

# ROSH HASHANAH 2018

*Israel – 70 Years*



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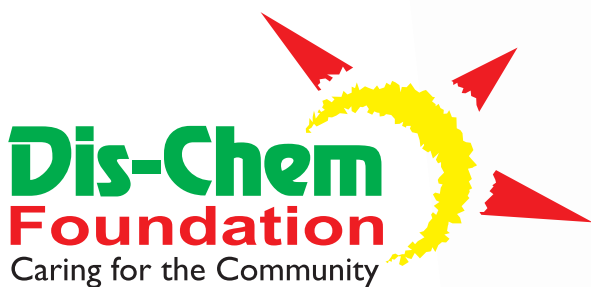
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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 73 ♦ NO. 2 ♦ ROSH HASHANAH 2018

Editor: David Saks

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# L'SHANAH TOVAH



WISHING ALL OUR  
JEWISH CUSTOMERS  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR  
AND WELL OVER  
THE FAST.



# LESLIE MARCUS, A TRUE WAR HERO

\*

Leila Bloch

It is important to preserve memories while there are people around to share them with us. This is the function of the Jewish Digital Archive Project (JDAP), a community project sponsored by the Kaplan-Kushlick Foundation at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town.

Among the JDAP's treasures is the Machal Collection, originally donated by Jason Hoff. They include the transcripts of interviews with Leslie Marcus, a true war hero.<sup>1</sup>



**Leslie Marcus at the time when he was commissioned, Netanya Officers Course, 1949**

"That's how we were in those days - 'one for all and all for one'", Leslie told me as he recounted his experiences, his eyes

---

**Leila Bloch** holds a BA (Hons) in Heritage and Public Culture from the University of Cape Town. She has been working on the Jewish Digital Archive Project for five years. She is currently a research assistant for the Biography of an Uncharted People Project, a Masters student in the history department at Stellenbosch University, and a researcher at the South African Jewish Museum.

glimmering with the memory of friendship during battles fought, between moments of real pain and fond memory.

In 1948, the Jewish Agency recognised the necessity of forming an organised Israeli defence force from the underground forces of the Haganah and the Palmach. However, there was a crucial shortage of trained manpower and equipment. This led to the decision to ask Jewish veterans of World War II to join as volunteers. At the beginning of 1948, therefore, Machal<sup>2</sup> was created. Its volunteers were "unpaid idealist" who served in all different types of army corps, including infantry, artillery, armour, signals, engineering and medical units.<sup>3</sup>

The time between Leslie's enrolment in the army and setting off for Israel was short. He had not a moment's hesitation about leaving:

"My late brother Sam had a clothing shop, so I got a few *shmattes* together in a suitcase. There was a fellow called Solly Laloon (from Claremont kosher butchery) who had a car; he came and fetched me at six the next morning, and took us to the airport.

There were two of us, myself and Max Korensky from Paarl. I had never been on a plane before. I said goodbye to my parents and we went to Yzerfontein airport. It took us four days to get to Israel. We had to stop every four hours to refuel. When we landed, the UN was waiting for us. We were taken straight away to some camp in Haifa. Two days later I was in the army, fighting. I was all of 21 but I was ready for it. I was physically very strong.

'There were 32 of us in our unit of various nationalities. I was second in command. There were eight South Africans. We had guys from Russia, Romania, England and America. We were the first to go into battle. Why did we go to battle first? Because we were the most trained'.

Leslie was in the B Company, 89th Commando, of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, known as the "Terrible Tigers". This was a unit commanded by Moshe Dayan, who had been instructed by David Ben Gurion to form an armoured



unit, consisting of especially tough soldiers hand-picked by Dayan himself.<sup>4</sup>

Leslie was personally backed by Dayan: "I remember being given an instruction in the morning during physical training. They were making fun of me. Dayan said, 'If you ever make a joke about Leslie I will knock you out.'"



***Members of the 89th B Platoon, Commander Unit***



***Leslie Marcus and Moshe Dayan, some years after the 1948 War of Independence***

With this support and the strength of a resilient and dynamic team, Leslie fought in many battles. Certain moments stand out with vivid accuracy, the first being the capture of Beit Govrin police station south of Jerusalem.

"This was an important route serving the Egyptian and Jordanian armies. Several members of our unit were wounded during this battle. One of our wounded was our medic, Shlomo Friedrich. He was in the greatest danger as he was lying closest to the Jordanians who were systematically bombarding the police station. Whoever tried to reach one of the wounded was immediately hit. I asked for permission to rescue Shlomo. My commander, Naftali Arbel, reported that

it was early afternoon, a time when any movement would immediately be spotted unless it was in the shadow of rocks and shrubs. It was essential to act with speed and decisiveness."

"You must understand this was midday in the middle of the heat. He was bad. I told Naftali that I was going to go and get Shlomo out. So with all the bullets flying from our own army and the Egyptians towards me I managed to get to Shlomo and I supposedly said to him, 'Shlomo either we will both get killed today or I will get you out alive. But I will not leave you alone.' I had bandages in my kit bag and after I had bandaged his wounds, I put him over my shoulder and carried him up the mountain again towards the police station".

