



Motto: To inform, connect with and to preserve old ties between former schoolmates and between residents of Habbaniya "town"

## With your support, HUSA hitch-hikes a ride!

### Dear Fellow Habbaniyans & Friends:

During the early weeks following the distribution of the first print of HUSA's maiden issue (and my new book *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*), Ben Yalda and I had a frown on our faces. Few prospective members seemed impressed, or heeded our appeal for support. And what worried us most was that some of the irresponsible ones were not only long-time friends or acquaintances, but also hardcore Habbaniyans. And a few of them still haven't responded to our appeal to date, despite reminder. But among those who responded positively,

were a few generous souls who contributed a donation in addition to the newsletter subscription or price of the book. We were grateful for that, and we appreciated everyone's support. But frankly, we thought the small number of respondents hardly made our work and expense worthwhile.

The Iraqis have a saying: "*M'ballal mai khaf min al-mattar.*" (He who is wet is not afraid of the rain), or per Assyrian saying: "*Ao d'dawik niuneh k'tareh quineh.*" (He who catches fishes wets his bottom—or pant seat if you like.)

So undaunted, Ben and I decided to go the whole hog and give our venture another push. We ordered a second print of 250 copies of the first issue, with a few minor changes, and distributed the newsletter to new names and addresses. Unfortunately, this too did not elicit the additional number of subscribers we had in mind, but it did attract twice as many as we gar-

nered by our first print. Although still not quite what we had hoped for, we decided HUSA had finally hitch-hiked a ride!

Now we are confident that in time, when our professional work and quality of journalism is savored by other readers, many more will hop in for the ride.

And as you can see from this issue, the quality, and the quantity, of our newsletter is an improvement over the previous issue. We have more pages and more interesting material to offer you. Even more encouraging is the number of letters received from the readers. And they are, as you can see on the "Ex-



Jan.1940: Union School Boy Scouts & Girl Guides assembled in the school courtyard prior to a street parade.

press Yourself!" pages, galore! And most of them express pleasure

in our product. We have also received a few interesting articles. It is hoped that the enthusiasm will continue unabated, and that we will even receive some constructive comments—suggestions, criticism, etc—along with articles and other publishable material from our readers for further change and improvement. But all such offerings will have to have a bearing on Hinaidi or Habbaniya and its local people

We have now printed, after some trimming in a few cases, all of the letters received. We are sorry that a few letters reached us too late to include in this issue. We hope to print these in our next number. But readers will have to observe our deadlines indicated in the masthead on page two.

A few of our readers have complained orally that the ten-point print used is somewhat too fine for the

**Cont'd on page 6**

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**Membership Subscription**

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payable to:

**HABBANIYA UNION SCHOOL  
ASSOCIATION**

and mailed to:

**The Administration Manager**

The Editor welcomes from readers  
contributions of articles, letters,  
photos, documents, newspaper  
clippings, and other memorabilia  
relating to Hinaidi and Habbaniya  
and their people. These may be  
of a current or vintage nature  
and may be on any subject,  
other than politics—if  
it can be helped!

**Deadlines: March 31,  
and September 30.**

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**THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT****By Basil K. Pius**

This Christmas Day a baby is born in Bethlehem  
And His name is Emmanuel... "God is with us."  
He forgives our sins because His love is unconditional.

So let's celebrate this Christmas in a faithful way  
As we listen to Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"  
An awesome commandment, but it can be simplified:  
This Christmas visit a sick friend, give to our needy,  
Talk with a lonesome shut-in or greet an apathetic neighbor,  
Call a far-away friend and tell him/her how much you care.  
In a spirit of humility, make amends from the heart.

Send out Christmas cards, but be generous with your time,  
Express a little more than printing your name,  
Say something special about people, something genuine;  
It's worth more than any expensive package you may offer,  
Make communication a habit, not an OBLIGATION.  
Remember, people love surprises, all year round.

Count your blessings and pray for PEACE,  
Peace among nations, in the family and peace within yourself.  
And let His light shine before you,  
And give praise to His glory in heaven. AMEN.

\*\*\*\*\*

**A Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**  
**from HUSA staff to each and every one of you.**

**And many thanks for your support.**

What's on your mind?**Express yourself!** (in a letter or e-mail)

Dear Mikhael:

I would like to compliment Ben Yalda and yourself for coming up with the idea of publishing the newsletter of Habbaniya Union School Association (HUSA). What a great way to promote communication among our people! Both Sargon [her husband] and I enjoyed it and will be looking forward to future issues.

Our family is honored to see the first issue dedicated to my late father *Raabi* Yacoub Bet-Yacoub. If he were alive, he would have been so proud, grateful and honored for being remembered by his students and being appreciated for his contributions. I can't hold back my tears as I'm writing this. If he were holding the newsletter now, he would have said, "I know them. These were my students."

A few years ago I held at our home a reunion for graduates of The American School for Girls (ASG) of Baghdad. A few ladies attended. Sitting around the table, I asked: "Besides getting our education, what impact did the teachings at the ASG have on your lives?" Each one responded with her answer.

The answers of all of us were basically that the teachings planted in us the seeds of dedication, commitment, love of service, sense of responsibility, truth and honesty.

How true that is of the Habbaniya Union School Students! If they were to be asked the same question they would have no need to answer in words, because their actions speak for them. Their dedication, commitment, sense of responsibility, respect and love for one another are clearly apparent in their reunions and in their efforts to keep the memory alive.

Don't you think this is more than enough to keep *Raabi* Yacoub pleased and happy? In his last months he often mentioned that he was ready to go because he had fulfilled his duties for his family and community. I believe his mission was successfully accomplished.

And congratulations on a job well done on your second book, *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*. It is interesting, entertaining and easy reading. Sargon has not lived in Habbaniya and yet he admires your work. Your Journal brings so many memories that are dear to me and to those who lived in Habbaniya.

I was ten years old when we left Habbaniya to Baghdad, but still through your eloquent writing I can visualize some places, events and faces, such as that of Minnania and Mr. Ingram. And your description of events on page three of your book reminded me of myself as a little girl of seven years, running from our house and heading for the shelter while shells whistled over my head.

Mikhael, you have not only fulfilled your dream to be a writer but in your works you also have served your people diligently by giving them a treasure chest full of memories.

In closing, I would like to speak for my late father and say "God bless all of the students of Habbaniya Union School."

**Samira (Shamiram) Jacob Hermes**  
Pinole, Calif.

[A check for \$25.00 was enclosed]

Dear Mikhael:

I received last week mail consisting of your book *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*, your note to me, also the circular [article] "Just A Thought," and did receive previously a copy of the maiden issue of *HUSA* newsletter from Benyamin Yalda. Many, many thanks!

When I opened your book I could not put it down. I read and read, at times my face registering different emotions, sometimes feeling my heart racing in my chest. Immediately one identifies with you as the incidents and events you have set down in your 1940s and 1950s diaries are so down-to-earth, kaleidoscopic, and written from the heart; they are nostalgic, bringing back memories we all have for those critical years of our growing up—the hopes, struggles, fears, joys, and heart breaks most of us experienced, living as we did both in Habbaniya and Baghdad. Your writings are very joyful to read and I must congratulate you for turning out this wonderful, unforgettable prose.

Sometime ago your brother Wiska sent me a copy of your previous book *Assyrian Tales and Confessions* and of course I have been reading that book too. Most of the stories in that book have appeared in *Nineveh* Magazine over the past years. I especially liked "Gilyaana's Pressing Secret." I read all of your writings that are printed in *Nineveh* Magazine, and enjoy every one of them. I am

also reading *HUSA* newsletter. Thanks for all these

I am sending a \$50.00 check to cover the expenses you have gone through in mailing these to me, leaving a balance to be included in the collection for the Assyrian needy in Jordan.

**Yooshia K. Poloss**  
Hollywood, Calif

Dear Mikhael:

Fantastic newsletter! Well done, to you and Ben Yalda. I really enjoyed reading it; I did not miss one single letter of it; it was so nostalgic. But then again, we come to expect this of you.

As you know, we had a very good 5<sup>th</sup> Reunion here in England, and I'm glad I was part of it. It was nice to see friends like Ben, Sargon, John, and many others. Obviously, I cannot mention them all. However, we are sorry that you were not with us, but this newsletter more than makes up for that. In any case we hope to see you soon, with the help of God.

Please keep up the good work. We really enjoy all the articles that you write, and I hope that you always keep me posted.

Thank you, and Ben, once again for sending me this newsletter. Should I find anything of interest, about Habbaniya, I'll be only too glad to send it to you.

Kindest regards to everyone.

**Andy Yourish Darmoo**  
Slade Green, Kent, England

Dear Mikhael:

The first issue of *HUSA* newsletter is a big success. Congratulations to you and Ben Yalda! I'm truly amazed at the never-ending stream of your pleasant stories and boundless energy. This also goes to Solomon Sawa Solomon. To all of you a big *CHEBU!*

I also very much enjoyed reading your book *An Assyrian's Youth Journal* though there are some nightmarish accounts in it—sorrow, misery, hardships—along with joy etc. You seem to have gone through a lot of ups and downs. But praise be to God, you triumphed in the end. Though sick and weak in body, you were nevertheless strong and steadfast in mind. When there is will, there is hope. But Dr. Papken probably saved your life...

When I read about the sparrow coming

**Express Yourself (Cont'd)**

to your aid (in your tongue-tied marriage proposal to Blandina) just in time by its droppings on your nose, I laughed so loud that my wife, sitting beside me, almost jumped out of her skin!

Incidentally, I have heard from reliable sources that Private Jallu was killed only after he ran out of ammunition and after having single-handedly killed between 30 and 40 of Rasheed Ali's troops. Jallu was the bravest of the brave. May he rest in peace.

**Aprim K. Abraham**  
North Hills, Calif.

[A \$15.00 check was enclosed]

My dear Menashi:\*

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of your book *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*, together with a copy of the HUSA newsletter.

Although I have not yet read your book or the newsletter, which I received two days ago, I am sure they will be very interesting and I will enjoy reading them, as I have always enjoyed reading whatever you have written.

I am pleased to enclose a small donation [\$25] for the fund mentioned in your letter. I have already mailed my HUSA membership form to Ben Yalda.

Again many thanks and best regards.

**William K. Kanon**  
Modesto, Calif

\*Also known as "Mikhael" or "Michael"

Dear Mike:

Enclosed find a check [\$25]. I mailed HUSA membership form and fee to Ben.

Keep up the excellent work, as you always do.

Wishing you the best of luck and happiness.

**Shimshon L. Essa**  
Modesto, Calif

Dear Michael Pius:

Thank you so very much for the wonderful book, *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*, you sent me. Very thoughtful of you to think of old friends. These contacts, books, periodicals, make me nostalgic for our beautiful and simple past life. Thank you again. I have read just a few pages of your book. You write so eloquently and with passion. May God give you the strength and stamina to continue your gift of writing.

I am sending you a check for \$30 for the book and the needy Assyrians in Jordan.

Take care and thanks again.

**Arpine' O. Hovasapian**  
Glendale, Calif

Dear Mikhael:

Just a short note to say I received my copy of HUSA from Ben Yalda. It is beautifully produced. I knew you two would do a great job of it. I enjoyed reading every bit of it. I will definitely subscribe.

Regards.

**Philimon G. Darmo**  
Sydney, Australia.

Dear Mikhael:

Thank you for your book. It was good meeting you in picnic [in Modesto] and hope to see you again soon. Come by us sometime. We'd love to see you.

Thanks again and good luck to you in your work. [\$50 check was enclosed].

**Juliette (Julia) and Rouel Aboona**  
Modesto, Calif.

Hello Mikhael:

Maddy and I returned [home in Toronto] from Chicago...We did go to Calgary and visit with your aunt Lujiya. What a lovely lady she is and she has such a nice family...We had a good visit with them and [her sister] Mary's daughters Violet and Elizabeth had a good chat with [Lujiya's daughter] Bernadette as they had gone to the same *Rahibat* School in Baghdad. Lujiya has a devoted family who love her... She is so lovely and hospitable...It did give her pleasure to see us...We went to [her son] Zaiya's house in the country too and saw their horses, cat and home. His wife [Romy] is a good artist. She has nice paintings and murals she has created in their house.

[When] we returned to Chicago, we were given the new HUSA which you and Ben Yalda had published. Thank you for saying nice things about us. I do appreciate your sentiments. Sorry I did not help you myself in writing, but I did make a good starting subject and hope others will participate also. Ben posted me the newsletter and I will join the membership.

I was telling Elizabeth about your brother Wiska in Montana and suggested that if God spared us that we make a trip to Montana next as it has mountains and nice scenery. Regards from Maddy.

**Regina (Gewargis) Jones**  
Thornhill, Ont. Canada

Dear Michael:

Congratulations on the first issue of HUSA Journal. I think you have done a splendid job. You will notice that in the feature on the Coronation [of Queen Elizabeth II] in the *Habbite* just published I have used a similar photograph of the Levies being inspected on parade. The source of my photo was at Habbaniya in 1953 and confirms that it was on the Coronation Day parade on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1953 and that the senior officer (with the mustache) is none other than the Duke of Gloucester in the uniform of an Air Marshall.

