at this point to say something about say something about Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and what happened to him. His father, Reza Shah, had a strong sense of mission, and felt that it was his duty to modernize Iran. He passed on this sense of mission to his son, the young Shah who was in power when we were there. The painful problem of poverty was everywhere apparent, and both Reza Shah and his son saw modernization of Iran as the only way to end poverty.

The goal of modernizing Iran and ending poverty was adopted as an almost-sacred mission by the young Shah, and it was the motive behind his White Revolution in 1963, when much of the land belonging to the feudal landowners and the crown was distributed to landless villagers. However, the White Revolution angered both the traditional landowning class and the clergy, and it created fierce opposition. In dealing with this opposition, the Shah's methods were very harsh, just as his father's had been. Because of alienation produced by his harsh methods, and because of the growing power of his opponents, the Shah was overthrown in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

One can also say that the westernization, at which both Shah Reza and his son aimed, produced an anti-western reaction among the conservative elements of Iranian society. Iran was "falling between two stools", on the one hand western culture and on the other hand the country's traditional culture. It seemed to be halfway between, belonging to neither. Finally in 1979 the Islamic clergy triumphed and Iran chose tradition.

After the deposition of the Shah, Princess Shams (with whom my mother had worked on the committee of the Red Lion and Sun) came to New York with her sister, Princess Ashraf. My mother went to New York to meet them and to arrange the practical details concerning their arrival. My mother spoke to the Shah's sisters in farsi, which she had kept fresh by talking with Iranian diplomats in Washington.

There was once an outbreak of plague in Afghanistan, and my father traveled there to discuss with Afghan authorities the measures that were needed to prevent the plague from spreading to Iran. My father also traveled to Rome as one of the two Iranian delegates to a conference drafting the charter of the World Health Organization

My father's secretary at the Ministry of Health was a pleasant, youngish man called Mr. Davidian. He and my father frequently played tennis together. One day when they were at the tennis club, the Iranian champion, Aftandilian, together with his partner, challenged them to a game of doubles. Mr. Davidian and my father won. I don't know how they managed to do that, unless Aftandilian's partner was a really bad player.

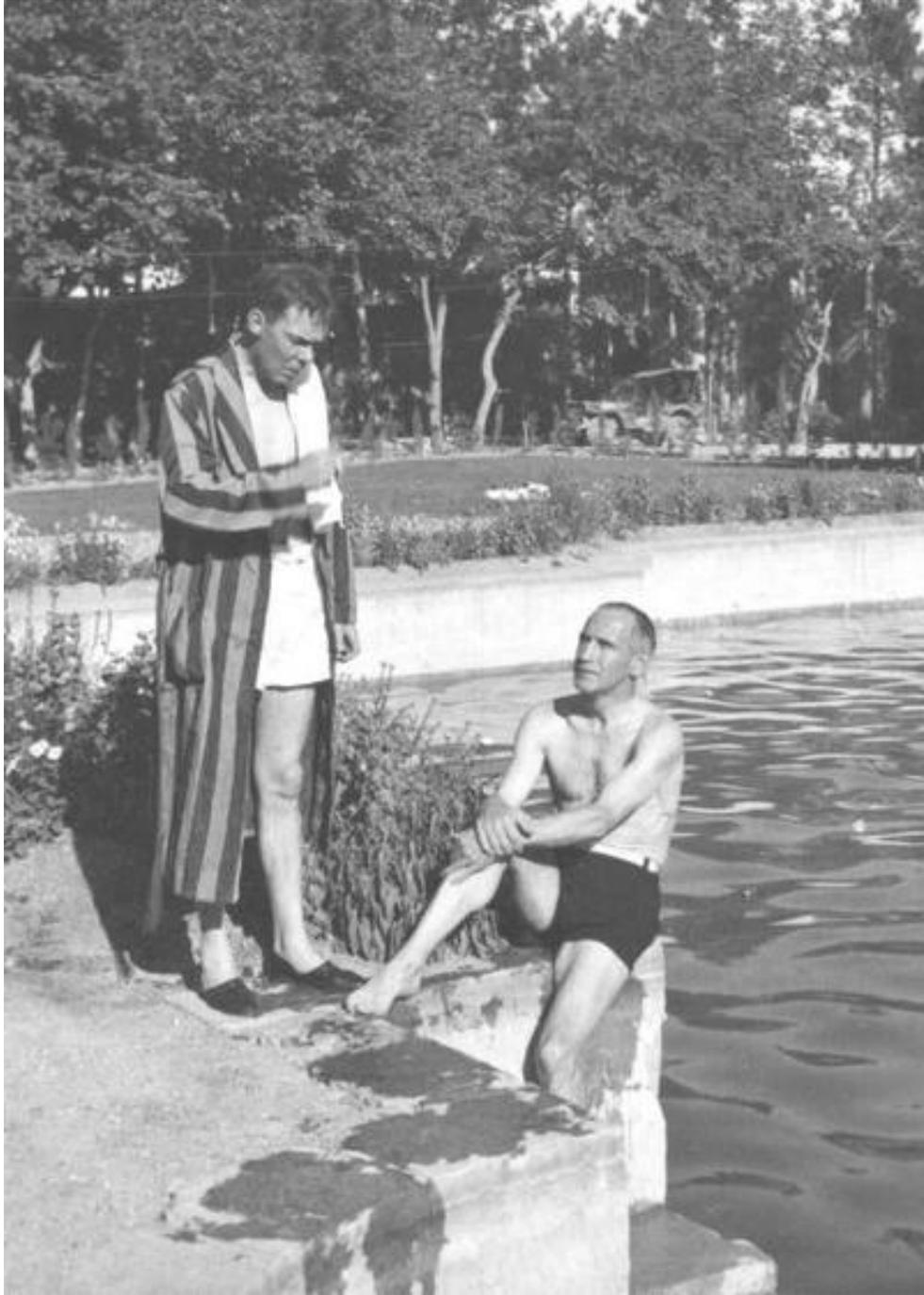


Figure 6.7: *My father with H.E. Ambassador George V. Allen at the US Embassy swimming pool.*



Figure 6.8: *From left to right, Prime Minister Gavam, my father and the Shah. They are at the Goulistan Palace in a room whose walls are decorated with a mosaic of tiny mirrors.*



Figure 6.9: *My father with his high silk hat, ready to visit the Shah.*



Figure 6.10: *My father and H.E. Habib Nafici at the Majlis (Parliament).*



Figure 6.11: *My mother with Princess Shams at the American Embassy*



Figure 6.12: *The day nursery for children of beggars. My mother helped to organize and maintain it, working together with several Iranian girls.*



Figure 6.13: Some photos from Tehran. In the lower left-hand corner is our wonderful old cook Mirza, who joined our family during the last years that we were there.

