

# **ACCOUNTS FROM AN OLD LEDGER**

**Short memoirs of a lifetime**

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## **UNITS**

**G.P.S.**

**Delinquents**

**Spreading our Wings**

**La belle Isabel**

**Omar and Juliet**

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# G. P. S.

As our life span increases (it was 47 years on average in 1910, it is approaching 80 a hundred years later, in 2010) and as our scientists are conquering a multitude of mid-life human-killer diseases, man is coming face to face with the limits of resilience of all his organs and especially his brain. Alzheimer is the contemporary haunting specter of our advancing old age. We are advised to keep our brain active. Games (cards, chess and electronic), crossword and sudoku puzzles, even toss-juggling with three balls or clubs and learning to play a musical instrument, all are supposed help. The physiological deterioration is unavoidable and evident. We try to forestall it. Each seeks to exercise his mind in his own manner, abilities and preferences. I delve into the past to exercise mine because I no longer have a future. I only have a past and I say this not as a lament but as a fact. I follow the trend in my own way and defend my mental health incidentally, in a way that gives me pleasure and immense satisfaction: by writing. The need to write is both a blessing and a bondage. I would have liked to write a novel, just now, or a longish short story, as is my style, but since I have zero inspiration at the moment, I fall back on a memoir where some of the facts are still iridescent in the thickening mists of long-ago, awaiting to be plucked, for a few more years of reminiscence, before they are forgotten totally for all eternity. They may be trivial and of no consequence except they touch us and bring to us a bittersweet happiness, a satisfaction that we have lived that life and time that is gone for good. We feel enriched and privileged.

I am writing this memoir for my friend Samia who has many fond memories of the Gezira Preparatory School. It is my way of thanking her for her encouragement, the kind words, and short but incisive comments she unfailingly sends me every time she receives a manila envelope with colorful Greek stamps and my short stories. I do not know how this memoir will develop and whether it will interest anyone else. It will be enough for me if a smile will flicker on Samia's luminous and adorable face.

The G.P.S., a British Council school, was on the main street in Zamalek with its entrance on a side street. The building itself must have been constructed specifically to house a school. It could not have been the villa of a wealthy family or a small hotel. As one went up the imposing marble stairs to the main entrance and entered the building, to the left was the office of the headmistress and, opposite, the administrative office. Just beyond was the large assembly hall with a platform at the far end of it where the headmistress stood every morning to address the pupils and where performances of sketches and plays were performed from time to time. To the left and right were classrooms and above the hall, on the three sides, was a walkway with a solid wooden banister looking onto the hall. There were classrooms on two of the sides of the walkway and the infirmary, an office and a common room for the teachers above the headmistress's office. A well polished wooden staircase, to the right as one walked into the hall, led to the floor above and to a similar area below which was the dining room with long tables and benches and more classrooms on one side and the kitchens on the other. The lower floor was a few steps below street level.

A year earlier, our parents sent us, my sister Nafsika and me, to the kindergarten of the Manor House. We cried bitterly for two days in class and were

miserable most of the rest of the time. We were timid children and our paternal grandmother, who lived with us, frightened us even more by telling us, when we were naughty, that soon we would go to school where we would be straightened out pronto. Happily, the drama was not repeated at the G.P.S. Nafsika went quietly to Mrs. Whitfield's kindergarten and I was put in a class called Transition A. Both classrooms were on the last floor above the assembly hall. My teacher was an elderly woman called Mrs. Lee. Years later, at the English School, I had her husband as a teacher in Applied Art where he taught the "intricacies" of fretwork and wood carving as gravely and as pedantically as if he were instructing us in the use of a cyclotron. A large, corpulent, and placid man, he formed with Mrs. Lee one of those oddly mismatched couples where one wonders at the dynamics that brought them together. Mrs. Lee was tiny, skinny and a bag of nerves. I think, perhaps, she was the most feared teacher at school. It did not take much to have her start punching your shoulder or vigorously trying to detach your ear. Mercifully, I did not have as many shoulder punches or pulled ears as some of the other boys did. In fact, I think she rather liked me. I was quiet, well behaved and did good work with plasticine. And if you will forgive a tiny bit of boasting, I once fashioned a blue elephant that elicited a "well done" from her and had the whole class of aspiring pre-teen artists queue up to have a look. So, don't be surprised at my erudition, my artistic vein goes way back!!