I will let you have some photographs of my parents with the Assyrians at their party [in Habbaniya] on New Year's Eve 1954.

With best wishes.

**[Dr] Christopher Morris**

Honorary Secretary, RAF  
Habbaniya Association, England

Dear Mikhael,

Your book is selling very well. I have not been turned down yet when making a sales pitch. People truly are appreciating the book written by a self-educated, self-motivated, self-published Assyrian senior of Iraq. The pictures inside are projecting your themes well. And they are sharp.

[To turn to another subject], I am amazed how fun loving and spirited these touring ladies are. I am talking about Regina, Mary, Maddy and the other two young Habbaniya beauties. They are even talking about making it to our area one day. That certainly takes a lot of enthusiasm and love of nature. I can tell by their preoccupation with gardens, vegies, flowers, "majestic mountain" etc. I would like to tell them about Montana one day and also South Dakota and Mt. Rushmore.

Do you know that Julie & Rouel Aboona's daughter is married to my friend Warda Goriel's nephew in Chicago? Warda just told me so.

Take care. I'll keep in touch

**Basil "Wisika" K. Pius**  
Miles City, Montana

[Basil sent me a \$535.00 check for 52 copies of my book he sold to American friends. Great work!]

Dear Minashi:

I received *An Assyrian's Youth Journal* through my brother Zaiya a couple of weeks ago, and I have been reading a bit every day. It (and the pictures) brought a lot of memories of my own childhood in Habbaniya. Sometimes I reflect on memories of some of the friends of years past

**Express Yourself (Cont'd)**

and wonder where some of them are now. I also received HUSA from Ben Yalda. It is always enjoyable to read your writings as you have a knack of capturing the spirit of the moment.

It was great seeing you all for the family reunion in Calgary last year, and we send you all our love until we meet again.

**Sargon F. Abraham**

Brompton, Ont., Canada

[A \$20.00 check was enclosed]

Dear Mikhael Pius,

Thank you so much for sending me your book and the newsletter [HUSA]. It reached me in a remarkably short time. I have just read your newsletter. I expect to read the book soon.

Yes, I did mention *Assyrian Tales & Confessions* in the review [published in *Assyrian Journal of Academic Studies*] of Werda's book [*The Flickering Light of Asia*]. What I meant is that your descriptions provided a vivid idea of the places, perhaps more so than Werda's, since your accounts come from your personal experience of having lived there...

Thank you again for your courtesy.

**Gladys Warda**

Montevideo, Uruguay

Dear Menashi:

Thank you for sending me your book *An Assyrian's Youth Journal* and HUSA newsletter. I enjoyed reading both of them, and I am enclosing a check for \$20 --\$10 for book and \$10 for subscription of newsletter.

Reading your book brought back fond memories of our younger days. Perhaps some readers will say your book is too personal and therefore not interesting. But I think the tragedies, financial problems, job difficulties and, mostly, health problems you had could easily have been the life story of many young men in Habbaniya. Therefore, many former Habbaniyans could now see themselves in your place if they read the book. Anyway, all that was another time and in another place whether happy or miserable. Now that we are living in this blessed country, we pray that God Almighty may give you good health and long life and we look forward to reading many more of your publications. God bless you.

**Davis E. David**

Modesto, Calif.

My dear Mike:

This has been long overdue. I sincerely hope you will accept this little something (\$50) towards your tireless efforts in bring the beautiful memories of Habbaniya through your most delightful memoirs, e.g. your books *My First Ten* and *An Assyrian's Youth Journal* and your newsletters *Bil Khizmaany Wdosty* and, recently, *HUSA* (in co-operation with Ben Yalda) as well as your many articles in *Nineveh Magazine*. I personally enjoy reading your material always, even though, as you know, I do take my sweet time in doing so!

May God bless you and Ben and give you health coupled with the ability to continue your excellent work.

**Zacharia O. Zacharia**

Modesto, Calif

Dear Menashi:

I really enjoyed your book. When I finished it I learnt why. I dreamed of your whole family! My best wishes to Wiska and his family. God bless you all.

[A \$15 donation check was enclosed]

**Shammiran Shabbas Huwe**

Athens, Ohio

Joe:

I am enjoying the Journal. Although I was too young to remember most of what had happened in Habbaniya, I can relate to Mike's memoir. [\$8.50 check enclosed]

**Ben G. Shabo**

Apex, N. Carolina

PS I remember Wiska. He and my brother Joe were pals.

Dear Ben:

Thank you for your No.1 issue of HUSA. I could have given you the membership money when I saw you at Sargon Aboona's house, but somehow you were so busy and departed before I realized what was required.

With you, Minashi as Editor has done a great job in putting the newsletter together considering how much he writes for other Assyrian magazines along with his home chores now that he is on his own without his beloved Blandina and her support.

I am enclosing a US Dollars money order for \$16. Please mail another copy to my brother Youseph.

**Regina G. Jones &**

**Madeleine G. Shabo**

Thornhill, ON, Canada.

Ben:

Congratulations for keeping the connections and memories alive and well through your newsletter. [\$25 check was enclosed]

**Andrew Bet-Shlimon**

Editor, *Assyrian Star*

Lincoln, Rhode Island.

Dear Ben (The Lion of Des Plaines):

This is a good publication which helps to preserve a part of our recent history, especially in Habbaniya where we had a nice and coherent community. This reminds me that Youel Baaba recently wrote an article on Gailani Camp. Perhaps you should print that. I am sure a lot of people will enjoy reading it.

**Bailis Y. Shamun**

Charlotte, N.C.

Hi Ben!

I thank you very much for HUSA newsletter and the membership form.

I know I am late in being a member. I was busy running a business for so many years and lately I got sick for a long time. Thank God, I am much better now.

Once again thank you for creating this kind of idea of Habbaniya Union School Association and for the good job you are doing.

Attached is a check for \$110.00 for our membership.

**John H. Tamras**

Chicago, IL.

Dear Ben:

I received HUSA and quickly started reading the articles which brought back sweet memories from my Habbaniya childhood. (I was ten when we moved from Habbaniya to Dora, Baghdad, in '61)

Minashi does an excellent job of reflecting on those memorable days. It was good seeing him again last year in Calgary [Canada]. (He and Wiska are my maternal first cousins and Yooshia [Po-loss] is our maternal uncle.

Will look forward to receiving HUSA. Keep up the good work in reaching as many Assyrians as possible.

**Sargon Fraidon Ibrahim.**

Brompton, Ont. Canada.

Dear Benyamin:

Thank you for the HUSA Newsletter. I consider it a gift from a good friend. I am sending you a check for \$8.00 to-

**Express Yourself! (Cont'd)**

gether with the completed membership form.

Your HUSA Newsletter brought back some of the old memories of Habbaniya. The signpost with the "Royal Air Force Habbaniya" on it was a long forgotten memory to me. I remember seeing that sign every time I went to Baghdad, Ramadi, or Falluja, and especially when we bicycled to Lake Habbaniya five or six times every summer. I visualize how I and a group of boys on bicycles passed the signboard in those days when all of us were young.

Keep up the good work.

**Aprim Ablakhad Murad**  
Madison Heights, MI.

Dear Benyamin:

I have mailed you my subscription. I enjoyed reading the first HUSA. I read all the articles and "Express Yourself!" and really enjoyed them all. I know it is a great task and responsibility to publish a newsletter, and even greater to publish a magazine. But knowing you, I know you can do it. You are always ready and alert for challenges. Keep up the good work and God bless you.

**Sargon L. Gabriel**  
Canada.

Dear Ben:

I wish to join your Habbaniya Union School Association and so does our chairman David Jones (who knew and worked with many Assyrians and Armenians and met with some in Greenford Town Hall) and there may be more of our members who will also join. Our reunion is on the 12<sup>th</sup> October and we will try to recruit more to the HUS at that event.

**Dr.Christopher Morris**  
Hon.Sec. RAF Habbaniya Association  
United Kingdom

Hi Ben!

Sorry for the delay—too many things going on. Am enclosing check for \$8.00. I have a lot that I can write/contribute—God willing I will be free enough to do it. Keep up the good job and good luck.

**Odisho Warda**  
Kenosha, WI

Dear Minashi:

I hope you and the members of your family are well and are happy. We too are well and Eshaya [her husband who had a stroke] has improved a lot, thank God. I am writing this letter on Eshaya's behalf, because his hand is slow and his penmanship is not so clear.

We are glad to receive your letter and your new book, *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*. Eshaya says it is well written and praises you for producing it. He also felt sad when reading certain sections in which you mentioned about the unfortunate events that had happened. But what

can we do but ask for the Almighty's mercy and guidance.

I am enclosing a check for \$30 as a donation toward the book.

We hope you will keep up with your writing and we trust to hear good news about you and our people, always.

We have received the school newsletter HUSA and have applied to be members.

**Abigail ( & Eshaya) Isaac**  
Skokie, IL.

Hi Minashi!

Thank you for the book. I hope you and family are keeping well. [\$50.00 check was enclosed]

**Sandra & Eshay Baba**  
Skokie, IL.

Dear Mikhael:

Thank you for your letter of September 2 and the book, *An Assyrian's Youth Journal*.

I wish to take this opportunity to confess that I have not only shown interest in but, indeed, also enjoyed reading most of what you have written. I will certainly cherish the above book similar to the *Assyrian Tales and Confessions*. Two remarkable books which all Assyrians, particularly ex-Habbaniya residents, should be proud of by displaying them in a prominent spot on their bookshelf.

Enclosed is a money order for US\$20 made payable to Joe M. Pius to cover printing and mailing costs plus a small amount for needy Assyrians.

You are doing a great service to our community for which we are thankful. Keep on with the good work.

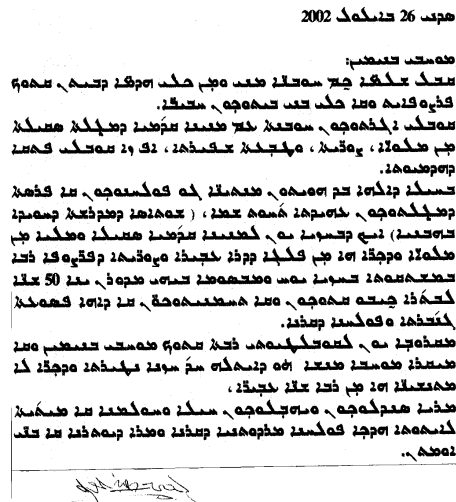
**John R. Michael**  
Beaconsfield, Canada.

**Continuation of Front Page**

eyesight of our generation. We tend to agree with that. But one reason the smaller print is more commonly used is because it is economical, allowing extra space for additional material. Another reason is that it fits in more evenly in a line, especially in narrow columns, without leaving too many ugly wide gaps between words. Anyway, as a sampling, we are setting the cover page in the larger print. If we hear enough assenting voices, beginning with the next issue we will try to set the whole newsletter (except captions) in 12-point font despite the fact that we will have one-fifth less space to use on our pages.

Finally, we have some good news about our Editorial staff: On Ben Yalda's suggestion, Basil K. Pius, aka "Wisaka," has agreed to join HUSA as consultant and contributing editor. And we welcome him with open arms, as his contributions will definitely be a support for us and a plus for the newsletter. Basil has an MA in English Literature and was a teacher at Miles City Community College in Montana for more than 30 years. He retired several years ago, but he sometimes teaches a Middle East culture class (including Assyrian culture) at the College to both students and adults. And he takes joy, along with his wife, in taking care of our disabled youngest brother at home.

Meanwhile, his contribution to this issue is a sensitive, meaningful, and heartwarming story about his late older brother "Appy" (Aprim) and a pear tree he planted in Basil's backyard 23 years ago, as well as the "Christmas Spirit" message he has on page two. —MKP



**Raabi Jacob Miraziz**, Sydney, Australia.

Dear Cousin Mikhael:

Thank you for the book. It is indeed very detailed and enjoyable. The pictures are the best reminders of our past. They especially remind us of some of the dearest ones we lost. I had a great joy looking at these photos.

I am sorry to tell you that I have not yet finished reading the book for lack of time, but I promise I will read everything in it.

I apologize that I haven't been able to take orders for many copies of this lovely book. But one person read it and said, "If all Assyrians could write in the same way, it would be very good to Assyrians and they would not be so unknown in this world."

Again George and I thank you for sending us this book and please accept our humble donation [\$50.00] for the people you are helping. We are very proud of you and of what you are doing to help people in need. We appreciate a great deal your concern and respect for us and may God bless you.

Cousin, please send me three or four books for people who ordered it. I will send you the money when they get the books.

**Najiba "Nina" (& George) Soro**  
Monterey, Calif.

## British Assyrians Host 5<sup>th</sup> Habbaniya School Reunion

By Mikhael K. Pius

For the first time since its birth 10 years ago, Habbaniya Union School Reunion was held in London, England. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> Reunion. The first two took place in the Chicago area and the next two in Toronto, Canada, and Sydney, Australia, respectively.

