

## Adele Kerbaj: Farmer, Gardener

(Born in 1937, in Barouk [Shouf]; currently living in 'Ain Ksour [Shouf]; recorded in her home; others present, Anissa Najjar. Language: Druze form of colloquial Arabic.)

**A**dele: We were three sisters at home, we had no brothers. My father, God bless his soul, loved farming. We had cattle, sheep, goats and cows. Because I didn't have brothers, our mother used to wake us up at six o'clock to go to the fields, to bring our father grass, and then go to school. When we came back from school in the afternoon we worked, we helped our father in the fields. When we got older, there was other work. Everyday we stayed in the fields helping our father until twelve or one at night. My father, God bless his soul, liked to have goats. We had to feed them, we used to bring grape and fig and blackberry leaves to feed the goats. My mother forced us to feed them. She made me feed the sheep either evening or early morning. I used to get upset. (smiles) I told my elder sister, "You feed them and I'll bring water". There was no water in the village. Every day in the evening we used to bring water from the river. I didn't like feeding the sheep. I was afraid they'd bite my hand (laughs). So I went to bring water. I took the container and went to the river with the girls. In the morning I went to bring water two or three times, and the same thing in the evening.

Days passed and I grew older. My father didn't have sons to help him, so we had to help him. The seasons passed, we had to harvest wheat, barley, hummus. Everyday he took us with him to pick the crops and help him. Sometimes we went back home, and sometimes we slept in the fields. He took mattresses with him. The field were one hour far from our home. Instead of going and coming, during the summer, he took mattresses with him and we slept in the fields.

Anisseh: They slept in tents.

Adele: Yes. Not only us, our neighbors also. We took with us tea and other things, and we had a lot of fun there. Then my father broke his leg, may God not break anyone's bones. He was sixty or seventy years old. My elder sister was married. I suffered a lot. I had to go to the field every day. Throughout my whole life I suffered. Every day I had to go to the fields, and in the evening I had to wash. There were no washing machines in those days. I brought water and washed while my mother stayed by my father.

Ghena: By then you had stopped going to school?

Adele: Yes, I didn't get a school certificate. I only reached second or third grade. But I continued to read. I like to read a lot. I wanted to go to school but my parents needed me to help

Picture Credit: Ghena Ismail



in the fields. I had a sister who was younger than me and the elder sister got married. So I worked in the fields alone. We had an apple tree and orchards. There was a lot of work.

During that period, God sent me a decent man from another village. I married him. He turned out to be (pause) very kind and decent, but he wasn't lucky. Life was not generous with him. Whatever money he made, we spent. I lived with him for thirty years. No month was better than the one before. (laughs) His financial situation was the same from the day we married until the day he died. I helped him, and he respected and appreciated me, and his parents did as well. Me too, I love and appreciate them. My husband has been dead for four years, but nothing has changed in our home. My brothers-in-laws, sisters-in-law and mother-in-law all visit me, they all like me. Thank God we lived decently, but we weren't well off.

Anisseh: Didn't you inherit some land?

Adele: My father, God bless his soul, didn't have sons. He only had girls. He gave us land. He divided the land among the three of us. I sold two pieces of land, I helped my nephews and nieces. They weren't very well off and they were orphans, I felt sorry for them. I helped the first nephew in building and I also helped him when he wanted to get married. We have been here for twenty years, guarding this building. They pay us LL200,000 per month. This doesn't last more than four or five days. I asked the owner for an increase. He said he couldn't. I asked him to register us with social security. He told me he can't, he's a foreigner. So I pay for doctors and medicines. That's why we were never able to save money. Every month I

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get a temperature. I pay from LL60,000 to LL70,000 for medicines and doctors' fees. We had no children. When we first got married I took medical treatment, but God didn't give us children. This is my life. Now I'm sixty years old.

Ghena: No, this is too short. I want to know more.

Adele: You want me to tell you about my life? You'd need two days. (laughs)

Ghena: That's alright, I'm here to listen to you.

Anisseh: Tell her about Baadharan.