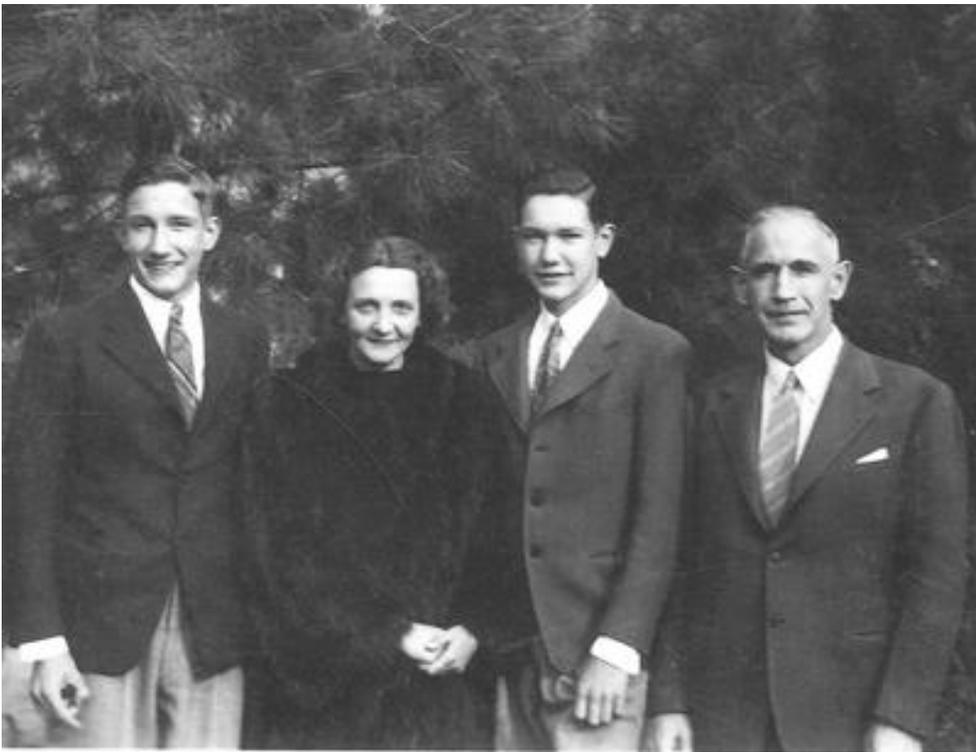


Figure 6.14: *The four of us in Tehran.*



# Chapter 7

## COMMUNITY SCHOOL

### 7.1 Perfect harmony

During our time in Tehran, Gordon and I had the privilege of attending a wonderful school, run by the Presbyterian missionaries. Here is what my mother says about it:

*The American Presbyterian Mission had been at work in Iran for many decades, and [had] sponsored many kinds of work: hospitals, health clinics, schools, printing press and church. They also ran a school for [English speaking] children, grades 1 to 11. Our boys spent three outstandingly happy years there. Mr. Fisher, the principle, drove with a loose rein, and allowed the joy to overflow. Singing, plays, athletics [and] Boy Scouts all flourished. Gordon and John climbed the high Elburz mountain [Tochal] (13,000 ft.) many times, and explored the Haft Hose (Seven Pools) Valley on donkeys. Still the instruction was good enough so that when they came back for last years at Andover Academy, they stood in the top 10% of their class.*

The English-speaking Community School, which we attended, was one of two foreign-language schools in Tehran. The other, Jean d'Arc, taught in French. Sometimes the children of Iranian and Iraqi families who could afford it attended both schools, one after the other, in order to learn both languages. For the most part, the children of the diplomatic corps in Tehran attended Community School, just as we did. Among our classmates, there were also a number of refugees, mainly from Russia. The result was a school with students of 28 different nationalities and 8 religions. Nevertheless, the harmony at the school was perfect.

The atmosphere was one of love and kindness. Of course the students came from privileged homes, so their was no reason for them not to be kind, but still, even taking this into account, the degree of harmony and warmth in the



Figure 7.1: *Community School, Tehran, 1945*

school was remarkable. The students at Community School realized that it was something very special, and they have continued to hold reunions in far-flung places like New York and San Francisco, even today, long after the school was closed down forever.

Gordon and I were in a car pool with two young sons of the American Ambassador, H.E. George V. Allen. When it was their turn to drive, we were called for by a Rolls Royce limousine belonging to the embassy, so on those days we really arrived in style.

Americans were very popular in Tehran at that time, and so, immediately after we arrived, I was elected to the school government, together with Sally Schwarzkopf<sup>1</sup> who had also recently arrived in Tehran. No one knew us because we had just come. The only reason that we were elected was that we were the “new Americans”.

Soon after our arrival, Gordon was given the starring role in a play called “Brewster’s Millions”. I was given two subsidiary parts, the Steward and the Quartermaster on a ship on which the millionaire Brewster was sailing. At one point in the play, Gordon was supposed to shout “Quartermaster! Quartermaster! Give me the keys!” When the play was performed, Gordon

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<sup>1</sup>Sally was the sister of Norman Schwarzkopf who later became well known during the first Gulf War. The Schwarzkopf family lived not far away from our house at Hjiaban Jalleh, and we sometimes went there to see films. General Schwarzkopf, Norman and Sally’s father, had once been the head of the New Jersey State Police, and in those days he used to introduce a radio program called Gang Busters - “true stories of the fight against organized crime”. In Tehran, he was Advisor to the Iranian National Gendarmerie.

mixed things up a little because of the two roles that I was playing, and he shouted “Stewmaster! Stewmaster! Give me the keys!”, a line that brought down the house.

Gordon and I were usually invited to parties once or twice a week. We would arrive at the house to which we had been invited at about 6 o’clock in the evening. There was always a hand-wound phonograph playing tangos, waltzes and fox-trots, and in winter there was usually a kerosine-burning stove to warm the room. We spent the time until 11 o’clock dancing, and then a buffet dinner was served. There was always much more food offered than we could possibly eat, this being required by the rules of Iranian hospitality. After dinner, we thanked our host and hostess and went home. Whenever it was our turn, we gave a similar party.

When I arrived in Tehran, I did not really know how to dance, although I had attended a few dancing classes in California. This was not a problem because some of the older girls taught me how to dance. They had no reason at all to do this, except the desire to be kind, and this illustrates the wonderful atmosphere of the school. When the older girls taught me to waltz, I whirled around the floor so violently that my partner and I ran into a potted plant and broke the pot, but this embarrassing crime was immediately forgiven with many smiles by the host and hostess.

During World War II, Reza Shah had offered refuge in Iran to many people fleeing from Hitler’s Europe, and among them were some of our teachers at Community School. For example, Latin and French were taught by a wonderful lady called Dr. Anna Farjean, who had a Ph.D. in philosophy. She was unmarried, and lived together with her mother. We sometimes called her “Aunt Anna” behind her back. Whenever we were tired of Latin, we could always distract her by asking her to tell us about her experiences climbing in the Alps.

The more advanced Latin class, which Gordon attended, consisted of him and five girls. Since there were so few in the class, Miss Farjean sometimes held it on an upstairs balcony of the school. All of the girls were allowed to sit in a row on the balcony and knit during the class, which Gordon thought was somewhat unfair. Miss Farjean told him that if he could learn to knit, he would be allowed to do it too. In order to receive equal treatment, Gordon learned how to knit (but with very thick pins), and he made me a sweater during Latin class.

When Miss Farjean wanted to rebuke us, she said severely, “Boy! You have not to do this! Tomorrow you will be a man!” This method of rebuke was different from that of Dr. Rébon, who also had a Ph.D. and also was a Jewish refugee from the Nazis. Dr. Rébon taught mathematics, and his method of keeping discipline was to throw a small piece of chalk, with great accuracy and

speed, at an offending student.

In general, the Presbyterian missionaries who ran Community School made no attempt to convert the students to Christianity. However, a Bible Studies course was a part of the curriculum. I have always been grateful for having had this opportunity to study both the Old and New Testaments in detail. Our Bible Studies class was taught by one of the missionaries, a lady called Mrs. Paine. Because of her somewhat dour view of life, I thought that she ought to have spelled her name “Pain”.