We were told the various events that took place in London Town lasted from August 2 through 5. They were complemented by guided six-day package tours of France, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium, organized by Tawer Michael of London in collaboration with Ben Yalda and Sargon Aboona of Chicago and undertaken by a small group, mostly overseas visitors. The visitors also toured a few of London's historical places and shopping centers as well as visited friends' and relatives' homes.

The main event, the banquet, took place at the Aviation Banquet Hall of Heathrow Park Hotel, on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2002. It was a dinner-dance party attended by 500 guests.

One hundred and twenty of them were from overseas, mostly from the United States and a handful from Canada, Australia, Kuwait and Dubai.

The party was preceded on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> by a special getting-acquainted dinner party for the overseas visitors. It was arranged by the Assyrian Auxiliary Ladies at the Assyrian club, where the guests and club members later mingled and enjoyed chatting for several hours about the old and the new over refreshments.

And on late Sunday morning, August 4, following a church service, the congregation of several hundred was treated to a traditional Assyrian breakfast at the Assyrian Club. The overseas visitors were also honored with a special dinner next evening, Monday 5<sup>th</sup>

The group of visitors from Chicago and California arrived in London on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, on two separate flights. They were welcomed at the Heathrow Airport by members of Assyrian Ladies Auxiliary. A white carnation was presented to each gentleman and a red one to each lady guest. A similar welcome was accorded by a small reception party to the fewer guests from Canada arriving at Gatwick Airport. As customary with Assyrians, each arriving guest was also offered a sweetmeat (an English toffee in this case) during the coach ride to the hotel to "sweetened" his or her mouth.

The tables at the banquet were arranged and decorated, with a touch of color, by the Assyrian Auxiliary ladies and the fare was English roast lamb with seasonal dressings and two bottles of red wine for each of the 50 ten-seat tables.

The program got underway with a flag-parading procession by six distinguished Assyrian ladies to the tune of the Assyrian national song *Ya Akhouni Qatoukh Baidagh* (O My Brother, to you the Flag) to the accompaniment of Assyrian music and vigorous hand clapping. The Assyrian national flag was followed by the Union Jack, Stars and Stripes, Canadian Leaf, Australian flag, Assyrian *Aata*, and, finally by the Habbaniya Union School flag.



The flag carriers: left, Louas Aghajan (Canada), Leena Yalda (USA), Madeleine Oshana (Australia), Dr. Victoria Zado (Assyria), and (not included in picture) Jenny Clarke (UK) and Lilly Baba (H.U.School)



Some members of the touring group in downtown of Lucerne, Switzerland. From left: Helen Amirkhas, David Ganja, Helda, Helen Sapper and Helen Zacharia.



The young-at-heart Ben Yalda (left), during a Paris tour, sitting and enjoying tending the flocks of two kinds of pigeons.

## Habbaniya's 5<sup>th</sup> Reunion (Con'td)

Each three of the six flags were then installed on each side of the stage. Their colors along with an arch of colored balloons gave the stage a picturesque appearance.

A one-minute silence was observed in memory of departed schoolmates and Assyrian martyrs, followed by the welcoming speech delivered by the Commander of the London Organizing Committee, Mr Andrious Mama Jotyar,

Next Benyamin Yalda, Chairman of the Founding Committee in the United States, welcomed the guests and thanked the Organizing Committee members, the Assyrian Auxiliary ladies in London, and others for their help and good work. He also touched on the history of the Habbaniya Union School Reunion.

Other speakers were representatives John Aghajan of Canada, Zacharia O. Zacharia of California and Zaia Shawel, on behalf of the absent Australian community representative, Dinkha Warda. Special speakers were: Dr. Christopher Morris of the RAF Habbaniya Association in the United Kingdom, *Raabi* Albert Babilla from the United States, and Dr. Victoria Zado from England.

Assyrian Khigga and Western dancing of a variety of numbers followed for the rest of the evening, while the hotel bar provided drinks on sale for those who wished to just sit, sip and chat. But considering our generation's diminished sense of hearing how much of the conversation filtered through the loud music and Assyrian hub-bub is anybody's guess!

The special Sunday morning church service was conducted by Rev. Stephan Turkhan at *Mart* Mariam Assyrian Church of the East in Ealing. The whole congregation, including the visitors, was later treated to a breakfast at the Assyrian Club, provided and served by the Assyrian Ladies Auxiliary and the Church Committee members.

And the next evening's special dinner was given at Greenford Town Hall, Middlesex, in honor of the overseas visitors by the Ladies Auxiliary and the Assyrian community, who bore the expense and did the work involved. Habbaniya photographs and maps of the vintage era, set on stands, were exhibited in the hall.

During the evening, Dr. Christopher Morris, assisted by Mr. David Jones and Mr. Andrew Carter, all of RAF Habbaniya Association, screened, with a running commentary (without the benefit of a microphone!), a collection of slides of scenes of the former RAF Station and the local camps of Habbaniya. The viewers enjoyed the show with, what we were told, a great deal of uninhibited Assyrian glee at familiar places and faces and with cheers and applause. But a small group of overseas visitors who had already left for Lourdes in France to visit the Marian holy shrines missed the show. And a larger group left on the following day, Tuesday, on a six-day package tour of France, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium.

Incidentally, Dr. Morris, as a pre-teen boy, lived in C.C. Habbaniya during 1954-55 when his father, Squadron Leader Frederick Morris, was the last officer-in-charge of the Civil Cantonment before the air base was taken over by the Iraqi Government.

The next Reunion is expected to be held in 2004. Where? Take a guess! California? Chicago? No! Perhaps Sweden or New Zealand? Not a chance! We are told Habbaniya itself, if political climate in Iraq is "warm"—or if Saddam Husein allows it! Otherwise one of the first two guesses is more likely.

If Habbaniya is the finalist, will the event and the desire to see the old hometown (perhaps unrecognizable now) and its

Invirons be a strong drawing card for many to brave the long, arduous and perhaps "perilous" journey? That remains to be seen. #



Some of the Assyrian tourist in Lucerne, Switzerland, in front of a lion statue honoring fallen Swiss guards of the Vatican



During a boat trip on a river in Amsterdam, Holland.



The whole five-day package touring group during a brief stop in Bruges on the return journey to Calais & London.



## When Habbaniyans visited in groups at Christmastime

by Mikhael K. Pius

Christmas is the time of the year to go to *Shaharta* (Midnight Mass), to sing hymns and Christmas carols; it's the season to forgive and forget, to give and receive, to call and communicate and to come together as a family and as a community. It is also the occasion to feast and drink and make merry, and to bask in the warmth of kinship, friendship and intimacy and to rejoice in the general feeling of well-being, contentment and goodwill.

Today, to some people the spirit of Christmas is still well and alive. They go to church, play and listen to Christmas music and songs, send and receive Christmas cards, exchange gifts, light up their homes, drink and dine and be merry, and enjoy the shared closeness of friends and relations and the peaceful afterglow of the holy occasion. There are a few compassionate souls who even share material and moral kindness with strangers less fortunate than themselves! But

there are also many more, including Assyrians in this wonderful materialistic country, who are gradually losing touch with the true spirit of the Holiday. They are the victims of commercialism, locked up in the modern Christmas craze and frustration of endless shopping sprees and vain showmanship.

The Christmas spirit is being used and abused for vanity, selfish motives and greedy gain. We are caught up and swept away by the tidal wave of the commercial puff and peal of the season. We buy and give like crazy, but neglect the real gift of giving of ourselves, of sharing joy and renewing love, faith, hope and charity. Some of us today hardly visit relations even though sometimes living only a stone's throw away, and most neighbors are barely more than on a nodding basis, let alone visiting each other's homes. Christmas should be, basically, a social and religious festival. Instead, it has become a commercial revelry

In former days, Assyrian Christmas was simple and uncomplicated. It was a modest family and community-oriented holiday, joyful and peaceful. There was little or none of today's clamor and materialistic sophistication, exploitation and showmanship.

And Easter was also celebrated in a very similar fashion as Christmas. In fact, Christmas was called "The Little Holiday" (*Eeda Soora*) and Easter "The Great Holiday" (*Eeda Goora*) with its colored eggs and "egg fights." Today Easter is hardly celebrated, except for its commercial aspect.

Most people were poor then by today's economic standards, but they were rich in moral values, family relations and religious and social traditions. None had private cars, elegant homes, plush furniture or personal bank accounts. Most people cycled, some walked, to work. And some slept half-a-dozen to a small room and couldn't afford chicken even on Sundays. But they related to each other more strongly, had a sounder moral base and a keener sense of awareness and belonging. Family members were closely

knit together, children were obedient, and elders were respected and the aged were cared for with personal family love and concern rather than by professional care-taking of "Home" isolation. Although parents' lives centered around their children, spanking was the surest way of straightening out a wayward child.

I remember some of the Christmases of the time in the local camps of Royal Air Force Station of Hinaidi, Iraq, in the thirties and from the late thirties to early fifties in Habbaniya, where the majority of the ten-to-twelve thousand population was Assyrian.

In the earlier years in particular, the Assyrians hadn't made the acquaintance of Santa, and very few of us knew what a Christmas tree was, let alone setting up one. The custom of exchanging Christmas cards was a foreign one, and the only people who got Christmas presents were children.

As a rule, the gifts were purchased by the parents. They were things to wear, such as clothes, hats, shoes, and so on. And for a lucky few kids whose parents could afford the luxury, there was a "Made-in-Japan" toy car or gun or a doll each worth the equivalent of 25 or 50 cents.

In addition to the toys and presents and the delicacies and special foods prepared for the occasion to enjoy, for us young ones there was also the electrifying excitement and the delicious anticipation of the approaching Holiday. No early

rising, no school, no homework! Only days of carefree time for fun and frolic and to use as we pleased.

For me the most exciting time was Christmas Eve. I'd flicker and glow with anticipation during the whole evening, impatient for the coming morning when I'd not only be able to put on my brand new clothes—and be compelled to go to confession and receive Holy Communion!—but I'd also see the interior of our modest, cramped, live-in abode of eight people, with its two tiny all-purpose rooms, transformed overnight, as though by magic, into a spic-and-span "dream home!"

My mother's and my pre-teenaged sister's handcrafts would be "on show": pillow shams, beds-spreads, bed ruffles, table covers, chair cushion cases, wall decorative handiwork. They would be in embroidery, crochet, and knitted work, all mounted in their proper places. And the ceiling and walls would be adorned with colored paper streamers, bells, and bunting my father had "scrounged," as excess, following the decoration of his NAAFI canteen. Paper ornaments would sparkle and twinkle in the oil-lamp light and twirl at the slightest whiff of air! In the middle of the room would be a table heaped with platefuls of "*boochy-moochy*" (seeds and nuts) and a bowlful of fruit, with a few bottles of arak and red wine—the latter usually made by my father from raisins—set in the center. And all



## Christmastime visiting (Cont'd)



1944 Habbaniya Boy Scout and Girl Guide Christmas Party held at the Civil Cantonment Cinema building. Taking part were also the RAF Scouting instructors and the female members of the "No, No, Nanette" concert troupe touring the British Forces bases in the Middle East. Some of the recognizable faces: Sitting, from left: Khawa Yacoub Aboona, Anna Youkhanna, Alice Roovil, Regina Gewargis, next three k.n. (not known), Glodia (Helen) Shaul, Louas Roovil, next k.n., "BabyBoy" Paul Apostoloff, next two n.k. Mrs. Apostoloff, wife of Assistant Officer-in-charge C.C.; 2<sup>nd</sup> row, first Yacoub Khoshaba, k.n., Envia Warda, nurse n.k., next n.k., Aprim ---?, Daniel L. Solomon with English lady, Jane Isaac, Roza Aziz, Wilson Khooshaba Isaac, n.k., Lazar Youkhanna; 3<sup>rd</sup> row: second from left Francis Shaul, next three n.k., William Khamis, n.k., Sargon Yacoub Aboona (raised head), next three n.k.; 4<sup>th</sup> row, first three n.k., Sgt. Ronald Marshall, Akhtiyar Jallu, nurse n.k., Mikhael Waranso, between two ladies Odisho Adam, next William Kamar, Albert Roye, and Ben Zaia Gewargis, n.k., Eshay Orahim Baba (necktie); last row: first n.k. Yosip "Tancho" Shimun, other four n.k. except Little Ben Esho Yalda (in front of framed picture).

this would be arranged between the time we children fell asleep shortly after supper and the time our parents went to bed which, I suppose, was well past midnight.

A good proportion of the Assyrian men in Habbaniya were employed by the Royal Air Force as a local military force called R.A.F. (Iraq) Levies. Their basic duty was to guard the air base and its installations, but they were used on many occasions in various military operations in the interest of the British Government. And the rest of the Assyrians, including a handful of women, worked in clerical and skilled and unskilled and domestic-service jobs. All were paid subsistence wages and were accommodated, for a rent, in scanty, mudbrick bungalow-type uniform attached houses of several classes, the majority without electricity and with commune-like common bathing, toilet and water-supply facilities. Despite minor problems in the community or between neighbors, they all lived with each other, including people of other races, in relative harmony.