The Jordanians opened fire. Leslie picked up speed and ran across the ground, reaching the collection point with Shlomo on his back. Although exhausted from the physical and mental effort, he immediately went back down the hill to join his comrades in defending the command post.<sup>5</sup>

"Until Shlomo died, I would visit Israel every year. He had two sons and a son-in-law, all pilots, and he would bring his children and 22 grandchildren to meet me and tell them that none of them would be there if it were not for me."

Leslie's unit fought in many battles against the Jordanians and against the Egyptians and they liberated a children's village surrounded by Arabs as well as Lod airport. There is a plaque at the airport commemorating their battle there.

They were also involved in the capture of the Iraq el Suedan fortress. This dominated the road to the Negev near the Israeli settlement of Negba which had been taken over by the Egyptians. After a battle, they blew a hole in the wall and Leslie and the assault forces poured into the three story building. The Egyptians came out of the fortress with their hands up. Not one of the attackers



***Marcus giving training instructions to members of the 89th B Platoon***

was killed. The many weapons they found in the fortress came in very handy. Among the Egyptians were several German officers. Hearing Leslie speaking English, one said, "What are you doing among these bloody Jews?" That was not a good idea because Yossele was standing next to Leslie. He was a thin concentration camp survivor, who had seen his family killed by the Nazis.

After the war, Leslie returned three times a year to Israel for retraining.

"The Six Day War was in 1967. I arrived in Israel two days before it broke out. Whilst I was in the desert we had heard on the radio they captured the Marivi. When we heard the Kotel had been recaptured by us these soldiers started crying. We had all the filth in our tear drops from fighting in the desert. There was nowhere to wash your face. The teardrops took out the salt and we could not see because we were blinded. Our tears blinded us. It took about six or seven hours for medics to wash our faces and eyes.

"I regret that I had to fire and kill, but that is war. For years afterwards I used to wake up at night in terror, the delayed action of the effects of the war. Hashem looked after us and not one of us was killed. Wounded yes, but never killed and we are in regular contact with each other. Today,

there are four of us still alive. Seventy years later and I'm the baby. I always said that Hashem came down to assist us".

These were just a few of the memories the Jewish Digital Archive has collected from Leslie, one of the 800 South African Machalniks whose personal sacrifices seventy years ago helped create the State of Israel. We are currently digitizing his many photographs, awards, souvenirs and anecdotes to add to his personal archive that will be permanently housed in JDAP so that future generations can benefit from stories of the past, and keep up with the present.

For further information or to donate photographs or other material to JDAP, contact Leila at [JDAP@sajewishmuseum.co.za](mailto:JDAP@sajewishmuseum.co.za) or [www.jdap.co.za](http://www.jdap.co.za).

## NOTES

- 1 Interviewed for JDAP by Leila Bloch, 2018
- 2 An acronym derived from *Mitmadvei Chutz LaAretz* – "volunteers from outside the country".
- 3 Schrire, Gwynne, 'Israel's War of Independence and Machal Cape Town', *Jewish Affairs*, Pesach, 2007, 62:1
- 4 Schrire, G, Katzew, Henry, *South Africa's 800: The story of South African Volunteers in Israel's war of birth*, (Ed Joe Woolf), SAZF, 2003, 257-8)
- 5 Schrire, G, Katzew, 257-8.

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# ON KIBBUTZ IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE STATE

\*

Marge Clouts

When retirement looms, the tricky problem of how to dispose of sentimental items, many of Jewish interest, presents practical and emotional difficulties. Children may not 'have room' for them, and the options of selling, giving to a charity shop or throwing away seems a waste and a shame. I myself searched in vain for a home for my stash of 70-year-old letters and photos from Israel. This is how I came to possess them.

Back in 1948, the National Party had just gained power in South Africa and the Israeli War of Independence was not quite over when eleven of us arrived at the offices of the South African Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and presented ourselves to the section dealing with *aliyah*. We must have seemed an odd and unprepossessing group. Only four of us had any *hachsharah* experience (collective living and serious farming in preparation for kibbutz life), just two could speak a moderate Hebrew and we were barely in our twenties. We were all ex-Hashomer Hatzair members, now belonging to no Zionist youth group, but still determined to live the life of equality and justice which we understood that the kibbutz exemplified. We had come to the SAJBD to plead for assistance in making *aliyah*, since we ourselves had neither the means nor the know-how, and also did we know of any kibbutz that might accept us. It is not surprising that we were politely but firmly refused.

Our next plan was to get together enough money to go it alone, initially to Britain, and then to find some way to get to Israel by ship. This was a very vague and hare-brained scheme, but at that time there were no direct

flights to Israel, and making *aliyah* was very hush-hush. Some of us earned extra money, or counted on parental support, and our one long-standing couple decided to get married and fortunately received generous wedding gifts. When we reported back to the SABD with our new funds and new decision, they had a change of heart. We were initiated into certain procedures relating to the circuitous journey and before we left, were presented with a small volume of Bialik's poems with a Hebrew inscription and the date: 20.8.48. I still have the book.

My mother was a passionate Zionist and a prominent member of WIZO, yet it saddened her greatly that I was refusing to avail myself of all that Johannesburg could offer. She herself had longed to go to university, but it had been financially impossible. I had been given that opportunity, but shortly before completing my B.A. at Wits, had given it up. My mother felt strongly that having done so in order to labour in a kibbutz kitchen or laundry was utter foolishness. She asked me at least to send her and my father a weekly letter, which I promised to do.