Mrs. Paine was anxious to show that she was open minded, and she maintained that all of the miracles described in the Bible could alternatively be explained without invoking anything besides natural laws. As an example, she told us about the death of Harrod, who is described in the Bible as vomiting up his insides. This could have been a miraculous punishment for his sins, Mrs. Paine told us, or alternatively it could have been due to an infestation of worms. This example gave Mrs. Paine an opportunity to describe how common such infestations are throughout the world, with two thirds of the global population seriously infected. She then told us about a little girl, the daughter of a missionary whom she knew, who was sitting in church when a tiny worm inside her eye began to crawl across the interior of the lens. I remember this story vividly many years later.

We also had a class in which the students from various religions were encouraged to tell about their beliefs, and a class on Persian mythology, predating Islam. For example, we learned the story of the White-Headed Zal, and the story of Rostam and Sohrab<sup>2</sup>.

Community School was the home of a branch of the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 1 of Tehran. There was only one Boy Scout troop in the country, so of course ours was Troop 1. Under Reza Shah, there had been a Boy Scout organization, but it was a quasi-military organization, much too similar to the Hitler Jugend, and so it had been abolished by the Allied occupation government.

Troop 1 was quite special because many of the students at Community School had already been through the French school, Jean d’Arc. Having learned French thoroughly, they were now attending Community to learn English. Thus many of “boys” in our Scout troop were actually young men in their twenties. This did not seem to matter, though, and we had a lot of fun.

If you know about the Boy Scouts of America, you will know that every boy starts as a Tenderfoot. By passing a series of tests it is possible to become a Second Class Scout, and then go on to the higher ranks, First Class, Life,

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<sup>2</sup>Besides learning farsi thoroughly, my mother read Sir Percy Sykes massive history of Persia. Today I very much regret not having used the opportunity offered by living in Iran to study the country’s ancient culture.

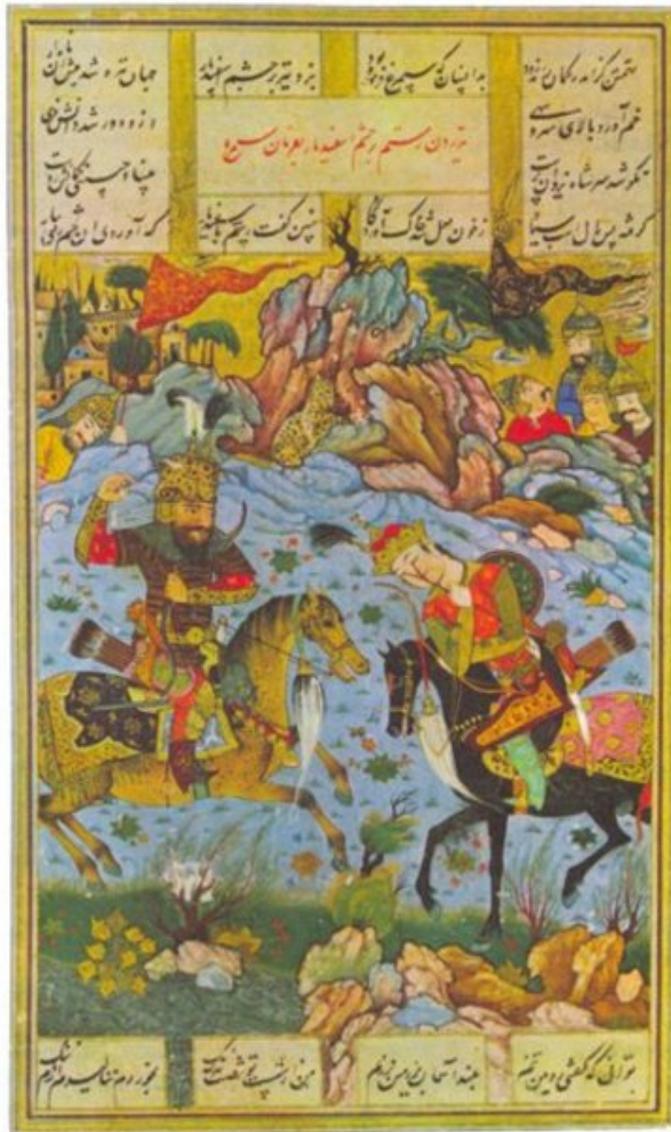


Figure 7.2: A Persian miniature painting showing Rostam and Esfandiyar

Star and Eagle. One of the tests that we had to pass to proceed up the ranks was to earn a certain amount of money by our own efforts, I've forgotten how much it was. The authors of the Handbook of the Boy Scouts of America probably visualized boys earning money by mowing lawns and other small jobs of that kind. However, in Tehran, there was absolutely no possibility for earning money by doing menial work. Jobs in that category were completely occupied by very poor people with whom it was impossible to compete.

Mr. Fisher, the Principle of Community School, realized that this was a problem, and he allowed us to set up all kinds of enterprises on the school grounds. My own method for passing the money-earning test was to bake cakes at home and sell them during recess. My cakes were very popular because they had thick fudge icing, which my parents helped me to make.

Another scouting test was cooking over an open campfire. One of the older boys was especially good at this - in fact he had made it his hobby - but the troop leaders kept failing him. After they finally passed him, they confessed that the many failures were because the food that he made was so delicious that they wanted more and more of it.

## 7.2 I buy a dead duck

As an experiment, Mr. Fisher, decided to start a painting class. The artist whom he hired to teach it spoke only French - he had absolutely no English at all. Therefore he asked me to translate what he said to the class. My French was extremely weak, but I guess that I must have been better at it than the other students, most of whom were younger than I was.

I soon decided that since our teacher spoke no English, I could just invent something to tell the others if I did not understand him, and that is what I did. But one day he said to me, "Jean, pour le prochain fois, voulez-vous acheter un canard?" Had I understood him? Did he really want me to buy a duck? There was no way of telling, but I went to the market and bought a dead duck, feathers and all, and brought it to the next class. It turned out that this was really what he wanted. He arranged a still-life theme with a vase, some fruit and the duck, and we painted it.

### 7.3 Three sisters - three cousins

There were three attractive sisters from Switzerland living in Tehran. Each had married a husband of a different nationality. One married an Iranian, another married an extremely rich Iraqi merchant named Hakim, and the third married a man from Czechoslovakia who was called Proteva. The three sisters had three daughters, Aida, Giselle and Wilma. The cousins did not look alike except that all three were beautiful. Aida, the Iranian-Swiss cousin, had black hair. Giselle Hakim, the Iraqi-Swiss cousin has masses of reddish curls, and Wilma Proteva, the Czech-Swiss cousin, had blond hair and blue eyes.

Gordon and I did not know Aida very well because she did not go to our school. We only saw her when she joined us for skiing. However, we were often invited to parties at the huge mansion where Giselle Hakim lived. Giselle took piano lessons from a Polish pianist, Kapuchinski, who was a student of a student of Paderewski. When we went to parties at the Hakims, Kapuchinski was always there, playing Chopin on their grand piano. Because of this, there was a rumor that Giselle's relationship with him was something more than the usual student-teacher relationship. Finally Giselle confirmed the rumors by marrying Kapuchinski. "Anyway", her friends said, "She certainly did not marry him in order to get free piano lessons."