Basically, the community as a whole had the same standard of living and led a simple frugal life. So Christmas and Easter were two occasions when not only Assyrian children but also adults had the opportunity to enjoy the luxury of special foods and delicacies.

After midnight Mass, there was the piping-hot big pot of *harreesa* (wheat porridge) of chicken or lamb, which lasted into the next day, cooked by cookery-wise housewives in *tannura* (clay oven) or on *ojakhta* (coal stove) rather than on the common noisy kerosene Primus stove. Each plateful would be crowned by a pat of butter.

For Christmas breakfast there were the home-baked pastry, *kaadey* and *Killaichy*; the inch-thick cream of milk of *gammishyateh* (water buffalo cows); the pungent Kurdish cheese and *jajik* (spicy cottage cheese); date molasses and *takheen* (sesame butter); fried or boiled eggs and hot, strong, sweetened *samovar* tea with—a recipe acquired from our British employers—fresh or canned milk. Christmas lunch was much more sumptuous. It consisted of Persian Sadri rice cooked in *dihin hoor* (ghee) with curried chicken (or lamb) with potatoes; lamb roast; *kepteh* (meat-balls); lamb cutlets and fried chicken pieces with potato fries; and *dolma* of grape leaves, cabbage or chard or of "colors" (stuffed onions, tomatoes, zucchini and eggplant). Lamb was more commonly used than beef. Iraq lamb was the finest lamb in the world. It was cheaper, tenderer, tastier and didn't have the unpleasant odor American mutton has. Supper was usually leftovers from the lunch menu.

Among the snacks were walnut-stuffed dates, *boochey-moochy* (seeds and nuts), toffees and sweets and, of course, various fruits in season, mostly dates, oranges and apples. Bananas were the luxury of a few.

It was more customary then for us Assyrians to exchange social visits to wish each other a Happy Holiday. Neighbors would visit neighbors, relatives visited relatives, and sometimes even strangers, including non-Christian friends, would drop in, to chat, smoke a cigarette, munch an apple or orange or nibble on *mazza* or *boochy-moochy*, and "toss a toast" to Christmas. "*Bkhoubbkhoun whaveh Eidokhoun breekha!* (To your health and a Happy Holiday to you!) Very few women, either singly or accompanied, visited during Christmas or Easter. They usually stayed home to take care of the children and ensure hospitality to the stream of holiday well-wishers.

As for New Year's Eve, most people spent it at home with their family members, sometimes with a few relatives or friends, sipping a drink or two, munching sandwiches, and bickering over bit-betting card games. While some others, especially the younger people, celebrated the occasion at the clubs' New Year dance parties.

## Christmastime visiting (Cont'd)

On these three holidays, often a hilarious group of young men would roam the camp streets, accompanied by a few musicians. They would play music, and sing songs and generally be boisterously merry. Older men, usually neighbors or members of same tribe, made the Christmas or Easter visiting rounds in *dasta* (group). One would see group after group of Holiday visitors roaming the community. Each group would originate, usually, at about noontime with one or two men. The visitors would then pick up the man of each family they visited, so that by evening the group would snowball into a dozen or more men, having visited as many homes also. The more homes visited the larger the group became, so that sometimes the last host's home had a hard time accommodating the crowd in the tight seating space. But we Assyrians say "It's your heart that should be big!"

The larger the group grew the merrier and noisier it became. Often each group would have one or two "singers" amongst it. So stimulated by the *pekeh* (shots) they had "tossed" and the excitement of the occasion, the singers would be challenged to singing "duels." Most of the old and middle-aged generations were World War I refugees from Kurdistan and Turkey and so some Kurdish and Turkish songs were favorites for some.

The snacks the men consumed with their drinks at the various homes visited were more than enough to stave their hunger. But it wasn't unusual for a whole group to have a meal at the home where it happened to be at mealtime, or at any other home whose family was hospitable enough to invite the visitors to eat.

It was customary for each man to have at least one small drink at each home he visited. So you can imagine what a bunch of "merry men" the group was at the time it broke up, sometimes at night. My father usually staggered home mumbling and smiling in his little Chaplin-type mustache, more "pickled" than a pickled cucumber—of which he probably had munched quite a few along with his drinks. But, then, what the heck, Christmas was only once a year—even though Christmas visiting period usually lasted till New Year's Day.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS and A HAPPY NEW YEAR to one and all!

[Excluding the two photographs, reproduced, with slight revision, from *Nineveh Magazine* #4/1989]



1952 New Year dance party at RAF Assyrian Employees' Club, C.C. Habbaniya, Iraq. The parade of happy, smiling faces belongs to: (clockwise from top center) Michael "Sawa" (with handsome mustache) and wife, and (above) Shimshon G. Daniel, Esho Hassan and wife, and (above) George Youkhanna, (below him) Agnis Karam and partner, Ezaria Akhko and Agnis Esho, next pair not known., (down) Zaia E. Yalda and sister Maryam, (up front) Baba Benyamin and Meriam, Barcham Mogi and hidden partner, Benyamin "Kanna" Youkhanna and Julia Warda, and Habbaniya's Gentleman Sportsman Youel Gewargis and sister Younia Billa, (above) Minashi Pius and wife Blandina (cropped out), William Shallou and Asho Thomas, Shlimon G. Daniel and partner, Ben Esho and partner (Englishwoman?) and (tall one) Paul N. Benjamin with cousin Glodia Shaul. Middle line, from right: Mishael "Misho" Akhko and partner, Youliya and husband Enwia Warda (hidden), Skharia Odisho and Merjaney, Albert Philip with Naima Shmaiel and (above them) Newton Elisha with Naano Polous. It is hoped that seeing their dearly beloved in the young arms of others would not pinch now a twinge of jealousy in the "mature" hearts of some of today's wives—or husbands!

## Grin and Grimace

### "Don't toe the coffee sack!"

An Arab villager in Saudi Arabia saw a full sack lying by the roadside, under a palm tree. Curious, he got down from his donkey and nudged it with his big toe. It felt like coffee. Since he did not know its owner and was too honest to take it home, he rode on straight to the *majlis* of

Abdulla bin Jaluwi and told the Emir what he had seen. "How could you tell it was coffee?" ask the Emir.

"Because I prodded it with my big toe and it felt like coffee, the Illustrious One," replied the honest villager.

"If you knew the sack was not yours

you should not have even touched it," snapped the Emir. Then looking at his *jallaat* he ordered sternly: "Take him outside and sever that offensive big toe immediately!"

—Contributed by Aprim K. Abraham

## Chit-chattin'... about Habb friends

On Sunday, May 26, Zacharia "Skharia" Odisho Zacharia called me to ask me if I wanted to go to the *Kaalu Sulaaqa* picnic. He told me that Khawa and Julia Aboona and their husbands were here and would be at the picnic and perhaps I would like to meet them. At first I stuttered and stammered, but finally said "Well, why not?" I thought the outing would be a change of scenery and would give me a break from my work, even though the long hours of being up on my feet at the park might overtax my rather scrawny legs.

When I drove to the picnic ground, the parking lot was so jam-packed that I had to park half a mile away. And as I ambled into the picnic grounds the park was literally swarming with people, like bees in a hive, with a similar noisy hum-drum. There must have been at least two or three thousand of them. "God, how can I find Skharia in this crowd?" I asked myself in consternation. It looked like the proverbial "looking for a needle in a haystack!"

But as luck would have it, I soon ran into Skharia and "Abu Basil" (Rouel Aboona) while they were wandering about, worried, like souls lost in a desert, trying to locate their wives chaperoning Khawa and Arnold. But as we three were slicing our way through the dense crowd, I literally ran into Khawa. I grabbed her hand and she

looked into my face for a moment, in puzzled surprise. Then her face broke into a smile of recognition. But I think her memory still could not quite connect with my name until I told her, even though it was only ten years when we met last, at Chicago's 1st Habbaniya Union School reunion.

Khawa, who is a former Habb Girl Guide Leader and, later, Commissioner, hasn't changed a whole lot like some of us have. Her life-long friend, Regina G. Jones, calls her "*Khaali d'Kaashan*." Her figure is still good and she doesn't look her age. In one of my *Nineveh* articles on the 1992 Reunion, I noted that among the women, I thought Khawa was the most girlish looking and Skharia Odisho (despite his vanishing hair) and Andrious Mama (notwithstanding his tinted hair and mustache) were the old timers that had kept a youngish body and look. Khawa's younger sister Julia is now even slimmer—and what a nice and considerate person. She called me up recently and had such knowledgeable and encouraging things to say about my book—not to mention her generosity—and urging me to visit her and Rouel at their new home in Modesto. I hardly knew Julia in Habb, but I think I'm going to take her up on her invitation one day.

Khawa's husband Arnold has grown lankier, following his bypass surgery two years ago. As regards Julia's husband, actually, I wasn't well acquainted with "Abu Basil", but I remember he used to come sometimes to our Bookstore in Baghdad in the sixties to see my late brother Appy. They would sometimes get together, along with Abris Al-Matran and other cronies.

Anyway, we spent about three hours wandering in the park

in group, sitting and chatting, though with all the racket going on, I had a hard time understanding some of the conversation, even with my hearing aid going full blast! We also listened to the lusty singers and watched the young (and some not so young) Assyrian men and women kicking up their heels (and a cloud of dust!) and having a wonderful time, while the older couples just sat under the trees and watched and munched sandwiches and guzzled cold drinks—and maybe day-dreamed of the days that were!

We also ran into a few old friends: Hormis Hassamo (Boy, can this guy talk!), who gave us, and Arnold, a bald "lesson" in American and English politics; William Kaplano Kanon with his shy and quiet wife Shammiran; the former footballer Avia Nimrod Khammo (from England) and his younger brother Alex and wife Flora and one or two others, though 99% of the picnic crowd was alien to us. But Skharia "Zac the Sax" seemed to



**Group outing at the Assyrian American Association's *Kaalu Sulaaqa* picnic. From right, Zacharia "Skharia" O. Zacharia, Arnold Pearce, Shammiran Kanon, Helen Zacharia, Julia Aboona, Khawa Pearce, William Kanon, and Mikhael Pius. Rouel snapped the picture.**

know so many people! And he's such a popular guy among the Assyrian crowd that we suggested to nominate him, at the next election, as the Assyrian candidate for the mayorship of Modesto!

And it's always a pleasure to meet William. He's such a nice, gentle and likable guy, with a constant smile lighting up his round handsome face. He's a life-long friend. We were neighbors (and smoke-sneaking pals!) in Maratha Lines, Hinai-

di, in mid 1930s and were classmates in Habbaniya. Sadly, William lost a sister and a young niece in Chicago in quick succession last year and

he recently suffered a more painful bereavement, the premature death of a younger brother Awia, aged 53. (See back cover). Julia and Basil, Skharia and Helen and I got together one evening last October and had a very pleasant visit with William and Shammiran to offer our condolences.

And they don't come any better than Skharia. He's one of my close friends now. Of course I knew Skharia since Habbaniya days, but we became closer friends during recent years and especially following Blandina's passing two years ago. He would call me often to see how my son Yosip and I were doing and how was my housekeeping and cooking "feats" coming up. Occasionally we would get together at a social event, such as a dinner party for a cause, a political rally, a seminar, or a funeral. He's visited me at home several times, and both he and his wife Helen, also a cheerful and hospitable person, have always urged me to visit them. Despite the long drive, I've dropped in on them a few times for tea and cakes. Why, Helen even forced on me a plate of a delicious lentil soup one afternoon despite my protests that my tank was already topped off up to my Adam's apple.

And just imagine, when we left the park to drive back home Skharia and Helen had even an icebox of sandwiches and cold drinks for us in their car—including some fresh, crispy *taranozy*—to gobble up and wet our dry whistles because the waiting time in the "refueling" queue at the picnic was sooooo long!

—MKP

## Assyrians were among Observers of Weather in Habbaniya



Some of the British and local Radio Sonde staff in the early 1950s: Squatting: Khallaf, peon from Abu Fleis; Sitting, from left: Mr. Ruddock, Sgt. Patrick, Mr. Cohen (Chief Radio Sonde Officer), Mr. Fitzgerald, Cpl. Paddy (with his dog); Standing, from left: Zacharia Odisho Zacharia, Youav Giliaana Tamraz, Davis Eshay David Raabi Albert Aghassi Babilla (senior observer), Arshavil Yousif Azizian, last two names not remembered. Among other local staff who worked for the office were: John Baijo Rehana, Albert P. Rasho, Noel E. David, Youseph Y. Shmouel, George J. Moukhatis, George Abdul Ahad, Daniel Zaia, Christie S. Michael, Yerjanik Sarkisian, Ramzi Neesan, Benyamin Mirza, and others whose names cannot be remembered now.

Among the many Royal Air Force departments in Habbaniya was the Radio Sonde and Meteorological Offices. Along with the British personnel, a number of local staff, mostly Assyrians, worked in these offices. They were called observers and wireless operators and a few were senior observers.

The office collected information on weather in advance to forecast temperature and weather conditions for aviation and general purposes.