When we finally waved good bye at the airport and entered the plane which was to take us to Rome, we were somewhat shocked to find just two facing rows of metal seating, designed for parachutists. We had to touch down every night - first in Entebbe and then in Khartoum. After landing in Rome, we flew to Israel in another plane, this time with normal seating, but with fiercely rattling windows. We had flown all the way with other young people intending to join the Haganah.

The excitement of landing in Israel was intense. We did not land at Lod (now Ben Gurion) airport, but on some very small airstrip. We were then transported by truck to the army base at Tel Levitsky. A few days later, in Tel Aviv, we visited the welcoming and comforting South African Office. The kibbutz they found for us was called Bet Keshet, a four-year-old basic settlement of about seventy Sabras located in the foothills of Mount Tabor in the lower Galil. The settlement had recently been traumatised by the deaths in an ambush of seven of its leading members.

---

*Marge Clouts spent two and a half years in Israel soon after the founding of the state. Following her return to South Africa, she married the South African Jewish poet, Sydney Clouts. After Sharpeville in March 1960 the couple, with their three sons, moved to London, where they started a literary agency. Marge also taught English as a Foreign Language, English literature in various London colleges and Creative Writing in the Cotswolds. She has written many literary reviews for Jewish Renaissance and other publications.*



***Bet Keshet kibbutz members. The author is centre, back row. Others in the photograph include Sam Fanaroff (far right), Gerard Siedner (far left, arms folded) and Vivian Rakoff (third from left, back row).***

We were warmly welcomed at Bet Keshet. Several army-type barracks made up the entire accommodation, with two larger buildings - the *chadar ochel* (dining room and kitchen) and the communal shower blocks. The sandy paths linking these structures and the more distant, very basic lavatories became hazardous streams of sticky mud in the rains of winter. A nearby hill called 'the Sheb' was where the permanent kibbutz was to be built in the future.

On our first Sunday at Bet Keshet we heard the church bells of the monastery on Mount Tabor, and at the same time the ominous sounds of distant gunfire.

My letters home described the place and the people, who now included forty or so young Bulgarian refugees who had been allocated to the kibbutz with no knowledge of its principles, and had no wish to be there. Many sad Russian songs filled the night air. The hard slog of repetitive work was enlivened by such occasional diversions as a Purim fancy dress evening, a visit to a Circassian village wedding or a trip to Tiberias and Lake Kinneret. After a while

I was 'hired out' with a few others to work in the kitchens of the Kadoorie Agricultural College. We daily walked the few miles there and back through the fields. My comfortable South African life had not prepared me for scrubbing pots and pans - I learned the hard way. I kept up the weekly correspondence, with a few judicious omissions, and my mother kept all the letters, passing them on to me much later.

After a year or so, only one of our group remained on the kibbutz - she and one of the Sabras had fallen in love. Years later they too had left for Tel Aviv, as did many of the original kibbutz members. I have lost touch with some of our group who had dispersed, firstly within Israel, and later emigrating, some returning to South Africa. I know two of us landed up in Canada, three in Britain and one in France.

That year was unforgettable for all of us. We had many photos taken. Recently, not knowing what to do with them, one of our group had the bright idea of writing to Bet Keshet, asking if the kibbutz would be at all interested in having them. They were! Indeed, they were delighted to have some record of the early days for the kibbutz museum (yes, a Kibbutz Museum!). I wondered if my letters could possibly be of any interest to them. Yes! Now relevant sections have been translated into Hebrew and are displayed in the museum. We certainly never dreamt we would become 'history'! I am amused, relieved and grateful to have come upon an unexpected solution for that pile of papers.

Among other mementos, I still have a small, round container made of treated orange peel, with a biblical figure of a woman carrying a jug painted on the cover. This enterprising ornament is now somewhat shrunken and misshapen, but remains a treasured farewell gift to me when I too left Israel in 1951. Anyone interested?



***Building and work on the hill called 'the Sheb', where the permanent Bet Keshet settlement (now flourishing) was to be.***



## EDDY MAGID, THE FIRST ISRAELI TANKS CORPS AND THE CAPTURE OF BEERSHEBA

\*

Michael and Suzanne Belling

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Eddy Magid was one of over 800 South Africans (mainly, although not exclusively, from the Jewish community) who volunteered to fight for the new-born Jewish state in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. On his return to South Africa, he went on to successful careers in the business world and in local government politics. He was Mayor of Johannesburg in the years 1984-5. This article is based on extracts from *Man of His Word – The Eddy Magid Story* by Michael and Suzanne Belling, which appeared in a limited edition for mainly private circulation in 2017. *Jewish Affairs* thanks Mr Magid and the authors for allowing these to be reproduced in this special 'Israel: 70 Years' issue.

Before he left South Africa, Eddy's aunt Hilda Altshuler gave him the address of some family members with the same surname. He and Morrie [Egdes] were given a pass and they went to find them in Kfar Saba.

They saw a man wearing a *kippah* cutting his hedge.

"We went up to him and said, 'We're looking for Mr Altshuler who has relatives in South Africa.' He told us he was Altshuler. After introducing ourselves, he asked where we were based. When we told him Tel Litwinski, he said his daughter Batsheva was there.

"We returned to Tel Litwinski and found my 'new' cousin. She was slim and petite, working as a trainee nurse. We spent the evening with her, arranging to meet again the next day. But soon after we met up again, an announcement came over the loudspeakers ordering all soldiers to return to their units, as we were going into action the next day.

