
Afula Folklore

It seems that every small village has some sort of folklore. You probably remember something that was striking about either your own hometown or a small town nearby. Well, Afula has a few stories. This village had traffic circles before most of the rest of the country. Israeli truck drivers for some reason would not simply go around the circle until they were facing the proper direction. They would go all the way around occasionally. Sometimes they did it more than once. It became somewhat of a tradition. Afula is a sleepy village in the center of an agricultural region. I guess folks will accept any entertainment offered if they are bored.

One of the problems of the Galilee region is the presence of wolves. The shepherds in particular are troubled by wolves that can ravage a flock. They would like to poison the wolves since there does not seem to be a natural predator that targets wolves. Unfortunately, if the wolves are poisoned, the carcass might be eaten by vultures and that would kill the vultures. Since vultures are very valuable to the ecology of the region and besides they are a protected species, the farmers are not allowed to poison the wolves.

Ecologists began to search for some possible natural solution. Someone suggested that perhaps there were crocodiles in the region in ancient times since they appear in artwork from ancient sources. The idea of re-introducing crocodiles got considerable negative responses. It seems the tourism industry of the Galilee area was not willing to give up the use of the sea. They seemed to want to keep it as part of the attraction of the region. The beach owners of the Galilee were concerned that

swimmers would not be willing to share the shoreline of the Galilee with the crocodiles.

Environmentalists being the sort of folks they are, they still wanted to know if the idea could have been a success. Someone got the idea of checking to see if the crocodiles might have survived by bringing alligators, which are not as aggressive. A place was found to conduct the experiment and permission was secured. They went on to the next step, bringing alligators to the Galilee from Florida. They wanted to start with full grown alligators because they didn't want to take several years learning how to raise them and watching them grow. Now an alligator is not a tame or gentle beast. It takes some serious precautions if you are going to transport a 12-foot alligator from Florida to the southern side of the Galilee. The alligators were captured and sedated, placed in crates and loaded on an El Al flight to Israel. Upon arrival at Ben Gurion airport as perhaps the strangest new immigrants, they were loaded on a truck for the last leg of the journey. By that time the alligators were used to the indignities of the journey but were still very unhappy. Did I mention that they were loaded on a truck? Off they go, headed toward a new home not far from the Galilee. It wasn't all that long before they entered the Jezreel valley on the journey north and came to the town of Afula. Are you getting ahead of me? The truck driver came to one of those traffic circles and something just seemed to snap in his head. Around he went. Then he did it again for good measure. Then something really did snap. One of the crates fell off the truck. Now the situation was completely out of hand. There was an angry 12-foot alligator on the loose in the streets of Afula! Alligators can move very fast when they want to and this one wanted revenge. Are you asking yourself what you would do with an angry alligator walking the streets? They were! Nobody wanted to hurt the animal but they couldn't just let it wander around loose either. Someone remembered that there were some American

Cowboys at a dude ranch at the northern end of the Galilee. They called them up and asked them if they could help capture the alligator. They were delighted with the challenge and the chance to show off their skills. So, here they came with their horses and ropes and they used lasso ropes to do the job. Today there is a successful alligator farm at Hamat Gadar, south east of the Sea of Galilee.

A Small Hero

I have a friend who is a tour guide. His name is Avigdor and he has two sons, Gilad and Asaph. Gilad is the older son and he is now married. At the time of the story, however, he was a young boy. This was back a few years, as you can imagine. I asked him recently if he would verify the story and he modestly refused but I'll tell the story anyway. As a young boy, Gilad was interested in the world and had a soft heart for stories about people with problems larger than his own. He learned about the horrors of the holocaust in school as all Israeli children learn. When he later heard about the people who were refugees from the war in Viet Nam, he felt as if he must do something. He determined in his heart that he would do what he could to help the boat people find a place of refuge. He got out his own savings from his piggy bank. He saw that it would not be enough so he went to one of his best friends and told her that she needed to help him save the boat people. Together they still only had a small amount so they began to ask all of their friends for help. Somehow, one of the local TV networks heard what they were doing and sent a camera crew to interview them. The story aired on Israeli television. Little Gilad's gigantic heart touched the hearts of many viewers and money began to arrive at Channel Two television to help the boat people. Soon, there was far more money than anyone expected and a plan was needed. At this point the government got involved and decided that it would indeed be a very good thing to help the boat people. After all, when the Jewish people were trying to flee from Nazi Germany, there were too few people who were

willing to help. If any nation on the face of the earth should be interested in helping people fleeing from death, it should be the Jewish nation of Israel. The end of the story is that 5000 Vietnamese people were allowed to immigrate to Israel. They were settled in Afula.