The third cousin, Wilma Proteva, was enormously popular in Community School. There were several reasons for this. First of all she was beautiful, but perhaps more importantly, both Wilma and her mother had great kindness, natural tact and skill in human relationships. Another point was that Wilma's mother, besides being extremely hospitable, was a marvelous cook. Because of all these factors, whenever a group of us went skiing, we always met at Wilma's house. One or two chartered busses called for us there and took us out to some mountains at Lashkarak, where we spent the day skiing. In the evening, tired from the day's exertions, we returned to the Proteva's house, where Wilma's mother appeased our ravenous appetites with wonderful Swiss cooking.

Most of the boys in Community School who were more or less Wilma's age were at least a little bit in love with her, but one of the older boys, Elimere Briss, was very much in love with her. Like Wilma's father, Elimere was from Czechoslovakia, and he was one of Gordon's best friends. Sadly for Elimere, he did not have the inside track in the race for Wilma's affections. This belonged to a young man called Gian Ludovico Antonio Maria Penacio, who was the son of the Italian Ambassador. "John Lu", as we called him, had the use of a flashy car from the Italian Embassy, and Elimere grumbled that the car gave him an unfair advantage. In 1949, a year after Gordon and I had returned to the United States, Wilma married John Lu.

Like his father, John Lu became a diplomat. Finally he became the Italian Ambassador to Kenya, where he and Wilma had a very large house. The very last that I heard about them, many years later, was that John Lu had died, and that Wilma was debating with herself whether to continue living in the big house in Kenya.

## 7.4 Delirium

Often the students from Community School went on picnics together. One picnic that I especially remember was to a village east of Tehran, not far from the Shah's hunting palace. Near to the village was a small open area surrounded by trees, and this is where we had our picnic. After we had eaten, we put gramophone records on a hand-cranked phonograph that we had brought with us on the bus, and we spent the afternoon dancing tangos, waltzes and foxtrots in the open air. So far as the villagers were concerned, this open-air dancing was a completely revolutionary concept, and crowds of them gathered to watch us.

Late in the afternoon, when Gordon and I returned to our home, I was so tired that I lay down in my bed for a nap. As I lay there, half awake and half dreaming, the events of the day whirled in my mind, raised to a higher level of poetry and beauty - the trees, the dancing, the shocked villagers - all blended into a wonderful dream.

After a while, I got up and went to the window. When I looked down into the back garden, I saw that the houseboy Sway was picking some of our roses. He then went to the back gate and opened it. His girlfriend was there, and he gave the roses to her. I returned to my bed and the beautiful half-dream continued. This time, Sway's small romantic crime blended in with the other events, all whirling around together. Finally I realized that I was delirious. I tried to get up from my bed to tell my parents but I was too weak to move, and I lay there until the morning. In the morning my father took my temperature and found that it was extremely high. He diagnosed my illness as sandfly fever. Sand flies are so small that they can crawl through the openings of screens, such as the ones on our bedroom windows.

There was a blond girl whom I liked at that time, and I had persuaded her to go to a school dance with me, but I was too ill to go. Gordon took her to the dance instead. Incidentally, in the matter of girlfriends, Gordon was much more advanced and liberated than I was. I stuck to the Americans, but Gordon had at least one Russian girlfriend, or perhaps two - my memory fails me on that point.

## 7.5 Gordik Averian

Like Giselle Hakim, Gordon took piano lessons from the Polish pianist Kapuchinski. Being extremely musical, Gordon learned to play very well, and one of my pleasant memories of Tehran is the memory of listening to him playing Bach's toccatas and two-part inventions. By that time, the owner of the house at Hjiaban Jalleh had returned from France, and we had moved to a smaller place near to Hjiaban Pahlavi, where there was a piano in the living room.

Gordon also played the cello with a string quartet. The other members of the quartet were three Armenian boys, whose nicknames were Vivik, Bibik and Rondik. (Armenian nicknames always end with "ik".) In order that Gordon should be able to go with them to the Armenian Club, these three young men made him an honorary Armenian and re-christened him "Gordik Averian", a proper Armenian name. Gordon also learned to count in Armenian because when starting a piece, the members of the quartet would count a measure. Thus he learned the numbers, "Mek, yerku, yerek, chors, hing, vets". Some years later, my parents helped all three of Gordon's Armenian friends to study music at conservatories in the United States.

I have several other pleasant memories of our new home near Hjiaban Pahlavi. It was within walking distance of Community School, and on the way home from school I often used to stop at a baker's shop and buy some Iranian bread. There were two kinds - lavash and sangak. Lavash was only a few millimeters thick, but was broad and circular, the size of a large pizza. The baker tossed the dough back and forth between his hands to make it very broad and thin. Then he threw it onto a large paddle and slapped it on top of his dome-like oven, within which a roaring fire was burning. In a minute or so, the lavash was cooked, and one could buy the disc-like bread for one or two rials. When the lavash was fresh from the baker's oven, it was hot, crisp and fantastically delicious. If you kept it for a day or so, it became soft and pliable. It was then possible to spread it with jam and roll it up. Sangak was heavier, thick, and less interesting.

On one occasion, I had great difficulty in walking home from school because the streets were so crowded with people that it was almost impossible to find a way through them. What had happened was this: Both the British and the Russians had promised that at the end of World War II they would withdraw from Iran. The British did so, but the Russians remained, occupying the northern province of Iran, near to Azerbaijan. Not only did the Russians forces stay in the north, they also sponsored a revolution there, and Soviet tanks rolled down towards Tehran. The young Shah went up to the north to organize resistance.

Suddenly the Soviet tanks stopped, and the Russians withdrew. What actually happened was never made public, but apparently there was some diplomatic work behind the scenes in the United Nations. Probably oil concessions were made, as well as some threats. However, so far as the public in Tehran was concerned, the whole credit for resolution of the crisis belonged to the Shah. When he returned to Tehran, triumphal arches were built over the roads along which he would pass. These triumphal arches were made from frameworks of poles onto which carpets were attached. The whole population of the city, it seemed, turned out to cheer as he arrived. His great popularity reached new heights.

Other memories from our new home near to Hjiaban Pahlavi are associated with our wonderful cook, Mirza, who joined the family at about the time when we moved. Mirza was a very old man at that time, at the end of an illustrious career during the course of which he had served as cook at three embassies. He knew an amazing number of different recipes, and during his first year with us he never repeated himself. Gordon and I called him “Mirza Khan”, the suffix “Khan” being added as a sign of respect. Mirza was illiterate, but at the same time, he was highly intelligent. He had invented his own system of writing, understood by no one except himself, and he used this system for writing recipes and accounts.

Besides showing us his three-country repertoire, Mirza also made many traditional Iranian dishes for the family. One special feature of Iranian rice dishes is that fruit and meat are frequently cooked together to make the sauce. My mother learned from Mirza how to make cherry pileau, and after we had returned to the United States she made it for us, awakening much nostalgia. Gordon makes cherry pileau even today. Mirza also had an amazing pileau that he made using meat and pomegranate juice. In order for the dish to be made correctly, the sauce has to be cooked together with a rusty nail. The rusty nail catalyzes a chemical reaction which makes the sauce turn black, but it tastes delicious.

Mirza always made much more food than we could eat. Perhaps, having cooked for whole embassies, he couldn't quite get used to making smaller amounts, but we realized that there was another factor as well. After we had eaten, Mirza probably took the leftovers back to his family. The amount of food served, in relation to the number of people in our family, became even more pronounced after Gordon and I were sent to boarding school in the United States. Finally my mother also returned to the United States (because Grandma Scales was seriously ill) and only my father remained, but still the amount that Mirza served remained more or less the same. In 1950, when my father returned to America, Mirza wanted to come with him. After all, he was a part of the family. My father realized that because of various regulations,

this would be impossible, so he instead arranged for a pension to be paid to Mirza for as long as he lived.

