

Simpatico ...



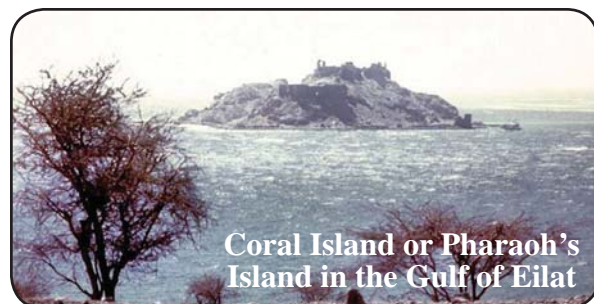
It was 1973. I was finally flying out of Israel after 5 months of living there and going through the "Yom Kippur War". I had visited the Golan Heights, down through the Negev and into the Sinai Desert.

Based out of Tel Aviv, my good friend Michael Hunter and I ventured forth with Dahlia Luxembourg, my French girlfriend at the time (whose mother or grandmother fought as a freedom fighter for the French Underground during WW II ... the Luxembourgish) who had moved to the Old City in Jerusalem (הקיתעה ריעה).

We had a car that we bought in Luxembourg from some travelers earlier and drove to Piraeus, Greece, then shipped it with us in steerage to Haifa Israel. The lights were covered with blackout paint so driving at night was challenging.

Dahlia was involved in the Peace Party and we participated with the demonstrations (what one does for a beautiful woman). And she was lovely. Long dark brown hair, French accent, spoke very little English but she had other attributes that only a man could appreciate. But I digress from my story.

She gave us a personal tour around Israel and after leaving her in Jerusalem, Michael and I ventured south of Eilat into the Sinai. We were free diving along the reefs in the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba). Across the water you could see Jordan and looking south, Saudi Arabia. About a mile and a half offshore was an island with a ruined Crusader castle on it (Coral Island or Pharaoh's Island). We swam out to it not knowing that the waters were shark infested and investigated (explored) the small island castle.



Upon swimming back to the mainland, Israeli soldiers were on the beach with Uzi's aimed at us thinking we might be terrorists. Being only dressed in our bathing suits and yelling "American, American," they lowered their weapons and we all had a good laugh. Later that day we were visited by a conservation gentleman, Steve, who was working as a liaison between the Bedouins and the Israeli government. He happened to be an Israeli who had made his money in San Francisco as an insurance salesman and returned home to do this work and was fluent in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. He asked if we would like to visit a Bedouin encampment and would meet us the next day to take us there.



a Bedouin with a kufiya head scarf and a Saluki dog

The next morning found us driving south in the Sinai, turning west up a wadi (dry river bed) to the Bedouin camp. All the men were sitting around a campfire. Coffee with cardamom was brewing and at the head of this encampment sat the Sheik (the tribal chieftain) on a rug, dressed in his white traditional robes and all wore a kufiya on their heads. Saluki dogs lay with their masters. The Sheik offered us a place to sit by him along with the Israeli gentleman. They started to converse in Arabic. While they were talking, two men rode into the camp mounted on camels and joined the group. The women were all in the back watching.

All were wearing semi-transparent veils and around their mouths were tattoos.

The Sheik had a sunburned face, wizened with age, with piercing green eyes and he asked me in Arabic, through the Israeli, if I knew what they were talking about. I looked at the Sheik and exclaimed, "yes I do -- you are talking about women." He looked at me and asked how I knew. I told him -- simpatico. And with that we were invited to stay at his encampment. -- *Drake Regent*