The British invented radar during World War II and after the war it was decided to use it for peaceful purposes, one of which was the work of Radio Sonde Office. This enabled forecasters to study the upper air and forecast weather conditions better.

Basically, a balloon, six to eight feet in diameter, was inflated with hydrogen gas. Attached beneath it would be a parachute and then a prefabricated triangle aluminum reflector called "target" fixed at the end of a 12-foot cord. A prefab radio transmitter would also be attached at the end of another 80-foot cord extending immediately beneath the target. A battery of 32 zinc cells, wrapped in heavy wadding, was plugged in and placed inside the transmitter, which would transmit signals to the ground crew. The transmitter also had three small windmills that propelled as the balloon ascended, sending down continuous signals of air pressure, temperature and humidity at intervals of about five seconds until the balloon burst and dropped to the ground. These signals were received on an oscilloscope called BTO and plotted on technical charts in the Radio Sonde office.

The observers on the ground also received similar signals on direction, speed, and height of the balloon. These were also plot-

ted and traced on a different chart at Radio Sonde office. Under the supervision of senior observers, data collected was dispatched to all RAF weather out-stations throughout the world.

Launching of the balloons and collection of technical data procedure was done twice daily, at 4:30 am and 4:30 pm. The balloon would normally climb up to 40 to 70 thousand feet before bursting. The transmitter would land safely, by means of the parachute, on the ground within a specified radius of 50 miles. With a reward notice card attached, the transmitter was occasionally returned to base by the finder to claim the 250-fils (\$1.00) reward. Sometimes, the transmitters were shipped to Britain to be refurbished for reuse.

The observers' jobs were highly technical and sensitive. It entailed the use and operation of various instruments such as BTO oscilloscope, barometric pressure, radar operation, slide rule, ozone observation, taking and reading of temperatures, pressure, humidity, as well as the study of numerous types of clouds on a daily basis.

The year 1954 was declared as International Geophysical Year by the United Nations. As a result, the Radio Sonde office at Habbaniya was entrusted with the special task of collecting data on upper air for use with the launching of satellites worldwide. Thus the era of outer space was born. The same year, study and collection of technical data on ozone observations also took place at Radio Sonde office. It has now been said and proven that a big hole (or two) in ozone layer is visible. The result is global warming! **(Information contributed by Zacharia O. Zacharia (with photo) and Davis E. David, both of Modesto)**

Portrait of a Habbaniya sportsman

## Habbaniya's Gentleman Sportsman

By Mikhael K. Pius

Youel Gewargis was among the score of Assyrian sportsmen who attained international status in Iraq and contributed toward highlighting both the Assyrian and the Iraqi reputation in sports. In addition, he was the gentleman of Habbaniya sports and one of its very best soccer players. Fast and resourceful on the field, he was a master of dribbling, ball control, and accurate passing, and often a scorer, too. A cool, collected, and clean player, he was meek and modest off the field, with a



1951: Levy C Hockey Team captain Youel Gewargis receiving Kumar Cup from Mrs. Quittenden, wife of Officer in-charge of Civil Cantonment, after his team won the championship against C.C. Team. In background, from left: Kumar Vello, Wazgain "Shikwana," Mirza Shmoel, Bob Benyamin, Andrious Mama ; extreme right, Mansor Zodo.

constant smile; a real nice guy, though somewhat coy and withdrawn.

Youel was basically a player and not a performer as some of the top sportsmen were. Like the great late Youra Eshaya—who, incidentally, told the writer in a published interview that he had learned his dribbling skill from Youel Gewargis—Youel played more for the love of the game than for its glory. And during his two-decade soccer career, he played righthalf, insiderright and outside-right. And he played equally well in all three positions, "delivering the goods" to his team. He was also a top hockey player, a good swimmer and Habbaniya's local 440-yard track champion in 1952 and 1953.

Youel started playing soccer in 1940, aged 15, in the Civil Cantonment of Royal Air Force Station, Habbaniya, Iraq. After playing for two seasons in the Union School's soccer competition organized by the late *Raabi* Emmanuel Jacob, he left school and started working—and playing soccer in the big local games.

The young player's employment career began in 1942 as a local junior clerk for the RAF Levies. Soon after he was sent to Palestine along with No.15 RAF Levy Squadron which was assigned to guard the RAF war-time airfields and bomb dumps, first in the cities of St Jean and Nahriya during 1942-43, and a year later, at the RAF Station in Beirut, Lebanon. He was already so good at soccer that he was picked to play in 1943 for the RAF Command football [soccer] team competing in the Levant Forces Football Championship taking place between the British Navy, Army and Air Force teams in R.A.F. Station in Beirut, Lebanon.

When he returned to Habbaniya in 1944, he joined the Levy C (Civilian) soccer and hockey teams, newly organized and captained by the then budding young player Aram Karam. Youel was an outstanding hockey player, too, and he captained the team during the last four years (1947-51) of its seven-year run.

At the end of 1951, Levy C's both soccer and hockey teams were dissolved. Youel, along with his top team mates, joined their arch rivals, the RAF Assyrian Employees' Club teams, the dominant Habbaniya competitors, under the captaincy of the late Hormis Goriel—father of today's well-known Assyrian singer Sargon Gabriel of Chicago. Youel played for the Employees' Club and for the C.C. Select soccer and hockey teams until he left for Baghdad in 1955, shortly after Habbaniya air base was surrendered to the Iraqi Government in May of that year. He was by then one of the elite soccer players of Habbaniya.

In Baghdad, while he worked for the American Embassy as personnel assistant, he played for *Muslaha* team (Baghdad Passenger Transport Co) for the next five years as part-time pro in the national soccer competitions. During this period, he also took part in a number of important matches: First, in June 1956 for the Assyrian national team playing under the name of Assyrian Sports Club of Baghdad, against Taj Club of Teheran; then in October 1956 for the same team against Shaheen Club plus a return match against the Taj Club, both matches being played in Teheran. He was on the lineup of the same team against Rising Club of Lebanon in Baghdad in 1957. In August of next year, Youel was on the Iraq National Team that went on a tour and played a series of friendly games in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and East Germany. And, in October 1959, he played against the Lebanese National Team in the Rome Olympic Games qualifying series, played off in Beirut. In 1960 Youel switched from *Muslaha* team to Baghdad Police team, again as a part-time pro, and was in the Assyrian Sports Club team's lineup against the Tunisian National team in Baghdad in August 1962. Not long after, however, he played his last game and retired from sports just before turning 40.

In 1967 Youel left his 12-year American Embassy job and worked for three years as secretary to the commercial manager of



Master Youel Gewargis(right)in a dribble duel with "pupil" Youra Eshaya Didier Werke AG, in Baghdad. From 1971 through 1981, the year he immigrated to Australia, Youel changed his job and employer three more times: 1971-75 as secretary for the project manager of International Bechtel in Basrah; 1975-78 as typist for a Polish company called Electrim; and 1979-81 in Abu Dhabi as office services supervisor for his former firm, International Bechtel Inc. And in Sydney, Australia, he was employed part time from 1981 through 1985 by News Limited, addressing and dispatching newspapers, before he decided to retire on pension.

## Gentleman Sportsman (Cont'd)



Levy C soccer team that won the C.C. 1949-50 Sheikh Abdul Razzaq Knockout Competition cup against RAF Assyrian Employees' Club in Habbaniya. From left, Howella Awshalim, John Isaac, Mansor Zodo, Aram Karam (Capt), Zaia Shawel, Avimalk Haider, Youel Gewargis, Awrahim Mansor, Armenak Shaul, Andrious Mama and Shlemon Youav Malik.

Youel Gewargis was born in Ain Kawa in North Iraq on April 12, 1925, the eldest of three brothers and three sisters. His father, who served loyally for many years in RAF (Iraq) Levies, was Gewargis Zorzan and his mother's name was Shmouni Cheeri. He spent his first three years in his birthplace and the next seven years in the village of Deanna, where his soldier father was stationed. There he was taught his early Assyrian lessons at the village's tiny *Mar* Gewargis Church of the East for three years. His family, with his father, then moved in 1935 to Levy Lines in RAF Station of Hinaidi, adjoining Baghdad. Youel continued his schooling at *Raabi* Sargis Shimon's elementary school in the camp. When the RAF Station relocated in 1937 to Habbaniya, 55



2000: Youel Gewargis today with his wife Mabel and their grandchildren, Eva and Steve, in Sydney, Australia.

miles west of the Capital, he studied one year at *Qaasha* Toma Esho's small chapel by the cemetery. Then *Raabi* Yacoub's RAF Union School opened in the Civil Cantonment, where he had his last four years of school ending in 1942, before he went to work. Youel also completed, while working, a one-year correspondence course in shorthand and typing through Pitman's College of London.

Youel was married on August 31, 1945 in Deanna, to Mabel, daughter of Mammo Goriel and Machilta Shimon. The couple has two sons, Johnny and Robin, and five grandchildren. Youel says he and Mabel are now "living in retirement very comfortably in a democratic country where human rights are exceptionally observed."

And having a green thumb and plenty of spare time on his hands, he bought some implements to indulge his favorite hobby—gardening. And to make sure of his proficiency, he attended a three-month course in Nursery and Landscape—and he has the certificate framed to prove it, too!

When asked for comments on soccer and other things, Youel wrote he is "gratified to have played soccer and reached the in-

ternational standard and to have visited and played in many countries in Europe and the Middle East." His favorite teammates, he indicates, were Aram Karam, Youra Eshaya, Edison David and Hormis Goriel. He compares Aram Karam's shots at goal to those of Pushkas and Roberto Carlos, and thinks Youra was an excellent player and a good sportsman, and so was Edison.

He adds that at one time six of Iraq National Team's eleven players were ex-Habbaniya Assyrians, but that he is yet to see an Assyrian player in Australia achieve the standard attained by Habbaniya players.

Youel's special early memories are of two roles he was chosen to play in *Raabi* Yacoub's Assyrian-translated and directed school plays in Habbaniya. One was as an old man, father of Othello, in "Othello," and the other one (he can't remember the role) was in "Romeo and Juliet." And his most memorable soccer event, is the time his team, Assyrian National Team, played two



1962: Baghdad's Assyrian Sports Club lineup against Tunis Football National team at Mansour Ground, Baghdad, August 23. From left: Ammo Baba, Mohammed Thamer (on loan), Sargis Shallou, Youra Eshaya, Edison David, Gilbert Shmouel, Khoshaba Lawo, Gewargis Gaggi" Ismaiel, Youel Gewargis, Kaako Shallou. Last player not recognized.

matches against Iranian clubs in Teheran in 1956, winning 1-0 against Shaheen and losing 1-3 to Taj, which his team had previously trounced 5-3 in Baghdad. The event was especially memorable, he says, because of the exceptional reception his team was given on arrival in Teheran by Iranian Assyrians and the boosting it received from a multitude of Assyrian spectators who came from all over the country "to cheer, to show pride and delight in the Assyrian players and [despite the Assyrian loss of the last match] to give the team a tumultuous send-off, creating an atmosphere of Assyrian love and unity," he concluded.



1952: RAF Assyrian Employees Club team, winners of 1950-51 and 1951-52 Sheikh Abdul Razzaq Knockout and RAF Station Habbaniya League Championships. Sitting from left: Sargis Shallou, Zaia Shawel, Avimalk Yonan Orahim (Club President) Hormis Goriel (Capt), Youra Eshaya, and Kaako Shallou. Back from left, Aram Karam, William Shallou, Youel Gewargis, Avimalk Haider, Benyamin Esho, and Ammo Baba. 1951-52 was its pinnacle of power after Aram, Zaia, Youel and Avimalk joined the team.

## A former Habbaniya teacher pays tribute... to HUSA, Union School, students

It is a pleasure to me to write the following paragraphs about HUSA and our former school and its students.

### 1. HUSA

After Jane and I returned from U.K in early September, I picked up our mail, a big bundle, from the main post office. Among the letters was a large white envelop with HUSA winged bull logo on one corner. It looked so attractive that it commanded my priority attention! So on reaching home, I opened it immediately and started reading. What a magnificent work—journalism, art, presentation—excellent in all respects. I am certain the whole idea will be a great success and I believe most readers will agree with me. So let us give it the best support we can.

It thrills my heart to see and hear of Habbaniya ex-students who have attained higher levels of education and achievement in different fields, among them journalism and administration, and I am sure such an undertaking as HUSA would have gladdened the heart of our headmaster, late *Raabi* Yacoub Bet-Yacoub.

Such undertakings as the Reunion or the production of such a fine newsletter, can only be achieved through love, interest, time, and selfless efforts of a few in order to serve and please others. I know that over the years Mikhael K. Pius has been literary contributor to different periodicals, containing local, nationalistic, and general information. But the contents of HUSA newsletter will be mostly about the past (and the present) activities and welfare of Habbaniyans in general.

I would request, or rather urge, all ex-Habbaniyans to support the HUSA Newsletter and the Founding Committee in their future efforts.