While we were living at the place near Hjiaban Pahlavi, Gail and Linda Williams came to stay with us for a few months while their parents were traveling. They were two nice and pretty girls, several years younger than Gordon and myself, daughters of the economist and diplomat Randall Williams. My father had once treated Gail when she was seriously ill, and she gave him credit for saving her life. Over the years, she remained a kind and loyal friend of our family until her recent death from cancer.

## 7.6 Lady Skrine's pantomime

The British Ambassador in Tehran was called Sir Clermont Skrine. One time he came to Community School and gave a talk about his experiences in Kashmere. I will never forget the beauty of the slides that he showed to us - the rhododendron-covered mountains, the gardens, and the lakes with their ornate house-boats. It was a wonderful talk, and since that time, I have always wanted to visit Kashmere.

Sir Clermont's wife, Lady Skrine, was a very tall and impressive woman, and she seemed even taller than she was because in the winter she usually wore a high grey sheep-skin hat. Lady Skrine was a strong believer in the rights of animals, and whenever she saw a droshki driver abusing his horse, she would seize the poor man's whip and threaten to hit him with it. The drivers were so astonished that they meekly submitted to this treatment.

One year, Lady Skrine wrote a children's' pantomime based on the story of Cinderella, and she asked some of the students at Community School to perform in it. Peggy Fisher, our Principle's daughter, was chosen to play Cinderella; I was the prince; Gordon and Norman Schwarzkopf were the two ugly sisters. We performed the pantomime at Tehran's English Speaking Union, and we had a real princess in the audience - one of the Shah's sisters; I cannot remember which one.

At one point in the performance, Peggy and I had to perform a Polka. In our nervousness, we forgot the steps and botched the dance completely. Gordon and Norman were the real stars of the show. Afterwards we actors shook hands with the Shah's sister, who was kind enough to say that she had enjoyed our performance. She did not mention the botched Polka.



Figure 7.3: *The students at Community School*

# Chapter 8

## EXPEDITIONS

### 8.1 Tochal and the Valley of Seven Pools

The plane on which Tehran is built slopes up to the base of a range of mountains, which begin to rise steeply at about 6,000 feet. The nearest peak, called Tochal, is 13,000 feet high, and it is part of the Elburz mountain chain that rises as a barrier between Tehran and the Caspian. To the northeast of the city, fifty miles away, is Mt. Demavand, an 18,600 foot extinct volcano.

Today the city of Tehran extends all the way up to the base of the mountains, but in the 1940's, there was an empty space of about ten miles between the city and the place where they rise steeply. My father, Gordon and I sometimes drove up to Darband Valley at the base of the mountains, and climbed the remaining 7,000 feet to the top of Tochal. If we started early, there was no problem in reaching the peak and coming down again in a single day.

From a technical mountaineering standpoint, the Elburz mountains are not at all difficult. You do not need ropes or pitons or ice axes to climb them. The only real difficulty is oxygen starvation. The villagers who live at a high altitude are adapted to a thin atmosphere, but non-adapted climbers like us have to pause and gasp for air after each few upward steps. I remember a place just below the peak of Tochal where the trail zigzags back and forth many times across the mountain face. We were nearly at the top of this zigzag section when a villager started at the bottom. He passed us with the greatest ease and reached the top before us.

Because the Elburz mountains form a wall separating Tehran from the Caspian, their southern slopes are very dry, especially in the summers. All the moisture is wrung from the air as it rises and cools on the northern slopes. There is some water, however, because of the winter rains. In general, the slopes are bare and treeless, but in the valleys there are streams, waterfalls, pools and trees. Occasionally, hot from climbing, we swam in a pool at the

base of a waterfall. The water was as cold as ice, because the stream was fed by melting snow.

When we climbed to the top of Tochal through Darband valley, we passed through a mountain village, with low mud-walled houses. Here there were small fields of wheat, watered by irrigation channels fed by the mountain stream. Poplar trees grew beside the stream, making the mountains seem less barren.

The most beautiful valley was called Haft Hose, meaning Seven Pools. Gordon and I have a special memory connected with that valley: We loved the mountains so much that we took every possible chance to visit them. We sometimes went climbing alone, when my father was unable to join us. We always looked forward eagerly to these expeditions. One time, when we had planned a climb, the day turned out to be rainy. No matter! We took a bus to the mountains anyway, hoping that the weather would clear.

We climbed higher and higher through Haft Hose Valley, but the weather did not clear; in fact the rain grew heavier. Finally we were so high that the rain turned to snow. We were soaked to the skin, but still we continued. Finally, at the head of the valley, we came a beautiful broad snow-covered slope up to the peak, but at last good sense got the better of us and we turned back down the valley. We were freezing and wet, so to keep up our spirits, we sang at the top of our lungs. As we passed through Haft Hose Village, the villagers stared at us, thinking (with reason) that we were crazy. “Az coja miri?” (“Where did you come from?”), they asked. “Az balah!” (From up there!), we answered pointing to the snow-covered peak. When we got home we found that the only dry places anywhere on us were small spots underneath our knapsacks. That is the sort of day that one remembers!

## 8.2 Galandouak

In telling you about Community School, I mentioned that we had a Boy Scout troop - Troop 1 of Tehran. We had a great deal of fun, although sometimes the wealthy boys in the troop didn't quite understand the spirit of scouting. For example I remember a hike where one of the boys brought along his family chauffeur to carry a large thermos full of lemonade. We also sometimes rode on donkeys instead of walking; and as I mentioned, some of the “boys” were really young men in their twenties; but in spite of these non-standard features, it was great fun.

During the summer vacations we always spent some time at a summer camp near a village called Galandouak in the mountains north-east of Tehran, not so far away from Mt. Demavand. Our camp was on the borderline between the properties of two big landlords, Mr. Dekhan and Mr. Nafezi. They were

quite different in their personalities.

Mr. Nafezi owned the entire village of Galandouak. Perhaps he did not actually own the people of the village, but he owned their houses and the land that they farmed. He might as well have owned the villagers themselves, since they had nowhere else to go. Nevertheless, Mr. Nafezi was very kind to the people who lived in his village. He built a school for them, and provided them with medical care.

When Mr. Nafezi's gardener was married, he gave a large party to celebrate the occasion, and invited all of us from our nearby scouting camp. Everyone sat outside in the garden beside the pool at Mr. Nafezi's house, cross-legged on carpets. The music at the party was very interesting: Some of the tunes were western pop songs played in the Iranian style on traditional instruments. Finally as we sat in the garden, the moon came up. Then Mr. Nafezi rose and did a solo dance in the moonlight, in honor of his gardener's wedding.

Mr. Dekhan was unusual for an Iranian landlord because he liked to go out and work in the fields, right beside his villagers. He was very much interested in improved agricultural methods. On his property there were several orchards, and Mr. Dekhan had decided that it would be better for the irrigation of the orchards if the stream beside our scout camp could be diverted to another course.

Mr. Dekhan came to us and suggested that the scouts should help him to build a dam to divert the stream. "It will be a memorial", he told us. We laughed a little at this pronouncement, and repeated it to each other as we worked on the dam (when Mr. Dekhan was not there), mimicking his accent; but perhaps there was something in it. Perhaps the dam is still there today, and perhaps the villagers still remember how it was built.

