

Travels: Israel, Sinai, Palestine

Part 4

Gail Goodman

Yom Rishon, Sunday, the first day of the workweek for Jews in Israel and I was headed once again to the bus station, once again heading south. Dr. Sirik had a busy schedule at the surgical clinic so we were on our way bright and early to the central bus station in Ramat Gan. The loading area was crowded with Israel's youngest soldiers, apparently returning to their bases in the south after a weekend of leave. By this trip I was used to the idea that in Israel everyone puts their baggage in the cargo holds of the bus and it is "safe" there, so, I put my bag with my precious photos in the hold, too. It was a relief not to have to drag it onto the bus and struggle getting it under the seat.

The now familiar landscape began to roll by, gradually descending from the coastal cities into the Negev. As the color and vegetation change, the contours of the hills soften, the irrigated fields create a green and burnt sienna checker board, and block and marble apartments give way to open space dotted here and there with tents and encampments. As I reflect on that journey, through so many small towns along the bus route, the stone buildings, the one room markets at street level where people buy fresh rolls and yogurt, the nursery school playgrounds, the women walking, pushing strollers.....it all felt like I remembered Israel twenty-three years ago. This Israel, these towns...cutting edge development, high tech industry and science seem to have either not yet arrived, or passed by. Nothing seemed to have changed.

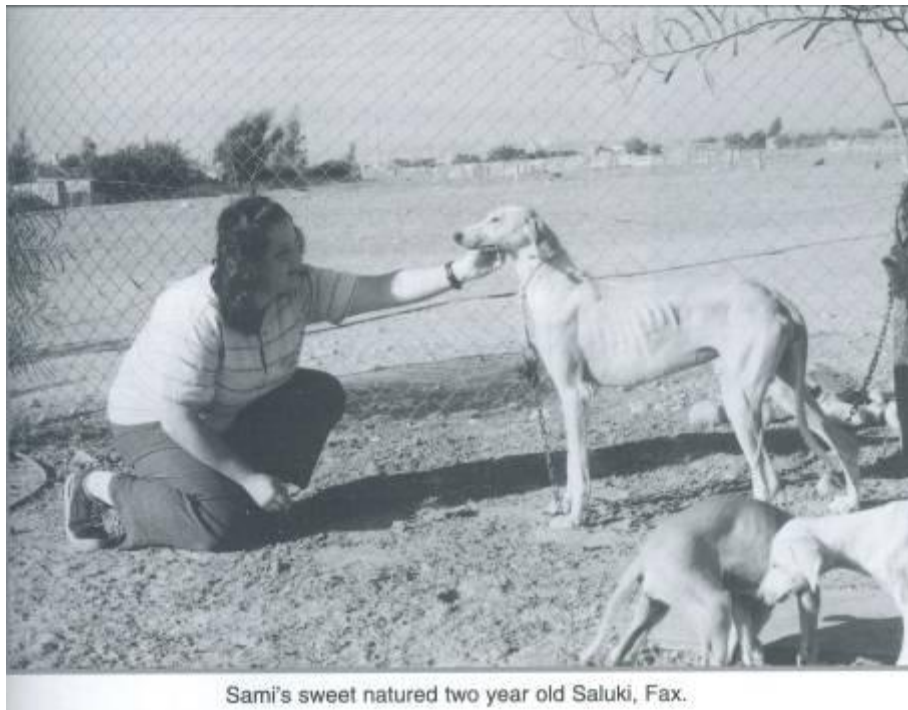
The journey was reflective and before long, the bus pulled into the central bus station in Beersheva right on time. I claimed my heavy black bag, which despite having wheels was cumbersome to drag along, and headed towards the now routine meeting place where Andreea would collect me. The corner where I wanted to cross to reach the parking area where I'd meet Andreea had a metal railing around it, probably to discourage people from crossing there, but I was determined. I assessed the space between the rails and thought that if I were younger, I could squeeze through, but I was afraid, at 57 I might not make it, so I rolled the bag under and started to follow the railing around. Half way around the barrier the security police pulled up to my bag, eyed it and were just about to open the van door for a better look when I got their attention. They reprimanded me for leaving the bag unattended, even momentarily.