Adele: When I went to Baadharan I was newly wed, (laughs) a twenty one day bride. My parents-in-law made charcoal. They needed someone to help them. I said, "I'll go with you." I went with them, I was a twenty one day bride, and I filled fourteen bags of charcoal. It was the olive season, and they were looking for laborers to help them, but they couldn't find any. I said, "I'll help you." I wasn't used to collecting olives - in the Barouk we didn't have olives. The first day I picked olives for an hour, and then I got a head-ache. I'd pick and rest. My mother-in-law said, "You aren't used to the olives. I told you to stay home, but you insisted on coming." It was very tough the first day. The second day they asked me if I wanted to go with them and I said, "Yes." She [mother-in-law] told me, "Why come? The whole day you hardly picked two olives. It's not worth it. Why don't you stay here?" I said, "No, I'll take some matté." The second day was better than the first. I worked for a while and when I got tired I went and prepared matté and coffee for them. At noon I prepared lunch. The third day was even better. So I picked olives with them for a month, and I felt very much at ease.

Then my husband decided to move to a village called Tir Jbeil. He wanted to work with charcoal. He thought working with charcoal would be more profitable. I said, "We know nothing about charcoal. We're only just managing with olives, let's stick to what we're doing." He said, "No, your sister's husband knows about charcoal, I'll cut it and carry it." So we moved to Tir Jbeil. We stayed in that village and rented a house. He went and cut wood. He did well. I took matté and coffee for them. Everyday I went to them, we stayed until three or four o'clock and then returned home. We felt strange the first few days, but then things went well. They decided to light the mashhara [a place where charcoal is burnt]. They had to sleep near it in the open air. They told me to sleep there with them but I said, "No I'll sleep at home." They slept in the woods for a week and worked the mashhara. Our daily income from the mashhara was LL5. I said, "Are we going to live in the woods, and suffer for LL5? Let's move to Beirut and find some other work."

We went to Hazmieh. We rented a room and a kitchen and he started to work in the port. His daily income was LL7. He went to the port in the morning and came back in the evening. The

LL7 covered our food, rent and all expenses, it was more than enough. At the end of the week we had LL35. We went to the Sursock market. For LL15 we bought everything we needed for the household. LL20 remained. We bought kerosene, coffee cups, plates, everything. Also potatoes, onions, tomatoes, rice, sugar. All this didn't cost more than LL15 to LL20. We were well-off and happy for one or two years. Then the Palestinians started to fight, and we ran away with our clothes only. You want me to tell you my life story? Oh!

We ran away with only our clothes. They told us that some people wanted someone to guard a building in Hazmieh. We came back to Hazmieh to guard a building. We didn't like the place where we lived, it was only one room. I couldn't receive guests. The residents paid us LL25 a month and we made an extra LL25 in tips. That added up to LL50 a month. Thirty years ago that was like LL500,000 today. So we stayed in that building. Every Saturday we cleaned it. The Lebanese singer, Wadih al-Safi, was one of the residents. When he found out that we were from Neeha in the Chouf he got excited, and told all the residents to give us LL10 every month. He gave us money very often. I was contented there.

We stayed in Hazmieh until fighting started at Jisr al-Bacha. Then we had to leave. We went to al-Na'meh. He [husband] went to work in a glass factory on the Bchamoun road. I took shoots and planted them. We stayed in al-Na'meh for one or two years, until Maarouf Saad was killed. We left with nothing but the clothes we were wearing.

We went to Barouk. We stayed for a year there. We planted vegetables. He had no experience in agriculture. "Get up to water the tomatoes!" I'd tell him. He'd say, "What's the hurry? We'll water them tomorrow." I'd say, "Let's pick the beans." He'd tell me, "What's the hurry? We'll pick them next week." I was angry the whole summer and ended up doing all the work. He appreciated my hard work, but I got upset. Then we managed to find work in an aluminum factory in Ain Maar, with Raymond Najjar. We pulled strings for him to get a job. He did well in the factory. He stayed for four years, and we rented a house in Ain Maar. The house was close to his work. He came home, had lunch, and went back to work. Then Kamal Junblat was killed. The Druze and Christians started to fight, each group said that the other group had killed people. When the fighting started we left with nothing but our clothes.