Mr. Dekhan and his men worked with us on the dam. They brought with them long iron levers for moving large boulders. When the large boulders were in place across the stream, we brought smaller boulders, then large stones, then smaller stones, and finally gravel and clay. The finished dam was something all of us looked on with pride - Mr. Dekhan, his men and the scouts; and we all cheered as the stream began to flow in its new course.

Sometimes we went on hikes, and on one occasion, when all of us were away hiking except a few boys who were too sick to go, the Shah's younger brother and the Colonel of the army regiment in which the prince was a private soldier, rode past the camp on their horses. The prince had studied in the United States, and when he saw the American flag flying over our camp, he stopped to ask about it. The few boys remaining in the camp, pajama-clad and sick, informed the prince that we were members of the Boy Scouts of America - Troop 1 of Tehran. They apologized for the fact that they were not in any condition to welcome him properly, and they invited the prince to visit

our camp for lunch another day. The Shah's brother graciously accepted the invitation, and a date was agreed on.

To prepare for the prince's visit, we learned to sing the Iranian national anthem, and our cook made a special lunch. Our plan was to stand in a line in our scout uniforms. The prince would arrive and walk in front of the line. We would then salute him and sing the national anthem. However, the best-laid plans of mice and men do not always work out. The prince arrived from a direction that we had not anticipated, and he walked behind the line instead of in front of it. Disconcerted, we began to sing the Iranian national anthem on too high a pitch, and we could not finish it. However the lunch was delicious and we had a good time talking with the prince as we ate.

To return our hospitality, the prince invited us to have tea with him at the garden of Mr. Nafezi's house in Galandouak. After tea, he sat at a table in the garden, and we stood in a circle around him, answering his questions about scouting. He was interested in our uniforms, with their merit badges, and we explained to him what they meant. Then he asked about our hats. Everyone turned towards me, because I was the only one who had a hat with me. I was in a back row, and all that I could think of was that I should let him see my hat as quickly as possible; so I threw it down onto the table. Everyone gasped! I was afraid that I had caused an international incident, but the Shah's brother just examined the hat and continued to talk pleasantly. "Come and visit me at my palace some time", he said to us later as we went out through the gate.

One of the older boys at our camp, Parviz Nabavi, had chronic malaria, and it sometimes flared up into a high fever. This happened while we were at the Galandouak camp, and his mother in Tehran somehow heard of it, perhaps through Mr. Nafezi. She immediately set out for our camp to take care of Parviz. She hired some donkeys at the village, and arrived at our camp in the middle of the night. Mrs. Nabavi was actually in worse shape than Parviz when she arrived. She had fallen from her donkey while it was crossing the stream, and she was soaked to the skin, shivering and coughing. So we had two people to take care of instead of one.

### 8.3 The Silk Road

Near to our camp was a range of steep mountains, with sheer rock faces similar to the difficult peaks of the alps. We had a telescope at our camp, and I spent hours using it to examine these mountains, looking for routes to the peaks. I longed to try to climb them, but there was no chance to do so. However, we did make an expedition to a beautiful valley near to the mountain range to which the 18,600 foot peak of Demavand belonged.

A river flowed through this valley, and beside the river, huge old chestnut trees grew. Torrents of water from springs gushed from the mountainside, feeding the river. Beside the river was a road, not made for automobiles but for camel caravans. In fact it was a branch of the ancient Silk Road that had once been an important trade route connecting China with the west. If we had only had time for it, we could have followed the Silk Road through the valley, and we could have reached the Caspian Sea in this way without crossing any mountain range. We had to turn back, but sometimes in my dreams I still see the Silk Road stretching out smoothly towards the Caspian, flanked by steeply-rising mountain walls. In my dreams I see the huge chestnut trees and the gushing springs, and I long to continue on the road.

On the expedition along the Silk Road, we were accompanied by Mr. Fisher, the Principal of Community School. He had lived in Iran for many decades, and he spoke fluent Farsee (but with a strong American accent). On the way home, still in the valley, we stopped at a chai-khané (tea house). While we were drinking our tea, Mr. Fisher began to talk with the villagers who were also there. They were pointing at a man who sat smoking an opium pipe, and they were laughing at him. Mr. Fisher later told Gordon and me the details of the conversation. Our Farsee had only been good enough to understand the general gist of it.

“This poor man!”, the villagers said, “Some years ago he mixed the opium with tobacco, and smoked it in the normal way, but now he is so far gone that he takes a lump of pure opium, touches it with a live coal from the fire, and he breaths in the fumes.” Then Mr. Fisher talked to the opium addict himself and asked him why he did it. The man told Mr. Fisher that he was a poor wood-cutter who lived on the Caspian side of the mountain range. Every day he had to carry a huge load of wood over a high pass. That was the way he earned his living. He took us outside and showed us his load of wood. It was inhumanly large. “Can you lift this?” he asked. None of us could. “I can’t lift it myself”, he told us, “but I smoke the opium, and then somehow, I am over the pass with the load. I don’t know how it happens because I don’t remember anything.” The woodcutter was abusing his body, and he would certainly die young, but he lifted his daily burden.



Figure 8.1: *Our scout camp at Galandouak, 1947.*

## 8.4 The road to Isfahan

In Farsee there is a saying: “Isfahan nesf-e-jahan” (Isfahan is half the world). From the 11th century A.D. to the 14th century, it was one of the largest cities in the world, and in the 16th century it became the capital of Iran. Isfahan had a period of special greatness under Shah Abbas (1587-1629), who invited craftsmen from many parts of the Middle East to come to Isfahan. The Armenian community of Isfahan came at that time, and they still live there today, occupying a district of the city known as Jalfa.

While we were living in Tehran, we drove down to visit Isfahan. This was during the winter, following the rainy season. An extremely large and heavy Dutch diplomat traveled with us, sitting in the back seat of the car. These factors together were a formula for disaster: The heavy winter rains has washed away portions of the road.<sup>1</sup> My father drove as best he could over the washed-out portions of the road, but it was so rough (and the Dutch diplomat

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<sup>1</sup>At that time the road was not very good, even at its best. There was a joke about the road: One person says “How was your journey to Isfahan?” The other answers, “I don’t know, I slept all the way.” It was a joke because everyone knew that the road to Isfahan was so incredibly rough that it would be impossible to sleep.

in the back seat was so heavy) that the springs of the car broke. This accident happened before we had reached the city of Qom. For the remainder of the way to Qom, we were forced drive at about 5 miles an hour. Donkeys passed us on the road as we inched along. Finally, after many frustrating hours, we reached Qom and were able to have the car springs repaired.

The remainder of the journey to Isfahan was not so difficult, and when when we reached it the reward was great. The city was full of buildings of great beauty and architectural interest, many of them built during the reign of Shah Abbas. There was a huge bazaar, which we explored, enjoying the scent of exotic spices and the sight of craftsmen in their shops making furniture using centuries-old techniques, or hand-engraving copper and silver trays and vases.