Our headmistress was Mrs. Wilson, a stocky Englishwoman of normal height with well groomed graying hair and gold-rimmed eyeglasses. There are Englishmen whose provenance one can not infer and others like Mrs. Wilson who could be nothing else. She was always well dressed with stylish high-heeled shoes. Stern but polite and smiling, she was respected by the other teachers and held in awe by us, the pupils. At one time we lived in Zamalek in a building owned by my father. It was a lovely airy flat with a large veranda and at the time there were practically no cars circulating on the street below. There was a lovely villa next to our building with a huge garden and the girl of the family living in it, rode a large tricycle inside the garden. I learned to ride a bicycle that year and felt far superior to be rushing around on two wheels rather than three. Secretly, I hoped she would ask me inside, one day, so I could tackle the ups and downs of the footpaths in the spacious garden. I had other reasons to feel superior at that time. Our wealthy neighbors had a chauffeured limousine on standby but my father bought a surplus British army Jeep, which he renovated and enjoyed taking us for short drives. It was open-air on top without a hood and without doors. It was a ball and I imagined everyone looking at us enviously.

We lived through the 1948 Arab-Israeli war in that flat but apart from the loud bang of two bombs on the Abdine Palace and the frequent blackouts with the columns of white light searching the skies for enemy aircraft, nothing troubled our existence. We left the house a year later and moved to a flat in town because the flat in Zamalek had no elevator and we lived on the fourth floor. In the nineties, I went looking for it and I almost could not find it. It was hidden, almost cowering, overshadowed by huge apartment blocks on every side, one of which took up the whole area of the lovely villa and garden next to us. No need to add that I found no space to park my car. In those days, Mrs. Wilson must have lived nearby because often, in our leisurely walks on the empty streets, we met her promenading her two daschund, sausage-like dogs. She always smiled and addressed us a polite greeting.

In every school, in every organization there is almost always a busybody. In truth, during the English period, the English School did not have one. After the Suez war of 1956, when the school administration was taken over by the Egyptian Ministry

of Education, two such people emerged: Mr. Salama and Mr. Iskandar. Both were Copts and they were literally running the school. The headmaster, Dr. Abdel Rahman, like the British sovereign, reigned but did not rule. Especially Mr. Salama, a short rotund man, was constantly on the go, forever hurrying here and there, out of breath, out of time, unable to stop and take in what you had to say to him, unable to give you a straight answer to your problem. He was not a bad person. He was pleasant and ready with a smile, which was the most you could get out of him. Obviously I am exaggerating a little as I am apt to do in this sort of memoir but I sketch a caricature to give an impression and the impression was rather comical. Many years later, I visited the school and asked for Mr. Salama. I was told that Dr. Salama was not available at the moment. Dr. Salama? Well, well! I had a hunch the Doctorate was awarded by him to himself. However, in all fairness, I do not discard the possibility that I am being gratuitously malicious.

The above was an introductory paragraph to Mrs. Swinburn. She was a busybody as well but perhaps more focused than Dr. Salama. Like him, she was constantly busy, running around on untold tasks that had to be done. But she taught classes as well and is fondly remembered by Samia together with the stories of Rudyard Kipling they read in her class. She was perhaps a little younger than Mrs. Wilson, in her late forties or early fifties, thinner and taller. Also unmistakably English with a pleasant but not by any means attractive face. Two things about her stand out in my memory. One is the frequent fainting fits of Roger Tamraz during morning assembly when Mrs. Swinburn would rush to the crumpled body on the floor, sweep him off the ground, hoist him like a sack onto her shoulder and carry him to the infirmary, on the floor above. The second was the inordinate fondness she had for Leila Thabet, which was quite out of character with the mostly aloof British educators. Leila's father was an important official in King Farouk's palace and every afternoon at the end of the school day, a limousine was stationed outside the school with Leila's nurse inside waiting to take Leila safely home. More than once, I heard Mrs. Swinburn ask, with some anxiety, if Leila had left the premises. She often went searching for her during school hours and she obviously wanted her for some reason but this preoccupation with Leila was not an isolated incident.