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We went up to Baadharan. We spent the winter there. We rented an olive orchard. I would tell him, "Come on, it's a sunny day, let's go and check the olives." He would say, "Why the big fuss? It's still early." Time went by. It would be ten o'clock and we had two hours' walk to reach the olives. I used to get angry and upset. We rented an olive orchard and I worked very hard.

I told him I no longer wanted to work with olives. I was talking in front of my in-laws. They said there was a building in 'Ain Ksour, in Shahhar, we could go and guard it. They brought us here, the garden was all brambles, it looked terrible. There were also people from the Syrian National Party and the Socialist Party. I asked him, "How can we stay here? We're all alone, we have no children." We thought about it, but then I decided that we would stay. We didn't know anyone in Ain Ksour. We were new in the area. But after a while we started to know people, we started to exchange visits. The days passed. We stayed for three years. The fourth year war erupted. Israel invaded. Months passed, and there was the 'War of the Shouf.' Our home was burnt down. We ran away carrying with us nothing but our clothes.

We fled to Beirut. We stayed there six months. We sent a request to the building owner to give us our end-of-service payment. We told him that we wanted to go back to our home because it was burnt - everything we possessed was in the home, our furniture, jewelry, everything. He agreed but he wanted us to continue to guard the building. We said, "How can we guard the building? It's been burned down." He told us to stay in Barouk until he's back from Saudi Arabia. When he came back he asked us to continue guarding the building. We accepted. He polished the floor, cleaned the walls, all of this [points at the walls] was black as charcoal. We stayed for a while, then A'oun's war started. We'd be sitting here and shells would be coming at us from both sides. We'd be sitting on the balcony, shelling would start and we'd go into the bedroom. "Oh God, what evil have we done?" We'd go down to the shelter. We'd be drinking coffee or matté and we'd leave everything, shut the door and go down. We stayed one year all through Aoun's war. Sometimes we'd put food on the stove and before even tasting it, we'd have to turn off the fire and go down. I said to my husband, "Wouldn't it have been easier to go to our village and die among our relatives?" However the owner insisted that we continue to guard the house. When the war ended, the roads were opened. We were about to relax when he died. During the war he didn't die, he died -- (pause).

Ghena: You told me you needed two days to finish telling me your life story.

Adele: Now you have interviewed twenty five women? Did they talk about their lives with their husbands? What should I tell you about?

Ghena: Your childhood, things you liked to do, how you spent your life, happy and sad moments.

Anisseh: You traveled to Egypt.

Adele: It's true. I like to travel. I also like farming. My heart and soul are in farming. You can deprive me of food or water, but not of gardens, plants and flowers. I often told the building owner, "If it wasn't for the water and the land you had I wouldn't have stayed." I have a passion for farming. I have to go down to the garden five or six time every day. In the

morning I have to say, "Good morning" to it. (laughs) At noon I tell it, "May God encourage you!" And in the evening I tell it, "Good night." I have a hobby of planting lines of beans and lines of tomatoes. I love to pick them. (laughs) I just adore it. Then comes the season for mulberries here. Everybody tells me that the 100 kilos of mulberries should give me LL300,000 to 400,000 a month. I tell them, God knows I don't make a single pound out of this. Since the first day I entered Abdul Ghani's building, twenty years ago, I haven't made a single pound from the garden. I give friends - people whom I love and who are kind to me - I feel that it's my duty to pick and take to my friends. The beans I send my friends are not going to make them richer but I like to send them things. It's a hobby. Whenever you come to see me you'd find me among the plants and flowers in the

garden. We used to have orchards in Barouk. I used to stay there all day. We had five orchards. (pause) If I could have a look at what the other interviewees told you - they're more educated perhaps - I'd have been able to talk better. (pause)

Anisseh: When you were a young woman in your parents' home weren't there men other than Kamel who wanted to marry you?