It gives me great pleasure to know, see and hear of the success of many of the Union School ex-students who have succeeded in achieving higher levels of education, either by attending colleges, universities, or even through self-education either through work or other experiences; and who have attained to positions of management, administration, business, journalism, teaching, and other professions of responsibility. It really delights my heart to realize that I, too, had The honor (even though for a short time)

in educating or trying to help some of such students to get along in life and be successful in their careers or professions.

### School

The standard of education at the Habbaniya Union School was only up to intermediate level, but it was the foundation of education. Former students who have been successful in their careers are proof of that. I know of only a few, but there are so many who have become career professionals. Such an example was given by Mr. Philimon G. Darro, of Australia in his article in the first issue of HUSA. He mentioned the late Albert Tattar, whom I remember vaguely and who ended up as a professor of mathematics at the University of New South Wells in Sydney, Australia. This is a great achievement that makes us all proud to be Habbaniyans and Assyrians.

Some of you readers may know of other Habbaniya ex-students successful in their careers, in whatever field. Please rejoice our hearts by letting us know of them through the medium of HUSA, by sending in your comments, story, or pictures about such individuals, whether former Habbaniya students or residents.

I believe most of the readers are by now familiar with HUSA. What I am writing about would generally involve Habbaniyans, especially a few outstanding persons. Yes, I'm thinking of Benjamin E. Yalda as HUSA's Administration Manager, and Mikhael K. Pius, as Editor. And I believe it is appropriate to mention another outstanding ex-Union School student who came to this country many years ago and eventually ended as the editor of one of the most prestigious magazines of the Assyrian nation. I am referring to Julius N. Shabbas, a highly respected and loved person, who labored intensively and out of pure love for his nation in editing, and distributing *Nineveh* Magazine for almost two whole decades.

I think Julius deserves the highest praise of *Nineveh* readers, yea, even of the whole Assyrian nation. All Habbaniyans, I am sure, are proud of his efforts in editing, compiling and distributing such a popular magazine. As his ex-teacher and close friend. I would say bravo for such a magnificent magazine and thanks for a

humble spirit and self-sacrificial effort. I would request the readers to pray for Julius, because following the death of his wife Violet, to whom he gave inexhaustible care and love during her long illness, he has not been in good health.

### Reunion

I would like to write a few lines about the 5<sup>th</sup> Reunion, which took place in London from 1<sup>st</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August. Because we were also visiting our eldest daughter Doreen and her family, Jane and I spent seven weeks in England. To us it was "killing two birds with one stone." A school reunion and a family reunion. And it was a great delight to have our daughter, who is a native Habbaniyan, and her husband David Holmes at the main event, the dinner dance party. And a special treat was the joy when I met a cousin I had not seen for 52 years. It was a great surprise, mixed with emotion. I knew him as a teenager in Habbaniya and he is now a grandfather from Chicago. Another heart-warming reunion was that of two sisters or close relatives, I am not sure which, who were estranged by circumstances for 30 years.

Even though one did sense a few difficiencies at the Reunion, we are human beings and cannot be perfect in all our undertakings. But the love and joy experienced in meeting old friends and relations and making new friendships, overshadowed all the difficiencies.

I wish we could have joined all of you who went on European tours. Unfortunately because Jane fell outside the hotel foyer and hurt herself, we could not make it. But we did enjoy the Reunion very much. So once again I would like to congratulate the Founding Committee members and the United Kingdom Organizing Committee members and the Ladies Auxiliary group for all their love, efforts, time and zeal in organizing another very successful undertaking in bringing us together for the fifth time.

Now, what can I say about (I believe) the most outstanding Habbaniyan, without whose efforts I doubt whether we would have had all the past Reunions. And he is still astive and eager and determined (political situation permitting) to hold our next reunion on the grounds of



### A former Habbaniya teacher (Cont'd)

our beloved Habbaniya Alma-Mater! A marvelous idea, but impossible with the present political situation. But, then, who knows! Faith can work miracles. "The assurance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." (Heb.11:1). Of course, this is spoken from the spiritual point of view, but I believe it could be ap-

plied to physical circumstances as well. However, not all glory goes to Ben, even though great. One person on his own, even though a great encourager, cannot achieve the successes the Union School Reunions have achieved without the help of many others, such as the other members of the Founding Committee, the various orga-

nizing committee members and their spouses. A hearty thank you to all of them and bravo to the persons behind the scene. I would like to encourage them all to continue with their untiring efforts and I am certain most of the Habbaniyans would stand behind them—**Albert A. Babilla, Ex-Habbaniya student and teacher.**

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### A Tribute to the former Assyrian Levies from Highland Heights, Ohio

## Assyrian Levies "march again!"

Dear Mr. Yalda:

Thank you for your letter inviting me to join HUSA. Since I never lived in Habbaniya, articles about life in that town are of little interest to me. However, since I am a great admirer of the Assyrian Levies whose headquarters was Habbaniya, I am enclosing a modest contribution to the success of your venture.

I met members of the Assyrian Levy Force in Abadan, Iran, a unit of which was stationed there after their great and heroic victory at Habbaniya in 1941. My father was of the Baz tribe, and I was interested to find any lost relatives among the Levies. Even though there were no relatives among them, I did find some Baz-naie who were welcome at my home whenever they had free time. In return, also I was invited to their canteen a number of times and watched them dance their tribal dances.

At the end of the war in Europe the British conducted a victory march in Abadan, in which units from various parts of the British Empire took part, including English units. Needless to say, the most handsome, soldierly and the best marchers were the Assyrians.

The Assyrian soldiers also had the reputation of being the neatest and smartest unit

of the British Army. So for one day the Christian population of Abadan could walk with their heads held high.

The Assyrian Levies are mentioned in a book published in 1992 by Barnes and Noble under the title "The Battle Book." The author's name is Bryant Perrett. In this book are listed the most crucial battles of the world, starting from the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC to the end of the Second World War. The Battle of Habbaniya is one of them. It was a small battle that lasted only five days. But 650 Assyrian soldiers and 1250 British guardsmen beat the whole Iraqi Army of tens of thousands and saved The Middle East oil for the Allies. Without this oil the war could not have been won.

It is amazing to me that in spite of their small number, the Assyrians played crucial roles in both world wars, but have been so soon forgotten by the Allied Powers and their welfare ignored.

Thank you again for your letter and good luck to your organization.

**William Yoel**  
Highland Heights, Ohio.



Two small groups of RAF Iraq [Assyrian] Levies (in khaki uniform and with white leggings and plumed hats) marching in the London Victory Parade of 1946. Note how neat and individually distinctive they stand out from the others. Photo contributed by M.K.Pius

From our archives: dramatic art**Habb's Employees' Club puts on play**

By A Correspondent [M.K.Pius]

A bouquet of roses to the RAF Employees' Club's Dramatic Section for their second production at Habbaniya of the three-act Assyrian play entitled "Mercy and Tears"—which indeed filled the audience's hearts with mercy and their eyes with tears.

The play, written by Mishael Lazar [Essa], a prolific author and playwright, and directed by John Isaac, was an effective tragedy. Though not a Shakespearian masterpiece, the story entertained as well as pointed out an old theme—that wealth and power when illgained and misused are eventually destroyed and that kindness and charity are the lasting triumph.

Briefly, the story is about a charitable wealthy man named Maninus. Maninus adopts a beggar boy called Banipal whom he sends abroad for higher studies. He plans to give his daughter Yasmina in marriage to him and make him the heir to his fortune.

Banipal, however, returns [from abroad] a spiteful tyrant who eventually seizes his benefactor's wealth, forces him out of his own house and then poisons his daughter, who dies still loving her murderer sweetheart.

Then retribution follows! Banipal is tortured by his own conscience. The

spiteful voices of his wretched past, especially the sad songs of Yosep, his blind fellow beggar, ringing in his ears, almost drive him mad.

Realising his guilt, he sends his servant Kochola after his foster father, Maninus, whom he wants to restore to his former position. But before Maninus returns, Kochola loses patience with his raving and apparently crazy master and murders him. Maninus arrives and finds Banipal dead.

The lighting and decorating effects of the setting were quite good and the play was acted well for the most part by the whole cast of 13. The first curtain packed the strongest emotional punch and its end caught the audience smiling through brimming eyes. The tattered rags, the sentimental songs and the emotional voice of Wilson Khoshaba [Isaac] as the boy Banipal and Minashi Yosep as the blind Yosep wrung the heart with compassion.

Davis Eshay [David] who had the longest role as the kind-hearted Maninus acted with much ease, while the sarcasm and rudeness of Mariam Shmaiel convincingly portrayed the stone-hearted and miserly Shmonie, Maninus' deaf wife.

William David [Shino]\* executed the cruelty and the ruthless laughter of the

man Banipal well. But instead of arousing the audience's smoldering hatred, strangely enough he made them laugh with him. I believe the public concentrated more on the gay and jaunty William than on the wicked and ungrateful Banipal. Both the girl and the woman Yasmina were also characterized with much reality by Margaret Murad and Martha Babajan, respectively.

The play, though melodramatic, had much merit. But it was not without its weaknesses. The secondary actors, for instance, sometimes failed to register authentic surprise or shock at the villain's brutal and evil actions or speech, and that was where the characters did not come out quite alive. That, however, is a common flaw in amateur drama. Much experience and a sensitive sense of dramatic values are essential. (Reprinted from *The Iraq Times* of June 6, 1953)

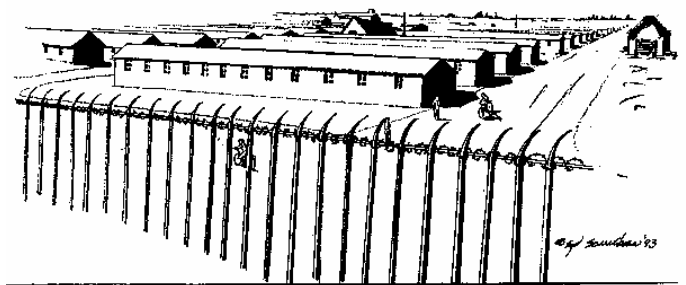
**\*William David Shino, younger brother of the late Raabi Janey Rizk, is not feeling too well. All friends and acquaintances are requested to pray for him.**

**By Basil (Wiska) K. Pius**

Whenever I listen to Evin Aghassi's song "Moghibti Habbaniya," I get the chills and a great feeling of joy and self-contentment. And those who read Mr. Philimon Darmo's outstanding article "Habbaniya Was a Way of Life" in the first issue of *HUSA*, must have felt genuine nostalgia. I certainly did. With that in mind, I feel fortunate to have been a part of Habbaniya way of life.

I believe most readers of this article are familiar with Habbaniya history, but I wonder how many know about Miles City and the broad plains of southeastern Montana, let alone the reason my family and I are living here.

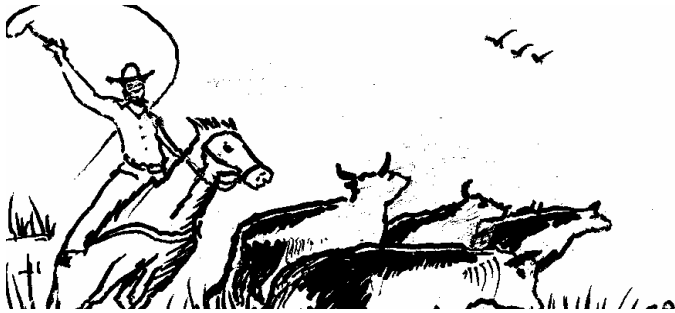
The first question is easy. Once you check the U.S. map you will see that Montana is surrounded by the Canadian Alberta province in the north, Wyoming in the south, North and South Dakotas on the east and Idaho in the west. Statistically speaking, Miles City is a small agricultural community of less than ten

**From Habbaniya, Iraq, to...**

thousand folks: farmers, ranchers, railroad frontiersmen, American Indians, avid hunters, and plenty of seniors...semi retirees.

As to why we are living in Miles City and not in one of the bigger and better-known cities where there is a major community of Assyrian immigrants like me, as well as Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, etc, these are the reasons:

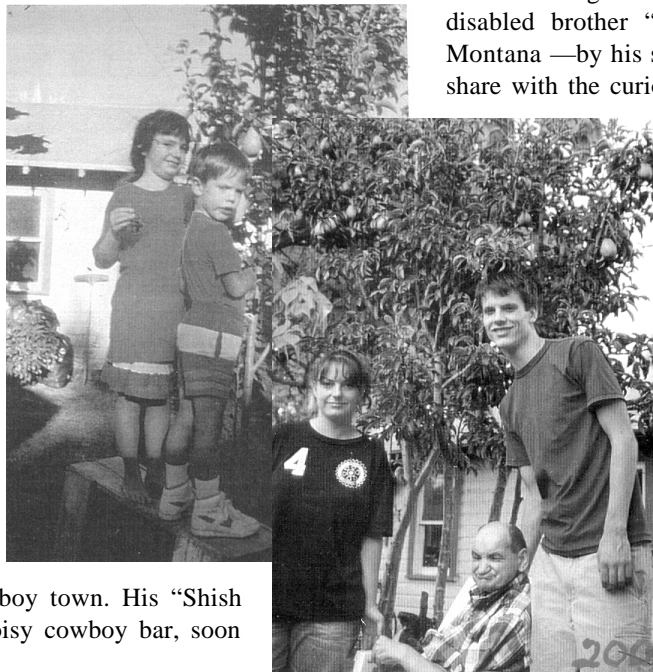
## ...Miles City, Montana



Montana has granted me and my family unconditional trust and hospitality that you simply cannot find in a metropolitan city. Furthermore, the pace of life is slower, the people are friendlier and the general landscape in eastern Montana has a touch of our homeland's (i.e. Iraq) semi desert panorama.