"We said we were sorry to leave her, but she replied: 'You are not leaving me. I am going too'."

Eddy and Morrie felt uncomfortable about a woman being in the front line. "We told her, 'It's not right! There are men at the back doing wages and administrative work. They should be in the front line and you

should be doing their work. Nurses can't go into the front line'."

Her reply took Eddy by surprise. "I shall not go as a nurse. I shall go as a soldier, with the commandos." Eddy's protests fell on deaf ears. "Many men have been wounded and killed and more will fall. You are a very thin line against the Arabs. There are no more men to take the place of those who fall. I can. Why shouldn't I?" she responded firmly, brooking no contradiction.

Eddy returned to his quarters to learn that they were going to attack the village of Lydda the next morning and try to take the adjoining airport, the only international one in the country. When Eddy finally saw action as the brand-new armoured corps joined other Israeli forces moving to attack Lydda, he was not in a tank – the were too few to go around. He was in a convoy of half-tracks. He knew Batsheva was in one of the other half-tracks, among the men.

Eddy learnt just how poorly equipped the Israelis were at that stage. In preparation for the assault, an IDF officer distributed weapons to the force at Tel Litwinski – handing a gun to one man and a clip of ammunition to the next. He handed a Sten gun to Morrie, but gave Eddy only a clip of ammunition.

"What about my weapon?" Eddy asked.

"There are not enough to go around," came the reply, "Don't worry, you will pick up a gun from the Arabs."

The fighting was heavy. Jordanian troops fired mortars at the convoy, but the force with Eddy and his comrades pressed ahead, eventually taking their targets. After a break, they switched vehicles to go into battle again, flies tormenting them as they moved. Eddy found the cause – a pool of dried blood on the floor of the half-track under his seat.

He reached down and found a pair of

---

*Michael Belling is an author, translator, trainer and journalist. He obtained a law degree at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and practised law in Israel, where he was also foreign correspondent for a South African media group. He now lectures in journalism at a Johannesburg college. Suzanne Belling is a veteran journalist, author and Jewish communal professional. Amongst previous positions held, she is a former editor of the SA Jewish Report and Executive Director of the Cape Council, SA Jewish Board of Deputies.*

black shoes below him. They were the shoes worn by a nurse with a small woman's feet, not a male soldier. He started at the shoes for a long time realising to his horror that he would never meet Batsheva again. They learnt later that a mortar shell fired by the Jordanians had landed in the half-track, killing everyone in it instantly, including Batsheva.

Eddy was devastated and recalled his warning to her not to go. He agonised at having found and lost a blood relation so quickly, and the manner in which this fine, courageous young woman had lost her life.

They finally took Lydda when the Arab forces withdrew from the town. They remained at the airport. It took them weeks to clean up the mess the Arab soldiers had made.

One day, Morrie was walking towards a shed housing one of their few tanks and saw a book lying in the grass. It was covered in grey linen with flowers embroidered on it. It was a book of Hebrew poetry containing pressed flowers in its pages. Batsheva had put her name in the book, with a date, one year before she was killed. At the first opportunity, Eddy hiked the entire distance to Kfar Saba and gave it to her parents.

The Lydda airport was turned into the tank corps base. The newly-established armoured corps set out from there for several other military actions. By the time the next truce was declared just ten days after the fighting restarted, they had taken two nearby villages, Deir Tarif and Beit Naballa.



***Eddy Magid with friend Lou Kotzen (standing in bomb crater) in front of the ruined Lydda airport building. The picture was taken in January 1949.***

Tanks were not the only weaponry obtained from Haifa at the time of Israel's independence. The British sometimes simply threw items into the Haifa bay, assuming this would both render them useless and save the time and effort of loading them

onto the ships going to the United Kingdom.

The Haganah, and later the IDF, felt differently, sending frogmen down to salvage what they could – and there was a lot to bring to the surface, including artillery shells, such as the six-pounders used on the tanks and fuses used in firing the shells.

These were distributed to different IDF units, among them the brand-new armoured corps. Often this was done even before the fuses had a chance to dry – in many cases they remained damp for a long time. Eddy and members of his unit experienced the problems these fuses caused in the heat of battle. It was quite common for Morrie to load a shell, which Eddy would then fire, but the shell remained in the barrel of the gun because the damp fuse did not work.

He remembers it vividly. "Morrie Egdes loads the cannon and I fire with my foot. I was instructed that if it doesn't go if I have to count to ten. Then I have to open the turret, take the round out as fast as possible and pull it out of the breech. As the six-pounder comes out, I have to take it and throw it out of the tank, fast. Now it can go off at any time during that period."

Even with a damp fuse, the shell would eventually ignite and explode. There was no way of knowing whether this would happen in a second or two, or whether they had more leisure to dispose of it. The result was that they worked frantically to get it out of the barrel and throw it overboard as far and as quickly as possible.

Sometimes the shell exploded while it was still in the air. On one occasion, it went off just as they had shoved it away from the tank. The blast hit them forcibly, but fortunately neither man was badly hurt.

"This little joke was close enough to sear off half the big beard I had at the time," Eddy says.

Two rooms at the Lydda airport were converted into the first tank school in Israel during August 1948. Harry MacDonald was their trainer. Eddy points out that it usually took around ten months to become a qualified tank man. It took this group far less time – they could not afford more.