Andreea pulled up to the parking area and yet again I loaded myself and my stuff into her van. Today, she said, we would first go to the plaza to have the best ice cream in Israel. We drove around old Beersheva, down narrow streets lined with shops and businesses of all kinds, looking for a parking place. Finally after being waved away from one space where a policeman was writing a ticket, we found a shady spot and walked to the plaza. The ice cream shop was at the entrance to the plaza and people could sit at tables outside to eat. This is what we did. The ice cream was delicious, light but full of flavor leaving no fatty residue on the tongue like the premium grade ice creams I'm used to in the USA. Since I was running out of film, we took the opportunity to do a little tourist shopping because I had not had a moment to buy a single gift. So, we walked up and down the street through the plaza looking for film and gifts. I bought a few gifts but Andreea thought the film was too expensive, so I didn't buy any, which proved to be a mistake, because there was no time later and I ended up being given film by people here and there or buying it at truly astronomical prices. This, of course, was a little mistake; but I won't make it again. I'll buy film where it is available in quantity if I run out again travelling.

We walked back to the van and drove to Andreea's beautiful flat where Shalom Shtokelman was to meet us. The plan was to visit Saluqis at a place called Abu Khaf, and then Shtokelman was going to take me to the moshav where he lives in the *Aravah*, the southernmost region of Israel, right above Sinai. Shalom Shtokelman has been involved with Saluqis since the early 1970s. And, like my visit with Rashid Darawshe, it proved to be an incredibly small world.but I'll get to that. However, from our brief phone conversations, I knew Shtokelman had definite ideas about Saluqis, so, I was anticipating "impassioned" discussions. Neither of us was disappointed.

As we pulled up to Andreea's, Shalom, a tall, lean, active mannered man, with the walk of a Bedouin, an Israeli bounce added, greeted us. As I got out of the van we assessed each other as we shook hands, then Shalom began to chat with Andreea as we climbed the steps to the apartment. Andreea had to take her dogs out for a little run, leaving Shtokelman and me to each other. Though the bus trips were becoming routine, they were still a bit tiring so Shalom offered to make coffee. I zoned out for a moment or two....then was handed my coffee. It tasted like straight seawater! Instead of sugar, Shalom has put salt in it. He was flabbergasted that this had happened and with utter disbelief said there is a saying if one puts salt instead of sugar in a guest's coffee, one is in love! And so my delightful visit with the Shtokelman family began.

Andreea returned and Shtokelman told her the sugar-salt mix up and asked if she knew the saying, which she did, further amusing him. This trip we'd go in Shalom's van, so we climbed in and were off to Abu Khaf to meet Sami and see his dogs and other Saluqis in the area. A short ways outside of Beersheva we pulled off the main highway and down a dirt track to a block building with a nice, friendly, finely built mature dog tied to a tiny tree and two healthy pups playing around a stripped car. Sami, accompanied by his Russian



Sami's sweet natured two year old Saluki, Fax.

Jewish wife dressed in proper Bedouin style carrying their rosy cheeked baby daughter, greeted us. (To give you some sense of my state of mind at this point in the trip, though I heard Sami's wife speaking Hebrew with a Russian accent, and noticed her beautiful blue eyes, it did not even dawn on me that she was Jewish or that there was actually anything unusual here. It was just another place to see Saluqis....I was becoming oblivious to everything else.)

We drank tea and I was able to measure the male Saluqi easily. He had the same sweet temperament of most of the dogs I'd seen. He also had a look about the head and expression that was becoming familiar, possibly a

family group, but trying to record all the pedigrees, in addition to the measurements and photographs, was too much for me. Pedigree information, how the local Bedouin and Arabs breed their dogs, what choices they make, will be the topic of focus for my next trip when I cannot possibly be as overwhelmed. My point here is that I was beginning to see "a look", commonalties in some of the Saluqis, which I assume is due to shared ancestry. This will be something to follow up on.

As we drank our tea Sami looked at my photo survey cards and shared with me a few ideas about the breed. He told me that some people believe the pup born last runs the best so he kept the last born. The last born is closest to the mother's heart so got the best food from the mother. Others believe that the smallest at birth will be the best. He believes that a Saluqi that is high in the rear and short bodied will be a good runner over both short and long distances. The dog should be short from the shoulder to the hip. Bowlegged rear legs are good and a slight sickle hock is good because the dog can "roll" the hock.

