

Yanoun, 30th January, 2011

Today it rained!



Not something that we in UK would normally make anything of but it is notable here. When we first arrived in this tiny village, at the end of the road, we had a time of torrential rain and strong winds. For us arriving cold and tired after our very busy time of orientation and travelling from Jerusalem, it was quite some experience. We four new EAs stayed

in a room that belongs to the family next door: mattresses on the floor and the toilet outside. Anyone of an older age will know of the night time forays to the nearest toilet – in this case it meant getting a coat on, battling with a torch, an umbrella and the door to get out and then the toilet door too as the wind was so strong that it was even difficult to stay on our feet. We also found that until then the solar panels on the roof had heated the water in the International House – but now there was nothing to heat it.

The house has a water cistern underneath and when we have torrential rain it sounds as if we are living under a waterfall. We were very concerned at first that the water would rise up into the living room - it does not - but we have since learnt that many of the village houses are filled with water when the rain comes as they are so much in need of repairs that are not possible for the villagers to undertake. They are also very cold and they don't have the luxury of the electric heaters we have.

Each dry night we can see the flames from the small braziers outside each home as the fire is lit with twigs and anything burnable and gradually bigger pieces of wood are added. A large tin sits on top and the art, that even the children have, is to get the flames just right by adding almond shells and then, as the fire gets hotter and the flames higher, ground up olive stone powder (from when the olives were processed into oil in Aqraba) are added to 'damp it down'. Health and Safety would have a field day here! Then the whole thing is carried inside to heat the room where the family will sit for the evening.



I nipped out to buy eggs from Najiha one evening when Petter was cooking supper – forgetting that here it is impossible to ‘nip out’ for anything. Sitting round their fire upstairs we drank tea with water heated on top of the brazier (and always with sugar) and the children baked chestnuts in the ashes and insisted that I share each one. I had my first taste of the fresh sheep’s milk that had been collected a very short time before and warmed gently on the stove. Eventually when Petter rang, to see if I was ever coming back for supper, I left with bread, yogurt, milk and cheese, as well as the eggs I had gone for. The eggs were saved for another day as the supper plan had changed in my absence



Two months ago the fields in the valley below us were brown and dry and now they have been ploughed and planted and the crops are showing through, as a fresh green carpet. The olive trees look more refreshed and the very first tiny buds of the almond trees were noticeable today. At least twice each day, one or more of us, walk around the village so we notice the small changes. The lambs and kid goats are growing and have been separated now from their mothers. Listening to them to the other

day, and watching over their gate, it was funny to hear that each of them has a different ‘voice’. Some were high pitched, others gruff, some more rhythmic and one definitely must have had a sore throat.

There are now just seven families living in Yanoun and for those that have them, the sheep and goats are their livelihood. At 5am each morning the women milk the sheep and goats, gently heat some of it for their families to drink and prepare the rest to make cheese, yogurt and Labana (soft cheese). With the help of their eldest daughters they feed the children, get them ready for the school bus that comes at 7am to take the older ones in Aqraba and the nine younger ones, between 6 and 12 years, walk up the hill to the school in the village. Then the cheese is made by putting the milk curds into cotton cloths and folding them over to let the whey drain out into a bowl that will be taken to feed the lambs later. This is done three times with great dexterity and each finished soft cheese ‘patty’ is exactly the right size. They are stored with salt and water and any those are not eaten by the family, or bought by us, are taken into Aqraba and exchanged for sheep feed.

Early too, the chicken will let out of the various enclosures they share with the other animals and the men and boys will take the sheep and goats down to the well to drink and for a short time of grazing in amongst the olive trees or on the lower slopes of the hills.



By about 9.30am the bread dough is ready for baking and this is taken to one of the village Tabbouns, where a fire has been smouldering under a heavy lid that is covered with hot ash, heating the stones below. My favourite bread oven is Wafa's, in the shell of an ancient VW van with no floor, where the ashes rise up and the heat is stifling but she gets in with the bowl of dough that has been 'proving' and manages the whole process without getting covered in the

dust. We are always offered bread if we are passing when it is being baked and last week after watching Wafa make cheese we were invited to come back later after our walk to get bread. In the tabboun she had put some small potatoes and a cheese covered in salt onto the roasting hot stones and then the dough was made into a large thin round and also put onto the stones.. The children were home from school, and it was a lovely, warm sunny morning, so the five youngest were sitting on sheep feed bags outside the oven, having their breakfast. Wafa peeled the hot potatoes for them and they ate them with the fresh bread and baked cheese. She broke bread and cheese for us too and sitting there sharing this fresh, simple, delicious breakfast was something I shall never forget. The generosity of the villagers is something we are aware of all the time. They have so little and have suffered so much but share what they have with us.



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