Whereas we never knew Mrs. Wilson's marital status, Mrs. Swinburn's husband appeared at school now and then. He was a tall, handsome man with a nonchalant bearing and smile, and round about his wife's age. On one occasion, when Mrs. Swinburn was occupied, he took over the class and read to us a story. His ruddy complexion makes me think, in retrospect, that he must have been fond of his tippie.

It is strange that of the many teachers at the G.P.S. I only remember two other ladies whereas I recall almost the totality of teachers of the English School during the English period. Of course, I was much older then. As for the period after 1956 when the school was taken over by the Egyptian Ministry, I only attended it for two years and it was a period where I was as close to being a juvenile delinquent as I ever was in my life. I describe this period in my memoir "Delinquents".

I must have been in Mrs. Porch's class at one time or another but I remember her specifically because of one single incident that was etched indelibly in my memory. The G.P.S. being a junior school, had class teachers that taught all the subjects. There was no changeover of teaching staff for specific subjects. In other words, geography, history, English, arithmetic. . .etc. were taught by the same person. However, Mrs. Porch, who was not our form teacher during the last two years when hockey entered the curriculum, was the person who undertook to teach us the game. Each student brought his/her own hockey stick for the game. Our gym shoes were

stored in cloth bags and hung behind each pupil's chair. There was no changing room at the G.P.S. Before gym or hockey we changed shoes in class and engaged in these activities in our school uniforms. For the hockey class we left the school grounds, which were too small and, hockey sticks in hand, marched to the Gezira Sporting Club, a ten-minute walk away. There, on the hockey field, we were taught the fundamentals of the game by Mrs. Porch and eventually separated into two mixed boy-girl teams and played the game. I was a fast runner and a good athlete although in later years, at the English School, I did not shine in sports. Mrs. Porch, fiftyish, on the short side, rotund and not particularly pretty, wearing gym shoes and a ribbon with a whistle around her neck was the referee. At one moment I got the ball and started moving towards the goal. The players next to me tried to stop me and so did the opposing defense but I broke through and, running like a rabbit, scored a goal. Mrs. Porch called me. I expected to be told, "Good show". Instead she pulled my ear. I must have been nine or ten at the time and the humiliation was not negligible with all the girls watching. "This is a team game," she said. "You are not alone on the field. What you did was disgraceful." I have no special affection for the English but as educators they excel.

The schoolteacher in whose form I was at the time of the above incident was Mrs. Arditi. She was not English and the name suggests an Italian or Maltese. She was a thin tall woman, again not attractive but pleasant enough to look at. I do not think there was a beautiful teacher at the G.P.S. If there were, I would not have forgotten it. Mrs. Arditi was calm and a good teacher. She encouraged us by giving us stars when our work was good. Red stars for v.good and golden stars for excellent. Apart from the stars she stuck in our writing books, she set up a list of our names on a notice board and stuck an equivalent star next to our names for every one that was in our notebooks. She did this so that everyone could see where each one of us stood and to encourage, I suppose, competition and a greater effort from star-deficient pupils. During Mrs. Arditi's school year I was given a prize for general progress. It was the second prize I was awarded at the G.P.S. The first one was during the early years because I was a fast learner. After that and all through the English School I sort of drifted into the pleasant, comfortable, and the devoid from excess-effort status of mediocrity, in other words, somewhere in the middle of the class.

Mrs. Arditi, like most of the other teachers welcomed flowers brought to the classroom by the pupils. Welcomed, encouraged, and when their lack dragged for too long we were gently reminded how nice it would be if there were some flowers in our empty vase. Father usually drove Nafsika and me to school in the mornings. One day, on our way there, in the car, I asked father to buy some flowers for our classroom and we stopped at a florist near school. While not a flower enthusiast or a connoisseur, my father spied some daffodils and, though inordinately expensive in 1950 at five piasters each, he asked for a bouquet of twenty. Mrs. Arditi was absolutely ecstatic. Daffodils! I can't believe my eyes, she kept on saying. Just the right occasion, boys and girls, to learn immediately a wonderful poem by a poet called William Wordsworth and she started reciting. . . "I wander'd lonely as a cloud, That floats on high o'er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd, A host of golden daffodils." . . . Another time I brought a bunch of tulips and again Mrs. Arditi was delighted and so, for quite a different reason, was the class. No poem on tulips existed and we did not have to memorize and recite yet another poem.