Sitting in the shade, looking out over the area I saw a boy approaching with a beautiful cream Saluqi. It turned out that this was the Saluqi Andreea had found roaming loose in Beershevah. She wanted to keep him, but he created havoc when she left him in her flat with her other dogs while at university and work, so she had to give him to the Bedouin in Abu Khaf where he could be confined safely and it didn't matter how much noise he made. Scud, as he was called, would not let me measure his head or tail but was friendly otherwise and really good looking. Though Andreea had searched and searched for an owner, nobody ever came for him.

We were told that there were more Saluqis in the large compound down the road so we walked down there. There were lots of children playing outside and numerous adobe houses and other buildings, some in stages of completion, some with only walls, and many large pens for livestock, which included sheep, goats, camels, and ostriches. There were wire cages for fancy chickens and peacocks. Scud was kept securely in a very large cage, maybe five feet square and six feet tall, which was used to hold compost. There were white guard dogs chained to dog houses in the middle of one of the large pens. Why Shtokelman wanted to razz the guard dogs, I have no idea, but he ran towards them in a challenging manner causing them to leap and bark at him. Most of the livestock was out grazing; this was clearly a prosperous family group.

The house at the far end was totally fenced and the owner was not home. Guarding the gate, however, were two beautiful red and white feathered Saluqis, male and female littermates in lovely condition, barking a most convincing warning that we shouldn't even think about entering, let alone putting a hand on either one of them! All I could do in the fading light was try to get a few photos. Obviously there was a lot that could be learned at this compound, but time was short, the light was all but gone, and I was out of film. We took our leave and headed for the super market because not only was I out of film, I was starving. Hunger would hit me suddenly at some point during these stimulating days and I would feel like I'd faint if I didn't eat something.

The film at the supermarket was way more expensive than the film in town, but I had no film, so no alternative at this point. We bought *borakas* and some fruit, but when we got into Shtokelman's van, he announced that he had an unbreakable rule...no eating or drinking in the van. This he decided when they bought the van. Israelis pack food and eat on any trip over half an hour, and food gets ground into the seats and floors of family vehicles. The Shtokelman family and guests would discipline themselves to eat before they got in the van or when they stopped but never in the vehicle. The result was the van looked like new but I thought I'd die! The delicious smelling *borakas* remained in the bag until we got to Andreea's where



Skind, found wandering the streets of Beershevah.



Shalom Shtokelman, razzing the Bedouin guard dogs.

some sophisticated work searching for missing persons and he had been doing research all day for a case that he was working on. As we drove through the velvet darkness of the desert night, making our solitary way towards the moshav of Ayn Yahav, where Shalom and his family live, the two lane highway climbed and descended like a narrow black ribbon marked with chalk edges. As we wound our way down the switchback road at Sidon, despite the total darkness, I knew where we were exactly.....I

as I was stepping out of the van to say good bye, I was stuffing food into my mouth.

It turned out that Shalom had had a very long day. Though he prides himself at being “just a farmer”, which in Israel is highly technical due to the modern developments for arid region agriculture, he also does



Another lovely bitch at Abu Khaf

was beginning to *feel* the landscape. And I could also feel how tired Shalom was and I just hoped we didn't have too much farther to go.



our long shadows at the entrance to the compound, where the beautiful red Salukis guarded the area.

We reached the gate of the moshav (a community where families own their own land and houses but market their produce together and hold the palm groves as community property), which was surrounded by rolls of razor wire and chain link and had a guard post to enter the residential area. Shalom commented that here we are in Israel, where no Arab town or village or settlement has a fence around it, but Jewish settlements are fenced and guarded in our own country. Ayn Yahav is located only a few kilometers from the Jordanian border, which today is jointly patrolled and enjoys much cooperation, but this was not always the case. The fences remain in place; the guard

post manned.

As we pulled into the Shtokelman compound, Saluki pups raced out to meet us and Shalom seemed to revive at the sight of them. He loves Salukis. As I was shown to my room, a separate building with bathroom usually occupied by their son who was currently on holiday in London before he begins his military service, Shalom began to feed his dogs. Leah led me into the main house where I was introduced to part of the Shtokelman clan. Shalom's brother with his two children was visiting from California, two daughters and a son

and a son-in-law were all sitting at the large round wooden table off the kitchen. The table was spread with delicious, fresh Israeli produce, yogurt, cheeses and breads. There was the customary cucumber and tomato salad, olives of several varieties, *humus*, melon, tea, coffee, pop....whatever anyone wanted seemed to be produced from the refrigerator. And, this table was spread several times a day yet no one in the family was overweight. It was also around this table that I learned my granddaughter had been born, so there was heart felt *mazal tov* in addition to the delicious food.