The certificate Eddie received at the end of September attesting to his successful completion of the course was issued in his Hebrew name: Eliyahu Magid.

\*\*\*\*\*

The uneasy second truce lasted for almost three months, until 9 October, 1948. By then the IDF was in a better situation, so when the fighting resumed, the initiative was in Israel's hands.

But in this final phase of Israel's struggle



for independence, the war was still far from over. In the south, the Egyptians held the Negev, the large desert area that today forms over half of all the land in Israel.

Israeli action was focused largely on this section of the country and Eddy took part in several major battles. The first was at the village of Beit Jibrin, a significant objective that served as a district centre for surrounding villages under the British.

This was followed by heavy fighting at Kibbutz Negba, near the Egyptian border. The kibbutz was destroyed in the conflict. A nearby Tegart fort at the Arab village of Iraq Suweidan controlled the route to the Negev. The Egyptians held the police station and the surrounding Arab villages, from where they attacked Israeli forces travelling to Ashkelon on the coast or Hebron on the West Bank.

For Israel to move further south to Beersheba and beyond, the IDF had to drive the Egyptians out of Iraq Suweidan, as part of a broad offensive. Eddy and the new armoured corps were in the front line of the attack. The first attempt to take the fort failed in the face of strong and determined Egyptian resistance, but in the second assault on 9 November, they finally managed to drive the Egyptians out.

The approaches to Beersheba, the “capital of the Negev”, were now open. In contrast with the hard fighting encountered over the previous days, they met little resistance in taking Beersheba. The IDF mounted a six-pounder on a half-track, naming it “the Beersheba tank”, which led the infantry into the town. Three of the six-man crew of the Beersheba tank were South Africans – Eddy was the gunner, Morrie Egdes the gun loader and Stanley Behr the driver.

While most of the Arabs in the town had fled, the Arab troops in the British-built police station put up fierce opposition. Snipers fired at any visible Israeli target. The IDF commanders decided to shell the fort, using the ‘tank’. Under the direction of a former Palmach officer (the Palmach was the elite pre-state Haganah strike force), they drove towards the front door of the fort, its most vulnerable point.

The Palmach officer, who stood sandwiched between Eddy and Morrie suddenly dropped, badly wounded by a sniper’s bullet from the fort. He was evacuated. The Palmachnik was squashed in shoulder to shoulder with them. The fact that both Eddy and Morrie came out unscathed, while their comrade right next to them was badly hurt, was one of the inexplicable vagaries of warfare.

The rest of the crew knew that their target was the door of the Tegart fort. Eddy adds. “I aimed for the door, [knowing that]

if I missed it, I could not help striking the building.

“Morrie loaded the round and I aimed over open sights and fired. I did not manage to hit the door, but the explosion caused a big cloud of dust. When it finally cleared, the door opened. A lot of people poured out of the building – women, children and soldiers, their leaders waving a white flag.”

Eddy pauses for a moment, recollecting how much relief he felt at the scene, rather than triumph. “Had I hit the, I believe a number of whom and children would have been killed. I thank G-d I missed.”



*The Beersheba ‘tank’, actually a six-pounder mounted on a half-track, and crew who helped to capture Beersheba. Eddy Magid is top right, in vest.*

The loss of Beersheba was a severe blow to the Arabs. It opened the way for Israel to push further south towards the northern tip of the Red Sea, where the town of Eilat was later built, west – in the direction of the Egyptian border – and even east, where the Jordanians had their strongholds.

Reports reached the Israeli command that the Jordanian Arab Legion and Hebron villagers were preparing a counter-attack to retake Beersheba. Only one main route was available to them. Destroying a bridge on the road the attackers would use would hold them back and might even prevent an assault on Beersheba. The road itself was the only way through the rough desert landscape.

The order came from the Israeli commanders to blow up the bridge. It was not a simple assignment and certainly not a case of just driving there.

Eddy and the members of his crew were instructed to “volunteer” to go to the bridge with the Beersheba tank, another half-track and some infantry, including a demolition squad.

“The bridge had to be blown up,” eddy

says. "Our half-track was to be used as a tank. The terrain was difficult, with large rocks and high mountains on either side of the road.

"We knew we could meet either the Jordanians or the Egyptians. The road was narrow. On some sections, it was not possible to turn around quickly. We were told we should know what we were letting ourselves in for" – although they actually had no choice in the matter.

Morrie Egdes led the half-track, with Eddy as the gunner. "We set out during the night," Eddy continues, "It was eerie. I suppose any desert at night is eerie, the Negev even more so. As we approached the bridge, fire poured down on us from the mountains, but we forged ahead. The road itself was clear.

"We arrived at the bridge, still under heavy fire, and crouched against the armour plating. The demolition men jumped out with their high explosives and began wiring the bridge. Someone was hit in the other half-track.

"The officer came running up to me. He said: 'Fire back!'"

"It's pitch dark,' I responded. 'I can't see them at all.'

"Just watch where the little sparks are, where they're firing from. As soon as you see a spark from their guns, fire!' the

officer yelled.

"I watched for the source of the little flashes on the mountain," Eddy says. "Without taking aim at anything in particular, I fired, traversing the other side of the road. I am certain I did not hit anything, but the firing died down. We were using high explosives. They are not like armour-piercing shells. The high explosives land with a big bang, throwing out shrapnel in all directions. At night, they are frightening. The enemy must have realised we were firing at their flashes."

