

5 Nights in Lebanon 2009



Sam Hedlund (Nikki's son), Wayne Karem, Olivia Karem, George Nasr, Nikki Naiser



Driving from the airport



18/08/2009

Jounie Bay



Our hotel overlooks this beautiful bay on the Mediterranean Sea.

Regency Palace Hotel



Lovely hotel, nice people. They thought Wayne and I were married first cousins!



The seawater pool overlooking the bay. Sam and I swam every night after coming home—around 1 or 2 am sometimes!



Hotel lobby with teenagers ©.



Wayne models the one-size-fits-all bathrobe.



Neighborhood near the hotel.



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We saw lots of new construction in progress.



Residence near the hotel.



Sign confusion.



The neighborhoods near the hotel were organized into zones and streets had numbers, e.g., "Rue 2."



Residence near the hotel.



Grapevines in private garden near the hotel.



Jasmine – HEAVENLY fragrance!



Many homes have small shrines in the front yards.



Private garden near the hotel.

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Our first day George took us to Jeita Grotto – a giant, beautiful cave on the order of Mammoth Cave.



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There were two levels you could tour; we took a tram up to the upper grotto.
The lower grotto has a large lake; you take a boat tour across the underground lake – it was beautiful.



Wayne and Olivia in front of statue at Jeita Grotto.



The garden at Jeita Grotto.



The adults talk and talk and talk and the teenagers are along for the ride...



Sam and George at the concessions area at Jeita Grotto.



George and Marie selecting fish for lunch at a seaside restaurant.





Fried fish and Syrian break like grandma used to make.
The food was soooooo good! And it just kept coming and coming. It was a beautiful, leisurely lunch.





New and old buildings...

Hamat – Home of Nasr



Each village is/was a settlement of 2 or 3 families. In Hamat, the Nasrs and Abi-Hannas have a number of homes all together, on the same street, right down the road from the church. Many work or worked in other countries - Kuwait, Qatar, Switzerland, Australia – but this is the home base and many of the older generation come back here to stay, and many of all generations come back for weeks in summer and holidays. For the summer wedding there were a lot in Hamat and it was such a happy, family place.



The church in Hamat, the site of so many Nasr and Abi-Hanna family weddings, baptisms, and funerals.



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Khaled Nasr (son of George), Olivia Karem, Michele Abi-Hanna, Fuad Nasr (son of Najeeb), Sam Hedlund (son of Nikki Naiser), George Nasr, Nick Abi-Hanna, Marie Nasr (wife of George), Mona Abi-Hanna (wife of Sabah Abi-Hanna), Mariam Abi-Hanna (daughter of Mona and Sabah), and Sabah Abi-Hanna.



Auntie Shams Abi-Hanna mausoleum. Auntie Shams died at age 102 just 40 days before we arrived.





Mausoleum of Uncle Najeeb Nasr (left) and great-grandparents Abe and Sadieh Nasr (right).



Sam and Olivia at the big tree outside the church in Hamat.