Adele: There were many suitors. Oh God! I feel shy. (laughs) Many men asked for me. Ten suitors came. (laughs) Frankly, I wasn't in love with my husband when I married him. My parents encouraged me to love him. I wanted to marry someone close to our village. He loved me and I loved him, but my father did not want me to marry him. My father wanted a man who would live in our house. Because he didn't have sons he wanted me and my husband to live with him in the same house. My husband was shrewd. He told my father that he accepted that we should live in my parent's home. He married me. We stayed in my father's house for three months. Then he said, "You believe that I'm going to stay in your father's house. Aren't I a man? I want to work and live with you in our own house." I said, "How can we do this to my poor parents? We have property here. There's plenty of space, this house could take ten more people." But my husband wasn't interested in work or income. I suffered a lot with him. He didn't want to stay in my father's house, and he didn't want to work. Of course I had to leave with him. I must say that he was a very kind man. He didn't object if I went to see my family twice a day. Haram! Whenever I cooked and felt like taking some of it to my parents in Barouk, and asked him if I could go, he would say, "Am I stopping you?" Sometimes I would ask him, "Why don't we live in Barouk?" He'd tell me, "I didn't break my promise to your father. I told him we'd live with him. We lived with him for three months." I told my husband then, "All those suitors came and none of them could outsmart my father except you, you fox" (laughs). Others call Baadharan people foxes.

There was a man who wanted to marry me and take me with

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him to Kuwait. That was the man I wanted. I would love to travel. My husband's father had a sweet tongue. So as to persuade my father to marry me to his son, they came to visit us very often. They kept visiting us for two to three years. Frankly, I wanted to marry the other man and go with him to Kuwait, I didn't want to stay in the village. This was my fate. I didn't gain or lose anything. When he [husband's father] first saw me I was a young girl going to collect grapes. I was putting the grapes in the basket when two men passed by. One was a man from our village, and the other was from Baadharan. They greeted me. I responded to their greeting and offered them grapes and figs. When I went home in the evening after a long working day, I found him [the man from Baadharan] in our house. I thought to myself, "Oh, I gave this man grapes in the morning, what is he doing in our house?" (laughs). Neither my father nor my mother nor any of us knew him. My father, God bless his soul, asked him, "Where are you from?" He told him, "From Baadharan, in the Shouf." My father greeted him - he used to stay at home all day because his health was poor, and he liked to receive visitors. My father-in-law was a very shrewd man. He chose his words well. He talked to my father, and after a while they began to dance. I was shocked. I thought, "Oh God, what a man!"

The second day in the evening my future father-in-law came, bringing with him a bag of charcoal. My father said, "Why all this, my brother? You must have carried it all the way from the woods, you shouldn't have done that" He said, "It's alright. You are in most of the time, a charcoal fire will keep you warm." He spent the evening at our place, and again they danced. "Oh, God!" I thought to myself. Two or three days later he went to Baadharan and brought his wife with him. He came and spent the evening with his wife at our place. My father, God bless his soul, and my mother wouldn't allow them to leave. They told him, "You can't leave with your wife at this hour. Stay!" My father-in-law just wanted to be persuaded to stay. They stayed at our place. His wife was very sociable. They spent the night at our place and left the next day.

Two or three days later my father-in-law came back and told my father that he wanted his son to marry me. My father told him, "Ten to fifteen men have asked for my daughter, but I don't want to let her marry a man who'd take her out the village. I want her to stay at home. I have a lot of land to attend to and I don't have sons. Her older sister is married, and her younger sister can't work or do anything. This girl is the blessing of our home. She is all we have. If she hadn't worked we wouldn't have eaten." He told him, "We'll do as you wish. Not only will my son stay at your place, we'll stay too if you want." My father needed to hear that. Two or three days passed, and then my father came to ask my opinion. I told him, "You refused to let me marry the men I liked, and now I refuse