The demolition men succeeded in blowing up the bridge. The driver of Eddy's vehicle turned around slowly, moving backwards and forwards several times, and making three or four turns before he was able to face back the way they had come. They suffered two more casualties before they could set off for Beersheba again. But there was no counter-attack from the enemy on Beersheba itself.

The final key battle on the southern front was at Al Auja, today the youth village of Nitzana on the Egyptian-Israeli border. The Israeli Eighth Brigade, in which Eddy served, began the assault on 26 December, 1948, finally taking the last two Egyptian positions two days later, after a major engagement.

This battle was one of three in the region that triggered a complete Egyptian withdrawal along the road west from Beersheba and effectively marked the end of the Egyptian campaign in Palestine.

But the Egyptians were still capable of striking Israel, even at that late stage. Returning to their base at Lydda after one action only weeks before the final cease-fire, the Israeli armoured corps troops found that Egyptian planes had carried out a surprise bombing attack on the Lydda airport. Fortunately, only the cookhouse was hit, but some of the buildings were seriously damaged. However, the Israelis suffered no casualties, as the building was unoccupied at the time.

The Israeli War of Independence ended on the Egyptian front in January 1949, setting the armistice lines – not international boundaries – that lasted until the 1967 Six Day War.

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***Eddy Magid (standing) with elder brother and fellow Machalnik David. The brothers were reunited in Beersheba after Israeli forces captured the town.***



## “IT WAS MEDICINE AFTER THE CAMPS” - A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR PARTICIPATES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

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Veronica Belling

When visiting Henia Bryer in her beautifully appointed apartment in Larmenier Retirement Village in Vredehoek, Cape Town, it is hard to believe that this beautifully groomed elegant lady has such a harrowing tale to tell. Henia is a Holocaust survivor from Poland. Together with her mother, she survived incarceration in several concentration camps, and a death march, to finally make it to Palestine with Aliyah Bet in 1947. After five years she met her husband, Maurice Bryer from Bloemfontein, who was visiting his family in Haifa. Some months after they were married they left Israel to live in Bloemfontein. It was only supposed to be for a year, but 68 years later she is still in South Africa. The couple moved to Cape Town in 2012. Although Henia's Holocaust experiences have been recorded in an hour-long BBC documentary and there is an interview with her at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, because she lived away from the main centres of Jewry in Cape Town and Johannesburg, her story as a survivor is less known. It was not recorded in the collection, *In Sacred Memory*, edited by Gwynne Robins in 1995,<sup>1</sup> and her unforgettable years in Israel before, during and after the 1948 War of Independence have never been told.

Henia attends a Yiddish class that I have been conducting at the Cape Jewish Seniors for the past three years. While she speaks a fluent Yiddish, her mother tongue is Polish. When she was little her parents brought 'a *rebbe* to the house - a *melamed*' to teach the children that language as they were not taught it at school. (There was a Yiddish school in Radom, but Henia did not attend it). However her grandparents spoke in Yiddish to the grandchildren. Henia's mother later visited her regularly in Bloemfontein and as

a result even her eldest son can speak and understand Yiddish! After Henia left Israel, it was the language in which she and her mother corresponded.

Henia tantalises the class with glimpses of her life in pre-war Poland, as well as of her experiences in Israel between 1947 and 1952. The aim of our interview was ostensibly not to discuss her Holocaust experiences as much as her life in Radom and most particularly her time in Israel. But it is impossible to tell her story without framing it in the context of the Holocaust.

Henia was born in Radom, a city 100 km southwest of Warsaw, on 10 December 1925. In those days, Radom was "quite a big city, not a *shtetle*. There were buses trains, taxis, and *droszkes* (horse drawn cabs)." The family lived in a six roomed apartment in a three storey block. They were very comfortable and lacked for nothing. They had a grand piano in the living room ("the first thing the 'bloody Nazis' took" Henia remarks).



*Elimelech and Miriam Fishman with their children, Yehuda Hirsh, Henia and Mila*

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Henia's Yiddish name is Hinde and her Hebrew name Ayala, but she was always known by the Polish name of Henia - even in Israel. Henia's father was Elimelech Fishman. Her mother was Miriam but was called by the very Polish-sounding name of Maria Studnia. Henia was the second oldest of four siblings. Her older brother Yehuda Hirsh, two years her senior, was unable to walk because of a birth defect. Every year, his mother took him to Vienna, which before the war was the medical centre of Europe. He had 'hundreds of operations' and could eventually be able to walk with calipers and go to school. Henia's had another brother, Avram, and a sister, Mila.

Henia first went to a Polish Catholic school, a private institution with few Jewish children. She spent four years there. One day, her mother came to fetch her early, when the children were eating lunch: "In front of me was a beautiful roll with butter and ham and a glass of milk. I did not know what I was eating. My mother took one look and nearly fainted. And at the end of the year she took me out of the school. But I had no complaints about the school, I loved it".