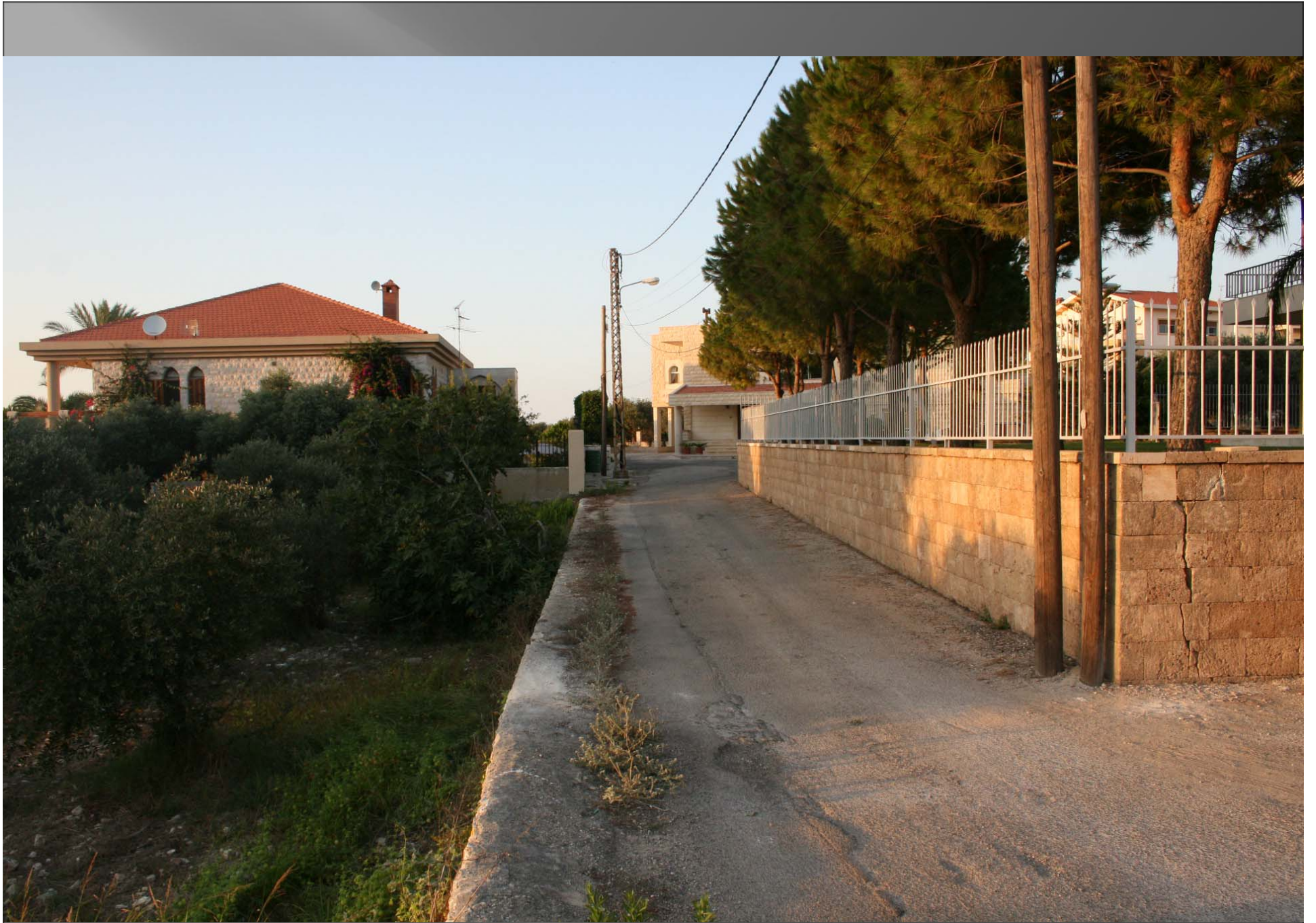
The area next to the church that will be transformed into a memorial part of Auntie Shams.



An ancient ruin viewed from the Hamat churchyard; the village of Hamat sits on a big hill.



Mariam Abi-Hanna looking down at the valley from the Hamat churchyard.



The road in Hamat showing Nasr and Abi-Hannah homes.



George and Marie Nasr's home in Hamat.



The back yard at George and Marie's house in Hamat.



We arrived and were surprised to find SO MANY welcoming relatives. We spent hours talking under the shade trees.



Mona Abi-Hanna, Hoda's son-in-law Fawzi and (?).



Sabah Abi-Hanna's sister-in-law (Helen?) and Nikki.



Olivia (George Nasr's sister), Olivia (Wayne Karem's daughter), and Victoria (George Nasr's sister).



Back row: Marie Nasr, Lili (Hoda Nasr's daughter), Saba Abi-Hanna's sister-in-law, Mona Abi-Hanna
Front Row: ? (George Nasr's sister), Saidee (Michel Abi-Hanna's wife?), Victoria (George Nasr's sister)



Victoria (George Nasr's sister), Nikki, and George Nasr. Nikki is wearing the necklace with her first name in Arabic (gift from George).



Olivia Karem, Mariam Abi-Hanna, and Sam Hedlund.



Wayne, Nikki, and Sabah Abi-Hanna.



I can't remember the two gentlemen's names on the ends. In the center is Hoda's son-in-law, Fawzi.



Nikki with Sabah Abi-Hanna's sister-in-law (Helen?). Can't remember the gentleman's name to the left.



The two Olivias.



Hoda Nasr (Sabah Abi-Hanna's sister) and her daughter Lili.



Hoda, Nikki, and Victoria.



Nazha and Fouad Nasr, Uncle Najeeb's children, at their home.



Front entrance of Nazha and Fouad's home. This is the home where our great-grandparents, Abe and Sadieh, raised 8 children, 4 of whom moved to the US (Nick, Dave, Bill, and Latifeh) and 4 of whom stayed in Lebanon (Elias, Najeeb, Ramzah, Shams).



An example of the vault-style home that our great-grandparents lived in.
Nazha and Fouad have remodeled and modernized their home around the core structure.



This home is similar to our great-grandparents' home: there were two single side-by-side vaults and an outdoor stairway that led to another room. As I understand it, the upper room of our great-grandparents' home was right on top of the roof of the other structure but there was not another doorway and structure to the upper side as shown in this home.



The inside of a traditional vault home. The doorway to the left leads to the adjoining vault.



Lighting anchors.



The remodeled interior of Nazha and Fouad's home (Uncle Najeeb's and our great-grandparents' home).