More importantly, I have always believed that God wanted us to be here for reasons that may be more complicated than I can express. For one thing, we are the only Assyrian family in Miles City and, probably, in the state of Montana. For me, that is a good enough reason to become an ambassador of good will on behalf of our virtually unknown Assyrian people. And I believe I have convinced our Mayor, our Sheriff, our neighbors, many of our colleagues and hundreds of my students, mostly through my M.E. Culture classes, that the Western civilization would not have been what it is today without the awesome cultural contributions of the mighty As-syrians of Mesopotamia. Also a lighted PEACE sign by our house is an expressive signal to our community that this Assyrian home prays for peace, peace among neighbors, peace among enemies and peace within our homes and our own hearts.

In addition, many of the former Habbaniya readers will be surprised to know that my late brother "Appy" and family actually lived here, from 1976 to 1978. In two years Appy was able to establish himself as a respected and entertaining chef in this little cowboy town. His "Shish Kabab" joint, next to a noisy cowboy bar, soon



Appy

became the talk of the town for its famous Assyrian cuisine and Turkish coffee. He also told his customers fantastic stories and they came back for more.

And when he reluctantly left Miles City, two years later, his advice to me was "Don't leave Miles City; these are good people."

Today we still cherish the keepsakes and memories of Appy and his family. Two precious nature-made souvenirs are surprisingly still standing up under our "BIG SKY" in celebration of Appy's spirit. More specifically, in 1978, just before he left, Appy planted several fruit trees in our backyard and insisted that they would survive our cold Montana winters if we packed the base well with dirt insulation. Three died out, but the pear tree and a grape vine have withstood the wild winters of Montana all these years. And in 1989, eight years after Appy's death, his pear tree gave us two pretty pears for the very first time! But no pears appeared in the succeeding years, although his grape vine is laden with black grapes every summer. Obviously, we were delighted and I thought a snapshot of the productive pear tree with little Sam and sister Sarah (hereunder on left) was in order.

Two years ago my wife Babs planted some special fruit trees, including a female pear tree close to Appy's pear tree. Lo and behold, suddenly this season, 13 years after its first fruit, Appy's pear tree was loaded with savory pears!

Think about it for a moment...The guy who believed in sensible risk-taking ventures from the days he established his little bookshop in Habbaniya, over 50 years ago, and the well-known Coronet Bookstore in Baghdad later, came to this cowboy town in southeastern

Montana and made us believe in the extraordinary. Appy was resourceful and definitely had foresight and sociability. We celebrate his eventful life in our hearts.

I can imagine how delighted he would have been to see his disabled brother "Kooya" bask-ing in the gentle sunlight of Montana —by his sturdy, fruitful pear tree. And I am happy to share with the curious readers the love and affection my family and I shared with Appy on the one hand, and our appreciation of a relatively simple way of life here in Montana on the other, including the privilege of still having fairly good health and the energy to play outdoor tennis five days a week even in October.

When we realized last month that the story of the pear tree was indeed a miraculous chapter in our family history, we decided it was time to record it again. So our 23-year-old Sarah and 18-year-old Sam were more than happy to flank their amused "Uncle Koo" and pose for another special snapshot, as seen here, in honor of Uncle Appy and his amazing pear tree.

God's ways are simply AMAZING!  
Aren't they?

## Portrait of a Habbaniya musician

# Habbaniyan with a golden horn

By Mikhael K. Pius

Zacharia Odisho Zacharia of Modesto, California, believes he was the first Assyrian saxophonist in Iraq. And this may well be true, for there were no visible Assyrian saxophonists before the 1950s. And Zacharia has been blowing his horn "off and on stage" since then. He says he bought his first clarinet, and later saxophone, more than half a century ago.

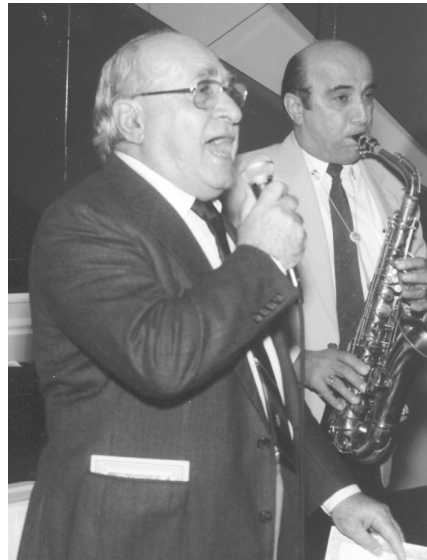
Zacharia, commonly known as Skharia (or affectionately "*Mouziqoura Mshamha*" to his fans) had music on his lips and fingertips ever since his early years in Habbaniya, Iraq. And those lips and fingers have produced quite a volume of music during the years.

He was very active musically for several years during the 1950s. But he stopped playing his saxophone in public in early 1960s due to unfavorable reaction from irrational Revolutionary political authorities. And when he moved to the Western countries eleven year later, the new musical culture and his preoccupation with making a living for his family precluded him from taking part in organized bands for more than 30 years, or until he had the opportunity to join, in 1995, Jim Ingram's Dance Band of Turlock, California.

The band is a regional twentyone-piece orchestra. It plays for various community events—dance gigs, parties, weddings, anniversaries. In 1998 the band gave a live show on Assyrian KBSV/TV, Channel 23, of Ceres, California. The show was received enthusiastically by the Stanislaus County viewers.

As a soloist Skharia has often performed gratis on the KBSV/TV as well as on numerous social or national occasions at various Assyrian clubs and meeting halls. On October 8, 2000, he was invited, along with his younger brother Benyamin, a vocalist, and his nephew, Danny, a pianist with a BA in music, to play for a testimonial banquet in Chicago, honoring the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of His Holiness Khnania Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. The main theme song was "The Patriarch of Love and Peace." It was composed by Benyamin, scored by Danny and performed, of course, by the Zacharia Trio. The Government officials,

church prelates and over 700 guests gave the Trio a standing ovation and His Holiness conferred on them his blessings. And in 1991 Zacharia played a sax solo, "*Ya Nishra :d'Tkhoumy*," (O, Eagle of Tkhoumy), again to warm applause, as the opening theme song at one of the Assyrian American National Federation's



1992: Skharia accompanying former Habbaniya's vocalist, William David Sheno, on his golden sax. This picture is in tribute to William, who is now seriously ill.

Annual Convention ceremonies. Skharia has also readily played, when requested, on Assyrian public funeral memorials in Modesto, Turlock and elsewhere.

Skharia was first hooked to music in his early teens. He watched musical movies and listened to the collection of 78 RPM gramophone records he had. In 1946, aged 14, he took violin lessons and a year later he bought his first musical instrument, a clarinet, from the well-known Iskanderian Music Shop in Baghdad. And a short time later he upped and bought a Grafton Acrylic alto saxophone, the very first of its kind seen in the local community of Habbaniya. Considering the meager wages paid by RAF in those days, that was quite a splash for him. Under the direct supervision of a RAF Sergeant, Alex Alexander, a professional teacher and saxophonist, Skharia started weekly music lessons as well as enrolled in and studied from 1952 through 1955 a correspondence course in advanced music

chords, and ad lib improvisation from Les Evans School of Music of London, and developed into a proficient saxophonist and clarinetist.

At the time, Skharia was the only performing Assyrian saxophonist in Iraq. He was member of the Assyrian Band, and the bandleader for several years in the fifties when the band changed its name to Babylon Band and later Arbella Band. This Assyrian band provided music at Habbaniya for local weddings and social parties as well as for British social functions, and made several tours in Iraq, performing in Basrah, Kirkuk, K3, H1, Baiji, Ramadi, Mosul, and Baghdad. It also played music for official functions and celebrations, among them the ceremony of the handing over of the RAF Station to the Iraqi government in May 1955 and, in Baghdad, at the Coronation of the late King Faisal II at King Faisal Auditorium in May 1953 and at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations at the American Embassy in 1958 and 1959.

In Habbaniya, Skharia also joined the RAF 15-piece orchestra named "Mello Tones." He was the only local musician picked to join the band. It performed on many occasions at various events, such as live stage shows in RAF Station Cinema, at festivals, ballroom dancing or even for the private party of Air Officer Commanding of the air base. He always played the first lead alto saxophone and doubled with clarinet and was often paid a bigger portion of the fee received.

In 1960, as bandleader of the seven-piece Arbella Band, Skharia performed on Baghdad Television a live show, scoring the theme song "Arbella" himself for the occasion. He has also composed and written several numbers, among them: *Bnooneh d'Atur Hitch Leh Talqee* (Sons of Assyria Shall Never Perish), *Touraneh d'Hakkari* (Hakkari Mountains) and *Yimma Khleeta* (Sweet Mother).

Skharia has been playing these numbers, and others, live on stage and on Assyrian TV shows. He has also already initiated the process of recording his songs on a cassette or CD and hopes to have it available in the near future to Assyrian communities everywhere.

In other aspects, Skharia was instru-

### **Habbaniyan with golden horn (Cont'd)**

mental in establishing the Assyrian [club] House in Ealing, London, in mid 1970s; was member and an active committee member of *Mar Narsai Assyrian Parish* of San Francisco and member of Assyrian Foundation of America of Berkeley from 1981 through 1988; member of the Assyrian American Association of Chicago; member of the HUS Reunion Founding Committee; and here in Modesto he is a member of the Assyrian American Civic Club of Turlock.

Skharia was born to Odisho Skharia Latchin and Khazay Adam Dermo of Lower Tiara on January 14, 1932 in Amadia district, Northern Iraq. [Bet-Nahrain]. In early 1937 the family left Amadia when he was four years old to rejoin father, Odisho, who was serving with the Royal Air Force (Iraq) Levies in RAF Station of Hinaidi, adjoining Baghdad. Later that year they moved to Habbaniya, 55 miles west of the Capital, where the RAF Station had just been relocated. While his military father



**Arabella Band at the American Embassy's 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1957 celebration in Baghdad. Skharia, is second from left.**

handed over to the Iraqi Government. And a year after a military coup d'e-tat toppled the Iraqi Monarchy and proclaimed the country a republic in July 1958, the remaining skeleton staff of RAF training personnel was evicted from Habbaniya and Skharia lost his job. He moved with his family and settled in Baghdad.

Zacharia worked three years for Scandinavia Airlines System; three months for American Embassy's United States Information Service and seven years as an administrative officer for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

Fed up with the uneasy political situation, Skharia moved his family to Paris, France, and from there to London, England, where he worked at Heathrow Airport as a traffic officer with Trans Mediterranean Airways for seven years. He then resigned



**1997: The Starlighters' Band, Modesto, Calif, for which band Skharia played for a short period. He is the third from left.**

served the British, Skharia received his primary and secondary education at *Raabi Yacoub's* RAF Union School in the Civil Cantonment.

In 1946, Skharia began working for the RAF at Habbaniya at the age of 14. Of his 13-year stretch, his last nine years were as senior meteorological observer and shift supervisor at RAF Met Office & Radio Sonde.

On December 4, 1954 Skharia married Helen Khoshaba Yacoub, niece of *Malik Shamisdin Bet-Malik* Barkho in Habbaniya. During the next few years, while Skharia worked, played music and was active in the community's general life, the couple were blessed with the first two of their four children, namely Edmund and Adeline (who were later followed by Fabian and Linda in Baghdad). In May 1955 the Habbaniya air base was



**In RAF Station of Habbaniya hangar, Mello Band, for which Zachria (third saxophonist from left), the only Assyrian among the British, played during 1956-57**

his job and went into a luggage and travel-goods business partnership, lasting four years. Zacharia had itching feet again. This time he immigrated, in 1981, with his family to the United States.

In Richmond, California, he enter into another business partnership, a liquor retail shop. This lasted nine years. Then misfortune struck and the shop burned down. It was a total loss, but Skharia and partner received insurance compensation.

Skharia and Helen then decided to be close to their eldest son and Skharia's parents. They moved to Chicago and Skharia again secured a liquor retail business, but this time on his own. Five years and he had had enough of it. He sold it and moved back to California, in Albany, where his son Fabian and family lived. But only a year later, in 1994, Skharia and Helen and their son and family decided to move to the larger Assyrian community of Modesto, where they have been living since—and the "*Mouziqoura Mshamha*" has been blowing his golden horn! ###



**2001: At Senior Citizens' House, Ingram's Band of Turlock, California, for which Skharia (fourth saxophonist from left) has been playing Zacharia is the fourth saxophonist from left.**

**From our archives: Tennis & Soccer Matches**

**Point-by-point game for Habb Tennis Championship**

By M. K. Pius

William Daniel and Andrious Simon, who won the CC Championship late last year, met Hassan Jum'aa and Italius John in the Royal Air Force Habbaniyah Open Doubles Knockout cup final recently and beat them 8-10, 7-5, 8-6. It was the fifth championship the pair was winning together as a team.