The day started with the bell. Not an electric bell; a hand-held bell about thirty centimeters long together with the wooden handle which connected to the bronze cup and clapper. I do not remember who was responsible for ringing the bell but it was

brought out from its shelf and rung vigorously in the assembly hall so that the sound would reverberate throughout the building for the change of subjects, our release for the break and the call to lunch. It was always a welcome sound. During break the bell descended to the playground and was held by the teacher supervising our mostly peaceful but sometimes more violent activities of boys fighting. It held a special fascination for us and usually there were volunteers to hold it, keeping strictly within a meter's distance from the teacher, for the privilege of ringing it at break's end. There was a waiting list of volunteers and, of course, I was no exception and would forego the playing of marbles, the games of "he", the races, and the fighting, for the thrill of ringing that very ordinary bell. The girls were not immune to its charm either.

In accordance to the British public school tradition, the G.P.S. had a school uniform for boys and girls and though I forget the details, the tie was essential for both sexes. It was divided into "houses". These were sort of teams that cut across the forms. In other words a house had members from all the forms, presumably after a certain age level. There were three such houses in the G.P.S. Aurora, Diana and Minerva and I cannot recall if it was both for girls and boys. At the English School there were four houses for each sex and competitions for all the sports were arranged each term between them. At the G.P.S. the only contest that comes to mind was hockey. At the English School we filed before assembly in the quadrangle in houses. At the G.P.S. as we arrived in the morning we went straight to our classrooms and then to the assembly hall by class holding our thin, dark green hymn books. The teachers arranged themselves below the platform, on the sides, with a teacher sitting on the piano stool.

In strode Mrs. Wilson with her heavy, noisy, clicking heels and up the stage. She looked at us and said, "Good morning children." A loud unselfconscious reply by all, "Good morning Mrs. Wilson." "Today," she would say, "we shall sing the hymn on page five." The piano would start with a small introduction and the singing would begin. Most hymns were dull and the teachers were there to make sure there was no flagging in the singing. There were one or two favorites but the top hit was on page number three. It was the "All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small . . ." Whenever Mrs. Wilson announced it, there was an audible commotion of happiness and pleasure, and the singing was loud and lusty. After the hymn came the Lord's Prayer, "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be they name. Thy kingdom come, . . ." At the English School it was a gruff murmur, at the G.P.S. it was a loud singsong, a recital, a poem innocently and generously voiced with a total lack of fanaticism by Christians of all denominations, Moslems, Jews, Buddhists and whatever other religions might be present. Ours was a time of racial and religious tolerance which started early, automatically and unthinkingly, and lasted a lifetime.

From those wonderful, carefree days I remember only a few of my fellow students. There was Kimon Valaskakis, a friend from Transition A, all the way through the English School, who went on to the American University, then to Cornell for a PhD in economics, a professorship at the University of Montreal before finally retiring as Canada's ambassador at the OECD in Paris. With Kimon we shared a very special relationship. We were pissing partners. When our class of tiny tots was taken to the toilets, to speed up the process our teacher sent us in the toilet cubicle in pairs and I always had Kimon as my partner. Though we no longer piss together we have kept in touch and we meet whenever he is in Athens. Andreas Vayanos came to the G.P.S. a little later but he is now in Athens and we meet for lunch every few months. My only reservation on these occasions is that he bullies me when the bill comes and I told him that his attitude makes me feel like a kept woman. Andre Hamaoui was with

us from early on and now he regularly sends me video clips and, sometimes, pictures of ESC reunions. Amr Abu el Dahab, Anthony Micallef, and Andre Mires were there but I have lost track of them. As for the girls, the gentle sex I am so fond of, I remember Nadia Fadel, Hoda Darwish, Nadia Zaklama, Inass Said, Sohaila el Sawi, Lulu Fahmi, Mary Paleoroutas, the fast runner Ingy Zein el Abedine, and the bright and pretty Mushira el Saifi. Most of them went on to the English School and for the next five years I had them under discreet ocular surveillance same as I had most of the pretty girls in school. Two other English girls were with us for a time but suddenly disappeared, Margaret Glover and Margaret Monroe. They were both pretty and delicate blondes and I cannot forget the adorable Margaret Glover who had a crush on me. She showed it on every possible occasion but I did not have time for girls at that time of my life. Not only that; I was abysmally ignorant of sex.