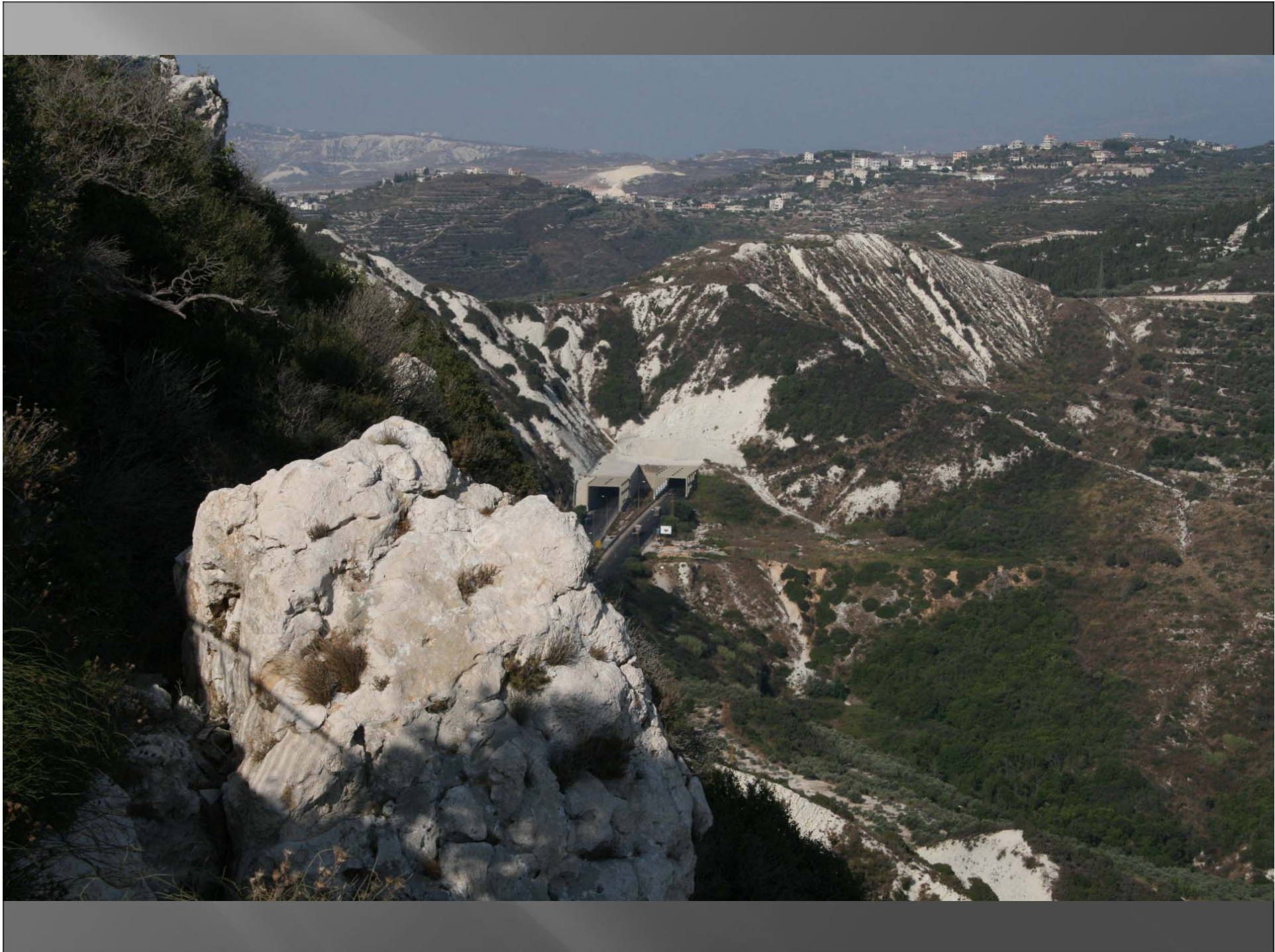
The front entryway room of Nazha and Fouad's home. The staircase to the right is the original staircase (or remains in the same location) that was on the exterior of the original vault home, leading to the extra room on the roof.



This doorway through the side of the vault in their home shows the thickness of the stone walls.



This is the original well at Nazha and Fouad's, now used as a planter.





Marie took me shopping one day...

مطعم جونیہ
Հայաստան Հիւնի
- غوريغیان
فلافل - فروج مشوي - طاووق - همبرغر - كفته
Հայաստան - Հայ
٠٩/٩٣٠٨٦٥٠٥

فروج مشوي

معجنات
مناقبش
خم بعجين
فطائر
بينزا

مطعم جونیہ
فلافل - طاووق
همبرغر - بطاطا
لحاج مشوي

نہو
شاي
تسک





It was a quaint and interesting shopping district.





We went to several carpet stores. Marie negotiated for me and I finally bought a rug from a small Iranian man who worked SO hard jumping all around the shop, pulling down rugs, digging out rugs – He really wanted a sale. We walked away and came back later and bought a rug.





We went to a very nice little French restaurant overlooking the sea for lunch.