Since Shalom had his second wind, and I had been dragging photographs all around the world to share with him, out they came and we started our Saluqi conversation, with the whole family at times, because the Shtokelman Saluqis were a part of all of their memories. Though I had sent a copy of *The Saluqi* to them, airmail, it had not



A young Shalom with young Hassan and Nejma, descending from Lobo, Ruah and a few other Sinai Salukis.



The Shtokelman home, an oasis in the starkest desert. Musdies and his pups are in the shade.

arrived (and did not arrive for a full three months!) so I couldn't show them the photos of their Tarabin Saluqis, *Hassan* and *Nejma*, that were actually in the book. They were not identified by name because I had no information on them when the book was published other than their first owner and that they were from Sinai. Small world! Shalom's foundation Saluqis were pictured in my book. The minute I saw his Saluqi photo album, I recognized *Hassan* and *Nejma*. Our conversation carried on and on through endless sweet tea, memories, preferences, stories, into the wee hours of the morning. What a wonderful tradition of warmth and hospitality exists among both Jewish and Arab

Saluqi lovers. Genuine warmth, genuine hospitality, sincere connection and real pleasure at the presence of a guest in the tent, house, courtyard.

The next morning, after a delicious breakfast, Leah, Shalom's wife, took their niece, Tamar, and nephew, Ori, and me for a ride around the moshav to see the Shtokelman fields as well as the other areas under cultivation, including the communally owned date palm grove, with the majestic palm crowns ringed with bunches of dates ripening in net sacks so the birds could not damage the precious fruit. Anyone who has read about the Bedouin knows how much of life depends on dates....people and animals. In some regions of the Middle East wealth is still measured in date palms. The Ayn Yahav grove was really beautiful, the trees mature



The date grove at Ayn Yahav. The dates are in black net sacs to keep the birds from eating them.

and tall with neatly trimmed trunks, the irrigation canals straight and clear, the leaves shiny as though polished, the trees robust and the fruit clearly premium grade. One could easily imagine such groves providing inspiration for ancient builders who created row upon row of fluted columns. Leah explained which crops were grown and how they were grown under the plastic of the greenhouses which provided both trellising and protection from the shriveling intensity of the desert sun.



Twelve year old Saluli, Alfa with Ori and Tamar.



Moshav Ayn Yahav, from the observation hill, catching the last rays of sun.

Later, just before sunset, Leah took us all again in the jeep, with the addition of twelve year old *Alpha* (a pseudonym because this Saluki's actual name might offend some readers), their Jordanian Saluqi. *Alpha* was



High tech desert agriculture. The plastic sheeting prevents moisture from escaping.

remarkably nimble for her age and repeatedly jumped in and out of the jeep. Leah took us through the desert tracks slowly climbing to a plateau where we could see the whole moshav and the vast expanse of the *Arava* fanning out all around us, and we could even see into Jordan. It was starkly, magnificently beautiful, and ancient, and eastern....and I felt that I could easily live there in body and soul. It was the time of day when the light lingers, touching everything with golden fingers.....the children, the Saluqi, the land, Leah.....it was a moment etched in

golden light as a dust devil swirled in the vast distance in silence.

Also during this day, Shalom, his younger brother, Ache Ezer, and I went to see some local Saluqis. Shalom, though not the owner, had a deep interest in a particular three and a half year old male, *Agab*, which he believed descends directly from his original Sinai hounds, *Hassan* and *Nejma*, and which lives with the Bedouin at the



Smaller, lighter boned Harris, wet from lying in a puddle to keep cool



Agab, believed to descend directly from Itassan and Nejmia

camel farm. So, first we went there, a short drive through the summer sizzling *Aravah*. There were several lovely Saluqis around the large concrete building which had once been an industrial site of some sort but now seemed abandoned except for providing housing for several Bedouin workers.

There were a few puddles of water and a few of the dogs were lying in them to keep cool. *Agab* was one of the tallest Saluqis I'd measured and was also square (26 inches tall and 26 inches long); in addition he had quite a bit of bone, not exactly typical of Sinai, in my experience. On the other hand, his head, expression, ink black pigment with golden eyes, and cream smooth coat all suggested Sinai to me, too. *Agab* is to be Shalom's genetic road back to the Bedouin type he feels he's lost in his current hounds. The other male that I measured was a two and a half-year-old named Harris and he was a lovely hound. The others were under a year so I didn't measure them. Shalom said we'd return later to see the camels, which were also at this site.