I shall talk of the younger and older fellow students and one or two prominent G.P.S. alumni a little later so as not to bore the reader straight off and because the description of the school's routine and even its trivialities have precedence.

The school break at around eleven was a vital part of our education. It opened up a venue for cerebral rest, the expending of energy through games, racing, fighting for boys and sociability and milder physical activity for girls such as rope skipping and hopscotch. There was little interaction between the two sexes in the playground though much more in the classroom. The girlfriend-boyfriend concept was absolutely taboo in our minds even if certain affinities between individuals of the opposite sex became apparent despite attempts to keep them under wraps. Also, there was little mixing between pupils of different forms and thus age groups. This separation continued in the English School and is perhaps a normal school phenomenon. There were, of course, cases of "best friend" between boys and such attachments were more pronounced with girls, but I do not recall any such exclusivity among the boys in our form. We did not always play games together. Small groups separated for certain games and other boys pursued their own interests such as playing marbles or even, like Timor Fayed, searching in the grass for a praying mantis or a grasshopper. Kimon Valaskakis enriched our vocabulary in ways where the dictum that to remember a word one has to learn it and forget it seven times was annulled. He would come up to us and tell us, "I am going to hit you. Do you have any objections?" Not knowing the word "objection", I would answer "No," whereupon I would receive a punch and a scuffle would ensue but the word objection would stick once and for all.

My friend Samia reminded me of the "nickels" which means that, at least during her time, girls might have played marbles. They did not, four years earlier, when I was there. Like the grownup world, the games we indulged in came in vogues, lasted a few weeks and changed to something else. Children, like adults, follow changing fashions. At the height of the marble period, my father brought me a net of perhaps fifty beautifully colored glass marbles. Within two days I lost my entire fortune. I did not take it to heart because I was bored of the game. More likely I was tired of losing. Then the nickels came out; they were metal balls of different sizes extracted from used industrial and automobile ball bearings. I was told that one of the school doorkeepers sold them. Next day with five piasters from my mother I went to him, and out of a shed he produced six or seven large, shiny nickels. I was so happy I would have given him another five piasters if I had them. I kept the nickels for a few days in my desk and when the novelty was over, I played them in the marble sweepstakes and lost them to the G.P.S. sharpshooters. Mrs. Wilson, meanwhile, got wind of the commerce of nickels in her backyard and stopped it on the double. Or

rather, like hashish, nickel dealing between doorkeeper and pupils went underground since the nickels were still around in Samia's time.

After our return to class and a couple of lessons, the bell would ring for lunch. Some of the pupils living nearby would go home for lunch and the rest would file in the dining hall and sit on the benches. I do not recall if the seating was by form or haphazard. The food was carried out of the kitchen by the *sofragis* (servants) in large pans, dished out on plates on a large table, and placed before us by the teachers. It was barely palatable and I remember with a shudder the dessert "banana custard" which was a weekly nightmare. I also remember the first time I sat for lunch, I had a hard time swallowing the contents of my plate when Mrs. Lee came smiling and asked me, "Would you like some more?" not knowing a word of English, I imagined she asked me if I liked the food whereupon I politely said "Yes." She took my plate filled it up again and placed it in front of me, as a result of which another phrase of the English language was indelibly etched on my mind early on. Sometimes the *sofragis* collected the plates and before removing them, they conscientiously asked us "Aouz more?" An amusing and well-intentioned marriage of English and Arabic.

There was a gymnasium in one corner of the playground separate from the school building. In the early years all pupils, boys and girls together, went to it for physical exercises and a spot of racing in mixed teams of boys and girls. Later, in the last two or three years of school we were separated and the boys began training in the manly art of boxing. Our coach was Mr. Ezzat who was said to be an officer in the army. He was short, dark and well built and had a friendly, no-nonsense attitude with us. He trained us once a week and arranged boxing matches with the Victoria College of Maadi, sometimes on their grounds and sometimes at the G.P.S., where a boxing ring was erected in the playground and the parents of boys were allowed to attend but hardly anyone ever came. Boxing exhibitions were also a feature of Parents' Day where attendance was far greater.