I had to take this photo. We saw several of these signs at restaurants that serve this coffee named after our family – although I never did hear that there is any connection! Cousin George told me Café Abi Nasr is sort of like Starbucks.



Political campaign signs.



Mona took us to Our Lady of Lebanon, also known as Notre Dame du Liban (the shrine of Harissa), a marian shrine and a pilgrimage site, honoring the patron saint of the country of Lebanon. "Dear to the heart of every Lebanese, Christian or Muslim, as all address Mary as their mother."





The building towering over the little school children on a field trip.





Mona and Sabah's home in Adma, near the hotel.



Mona and Sabah's home.



Swimming and lunch party at Sabah and Mona's. From left, Mariam, Sam, Olivia, Sabah, Salem, Wayne, Hanna, and Mona.





Dinner at midnight in Byblos, one of 6 ancient Phoenician seaports in Lebanon. This one celebrated its 7000th year of settlement. Olivia, Sam, Nikki, Sabah, Mona, and Wayne. We had amazing, fresh food everywhere we went.



Mona took us to a historic artisan area to shop for gifts and souvenirs.



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When I saw the rubber tree and the family gathering place at Auntie Shams's home I was overcome with emotion. It is such a happy place, and there were brothers and sisters and cousins, old people and children. You can just feel family in this place. Auntie Shams's home was

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designed by Sabah 40 years ago. When she moved in Uncle Najeeb planted a small rubber tree sprig. She nurtured it her whole life and this is what it has become. The picture doesn't do justice to its beautiful canopy that provided shade and cover for Auntie Shams and her visitors.



Michele Abi-Hanna, visiting from Australia.



Nikki and Sabah Abi-Hanna's sister-in-law (Josef's wife?)



Siblings Hoda Nasr, Nick Abi-Hanna, and Joseph Abi-Hanna.



Joseph and his wife (?)



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Mona and Sabah have an art gallery in the ancient seaport town of Batroun. They had a show for Hanna and his friend Beyro – Hanna (left) painted Beyro (right) and Beyro painted Hanna, in various moods and poses. We loved it.



Teenagers gone wild in the gallery. The wall at right is an exhibit of art by school children – some really interesting perspectives.



Mona Abi-Hanna painting



...and another Mona Abi-Hanna painting.



...and another. This one looks like Hoda's house. I didn't put it together until later so never got to ask...



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Olivia, Mona, Nikki, and Sabah walking through Byblos. This was a fun evening – we got there around 10 or 10:30 and saw some of the ruins lit at night, then went through some of the shops. There were cafes, music, and dancing, lots of activity. We ate at midnight-not something you can do many places I've been. What a great way to celebrate a historic place. Can you imagine something like this in colonial Williamsburg?



Walking through the shops at Byblos. Midnight shopping!



Byblos ruins. Byblos celebrated seven thousand years of settlement just before we were there.



مسجد
السلطان
عبدالمجيد
ناصر للمساكين



Byblos—you could feel the history.



Part of the market at Byblos



Sabah and Mona



More ruins at Byblos



Byblos



Byblos is such an exciting way to preserve history. Much more exciting than, say Colonial Williamsburg!



As we were driving we asked Sabah what this is: it's a generator truck. George had told us earlier that since the civil war (1975-1990) they only have power a certain number of hours every day. We learned that there are businesses that deliver mobile power, and power reserve systems to places like the hotel where we stayed.



Wayne and Hoda



Wayne and Olivia – so color coordinated for the wedding



Sam and Nikki – so color coordinated for the wedding, too!



Teenagers gone wild again



The parliament building in downtown Beirut. When we were there, there was no parliament – the prime minister was being pressured by all sides – the Hezbollah (?) wanting more Muslim representation in Parliament. Sabah told us the population used to be 60% Christian, 40% Muslim, and now it's the opposite. The political representation is all religion-based: The President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be a Sunni, and the seats in the Parliament are allocated by religion, too.



Jihad Nasr (son of George) and his new wife, Sandra, were married in the beautiful Greek Orthodox Cathedral in downtown Beirut. Note the beautiful floral sprays of white roses and orchids at the end of each and every pew.







Jihad and Sandra



Khaled Nasr and the bride's sister



Lili took me aside after the wedding and showed me outside the cathedral where Roman ruins had been discovered during some of the post-war rebuilding. You can't see them very well from this photo, but I loved the beautiful blue-roofed Muslim mosque just next to the cathedral.



In 2007(?) the Israelis attacked and blew up 140 bridges and all access in and out of the country except the road to Damascus. The cathedral was damaged and all the frescos were shot. They replaced all but two, and said they wanted to keep them the way they are to remember.



Sabah and Mona



Near the cathedral are ruins of Roman baths. These were also discovered during post-war rebuilding. The cylinders were sub-floor and were used (somehow) to heat the water. Sabah said there are so many layers of civilization under Beirut that you almost can't build anything without uncovering ruins.





The reception – excellent food and wine...