We drove to a cattle feed lot where there were two young Saluqis descending from Shalom's breeding, which has a number of western imports blended in. It was terribly hot and the pups, though not shy, didn't want to be bothered, and particularly didn't want to come out from the

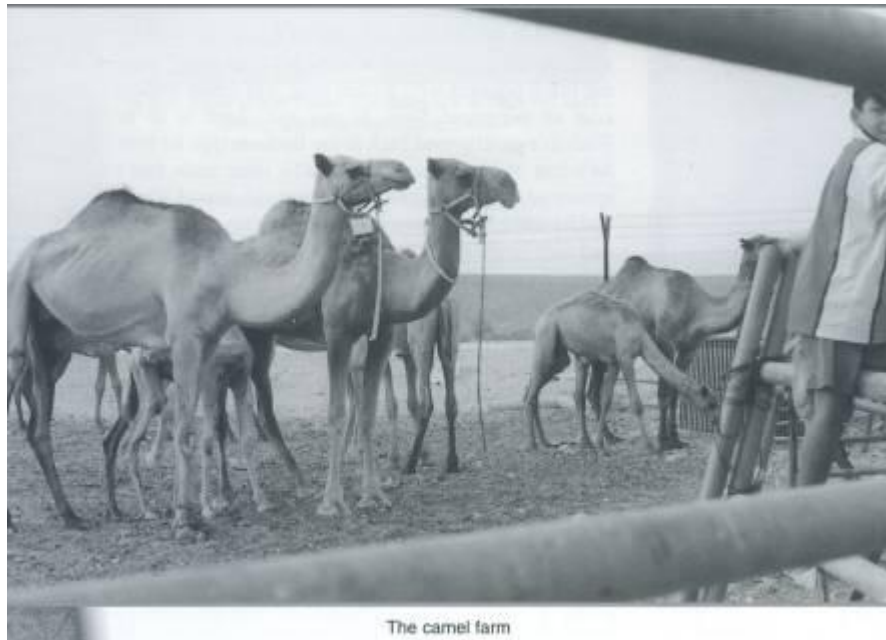


Feed lot pups

shade under the trailer where we found them. Shalom attempted to get them out, which was successful, but they just took off towards the livestock pens, and more shade. They had much the same air about them as *Agab*, similar bone, but they were grizzle rather than cream.

Later in the day we all got back in the car, this time with Ori and Tamar, and returned to the camel farm of renowned Professor Reuven Yagil (*refer to note for more information). Dr. Yagil is an authority on the adaptation of mammals to desert environments, camels in particular. He has participated in conferences and seminars throughout Asia and Africa, in countries where the camel remains the basis of local economies, has perfected milking methods which vastly increase the amount of milk yielded, and has even developed camel milk ice cream, which is delicious. Unfortunately, due to always pressing and vying needs of Israeli society, political intrigue and power brokering, Dr. Yagil's camels, work area, and conference hall have yet to occupy a permanent facility.

Though Dr. Yagil's stories of his travels to seminars in camel breeding countries were intriguing, conveying the large measure of common sense and respect in his approach to working with tribal people who rely on nomadism and their camels to sustain themselves, his own camels were in a rather sorry state. So, whereas with some of the settled Bedouin I saw tick covered, dirty Saluqis, but the few camels I saw in such environments were clear of ticks and filth, at this famous camel farm I saw filthy camels with ticks but clean, well cared for Saluqis! Though obviously healthy, it was sad to see camels, so precious to the Bedouin, covered with caked urine and dirt and ticks. No Bedouin would ride such a dirty animal and the camel to the Bedouin was not merely a milk producer but a source of transportation and pride. So, clean Saluqis, filthy camels and a subtle cultural message is transmitted. One can only speculate that the large number of camels



The camel farm

and lack of water must in part be responsible for the neglected state of hygiene, though the camels were apparently healthy and producing large quantities of milk. Every Bedouin mount and tethered camel that I saw, also in places lacking water, was cleaner, to my recollection.