Henia's parents were not religious but everything was strictly kosher (because "that's the way it was in those days"). Her father wore modern clothes and most of the workers at his shoe factory were Polish. He was a *Kohen*, and on Saturday and Sunday his factory was closed. He went to *shul* on *yontef* and the family celebrated the festivals. Of her grandparents, Henia says:

I went back to Poland their house was still standing. My grandfather had a timber mill; he cut down trees for builders. And on the other side of his factory he built a distillery, a very sophisticated one. He always made wine for Pesach from apples, grapes, or berries. The children were not allowed in - not into the factory, nor the distillery. We could only look through the windows! My grandparents immigrated to Israel in 1938; four sons and a daughter had been there for many years, having arrived with the Second Aliyah when they were youngsters. My grandfather was very *frum* and also very clever. He knew many languages and would write letters for the peasants - in German when the Germans occupied Poland or in Russian during the Russian occupation - Poland was always under one or other occupation throughout the centuries. He was not a Hasid but a *Mitnaged*,<sup>2</sup> but he believed that if you didn't die in Israel, your *neshome* [soul] wandered all over the world before it arrived there. So he wanted to save himself the trip! I remember my

grandmother saying that they were not going to eat anything on the way. So she baked and baked for months and took all the food with her. They had to get to Trieste to take the boat to Palestine. When we eventually arrived in Palestine, they were still alive.

Back in Radom, Henia went to the Hebrew *Gimnasye Hoveve Da'at* [Lovers of Knowledge], a very good school where the language of instruction was Polish. She remained in the primary school for only two years before she was promoted. Because her brother had a tutor at home - there were then no kindergartens in Radom and children stayed home until they were six - Henia was able to listen in on her brother's lessons and was advanced for her age. Thus she managed to finish four classes of the *gimnasye* before they created the ghetto. At school her subjects were Hebrew, German and Polish, Geography, History and Latin (her favourite subject). They also had Nature Studies and Music, and attended a concert once a week. To this day Henia is passionate about classical music:

You had to learn those subjects, because in Poland you couldn't choose subjects, you chose a school. Either a school of Humanities with many languages - geography, history and ancient history that came with Latin - or a technical school with mathematics and science. I didn't go to school until matric because the war broke out but we learnt in the ghetto. All the professors were there and they gave us lessons. My father wouldn't allow us to go into the street because it was dangerous so the teachers would organise small groups. Whichever teacher was available my father engaged. I will never forget how he came home with a Professor of Calligraphy from Krakau, and I learnt calligraphy. Then he came with a teacher of Accounting and I hated it. But we stayed home and that was how we occupied ourselves. We also gave lessons to the younger children, teaching them to read and to write Polish.

Henia was nearly fourteen when the war started on 1 September 1939. According to the *Yivo Encyclopedia of the Jews in Eastern Europe*,

With the Nazi occupation of 1939, Radom became the capital of one of the four districts of the General Gouvernement. With forced resettlements, the city's Jewish population increased dramatically, reaching about 33000 in 1942. In April 1941, the



Germans established two ghettos in the city – the ‘large ghetto’ in the city center and the ‘small’ ghetto in the Glinica neighbourhood. Despite extreme hardship and persecution, ghetto residents organized a well-developed network of self-help organizations and a civilian resistance movement that included clandestine schooling, a theatre and literary activities. The Germans liquidated the Glinica ghetto on 4 August 1942, the larger ghetto 12 days later. Most of Radom’s Jews were murdered at Treblinka. About 3000 remained in town as labourers; in the end they were housed in a camp in Szkolna Street, which from 1944 was linked to the Majdanek concentration camp. In the summer of 1944, most were sent to the Valhingen camp near Stuttgart, where the survivors were liberated.<sup>3</sup>

These historical facts tally with Henia’s memories. She says, “One day they had an *akzion* and transferred 20 000 Jews to Treblinka. We were transferred to the main ghetto and the second ghetto was totally liquidated. We couldn’t go out at night as there was a curfew.” Henia’s family were among the Jews who remained in Radom after the liquidation of the ‘large’ ghetto: “Initially the family was safe as my father had a shoe factory that the Germans needed for the war effort. However they confiscated the shoes and the leather, and he had to work for them.”

Henia’s disabled brother was shot in the ghetto when they liquidated the hospital. Henia was supposed to go to the hospital the very same morning as she had a sore tooth that needed extracting. When they evacuated the patients from the hospital before murdering them, her brother took off his coat and gave it to his mother, saying, “Where I’m going I won’t need a coat.” Henia’s younger brother, Avram, who also survived, was separated from the rest of the family quite early on and sent to work in a munitions factory. They did not meet up with him until many years later.

In 1943, Henia was sent from the ghetto to a forced labour camp, where she spent nearly a year while her parents and little sister remained in Radom. At the end of 1943 only 3000 people were left in the former ghetto. At the beginning of 1944, she and her family were sent from the camp on Szkolna Street on the last transport to Majdanek concentration camp. Of Majdanek, Henia recalls:

It was a horrible place. There were Russians and Poles and all sorts of people. Fortunately it was 1944, and the Russians

were coming, so we were only in Majdanek for six weeks. We worked there making baskets for the bombs. These were long cylinders, handmade baskets soaked in water.<sup>4</sup> We had to make eight a day and heaven help you if you did not fill the quota. The younger women would help the older women to fill their quotas. I would make twelve cylinders. There was a very good relationship between the women, who helped each other a lot.