George and Nikki



Jihad the groom and Nikki



Wayne, George, and Sam



The 15-piece band that played great dancing music with Arabic influence



The singer



The cake and confetti!





Sam's eyes match the lighting!



We were told that Lebanon doesn't import any produce – and there were greenhouses everywhere. The food was so fresh everywhere we went.

Ouajh el Hajar – Home of Karam



This town was named for the kind of limestone rock that is there.



We spent a day looking for houses where our deceased grandparents lived – we knew the towns and George and our cousin Fahim were interested in helping us out. First we went to the little store in Oujah el Harjar, looking for anyone who knows about Wayne’s grandfather Nick Karem (spelled Karam there). George had a 20 minute discussion in Arabic with these people, and they sent us off to a family up the road who might know something...



As soon as these people heard we were looking for a relative they pulled up the chairs and served us tea... There was another 20-minute discussion in Arabic and a little visiting.... And they sent us up the road to another house to see what we could find out.

Just as we were leaving this woman came home and ran up to the van, telling us to come back later after her husband gets home, as he will certainly have more information for us. She invited us to come back for lunch in an hour...



Description above...



This woman greeted us with big hugs and kisses before she even knew what we were there for! She brought out her photo album to see if anyone in there might happen to be Nick Karam. She thought she might know something and as we left Wayne gave her his business card so she could get in touch if she learned anything. She said, 'You can look me up on Facebook.'



She showed us her grandfather's house – the vault home in the earlier photos that is still intact.



Old farm equipment at the lady's house.



Hoda's home in Hamat. Her original home on this site was burned down in a skirmish. Sabah Abi-Hanna designed this home for her.



The bougainvillea at Hoda's were so beautiful!



The olive grove in front of Hoda's home. She sent me home with home-brined olives and has vats of home-pressed olive oil in her home. Yummy.



The table, set for the amazing family meal we were about to have. Hoda's home is decorated throughout with art her daughters have created.



The inscription above is an artistic rendering of all Hoda's children's names.



Hoda's home was designed for big family gatherings and meals.



The outdoor cooking area



Hoda cooking greens that were so delicious.



Fatoush – salata with crispy baked bread



Abandoned check point. There were several checkpoints we had to pass through. I was glad to be with relatives who live there. They said the checkpoints are okay now, but during the Syrian occupation they were more disconcerting.



French, English, and Arabic signs.

AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY

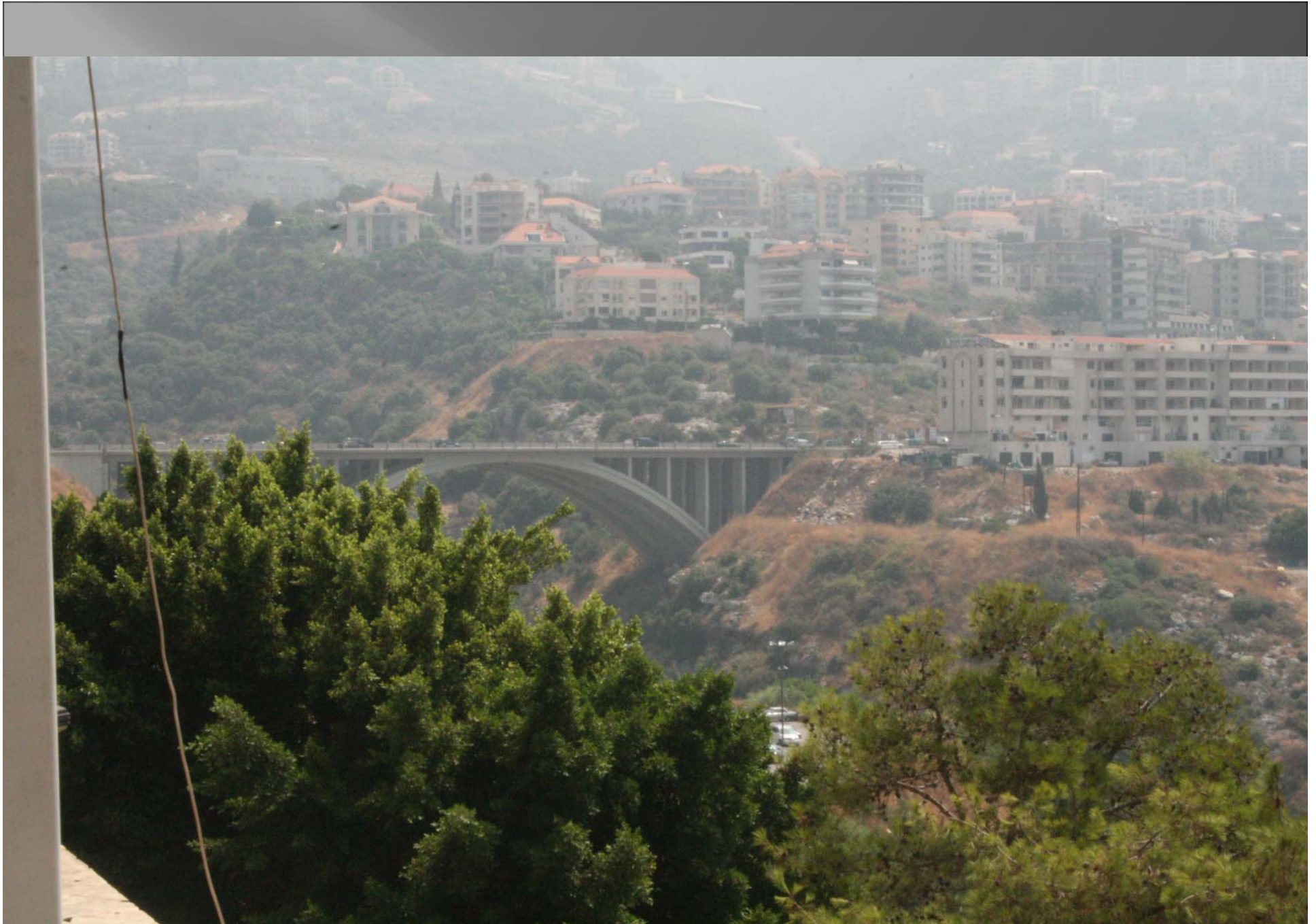


OF BEIRUT
1866



Wayne and cousin George went to AUB to get Wayne connected.

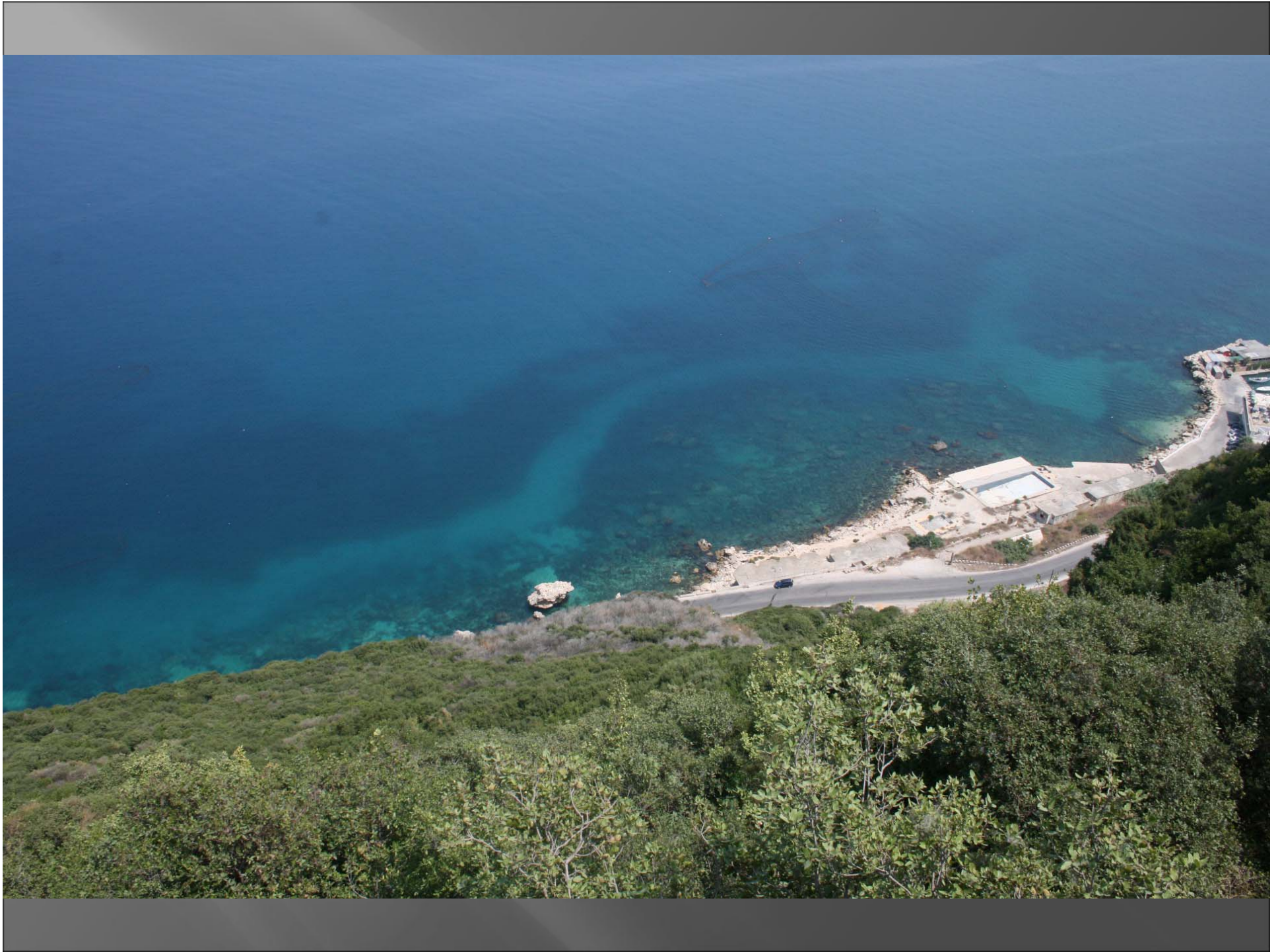




A bridge near Jounie Bay. One of the 149 that the Israelis blew up. George said they did not intend to do great damage because they blew up only the spans, not the supports. The haziness is from forest fires. (We were there in August and it was quite dry.)