Mr. Davidian, my father's secretary, had told us that while we were in Isfahan, we should visit Jalfa, the Armenian part of the city. In fact, Mr. Davidian's father was the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Jalfa. We went to Sunday service at the church, and we were welcomed by the Patriarch. The Orthodox service was extremely beautiful. There were no seats, and the congregation stood during the entire ceremony. The music was especially interesting and impressive. Just as in Russian Orthodox churches, there was a chorus, heavy with bass voices, and the chants which they sang sounded very ancient - completely unlike the familiar musical idiom of the west. Meanwhile, as the chorus of bass voices sang, accolites swinging incense censors walked slowly to the front of the church. Many years later, Mr. Davidian's father was invited by the Soviet Union to move to Soviet Armenia. "Bring your congregation and your money with you", they told him. After much soul-searching the Patriarch and many of his congregation accepted this invitation. Whether they were happy in Soviet Armenia I do not know.



Figure 8.2: *The road to Qom.*



Figure 8.3: *Demavand, seen from the top of Darband Valley. Photo by Mahdi Madani.*



Figure 8.4: Some photos from our expedition to Isfahan.



Figure 8.5: *Abbasi Mosque in Isfahan.*



Figure 8.6: *The Ali Qapu palace.*



Figure 8.7: *Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, where polo once was played.*

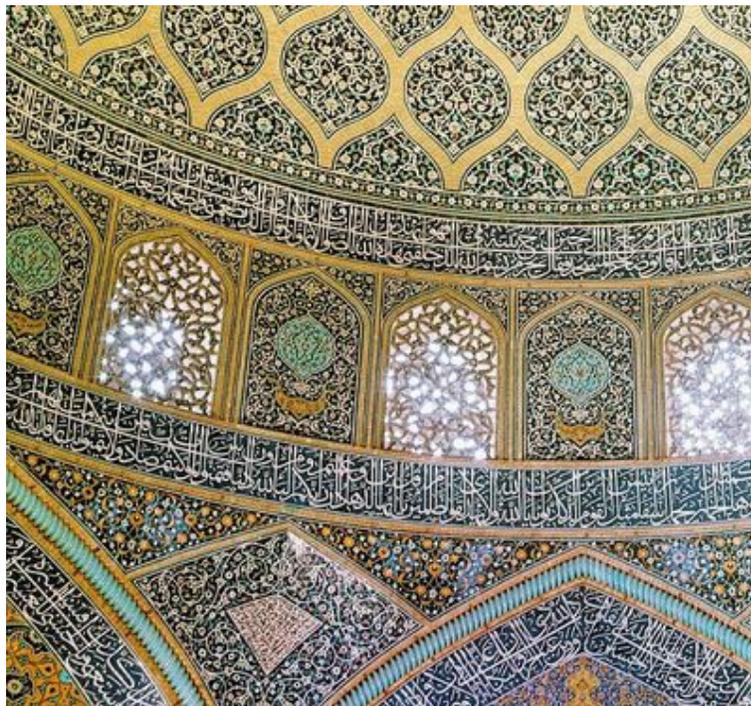


Figure 8.8: *The interior of the Abbasi Mosque.*

## 8.5 Jungles of the Caspian

The Elburz Mountains form a wall between the Caspian Sea and the remainder of Iran. Humid air from the Caspian rises and cools as the wind blows over the northern slopes of the mountains and all the moisture falls as rain. When the wind reaches the southern slopes of the Elburz range, it has been wrung dry. Except for a few months during the winter, there is no rain on the southern side of the mountains. The southern slopes are treeless, but in the north, on the shores of the Caspian there are dense forests. The Iranians call the forest the “Djungal”, and in fact tigers live there.

One of the expeditions that we made while we were living in Tehran took us to the jungles of the Caspian. The northern province of Iran is called Mazenderan, and at the time when we visited it, malaria was endemic in most parts of the province. Later, the programs initiated by my father virtually eliminated malaria, but when we went there, it was necessary to take Atabrin tablets to keep from being infected. We began taking these tablets a week or so before we started, and they made our skins yellow.

An American economist from the World Bank went with us on the trip. He was called Henry Wiens, and as my father drove the car upward through the Elburz Mountains on the road leading to the Mazenderan, Henry Wiens taught us a really good song, “The man who hath plenty of good peanuts”.

Finally, when we reached the the highest point on the road, we entered a tunnel. When we emerged on the Mazenderan side of the tunnel, the landscape was totally transformed. On the Tehran side, the mountains had been bare and treeless. When we emerged from the tunnel, we were driving through a thick forest, and the air was blue with smoke. The smoke was due to the burning of wood to make charcoal, one of the big industries in the Mazenderan.

We visited the towns of Babolsar, Noor, Chalus and Ramsar, all of them just beside the Caspian. It was interesting to see the Caspian beaches, because the sand was black, perhaps because it came from volcanic rock. There were other signs of volcanic activity, especially many hot springs, and the hotels in the Mazenderan had facilities so that their patrons could bathe in the hot, mineral-rich water from the springs, which was supposed to be good for their health.

The Russian influence was strong in the Mazenderan. For example, on the beaches, people bathed Russian style, that is, completely naked. There was one beach for men, another for women, and a third beach between them for mixed bathing in case people preferred it that way.

We also saw a factory that had been built following the orders of Reza Shah, who was trying to industrialize Iran. Undoubtedly industrialization was a good idea, but at the time when the factory was built, the country did not

have enough infrastructure to support it. When we saw the factory, it had been made over into a hotel.

Here is Henry Wiens' song, which I think is lots of fun:

**Henry Wiens' song**

The man who hath plenty of good peanuts,  
 And giveth his neighbor none,  
 He shan't have any of my peanuts,  
 When his peanuts are gone.  
 When his peanuts are gone, tra la!  
 When his peanuts are gone.  
 He shan't have any of my peanuts,  
 When his peanuts are gone.

The man who hath plenty of ripe red strawberry shortcake,  
 And giveth his neighbor none,  
 He shan't have any of my ripe red strawberry shortcake,  
 When his ripe red strawberry shortcake is gone.  
 When his ripe red strawberry shortcake is gone, tra la!  
 When his ripe red strawberry shortcake is gone.  
 He shan't have any of my ripe red strawberry shortcake,  
 When his ripe red strawberry shortcake is gone.

The man who hath plenty of patented collapsible white duck trousers  
 guaranteed not to rip at the seat or tear at the seams,  
 And giveth his neighbor none,  
 He shan't have any of my patented collapsible white duck trousers...etc.

## 8.6 Dog River Cave

During the summer of 1947, my father took a month's vacation from his duties at the Ministry of Health, and the whole family drove across the desert to revisit Beirut. Crossing the desert, we drove at night to avoid the enormous heat. Often, as we drove, the eyes of desert foxes glinted in our headlights. We were entirely alone for most of the crossing, with no other cars anywhere in sight.

During part of the month in Beirut, we lived with the American professors' families who had summer houses on the mountaintop above the village of Shimlan. Besides tennis and evening campfires, I remember some games that

Gordon and I played with the other young people in Shimlan. One of the games was called “murder in the dark”. We drew cards, which gave us roles that we were to play in the drama. Then all the lights were turned out and the person who had drawn the murderer’s card had to pretend to strangle the victim, who screamed. The lights were then turned on again, and the person who had drawn the detective’s card had to solve the mystery.

Another game was called “sardines”. One of the players was “it” and had to hide. Then the others searched, and when they found the hiding place, they had to stay there too, until in the end, almost everyone was hiding in (for example) a tiny closet, packed together like sardines.