The match was very closely contested and exciting and drew much applause from the spectators. William Daniel, playing mostly at baseline, was especially good for his fast and hard straight and cross forehand drives that shot down the court like bullets, while Andrious Simon's left-handed chops, volleys and smashes at the net stacked up their points.

Hassan and partner were hard workers, fighting out each point every inch of the way. But they were up against some hard luck.

Playing mostly at the net, Italius threw in an occasional surprise ball, and Hassan dueled at the back, retrieving and countering with zest. Hassan and partner won the first three games without losing a single point. Their oppo-

nents, however, soon warmed up and the score went up by turns. But Hassan and partner finally manage to wrestle the set

a barrage of volleys, smashes, and hard-to-return drives. But Hassan and Italius shook their heads clear and pressed on, reluctant to lose the lead. It was a close, dogged fight until William and partner got the set at 7-5

The final set was by far the most interesting and exciting. Hassan and partner snatched away five games and the advantage point of the sixth, while their opponents had won only two games. One single point stood between them and the set! William and Andrious's supporters trembled with suspense as Italius walked over to serve. But as luck would have it, William and Andy won the point and the score evened at deuce.

But once again the tension mounted as Hassan and partner regained the point. Unluckily, they lost it again and with it went their hard-built advantage as their opponents played on with hopes a-flying and finished off the set at 8-6.

Flight Lieutenant Merricks refereed the match.

**(Reprinted, except for the photograph, from *The Iraq Times* of November 26, 1953)**



**1956: Playing for the Assyrian Sports Club of Baghdad, Habbaniya's Andy (center left) and William, winners of the Iraqi National Tennis Doubles Championship for 1955 and 1956 along with other titles in Habbaniya. Posing with them are the Club's late enthusiasts and sports promoters: from left, Dentist Youel Baba George, Sports Secretary; Benyamin Ganadalo, Hon. Secretary and a good tennis player in earlier years; Ashur Kelaita, President; and Yonan Constantine, Entertainment Officer, and controversial nationalist.**

away at 10-8.

William and Andrious dueled in the second set and took the next two games in

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**C.C. win over RAF by 4 goals was no surprise**

By A. Vincent

If ever a team shows improvement day-to-day, it is the Civil Cantonment football [soccer] team. Their victory over the RAF at Habbaniyah on March 24 by 4 goals to nothing did not come as a surprise. The Civil Cantonment players had experience and teamwork enough blended with fine stamina to make them easy victors.

A few yards away from the penalty area Youra [Eshaya] sent a straight pass and Yavil [Youel] Gewargis picking up immediately cross-passed to Kako [Kaako Shallou] who pounced on the opening and scored with a low shot at 35<sup>th</sup> minute of the opening session.

At half time the Civil Cantonment lead by one goal to nil. Early after the recess Yavil sent a lovely center and Kako was there to head it beautifully into the net. The Royal Air Force forwards carried out many closely linked attacks at a tre-

mendous pace—Morgan trying his best to open the score for the Station was met with stiff resistance from Sargis [Shallou].

Another new comer to the Civil Cantonment team, Azzoo Yonan, showed promise as outside left. Azzoo gave a brilliant display, but Aram Karam was closely watched and his quick movements were checked by the RAF defence.

At the 26<sup>th</sup> minute Civils were awarded a corner. Yavil, who took the kick, sent the ball right into the goal leaving Birrell bewildered. And with three goals up, the Civils team played with more confidence and ease.

The Station team, with Creigh, Morgan, and the wingers, forced the game on the Civils penalty box, sending hard shots at short angles. But Airmulk [Avimalk] Haider, Civils custodian, saved the goal. The RAF defenders were always kept

worried by the elusive forwards, Youra, Aram, Kako and Yavil, who gave them anxious moments.

Hormus Gabriel, the [C.C.] captain, Zaia [Shawel], William Kawbar [Kambar], William and Sargis Thwishear [Shallou] formed a tough defence. The RAF half-line were hard-worked and their long passes were not made proper use of.

The last few minutes proved exciting when Youra neatly sent a terrific shot [into the goal] at close range, and the final whistle found the Civil Cantonment winners by 4 goals to nil.

The whole Cantonment is now looking forward to witness another thrilling match between RAF [Assyrian] Employees Club, 1<sup>st</sup> Division Football League champions, and the rest of the League.

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## The Habbaniya Flood Scare of 1940

By Solomon S. Solomon

(with collaboration from M.K. Pius)

While it is not certain whether the threat of Habbaniya flood took place in 1939 or 1940, most of the people consulted during recent years believe it was in 1940.

The story goes on to say that in May 1940 it was feared that the bloated Euphrates River, running along from the western to the northern and eastern perimeter fence of Royal Air Force Station of Habbaniya, Iraq, might overflow its bank and flood the air base. For safety's sake, the British RAF authorities ordered the inhabitants of the two local camps to leave their endangered homes temporarily and move to the higher ground by the hills overlooking Habbaniya, a mile southwest of the iron fence. Accordingly, the whole population took their most essential belongings along with food and water, and trekked to the hills. The British personnel themselves perched up on the plateau of the hills.

At that time, the two local camps, the Civil Cantonment and the Levy Family Lines, consisted of some eight thousand souls. The majority of the residents were Assyrians, with minorities of Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, Indians and a few other races. All of this population lived in a mixed housing project of several grades. So within a couple of days, all this mass of humanity left their homes and encamped at the foot of the hills in some



Chatting by their makeshift shelters: From left, Murad of Satibak, Khourma Adam, and Deacon Warda Odisho

tents provided by the RAF authorities as well as in makeshift shelters made of whatever material at their disposal.

RAF authorities also provided motor trucks to transport the essential belongings—clothes, toilet items, bedding, cooking utensils, few items of furniture, etc—to the hills, as well as transport for the most needed employees who did not have bicycles to commute.

During the confinement, some people managed to sneak back into their own homes now and then and bring out supplies, basically water in various containers, either carrying them or carting them on bicycles or on small wheel carts. And because it was not easy obtaining groceries from the local bazaar inside the airbase, RAF authorities also distributed



Standing with the three children behind their water-hauling wheel cart are, from left: Kaisar Israel, Khourma Adam, and Hinnar Odisho

to families some free rations of staple dry groceries—biscuits, canned foods, sugar, tea, rice, cooking oil, cigarettes—and, by mobile water tankers, drinking water to supplement the scarce local supplies.

May in Central Iraq is quite hot. Sometimes the temperature hovers above 100 in the shade, especially in a barren, sandy environment, which was also infested with scorpions. And the food and exposed garbage and other refuse in and near the encampment soon attracted swarms of hungry, vicious flies. These, along with the heat and dust and sand storms kicked up by the wind, made life quite miserable for the inhabitants during the three weeks of their temporary sojourn, despite the various games, chatting sessions, and other recreational activities indulged in. Of course there was no school for the children, but some of the senior boy scouts were active at the camps enforcing order and cleanliness, supervising water and food rationing and other social services. Many of the RAF personnel as well as most of the RAF Levy Force had to work hard at the river bank filling and placing sand bags to reinforce the bund.

Inopportune as it may seem, Easter was also approaching. Deacon Warda Odisho, employed by the [British] Air Ministry Works & Buildings, asked his Arab laborers if they could provide him with a spacious tent for the holy occasion. With common Arab hospitality as well as to please their superior, they happily agreed, and they soon brought and pitched on a nearby hill a big Bedouin tent in which *Khouri* Ablakhad Jergees Quallo, pastor of *Mar* Gewargis Church of the East in the Cantonment, celebrated mass on Easter Sunday. It was attended by a large crowd of Assyrians.

At first, the RAF authorities relieved some of the dangerous overflow of the river into the nearby Lake Habbaniya. When that didn't seem to help much, they finally bombed the eastern bank, alleging that the pressure of water "broke a gap" in the levee. This flooded the desert toward Falluja town 18 miles to the east, wrecking havoc on Arab farmlands. But it saved the airbase!

(Several years later, however, the RAF had a channel constructed to divert the overflow into the downflow of the river beyond the air base as a safety valve.)

After three weeks, the RAF authorities declared the danger over and ordered all the encampment inhabitants to return to their abandoned homes in the airbase. What a great relief and joy the "dis-



Yosip Jitto (standing) and Hinnar Odisho in front of makeshift shelters at the temporary encampment.

placed" humanity must have felt to return once again to their humble homes sweet homes in the local camps of the air base!

(Photos contributed by Solomon)





**From our archives: community leader**

**A True Assyrian**

**By Youkhanna Patros of Babary**

HABBANIYA, IRAQ. The seven thousand Assyrians here have at last a *Mukhtar* (alderman) of whom they are really proud. The man who has made such a good impression is Haidoo Patros.

Mr Haidoo Patros was elected their *Mukhtar* by a unanimous vote in July 1954, a few months after the death of the former *Mukhtar*, Patros Challoo. Since then Haidoo Patros has proven himself a good leader, a loyal Iraqi citizen and a true Assyrian. He has thus won the confidence and respect of both the Iraqi Government and the British officials and the admiration of the people he serves.

His Grace *Mar* Yosip Khnanishoo, Metropolitan of the Church of the East in Iraq, paid a visit to Mr Patros' house, especially to express to him his thanks and appreciation of the fine work he was doing for his people.

Haidoo is the son of the late Patros Roovil of Upper Tiari. He is 43, is married and has five sons and a daughter. He is a dependable, generous and outspoken person, a strict adherent to the country's laws and an advocate of the same policy.

To Assyrians, he is especially known for his patriotism, courage and bravery. He is also a former top local sportsman, particularly in soccer.

Among *Mukhtar* Patros's good work during his office as *Mukhtar* was to set the ball rolling that resulted in an expeditious mass Iraqi naturalization of the Habbaniya Assyrians. He arranged this at the conferences in which he took part in last April, as the official representative of his people, for the handing over

of Habbaniya air base by the Royal Air Force to the Iraqi Government in the following month.

The termination of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty between the Iraqi Government and the RAF, however, struck a deep anxiety into the hearts of the Habbaniya Assyrians in regard to their uncertain future. *Mukhtar* Patros took his people's worries to His Excellency *Sayid* Sa'id Qazzaz, the Iraqi Interior Minister. *Sayid* Qazzaz assured him that the majority of the people could continue to work at the base and that the Government would do everything possible to make all Habbaniya residents happy.

*Mukhtars* receive no salary, but they charge each client they serve a nominal fee. *Mukhtar* Patros not only accepts no remuneration for his services, but also often aids those financially weak. And he is always ready to serve and help.

Haidoo Patros' professional work is secretary to the RAF Air Headquarters Officers' Mess and is the messing contractor for Lake Habbaniya Boat Club. The *Mukhtarship* is a non-paying sideline social work.

He also serves on a committee that is presently working, under the chairmanship of RAF and Iraqi high-ranking officials, on a scheme for the housing resettlement of Habbaniya Assyrians at Dora township in Baghdad. [Haidoo Patros left Habbaniya in late 1950s for Dora, Baghdad, and died of cancer in London in March 1969, at the age of 57.]

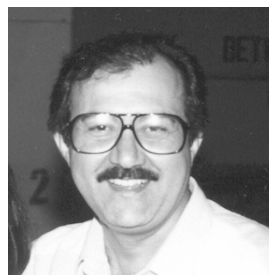
**(Reprinted from *Assyrian Star Magazine* of January, 1956)**



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**In Remembrance of...**

...**Awia Kaplano Kanon**, a member of our younger generation of Habbaniyans, who passed away prematurely in Chicago, Illinois on Sept. 2, 2002, of heart failure at the youngish age of 53.



**Awia Kanon at age 38**

He leaves behind his wife Emmama, three young children, Ramsin, Olivia and Silvia and his mother Siyi in Chicago; also several siblings and families: eldest brother William in Modesto; Yarrow and Youshiya in London; Johnson, Wilson, Withronia, and Edward in Chicago; and Virginia in Arizona..

Awia was put to rest at Montrose Cemetery and his funeral service,

officiated by Reverends Aprim DeBaz and Shlimon Heskiel, was attended by 600 mourners at *Mar* Gewargis Assyrian Church of the East, followed by a memorial luncheon

Awia was born June 27, 1949 in Habbaniya, Iraq. He had his elementary and intermediate schooling there in the government school and his high school education in Ramadi, 15 miles north. He taught for a short while at the elementary school in Khalidiya, a shanty town adjoining Habbaniya, before immigrating to this country in 1977. He settled in Chicago, where he met and married, in 1979, Emmama daughter of Lado and Zatto Serhan. He owned a video store business for many years. He sold it and worked after that as a real estate agent for several years.

According to Ben Yalda, Awia was a well-liked and respected member of the Assyrian community of Chicago and will be missed by many. May he rest in peace. -MKP