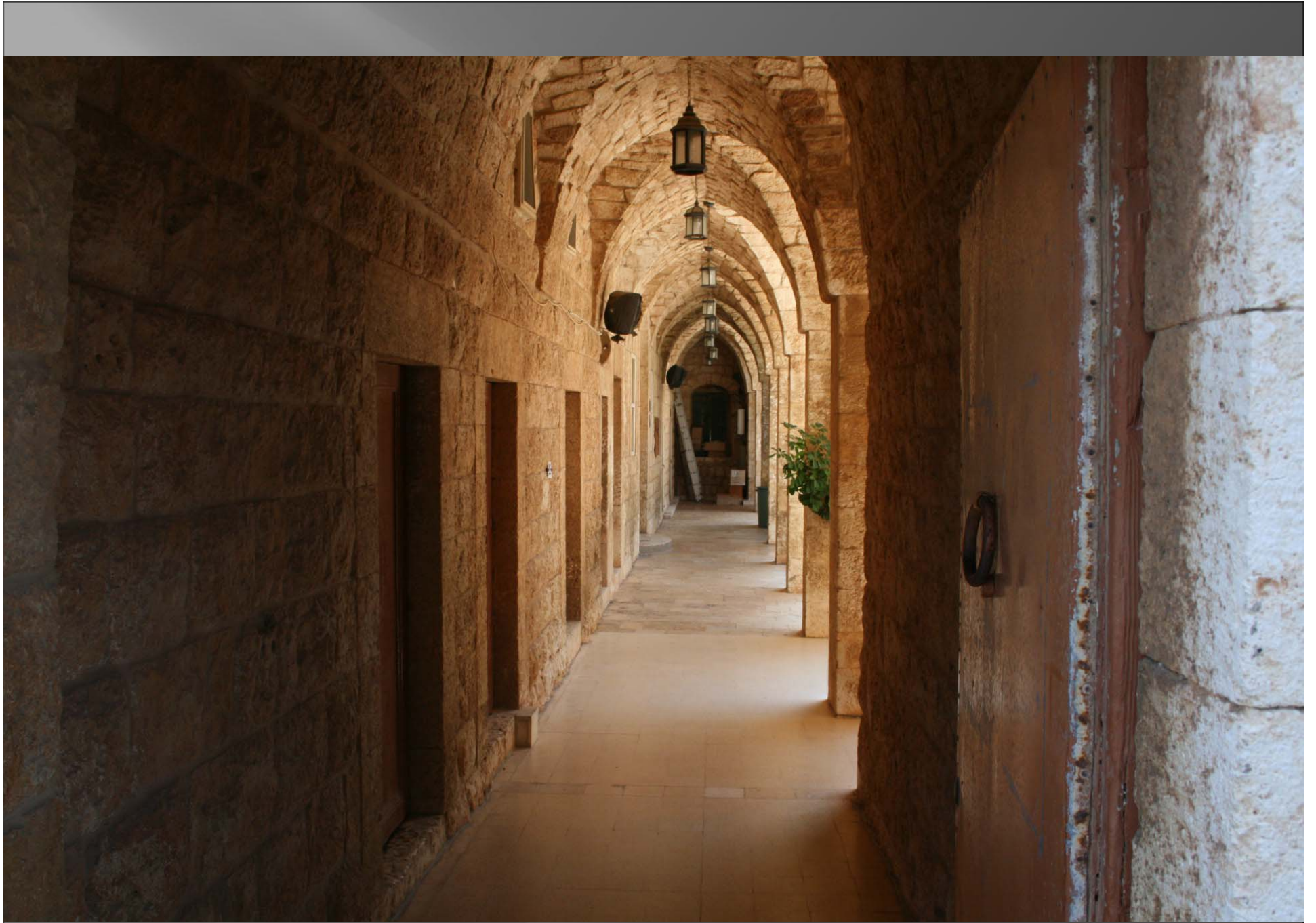
The view from the monastery where George went as a child.