There were many exciting places for hikes or picnics in the mountains, but the most exciting goal for exploration was the huge cave at Dog River, in a mountain gorge north of Beirut. This cave may well have been the source of the legend of the River Styx, across which one had to pass on the way to the underworld. The river, which was Beirut’s source of drinking water, poured out of a gigantic limestone cavern. The cave had never been fully explored, but it was known to be more than 15 kilometers long. Much of the water in the river came from a fissure in the bottom of a lake on the other side of the mountain, fifteen or twenty kilometers away, and this was known because of a famous law suit:

The owners of the land around the lake claimed that the city of Beirut ought to pay them for the water. The city government of Beirut, on the other hand, refused to believe that water disappearing into a fissure in the bottom of a lake so far away could possibly be the source of the river that was flowing out of the mouth of Dog River Cave. The distance seemed too great. In order to settle this dispute, dye was put into the lake, and representatives from both sides waited at the mouth of the cave to see whether the dye would come out. Two days passed, and it did not appear, so the representatives of the city went away thinking that they had won their case. On the third day, however, there were traces of dye in the water coming out of the cave. The city fathers were not convinced by this, and claimed that the owners of the land near the lake had secretly entered the cave and put dye in the water as soon as the official watchers had gone home. The question was finally settled by Stanley Kerr, who was the Biochemistry Professor at the American University of Beirut. Without telling anyone, he went to the lake at night and secretly dumped several large bags of salt into it. Then he took samples of the water at the mouth of Dog River Cave and subjected them to an extremely sensitive test for salt. He found that after a few days, the salt content increased sharply!

My mother and father had explored part of it using rafts made from the large tins in which kerosine was sold in those days. They floated on their raft of empty tins, following the river into the depths of the cave, but this was

before Gordon and I were born. My father had promised that if we returned to Beirut one day, he would take Gordon and me on an expedition into Dog River Cave. On our summer visit in 1947, he kept his promise.

There were about twenty people with us on our expedition to the cavern, many of them sons and daughters of American professors at the university. I think that Johnny Crawford was with us, and also Ted Smith and his sister Elizabeth, David and Elizabeth West, Dorothy and Malcolm Kerr, and Bruce Dodd, but it was a long time ago and my memory may be wrong. These were young people whom Gordon and I had known all of our lives. Our leader was Mr. Annabi, who had made a hobby of exploring the cave, and who knew more about it than anyone else.

We had with us a number of inflatable rubber rafts, primus lanterns, magnesium flares, warm clothes and ping-pong paddles. Since we did not have enough rafts for everyone, we divided into two groups and took turns exploring the cave.

We entered the cavern through a dry chimney, and descended a hundred meters or so to the shore of an underground lake. where we pumped up our rafts and lighted our primus lanterns. Then we set off across the lake with two people and a lantern in each raft, paddling with our ping-pong paddles, and singing "row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream".

The roof of the cavern was in places so high that it could not be seen at all, and there seemed to be only empty darkness over us. In other place, the roof was so low that we had to submerge our rafts to get past. Mr. Annabi told us that that the cavern was really a series of several caves, one above the other, and where the roof seemed high, it was because the floor separating the upper and lower chambers had collapsed.

As we paddled farther and farther into the darkness, we passed a stalactite on top of which was a limestone-encrusted bottle. One of the American professors (I think it was Professor Archie Crawford) had placed the bottle on top of the stalactite many years previously to mark his farthest penetration into the cave. Later, his son had reached the same place, and had brought out the stone-covered bottle to prove it. Instead of being pleased with this accomplishment, Professor Crawford had insisted that his son should return the bottle to its proper place.

We finally reached a place called "Chaos", where the floors between several levels of the cavern had collapsed, creating an enormous room. The debris from the collapsed floors formed a sort of underground mountain -a mountain within a mountain. We pulled our boats onto the beach, leaving a lighted candle beside them, and began to climb. When we reached the top of the mountain, we extinguished our lights. After a few minutes, when our eyes had become adapted to the darkness, the single candle that we had left behind by

our rafts seemed to illuminate the whole chamber. Mr. Annabi then showed us a special side-chamber which he had discovered and named “Shangra La”. It was extremely beautiful because of the pure whiteness of the limestone formations.

On the other side of “Chaos”, the current in the underground river became so rapid that it was impossible to paddle rubber rafts against it. For this reason, the remainder of the cave had not been explored.

When I came out of the cavern, there was terrible news: Gordon was missing! He belonged to the group that was waiting outside the cave, and to make time go faster, he had gone for a walk by himself. He had not come back. Everything else was instantly forgotten, and we began a frantic search for Gordon, calling his name again and again.

We finally found Gordon late in the afternoon, staggering along a path, his hands scratched and bleeding. He told us what had happened. He had walked far up the river gorge and had climbed the steep cliffs by an easy route, returning towards our camp along the cliff-top. At this point, he thought he saw a route directly down the precipice to our camp, but when he followed this more difficult route down the cliff face, he found himself trapped on a narrow ledge with bad hand- and foot-holds, in a position where he could neither continue nor go back. The drop below him was certainly enough to be fatal.

Gordon remained in this position for a long time, becoming more and more tired and frightened, trying to think how he could save himself. His hands were becoming so tired and painful that he wanted to let go, but he knew that he had to hold on. He could hear us calling, but knew that we could not help him. He dropped his watch, hoping that seeing it fall would shock his brain into finding a way out.

Finally Gordon decided that in such a hopeless situation, he could only save himself by taking chances that he would normally not take. Having made this decision, he held onto insecure bits of shrubs or grass that grew out of the cliff, and in this way he climbed back to the top, where we found him, dazed and exhausted. It had been an extremely close call.

Visiting Beirut again after almost a decade, my parents were delighted to see all of their old friends. Mr. Tilkian, my father’s assistant at the Department of Anatomy, was still there. He had faithfully taken care of our house and possessions, but finally the house was sold; some of our possessions were sold with the house, and the rest sent to us in America. All that was left was the hand-wound gramophone that had belonged to Gordon and me when we were only a few years old, together with a few gramophone records from the 1930’s. Mr. Tilkian gave these to us, and we happily listened to the old records. They were fantastic: “My Blue Heaven”, “Love Me or Leave Me”, “My Castle in Spain”, and so on. Those songs from the 1930’s were really great!

# Chapter 9

## AFTERWARDS

### 9.1 Gordon and I fly to Boston

My mother believed strongly in the value of science, and she worried about the fact that Community School had no course in experimental chemistry. Therefore she sent away for chemicals and other laboratory equipment, and when they arrived, she gave Gordon and me a course in qualitative analysis. I think that few mothers would have done this.

Nevertheless, despite my mother's efforts, we were running out of classes at Community School, which only went up to the 11th grade. This was particularly true for Gordon, who was a year ahead of me. It was decided that we both should be sent to a boarding school in the United States, and that we should travel there together. By this time it was possible to go by plane, and so we flew first to Paris, then to Shannon Ireland, then to Gander Newfoundland, and finally to Boston.

Our parents, after consulting their friends, had chosen Phillips Academy at Andover Massachusetts as the boarding school which we were to attend. Gordon spent a year there before going on to Harvard, and I spent two years before entering MIT. Luckily Harvard and MIT are in the same city, so Gordon and I saw each other quite a bit during our undergraduate years. Many other things happened, and I hope that someone in the family will write about them, but I think that I will stop at this point. What I really wanted to tell you was the story of my parents and their time in the Middle East.

When our family lived in the Middle East, we experienced great hospitality and kindness, and we took away wonderful memories from our time there. We grew to appreciate the beautiful cultural achievements of the region and the extremely fine and generous qualities of the people. The Middle East is a less happy place today, but I wanted to describe it as it was when we were there.