As we drove back to Ayn Yahav from the camel farm, Ache Ezer started to explain to his brother what he was working on in the States. He went into the most sophisticated description I have ever heard of molecule splitting, folding, and processing to create protein bases for new drugs and other research. Shalom told Ache that that was all very

interesting but in a few years the chemical gas that they use as a pesticide, shooting it under the plastic where the crops grow will be banned due to it's effect on the ozone layer and he needs a new pesticide and that would be far more interesting to him. As we drove through the thick desert night with bugs the color of chalk pellets spiraling through the headlights, I was listening to a discussion of cutting edge science for the 21st century, all somehow perfectly congruous with everything else about this remarkable family.

Once home, around the large table spread with the evening meal, the trip to Eilat, to give Ache's children a special day at the aquarium, was discussed and I was invited to join the family. This is such a wonderful family to be around, I was delighted to be included in their plans. After more intense Saluqi



Nahal Zin, a broad dry stream bed in the Arava

discussions, I went to sleep....time was flying....the next day was August 10th and on midnight of the 12th I would be leaving Israel! Shalom had announced that along with no eating in the van, we would not say the word *saluqi* during the whole trip....not once. And, when Shalom makes a rule, everybody sticks to it.

As we drove from Ayn Yahav to Eilat, maybe an hour and a half or so drive, Leah pointed out places of interest to the children and me. As we came to Nahal Zin, an

enormously wide dry streambed, now spanned by a bridge, Leah told us a story that conjured an image so surreal I laughed until I thought I would burst. You must picture Nahal Zin, surrounded by nothing....nothing in its purest form....open desert. The bridge is of recent construction. Before the bridge was built, when there were flash floods, people had to wait for the water to pass before they could ford the streambed. To make sure people were not reckless, the police would set up barriers and guard them until it was safe to drive on.

Leah described an incident in 1991, during the Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein was shelling Israel with scuds. About 200 cars were lined up, waiting to cross. The people were all standing around talking when the news came on and the police vehicle turned the megaphone on. The news announced that scuds had been fired. Instantly everyone rushed to their cars, got in, rolled up the windows and put on their gas masks! This is how everyone sat for several hours until the flood subsided. Then, still wearing gas masks, people started their engines and continued travelling. The image of gas-masked drivers in the emptiness of Nahal Zin was so incongruous it struck me as hilarious.

The trip to Eilat and the aquarium, where I had taken my own children in the mid 1970s, was great fun and a good break. The underwater viewing station is fascinating, for the fish, coral, and all the varied humanity it attracts. Israelis and tourists of every background, from the far corners of the world, all the colors of the human rainbow, and as many religions and traditions, were all there to see the wonders of the sea. Ache and Shalom and the children went in the submarine, which actually submerges and travels around the Gulf of Eilat (Akaba), while Leah and I had something to drink in the packed cafeteria. After the aquarium we went into Eilat and had a delicious fish dinner and did a little tourist shopping. The *saluqi* ban remained in force until we got home, and, since several hours had passed since we last ate, the table was spread yet again, the ban lifted, and serious ground covered in our last discussion. I even managed to do a very brief interview with Shalom because he is if not the Israeli with the longest continuing tenure as a breeder, then certainly one of them. Since Ache Ezer had graciously volunteered to take me to Jerusalem where I would pick up my South Africa

luggage, then on to Ramat Gan, where I would spend my last night in Israel, Shalom and I could talk until the wee hours. And, we did.

Short interview with Shalom Shtokelman, Ayn Yahav, August 10, 1999

What is recounted here is from notes rather than a tape recording.

Shalom got his first Saluqi in 1972, a smooth dog from Yavnel. This was a Bedouin hound and he got him from a vet. Shalom said at the time he simply didn't know what he had....today he knows. He saw Bedouin dogs but didn't appreciate them.

Next he got a feathered American Saluki and he found a Sinai Saluqi in the street. He fell in love with the character of the breed. But, he had to give the feathered dog back because it killed all the turkeys in the moshav, Bustan Ha Galil, where he was living. This was the same moshav where Igal Sella lived.

About 1974 or 75 he got *Hassan* and *Nejma* from Mike Van Grevenbroek (pictured as puppies in *The Saluqi*, pp.253-54). He thinks Mike gave him these Saluqis because they made "big trouble" for him on the kibbutz. *Hassan* was a good hunter as well as a good guard dog for the Shtokelman family. But, the Sinai Saluqis were aggressive towards some of the moshav members, especially if they were riding bicycles. *Hassan* and *Nejma* had several litters but the rule was, if the dog bit someone, it had to be given to the Bedouin, so, most of the pups were given away. One particular Bedouin, Shalom believes, still has this bloodline, Hareb Al Awashle, who lives near Dimona.