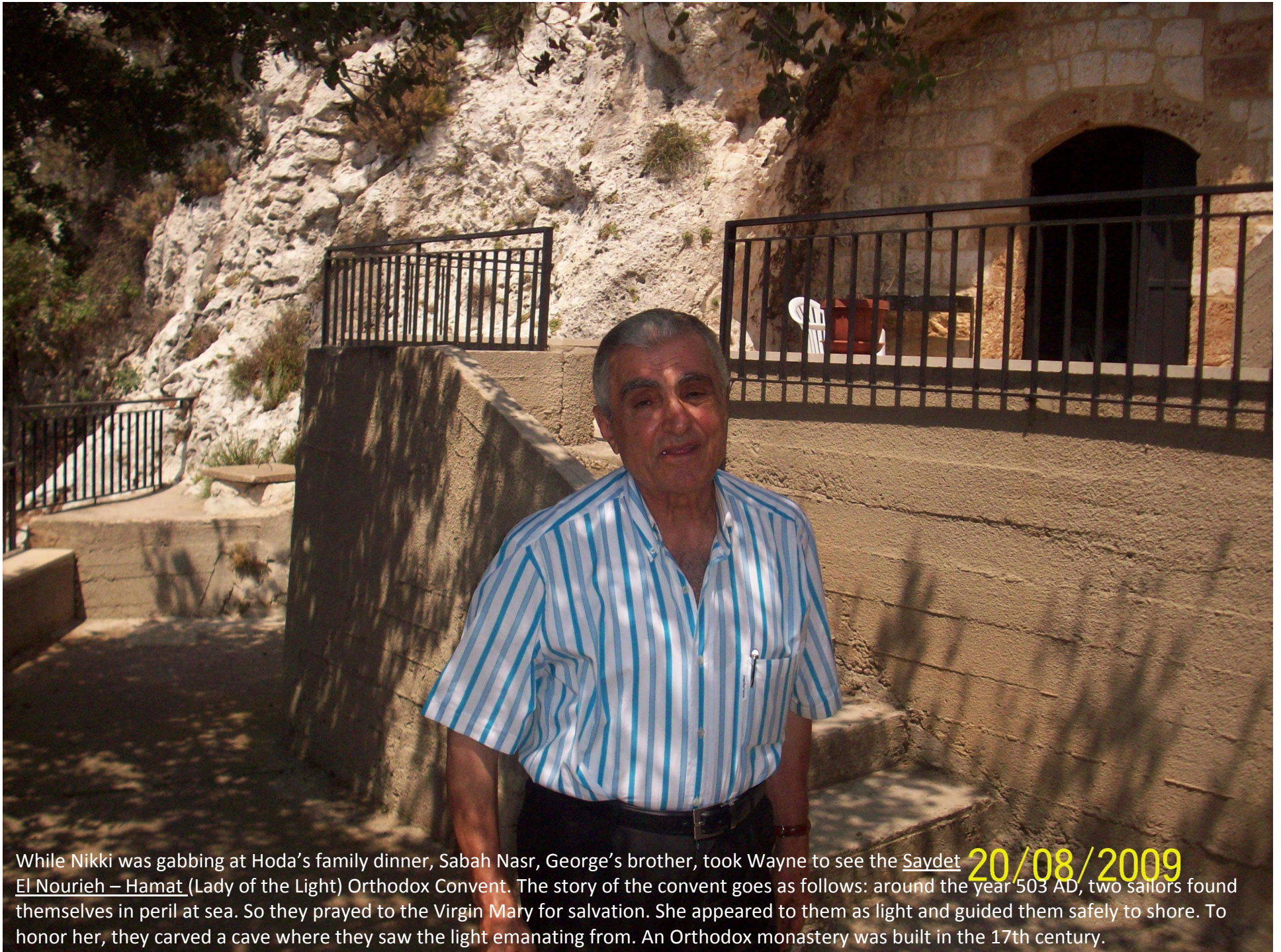


Part of the Monastery of Saint George at Deir-esh-Shir ('monastery of the cliff')—it overlooks the sea. George said he went to school there in his youth.





Another view of the monastery



While Nikki was gabbing at Hoda's family dinner, Sabah Nasr, George's brother, took Wayne to see the Saydet El Nourieh – Hamat (Lady of the Light) Orthodox Convent. The story of the convent goes as follows: around the year 503 AD, two sailors found themselves in peril at sea. So they prayed to the Virgin Mary for salvation. She appeared to them as light and guided them safely to shore. To honor her, they carved a cave where they saw the light emanating from. An Orthodox monastery was built in the 17th century.



The old church built with stone as it incorporates the cave-like rocks of the mountain. At first glance, it seems like this church is in ruins. One can see walls with no ceilings, and some abandoned rooms. Something that is apparent is the arc made of stone that one has to pass under to continue the walk. Once beyond that point, to the left is a relatively small room, half cave, half stone, where some benches are placed and religious icons are put up.

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Bechmizzine - Home of Nabti



Then we went to the town of our grandmother, Nazha Nabti Naiser, to find the home where she was born and raised.



The Nabtis.







