

## TALAS MEMORIES

My introduction to Talas came in August of 1950 when I substituted in Dr. Nute's clinic for his nurse Barbaras Bird who was on home leave. On the second afternoon, horseback riding with one of the tutors (who just happened to be Bill Edmonds), I fell off the horse. Bill scooped me up; Dr. Nute stitched my face back together, and thanks to him and Bill's frequent entertainment I've felt more deeply involved with my memories of Talas.

Memories? I've forgotten much more than I remember. I often think back to the stiff climb from our residence in the lower compound to the school rooms in the upper, the large rocks in the path that made climbing it work, graduation ceremonies, Mrs. Scott serving tea and cookies in their yard to the students' parents, tiny violets and snow drops blooming through the snow, the wind that howled down the valley next to the school without stopping to catch a breath from January through April, the boys playing soccer in the short field at the school entrance.

I relished the tale of Bill climbing over the huge brass bell at the school's entrance late one night. As he dropped into the classroom he was met by the principle Mr. Nilson. "So, Mr. Edmonds: this is the behavior you wish as an example for our students?"

Mr. Nilson must have enjoyed his moments of teasing his American staff. The usual dessert at supper was cutup fruit smothered in yogurt. The exchange at the table invariably in honeyed tones was, "Mr. Sather, won't you have some yogurt on your fruit? It's just like an ice cream sundae." And invariably Mr. Sather (known to his friends as "Egad,") would reply with a carefully cultivated accent, "No, thank you, Mr. Nilson. I do not eat yogurt." Night, after night, after night, after...

The year that the Nilsons were on furlough (1957-1958) Bill was acting director; studying the financial records he realized that the tuition charged did not begin to pay the regular expenses of the school and he had to make a formal change through the governor of Kayseri. When he went to his office he found Gov. Ahmet Kinik in conference with the Superintendent of Education over the Talas unpopular (culturally non-observant) school matron, Miss K. Bill presented his request for an increase in tuition, to which Ahmet Bey told him that such a request should come from the entire faculty. "That being the case, we will have a faculty meeting this coming Sunday." Ahmet Bey's response was, "I shall be there." Bill hastily said, "That's not necessary," to which Ahmet Bey said, "I have every legal right to attend all formal meetings." "Fine," said Bill, "Sunday afternoon 1:30 in the school living room."

On Sunday we – the teachers, foreign and local – gathered promptly. One-thirty came, two o'clock, two fifteen, and a phone call informed us that the governor was on his way, having been delayed by noon prayers in Kayseri. He, the superintendent of education and the teachers who were protesting Miss K appeared with an important bustle, sat

down, and Ahmet Bey, clearing his throat started, "We have come to consider a worker's improper..."

Whereat one of the foreign staff interrupted, "Your pardon, Ahmet Bey. We always begin our meetings with a silent prayer.

Total silence.

After a minute Bill said in his most solemn tones as he started to pass around some sheets of income and expense, "We are concerned about the finances of this school in relation to those of similar institutions, which you will see from the pages in your hands."

(Incidentally, all of the language relative to the preceding paragraphs and to this meeting was Turkish.)

The issue of the school's finances was acknowledged and a recommendation was voted formally to be sent to the government. The issue of Miss K. was referred to a committee chosen by the governor, and to be chaired by the woman who had interrupted his opening thrust.

Another memory including Dr. Nute, was when he began his routine examination of a woman who had been brought by her husband from a distant village to the clinic. The doctor asked her for her name and she answered, "Fatma." The man started, jumped up grabbing her arm and gasped, "Ey vah!!!! I brought the wrong one."

For one literature class I played the entire tape of the musical *Cry, the Beloved Country* which we'd just finished reading, only to realize at the end that we hadn't understood any of the words because I had recorded it backwards.

Cultural complications: The school Discipline Committee considered a student's inflamed accusations that his American teacher had insulted him by comparing him to a sheep when he quoted the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm in trying to calm his anger.

Perhaps for Bill, the crowning climax of his Talas experiences came one evening during supper when he was at the head of the table attempting to lift from the kitchen window behind his back to the table the large bowl of dessert. He'd leaned back in his chair and the desert determined the balance of the meal. Bowl, contents, chair, and Bill were churning together as Egad raced into the fray. "See!" he shouted., scooping the disaster out of Bill's lap and onto his head. "I always said it was just like an ice cream sundae." Globes of white yogurt dribbled down Bill's nose and chin.

And that path. There was the afternoon when I came upon a youngster on the path, a school girl screaming with fear, "The DOG!! Danger! Watch out! Careful!!! DANger!!!! Dog, No! Rabid, RABid! RABID!"

On both sides people were hanging over the walls screaming as loud as the girl had been, but at me, not the dog: "Danger! DANger!!": I started down, talking, "Come doggy. Goodoggy. Goooooddddddddddd ddddogy,dddodddoogggg" to hold the its attention, the dog now

growling at me as loud as the people. Step by jerky step, dog by jerky ddddog, I made it to the gate of the lower compound where I squeezed through, blocking the dddog's entrance and my stream of nonsense. Once inside my rooms, I phoned another American teacher, knowing that he was conversant with firearms, and in about five minutes the dog's earthly voice, rabid or not, ceased. (I'm not sure what my relief felt like, except that for me that ddog has not has not yet dddddddied.)

Ah, Talas!

Anna Edmonds