Parents' Day's activities changed from year to year. Boxing was a feature of the later years but I remember in the early days we had Maypole dancing with a tall wooden maypole erected in the assembly hall. We danced to the piano-playing of a teacher, holding the long colorful ribbons hanging from the top of the pole, half of us circling one way and the other half in the other, going in and out, making beautiful colored patterns as the ribbons intertwined and were plaited on the maypole.

By far the finest Parents' Day event in all my years at the G.P.S. was the play Alice in Wonderland. The leading role of Alice was acted by a winsome English girl of the last form. Obviously not all, but many of the events of that engaging story were performed in the school play in an unbelievably professional way. The White Rabbit, the Duchess, the Mad Tea Party with the Hatter, the March Hare and the sleeping Dormouse with all the nonsense talk that is so absurd and amusing, and finally the appearance of the Queen of Hearts, who kept shouting "Off with his head," at anyone who displeased her. In the end, there is the a trial in the story, involving the Knave of Hearts who was accused of stealing the Queen's tarts and Alice is called as a witness. By that time, Alice is quite fed up and calls the trial proceedings ridiculous. The Queen of Hearts is infuriated and shouts, as usual, "Off with her head." Alice shouts back, "Ha, you are nothing but a pack of cards," and with a sweeping gesture throws a pack of cards at the Queen and the audience. It was quite a remarkable achievement for twelve-year olds.

I took part in a sketch on that occasion. It was amusing but not particularly funny. Funny was the way I was chosen. Mrs. Swinburn entered our class in the middle of a lesson and looked at us boys. She picked on Amr Abu el Dahab and asked



him to scream. Poor Amr did not understand. Just scream, boy, she told him, give us a good, loud yell. After repeated attempts, a half-hearted, barely audible throaty howl came out of Amr. Dissatisfied, she looked around the class. George, give us a good scream, she said. I let out a shriek that reverberated from one end of the school building to the other and so got the part of Fidgety Phil who could not stand still. The plot was simple-minded and the humor slapstick. There was father, mother, and Fidgety Phil having their five o'clock tea in pantomime while an older pupil was reciting the ditty. Fidgety Phil all the while was fidgeting restlessly, almost deranged, on his chair. Suddenly the chair tilts backwards, Fidgety Phil grabs the tablecloth, instinctively, to break his fall, but down he goes with that deafening scream (I put in the maximum of decibels for the Parents' Day performance) pulling with him plates, cups and teapots and covering himself completely with the tablecloth. There was laughter and some clapping but I did not emerge from under the tablecloth and broken cutlery to take a bow. Such self-promoting would not be condoned by our English teachers.

Prize giving day was, of course, a big event. The whole of the playground was covered by a tent because the assembly hall was too small to accommodate the parents and relatives of pupils that usually attended this ceremony. A wooden platform was erected for some of the teachers and the official guests of the school board. The G.P.S. was not important enough to merit the presence of the British ambassador, who usually graced the principal functions of the English School, but usually we had the director of the British Council and a high ranking diplomat or two just under ambassadorial status. The prize winners were announced during the morning assembly that same day and were isolated from the herd in an out-of-the-way classroom, were briefed on the procedure and taught the correct way to receive their prize. I know the details because as I said above I received two, and only two, prizes in my lifetime, both at the G.P.S. We were told that we would go to the platform as our names were called, preferably smiling, take the prize with our left hand and shake the person's hand, who gave away the prizes, with our right. I think the girls had to put in a curtsy either before or after receiving the prize. After all, it is still the protocol if you are ever to meet the Queen! The rest of the pupils, that day, returned to the classrooms though no teaching took place. They amused themselves by playing naughts and crosses, or battleships, talking, teasing the girls or having the teacher read to them a story; many of us nursing our disappointment for not being with the select few. The pupils' dress code that day was white shirts and tie and because the occasion took place in mid winter, pullovers had to be worn under the white long-sleeved shirts. That first time I received a prize, because of my deficient English, I did not understand the instructions and came to school with a short-sleeved shirt under my pullover. When we filed to our places to receive our prize I had to remove the pullover which could not be worn under a short-sleeved shirt and shivered all through the ceremony of speeches and the awarding of prizes. I was thin but hardy and was lucky not to contract pneumonia.

