

MR. SADDAM'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

By Declan Hill

IF THERE WAS A COMPETITION for who had the world's worst neighbour: Turki Sadas would probably win. In the last fifteen years — his neighbour has had him arrested fourteen times, repeatedly stolen his property, had his friends beaten up, and imprisoned his son.

It was not from jealousy. His neighbour lived in a series of palaces decorated with white marble and Italian stained glass: his neighbour had an Olympic size swimming pool surrounded by terracotta statues, and even his own private road. Turki Sadas shares a four-roomed mud hut with fourteen relatives, various farm animals and does not even have running water.

His neighbour was Saddam Hussein, who moved in next to Sadas in 1988 when he decided to build a palace on the banks of the Tigris River, in northern Iraq.

"It was awful," recalls Sadas, an elderly man who works as a night watchman at a nearby construction site. "One time Hussein's security agents caught an old man fishing in the river. They beat him up. As he was lying on the ground, they were kicking him. So another man — a leader of our community — tried to stop them saying, 'Why are you bothering? He means no harm.' So they threatened to beat him up as well."

But the relationship between the two men changed on April eleventh. And the memory of what happened

next is still the talk of Sadas's community.

"The first we heard was on the radio. We would all listen to Radio Monte Carlo or the BBC Arabic service, secretly, otherwise you would be imprisoned — and it announced the fall of Baghdad and the freeing of Iraq. We were overjoyed."

Then Sadas and his neighbours saw the security guards who had terrorized them piling TVs and videos into a truck and then rushing away from the palace.



NAJAAF ASHAM HALAAF, WHOSE 18-YEAR OLD SON WAS KILLED IN THE BOMBING RAID, AND WHOSE OTHER TWO SONS WERE SEVERELY INJURED.

"We knew it could mean only one thing — the end of the war. It was over. Saddam was gone and we were free." Says Turki's oldest son, Kemal.

So almost the whole community rushed over to the palace. It was sweet revenge. They are al-Jabours,

an Arabic tribe that Hussein pushed into an internal isolation after he accused one of its leaders of a coup attempt in 1989. Every single one of the tribe was fired from their government jobs and most were forced to scrape a living as shepherds in this remote area of Iraq. Now their tormentor was dead and the villages rejoiced.

"I remember we were singing: 'God Bless Tony Blair! God Bless George Bush!' as we went down to the palace," remembers Younis Asharm who lives in a village near Sadas's home.

Younis, Sadas, and most of the community rushed to the palace to discover a world that they could not have imagined a few days before: "The inside of the palace was incredible. It was like a dream! There were riches everywhere: expensive furniture, televisions, chandeliers. There were beds so deep that you wanted to dive into them! In the bathrooms there were these marble things that shot out water at you from all directions," remembers Sadas, trying to describe a Jacuzzi — no easy task for a man whose hut has no running water.

Hundreds of villagers rummaged and looted through the place for a day; there was a traffic jam a mile long, and celebrating, cheering and rejoicing the whole night.

The first bombs hit the palace at exactly 3:22 p.m. on April twelfth.

Younis Asharm was inside.

“I was just leaving the main palace. My hands were on some furniture when suddenly the missiles came in the roof. My right leg was cut in two, and I was screaming. There were bodies everywhere and bits of flesh hanging from the walls.”

He lay there for an hour —until his brother-in-law and some other friends rescued him. But it was too late for his 18-year-old brother; he died from loss of blood.

For the next twenty-four hours the American Air Force repeatedly attacked the palaces — with missiles, conventional bombs and cluster bombs. In all, sixteen villagers were killed and dozens injured.

The community is now in an uproar. Their love of the American liberation has evaporated.

Younis Asharm is bewildered. “I cannot believe they would do that. There was an American plane in the sky the whole morning watching us. They must have seen all the civilian cars. They must have seen that we

were just villagers. How could they have done that?”

His mother, who still carries a photo of her youngest son around with her and weeps, is even more at a loss, “The people in Canada and other countries, if they knew my son: how young, how near in my heart he was, how innocent. They would never allow it. What would they do? They are not guilty. They do not want to kill anyone.” ✨

Declan Hill is a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.

Teen Work Camp

BY DON BOWYER

TEEN WORK CAMP (TWC) IS A CAMP FOR OLDER TEENS 16 and above. It takes place at Camp NeeKauNis in southern Ontario, along the shores of Sturgeon Bay. The focus of the camp, in addition to the fellowship and fun of summer vacation, is to prepare the camp facilities for the upcoming camp season, and to engage the campers and staff with Friend’s ideas and practices.

A typical camp day begins at 8:00 am, with the sound of a gong clattering to awaken campers. Everyone at camp gets to give a hand setting up in the dining hall, and doing dishes after each meal.

After breakfast, meeting for worship is held on the hillside overlooking Sturgeon Bay in good weather, or inside the meeting centre around the stone fireplace on damp days. Often the meetings for worship are filled with the ministry of the wind and of the wild life that is much more tangible away from the busyness of the world.

At the rise of meeting, work crews are formed to set about doing the physical maintenance of the facility. Work ranges from cutting the grass or fire-

wood, trenching, roofing, and maintaining the structures around the grounds. This year, renovations to the boathouse were undertaken to expand its storage capacity.

Work projects are only half of the TWC experience. Many afternoons are spent on the waterfront, swimming or boating. A workshop on copper etching was led, and games such as wink and euchre were entertainment in the evening. Beach cookouts and fires, many early morning conversations, and spontaneous runs around the camp keep a vibrant, youthful spirit at the camp.

A formal Quaker Education component had been reintroduced to the camp in the previous year. Orion Smith led a discussion about the peace testimony and its application in daily life. Lyn Adamson facilitated a conflict resolution workshop. Declan Hill gave a moving presentation on his experiences in Iraq and Turkey. Campers also had a round table about violence and non-violence. ✨

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