to marry this man." He told me, "Oh daughter, this man is willing to stay with us, his father too. They'll take care of the orchards. We have seven or eight orchards, we shouldn't forget about them." He kept talking to me like that. One or two weeks later my father-in-law came with his son. Poor man [husband], he'd broken his leg and couldn't walk. When I saw him I screamed at my father, "What! Am I to marry a man who walks with a stick? His parents must be crazy! I don't want to marry this man! You'd better understand." For a year his parents kept coming, and my father kept begging me, "Please, daughter, accept them. I don't have sons. I have no one to care for me." I told him, "Why don't you think about me? The most handsome men asked for me and now you want to give me to a poor man who walks with a stick." He told me, "Oh, daughter, his leg is broken. It's only a matter of weeks and he'll be walking without a stick."

The days went by, and I got married to him. He was very kind and decent, but he wasn't productive, he wasn't serious about work. If things came easy, fine, if not he didn't bother himself. I suffered a lot. Shall I tell you about my wedding? My parents celebrated for three nights. Every night they invited all the neighbors. Thirty years ago weddings were really splendid. The dresses I bought filled three cars. No other girl in Barouk bought as many dresses as I bought, no girl received as many gifts. My parents bought me gold, rugs, brass. They were trying to make it up to me for marrying me to a man I didn't like. But to be honest my husband's family were all very kind to me. I've never had a clash with any of them. Never have we argued. They weren't well off, I figured that out from the beginning, and I accepted my fate. My husband, God bless his soul, lacked motivation, he didn't have enthusiasm.

The day he died he passed by his brother's house. He invited them to come and spend the evening at our place. At seven o'clock my husband came back home. He asked me if there was a packet of cigarettes. I told him, "You've been out the whole day and now you want to smoke here? No, you

shouldn't smoke." I went inside to prepare *matte* but I found that we didn't have enough. I told him, "Alright, go and get yourself cigarettes and bring some *matte*." He said, "I've been out the whole day, you go." As I was going out he told me to bring him a bottle of *arak*. I told him, "No, I won't bring you cigarettes and *arak*. You go and bring it." He said, "No, you bring it with you, and do it with a bride's smile." I said, "Okay." I went to the shop, I brought him cigarettes and a bottle of *arak*. I came back. As we were drinking coffee we started calling, "Kamel, Kamel!" His brother was sitting on the sofa, he had come to take his *matte*. We thought he [husband] was kidding.

Throughout our life together I used to tell him, "My God, are you going to stay like this? We don't have children or security.

*"You can deprive  
me of food  
and water but  
not of gardens"*

How shall we live when we get old?" He used to reply that he would die before me. Whenever he told me that, that he'll die young, I'd tell him, "You won't die young! God will make you suffer because of the arak you drank." Things happened as he expected. His death cost us nothing, not a tissue paper. We didn't have to pay doctors. He died at nine o'clock at night. God bless his soul! So many people came! We didn't expect it. They read poems for his soul. Young people were reading poems inside. We sent the news to Baadharan and to Barouk. My family came before his family. Baadharan people came at about two in the morning. They wanted to take him up to Baadharan. I told them, "You take him up on the condition that you take him to his home. He built the home, let him rest in it for two hours." They said that this wasn't possible - "We'd reach there at four in the morning and then we'll have to take him at eight o'clock to the 'village house.'" I told them, "I have been living here for sixteen years, I've spent good days and bad ones. You think I don't know about the Shouf!" They said, there's no difference between Shouf and Shahhar. I said, "So you don't want to take him to his home?" People discussed the matter, and then my sister-in-law's brother said, "We'll do as you wish, we'll take him to his home. But we won't tell people in Shahhar of his death." I said, "Alright." We reached Baadharan at four in the morning. We waited until nine or ten o'clock, then they moved him to the 'village house.' They arranged a place of condolence. All the sheikhs and relatives were saying, "May we enjoy a funeral like his, and testimonies like his!" You can't believe how many people came! He was poor but he had a good soul. God sent people from Kfar Matta, Abey, Bsateen. People wanted to give their testimonies [repeat his good qualities]. He had an incredible day. It was two or three in the afternoon when people returned to their homes.