I often think of our fellow students of both the English School and the G.P.S. and wonder how life has treated them. Some of them like Roger Tamraz I have written about in an earlier memoir on my student days in London and if I am ever accused of having been malicious I shall plead innocent. I did not fabricate his professional journey; I accessed the information from the Internet and he certainly is one of the more fascinating graduates of the G.P.S. But perhaps the most famous former pupil was the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said. From the G.P.S. he went on for a few years to Victoria College and then completed his studies in the U.S. He

eventually became a Columbia University professor of English and Comparative Literature and was a prolific author and cultural critic best known for his book *Orientalism*, the Western study of Eastern cultures. He also was a fervent advocate of Palestinian rights and his autobiographical works are closely scrutinized and attacked by Jewish scholars. Furthermore, Edward Said was an accomplished concert pianist who, in 1999, co-founded with Daniel Barenboim the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra made up of children from Israel, the Palestinian territories and surrounding Arab nations. In one of his autobiographies he mentions Naki Rigopoulos who was his classmate at the G.P.S. Naki, who was older than most of our crowd, went on to the English School and later attained top executive posts at the International Red Cross. He lived permanently in Geneva. I met him again, many years later, at the island of Limnos where both he and my family spent our summers and where Naki had a fine family home in the village of Cornos. Together with some of his friends, we enjoyed his hospitality at sumptuous dinners served on Limoges cutlery and Christoffle silverware. Sadly both classmates are deceased; Said died in 2003 and Naki just a year ago. About Kimon Valaskakis I wrote a few words above, which imply but do not do justice to his intelligence, continuing drive for new ideas and ideals, and pleasant personality.

I shall mention a few names I remember from the nostalgic mists of the past. Claude and Gilles Mosseri to remind us that once nationalities, races and religions were peripheral to our friendships. The Rifaats, Cherif, Mohsen and Aziz. Mohsen, a successful businessman, author and brilliant watercolorist living in Canada. Aziz, an equally successful entrepreneur in Egypt. Timor and Toman Fayed, I believe, in Canada. Gengis Osmanoglu (?), Steven Lawrence (?), Saad Mohaffel (London), Aris Dimopoulos (Greece), Nicholas and Ion Dimopoulos (USA-Greece), Nicholas Stolidakis (Greece), Freddy Saad (Egypt?), Panos and Rea Raftopoulos (??), Leila Thabet (married to Taki Raissi - Egypt), and our very special Samia Zeitoun (Egypt).

I left Egypt in 1997 and before I left I often used to shop at a small supermarket opposite the G.P.S. entrance. Once, on an impulse, I asked permission and walked in the playground but did not ask the bawab to enter the building, which he would probably have refused. I saw the shed where the pupils living in Zamalek put their bicycles and remembered what a fascination they held for me. The brand new Raleigh bicycles with their gadgets: bells, buzzers, mirrors and gears; the heavy American Schwinn whose breaks were with the pedals and though I had a bicycle when we lived in Zamalek, I was too young to use it for transport. I don't think the finest Porsche Carrera ever thrilled me as much as those bicycles. I remembered that quiet street getting jammed and deafening with car horns at 3:30 pm as the private cars with parents or chauffeurs gathered to collect the pupils and the school bus stationed just outside the gate waiting patiently for its high-spirited occupants. A brick wall has been built around the school and parents can no longer peer through the railing to see their children at play as my mother often did in those days. One day, I happened to pass by in the morning. I could not see inside the playground. On the balcony stood one or two teachers and, using a microphone and loudspeakers, were haranguing noisily and interminably the children which I assumed were assembled beneath. I stood for a while. I did not get a word of what was being said, the noise was ear-splitting and unpleasant. I felt sorry for the children that were born too late to answer the "Good morning, children" with a "Good morning Mrs. Wilson."

Yes, it is till there the G.P.S. The building, not the spirit.

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