Shalom was fascinated by the group interactions of his Saluqis, how they lived together and hunted together. He hunted with Bedouin a few times, but it was difficult....a big problem (which went unexplained). He feels the Saluqi is like a feral animal, a wild animal, natural....a perfect balance between muscle and bone. He cited some research on desert animals done at Tel Aviv University by Amiram Shkolnik....the biology of desert animals and how they have adapted to survive. How does the Saluqi survive on minimal water? The blood concentrates and the dog does not go into shock. It is clear that Saluqis have many characteristics that modern people don't pay attention to.

In 1977 Shalom acquired Yossi, a black smooth dog from the brother of Salim Ibn Jahzi. Yossi was one solid muscle with a beautiful temperament with the family but he always competed with *Hassan* for the alpha position. Shalom gave Ibn Jahzi a pup from *Hassan* and *Nejma* for Yossi. Before he could sire a litter, Yossi was poisoned and died. *Hassan* died in 1980. Of all the pups from *Hassan* and *Nejma*, only one was feathered. This cream bitch was named Alfa (pseudonym because the name would be offensive to some readers) was heavily feathered and went to Kibbutz Urim (where she was photographed by American Saluki breeder and judge Dale Wright during one of his trips to Israel! Talk about a small world). This bitch won first place at the International Show in Ashkelon one year (maybe it was the year Dale judged).

Two black feathered Salukis were



Eilat, the entrance to the Gulf of Eilat coral reef observation structure. The mountains of Jordan in the distance.



Hassan, stacked during a break in the moshav field



Hassan with Ponit – both youngsters!

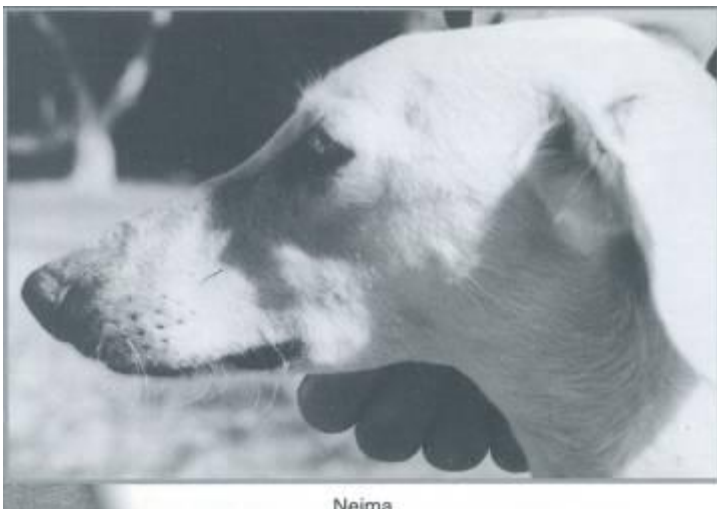
Alpha was bred a second time to *Psic*, whose dam was *Seffi* (Jordanian sire x Sinai dam) and whose sire was *Dahab*, a tall golden dog imported from the USA or South Africa. This litter is now three years old and a bitch has been bred to *Musdies*, Shalom's black feathered import from Scandinavia. These pups will be a year old on December 24, 1999. He has also bred a second bitch from this same litter to *Musdies* and these pups were three months old at the time of my visit.

brought into Israel from Jordan. Shalom got the male after a car accident. This male was bred to a daughter of *Hassan* and *Nejma*, in 1981 or 82. One of the puppies was a heavily feathered black fringed red, a bitch, and she was given to *Ruthie*. Her name was *Seffi* and she was eventually bred to a Nueba type smooth cream dog belonging to Bedouin from Beershevah. One of these puppies, a bitch, was a heavily feathered tricolor like the Jordanian grandsire. This was about 1988 and the bitch was *Alpha*. All of the other puppies were given away.

In about 1991 *Alpha* was bred to *Joker*, a western import but Shalom no longer remembers from which country. He was not Sinai type. Shalom thought the puppies were awful. He didn't like them at all and thought there was something the matter with them because they had so much body hair. He worried that maybe they weren't purebred. He told the people who took them, "This is the father, this is the mother, and you get a donkey!" He didn't breed another litter for eight years. In the end, when they matured, the puppies turned out nice.



Tarabin Bedouin Tossi, self-black smooth Saluki



Nejma



Yossi, self black with white markings, with Hassan in Sinai, 1970s