At eight in the evening I called my sister-in-law and her brother. I said, "I wanted to broadcast the news of his death in Shahhar and you refused. However, God bless you, you took him to Baadharan, his village. Now I'm thinking of holding a condolence for him here and to stay there for a week." My brother-in-law said, "This would be a great relief for me, I won't have people coming to pay their condolences at my home." I told him, "I'm doing this for your sake. You have four young men, and you are my fifth young man. We don't want to bring bad luck to your house, dear brother." I've been living in that village for sixteen or seventeen years, there's no village where I don't know people.



We stayed in Baadharan for a week, on Thursday we came here ['Ain Ksour]. We had decided to hold a funeral for him on Sunday. We put money for charity in the letters of announcement. I put LL5,000 in every envelope. I put LL50,000 for the 'family house' and another LL50,000 for Abdullah's house. On Sunday seven cars came from Baadharan, and seven cars from Barouk. We held the condolence for him, and announced his death in Barouk and Aley. We didn't miss out any village. The condolences here were even better than the one held in Baadharan. My God punish me if I'm exaggerating.

My husband's family were very gratified. They said, "Speaking frankly, Kamel was no more than a guard, and poor. We didn't think that people will show so much respect for his death. It's all due to your efforts." I told them it was my duty, he was my husband. So we made a condolence for him. We stayed from ten in the morning until twelve at night. One of my friends brought two cars filled with food. He said that people would come from Baadharan and Barouk to spend the whole day with us, they would need to eat. At three or four in the afternoon they put tables outside for the men and tables inside for the women. More than a hundred people ate, and food still remained. Oh God, as if we had a wedding! My husband's family felt very grateful. They said, "We didn't know that you had gained so much respect over the years." My sister's family, my nephews in Barouk, came early in the morning. They brought with them a hundred meat pies, and cheese and *kishk* (cries).

I stayed on here. My mother-in-law and my sister stayed with me for thirty days. They didn't leave me. I was in shock, I had a terrible headache. Every hair on my head seemed to be causing me pain. They took me to the American University Hospital. They wanted LL600,000 to do an X-ray of my head. I went to Sitt Anisseh and told her. She gave me a card with which I saved LL200,000. They took LL400,000 for a five-minute check-up with some machine, and they gave me medicines. I had a year of treatment, I suffered a nervous breakdown. I don't know what happened to me, I felt very depressed. I begged them to cut off all my hair. I'd always felt strong and active before.

I brought my nephew to stay with me. He worked as a taxi driver in Beirut. He went and worked during the day and stayed at my place in the evening. He was a young man. I didn't allow him to put on television or the radio. He got upset, "What's

this? Do you want to imprison me with you? I'm a young man, I need to have fun." I told him, "Didn't you love your uncle?" He said, "I loved him, he was like my father" - he didn't have a father. When he died my nephews were very shocked and upset. The first seven days after he died they came every day from Barouk to Baadharan. Everyday some family members came from Barouk to stay with me. They brought food with them, and cooked for me. Then when I came here, it was the same thing. They cooked food and came all the way from Barouk to stay with me. For a whole month I didn't have to cook anything. My mother-in-law and sister stayed with me for a whole month, thirty days they didn't leave me. We didn't put anything on the stove. The moment I opened my eyes in the morning I found the neighbors with thyme-bread.

Its true we suffered a lot, but I felt more at ease when my husband was alive. For four years I haven't spent an evening at anyone's place. At six o'clock I close the door and stay inside. Whoever visits me is most welcome. But if no one comes I sit and read. When he was alive we went out a lot in the evening. Sometimes we went to Kfar Matta, even to Abey. Today, even if you tear me up, after six o'clock I won't step out of the house. I'm really upset these days. There's a proverb which says "Even if the man is a piece of charcoal his presence is a blessing!" It's true, his presence was a hundred blessings for a woman who doesn't have children. However, this is what God chose for me, and I have to accept it.

Ghena: Had you lived in a country outside Lebanon, do you feel you would have led a different life?

