

Saudi-American Forum



SAF Book Serial

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Lunch with a Prince

By Steve Furman

Editor's Note:

The Saudi-American Forum is very pleased to present "Lunch with a Prince" by Steve Furman. This delightful memoir of the early days of Americans working and living in Saudi Arabia is excerpted from the book, *Dhahran Fables, Fiesta Room Tales* by Steve Furman, Clark Magruder and Ann Peart. Check below for information to order a copy of *Dhahran Fables, Fiesta Room Tales*.

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Lunch with a Prince

By Steve Furman

It was December, the weather had turned chilly, and we'd had a lot of rain. I was seven-years-old and looking forward to our first family Christmas in Arabia, reunited with my father after WWII. The world was at peace again.

Our household shipment had finally arrived, and my mother was trying very hard to decorate our house at 1151-B for the holiday season. Everything looked very festive, except for the lack of a tree. My dad drove out to the company's wartime cattle farm and brought back a small tamarisk, thinned from a row planted as windbreakers. When my mother had hosed off the dust and strung it with lights, it made a magnificent sight. I was as happy as a clam.

One of the presents I found under the tamarisk tree on the morning of December 25 was a blue tin boat. But, this was not just any ordinary run-of-the-mill boat. This was a boat that was powered by the heat of a single candle. When set in place and lit, the candle warmed a diaphragm where air expanded and propelled the boat forward with a wonderfully audible "putt putt."

I was delighted with my boat and immediately gave it a "shake-down" cruise in the bathtub at 1151-B. Of course, as any self-respecting sailor knows, a bathtub is fine, but such a super vessel as my tin boat had to be destined for better things. It had to be launched on bigger waters. So, my search began.

There was the swimming pool, of course, but that was out because if the boat got out in the middle of the pool and the candle went out, I wouldn't be able to retrieve it. I hadn't learned to

swim yet, so the swimming pool was not an option.

A few days later, it poured rain. A cold front had rolled in from the north, and the rain came down in buckets. I was sitting out on our front porch, bemoaning the rain when all of a sudden, it came to me. I knew where I could find an expanse of water broad enough to give my boat the voyage it deserved. I bolted from the porch, boat in hand, and ran south down 11th Street to the recreation area.

I was soaked when I arrived, but there it was, a lake of rainwater pooled by a newly constructed sidewalk on the east side of the tennis courts. It was not unusual in those early days before top soil and grass for concrete sidewalks to be a foot or so high. The new one by the tennis courts made a terrific dam. I kicked off my shoes and socks, rolled my pants up over my knees and waded in.

This was perfect. I rigged the boat with the candle and tried to light the wick with a match from a confiscated matchbook that I hoped my father would never miss. I couldn't get the wick going right away, but after several attempts, I was successful. In the meantime, I had soot on my hands and smudges on my face. All in all, I was a very wet, muddy and messy seven-year-old.

From the shore, I placed the boat gently in the water and proudly watched it make its way across the shallow, wind-blown pool. I could see little clouds of smoke emerging from the cabin where the candle was hidden, as the boat chugged toward the sidewalk on the far side. Before long, I was lost in my imaginary world of seafaring, sailing on my boat to far-off places and grown-up times. Suddenly, a shout brought me back to reality.

"Steve, get out of that water, and put on your shoes and socks! We're going to lunch." It was Tom Barger, a friend of my dad. He had climbed out of his car and was standing by the sidewalk smiling down at me.

Mr. Barger was wearing a suit! A suit, mind you, a very unusual thing in Dhahran in those days. My dad had a suit, but I'd never seen him wear it. I was in my muddy pants, rolled up to my knees, a Fruit of the Loom t-shirt and a wet sweater that was maybe one or two sizes too large for me.

"Where are we going to lunch?" I asked. "Who's in the big car, and why are you in a suit?"

"Just get yourself fixed up and roll down your pants," he said. "First, get out of the water. Come on over here. We haven't got much time, so hurry."

Soon, I was marching off to the big car, Tom Barger leading me by one hand and me holding my boat tightly in the other.

"Where are we going, Tom? Whose car is that?" Tom opened the door and inside was Mr. MacPherson and his son Jimmy. Jimmy was a big kid, maybe eight or nine.

"Hi, Mr. Mac. Hi, Jimmy. Are you going to lunch too?" Jimmy was dressed in a suit too and

he was wearing a tie. His hair was slickly combed the way my mom would try to comb mine when she could catch me. Off we drove to the dining hall, only a block or two away.

When we got there, Tom took me into the men's room and spruced me up as best he could. Then, into the central dining room we went. There were lots of people at long tables, and I still remember how nice everything looked with flowers and everything. Tom told me we were going to have lunch with Crown Prince Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia. I remember asking if I could have rice pudding for dessert.

I don't remember what we had for lunch or dessert, but it was good, and I sat my boat right on the table next to my plate. Afterwards, Tom offered to give me a ride home, but I thanked him and said I had to go back to sail my boat a little more.

I walked back to the muddy pond and resumed my nautical adventures. As usual when I wandered home that evening, I was late.

"Where have you been, young man? You've been gone all day. And, just look at your pants."

I looked at my mother and explained, "I sailed my boat and went to lunch with the Crown Prince."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Furman was born in Inglewood, California in 1938. He traveled to Saudi Arabia in June of 1945 and was the first American child into the Kingdom after the end of World War II in Europe. He was also the first American child enrolled in the Aramco School System in October of 1945. Furman lived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia until 1962. He graduated from Holy Cross College, a Jesuit Liberal Arts College in Worcester, Massachusetts, with a B.A. degree in English Literature.

In his career, Furman served as an Infantry Officer, USMC from 1960 to 1965. He has worked for various oil companies and contractors in West Africa, Brazil, Iran, Kuwait and Bahrain. He also worked for Aramco in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Dhahran Fables: Fiesta Room Tales

By Steve Furman, Clark Magruder and Ann Peart

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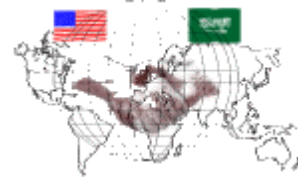
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The Forum is a resource for Americans who value the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and who want to act in response to erroneous and misleading depictions of the relationship in the media and elsewhere. The Forum is a vehicle for stakeholders in the Saudi-U.S. relationship to contribute their experiences and their ideas and opinions on the issues of the day.

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