Adele: I don't know, God only knows. Oh, let me tell you why I felt different this year. Last year — my brother-in-law has three sons. One of them likes me a lot. One day as I was sitting with him, he said, "Aunt, my mother and I are planning something, will you join us?" I said, "Tell me what's up." He said, "My father has worked for thirty years in the airport (laughs), he never went on a plane. We want to go for a week to Egypt, will come with us?" I said, "How can I go to Egypt?" He said, "Oh aunt, I'd like you to come with us. Besides, if I want to go out on my own you'll stay with my mother. If you can't afford it, I'll take care of the expenses." I told him, "I'll think about it." The next day as I was working in the field, he passed by. He said, "Please, for the sake of all those you love, come with us." I said, "What will people say - she buried her husband, and then went to have a good time in Egypt?" He said, "Don't pay attention to people's gossip, they're ready to talk if you only go to Baadharan." I told him there was also the problem of money. He said, "You have many friends who would lend you the money." I said, "I have nothing but my salary." Two days later he passed by again. I told him, "God must love you! Yesterday my nephew Yusif brought me \$200 for the pine nuts." How would I find the rest of the money? He took the \$200 and left. One week later, he finished the papers, and I found myself in the plane. Sitt Anisseh gave me \$200 and told me to pay her back whenever I could. We went. It was the 13th of January. It was snowing. I didn't know how to leave. Who would take me to Bsateen? But my nephew passed by,

and he took me. (laughs) I said, "Does any one except the mad and stupid go to Egypt when it's snowing?" My nephew told me that there's no snow in Egypt. We arrived at the airport at eleven. At one the plane took off. My sister-in-law and I were laughing like crazy people. I told her, "You sit next to the window on the way to Egypt; on the way back I'll sit there." (laughs) We agreed.

We landed in Egypt. The taxi driver asked us, "Where do you want to go?" We told him we wanted to go to a hotel. He asked, "What kind of hotel do you want, medium or luxury?" We told him, no, we want a medium one. He took us to a hotel. We were very tired, we sat and ate. The second day, early in the morning we started to wander around. We asked, we didn't miss anything. We went to the pyramids, to the Sphinx, the Nile, Mohammed Ali's palace, the zoo. Everyday we went somewhere new. We had brought food with us. Oh God, if we hadn't brought food we would have starved. There's no good food there. The whole week we wished we could find thyme-bread or fried chicken, but we couldn't. We had brought with us *kishk*, *halaweh*, mortadella, cheese, yogurt, coffee, fig jam - we didn't forget anything. In the morning we had breakfast at the hotel, (laughs) their breakfast was a boiled egg, milk, tea - we didn't like their food. The hotel staff found us having *matté*. They asked us, "Is this a *narghileh* you're having?" We told them, "This is *matté*, come and join us." A little while later we prepared coffee, we served some to the hotel owner, he really liked it. We told him, "As long as we're here you'll drink with us."

We had great fun there. Everyday we went out early in the morning. We came back for lunch, slept for two hours and then went back out. We stayed out until ten and eleven at night, as if it was daytime. All the street lights were on. It's safe there. If you feel tired you find seats on the pavement. Whenever we got tired, we sat down and ate nuts, we always had a bag of nuts with us. We really enjoyed ourselves. It was Ramadan. In the evening when the prayers were read announcing *iftar* we went out. The road was filled with tables of food. The food was donated by rich people so that poor people can eat. Dishes and spoons were laid. For a month a different meal was served every day. Every day we went there. For a week we kept wandering until midnight. I consider this was the best week of my life. I'm sixty years old, and I really lived for that week. This is all (laughs). And now we tell you good night and may all your days be filled with happiness. Come to us everyday and we'll entertain you, we'll tell you a new story.

Recorded and translated by Ghena Ismail

## End Notes

1. *Matté* is a herbal infusion imported from South America, especially popular with Lebanese Druzes and some Shi'ites.
2. 'Aoun's War took place in 1989; it was directed against the Syrian Army and Syria's Lebanese allies.
3. Druze villages have a 'village house', public space where, for example, bodies are laid before burial.