In 1944, the family was transferred to the Plaszow concentration camp near Krakau. This was where Oscar Schindler’s factory was located (and where the movie *Schindler’s List* was filmed). In 1944 Plaszow was liquidated because the Russians were approaching. It was there that Henia’s father and young sister Mila were murdered. Despite having come back hale and hearty after serving in the Russian army for ten years, Elimelech Fishman was unable to come to terms with the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews (“He was bewildered and he couldn’t cope. He was beaten to death in Plaszow”). Mila, then twelve years old, was killed in a roundup of the children in the Plaszow camp. Oscar Schindler managed to save his workers’ children but the rest were murdered in a children’s *akzion*.

In October 1944, Miriam and Henia were sent to Auschwitz. They arrived on the eve of Yom Kippur, and as they wanted to fast, they were punished by not receiving any food for two days. On the other hand, the woman in charge of Henia’s section took ‘a shine’ to her as she could not believe that she was Jewish and hence gave her extra food. She even took photographs of Henia and sent them to her family to show that not all Jews conformed to the image that was being conveyed by the Nazis.

When Auschwitz was liquidated in January 1945, Henia went on the death march. Her mother remained behind as she was too weak to be sent with her. Fortunately the Germans did not have time to murder everybody before they left, so she survived and was liberated by the Russians on 27 January 1945.

From Auschwitz they walked through the middle of the night to Breslau and from there through the forests to Bergen Belsen. “That camp was the worst of the lot,” says Henia, “There was typhus there and no food, medication - there was nothing. We washed ourselves with snow.”

In 1945 Bergen Belsen, located near Hamburg, Germany, was liberated by the British. Says Henia: “The British came and looked and then drove away, not to return for two days. They weren’t very kind; they were still fighting a war.” Henia was very

sick at the time. She had typhus and had only snow for medication. Her best friend had just died. After the liberation, she remembers that thousands of people died because they were given the wrong food. When Henia had recovered from typhus she still had third degree abrasions on her feet, the result of walking barefoot in the snow. A Hungarian woman stole her shoes ("There were many Hungarians Jews with us. We called them *tsigayners* - gypsies"). She didn't remain at Bergen Belsen very long as the Jews from Radom, most of who had been sent to the Valhingen camp, had gathered in nearby Stuttgart. A friend came to fetch her and took her to Stuttgart, where she was eventually reunited with Miriam.

Stuttgart was under American control. Henia remembers the Americans as being "totally different [to the British]. They were supported by UNNRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, as well as by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, who sent a rabbi and established a kitchen. They looked after us very well. They requisitioned a street where we lived in apartment blocks." Miriam had gone back to Radom, where she stayed until she was able to travel. While in Radom, she went to the local magistrate and got copies of the papers for a large property that the family owned, and which was registered in her name. The papers were found in her flat in Haifa after her death fifty years later, by which time Poland had freed itself from Soviet domination.

From Stuttgart, Miriam and Henia went to Paris, where the late Elimelech Fishman's younger brother lived with his wife and three children. The family had survived the Nazi occupation and Vichy period by placing their children in convents. They were all blond and blue eyed and nobody suspected them of being Jewish. When Henia's uncle learned that his sister-in-law and niece were in Stuttgart, he sent a car with two Polish officers to fetch them. To avoid the risk of being detained, they dressed up in Polish uniforms and crossed over quite easily.

Henia and her mother remained in Paris from the end of 1945 until mid-1947. They lived in an apartment not far from the Jewish Quarter (known as "the *Pletzel*"). A morning job was found for Henia while her mother helped her sister-in-law around the house. After finishing work around 3 p.m., Henia would go directly to the Alliance Francaise, where she learnt French language and culture. She visited every museum in the city and acquired "an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Paris Metro".

Although only 8% of DPs chose to immigrate to Palestine, there was never any

doubt in the minds of Miriam and Henia that this was their final destination. The family was very Zionist. Miriam's four brothers and a sister were already living there, together with her parents. Henia had attended a Zionist youth movement in Radom, called Akiba. It was a general Zionist youth group, neither religious nor socialist. While in Paris they tried to get papers to go to Palestine, but it was impossible as there were such strict quotas. Finally Moshe Fishman, one of Miriam's brothers in Haifa managed to organise papers for them via the *Mossad l'Aliya Bet*, the organisation for the illegal immigration of Jews initiated after the issuing of the British White Paper in 1939.<sup>5</sup>

They left from Marseilles where the DPs were accommodated in a huge transit camp supported by the Zionist Organisation while they waited for a ship to take them to Palestine. Henia recalls how all the young people were roped in to help to pack food and supplies into the legendary illegal immigration ship, the *Exodus*, that sailed to Palestine on 11 July 1947 only to be attacked and turned back.<sup>6</sup> Henia and her mother were still there six weeks later when the ill-fated passengers returned. Finally they travelled on a Greek liner with a cabin to themselves and were able to dock safely in Haifa.

When they arrived in Palestine, her younger brother, Avram, was already in Israel. After being liberated in 1945, he had been taken there by the Youth Aliya and sent to Kibbutz Hulata in the Hula Valley. There, they were planting eucalyptus trees to drain the swamps. When they arrived he came to live with them.

Three of Henia's mother's brothers were living in Haifa. A fourth lived in Tel-Aviv. One brother in Haifa took her and Henia to live in his home at 5 Rehov Rambam, a wooden hut on top of the mountain in the Hadar. They shared a downstairs room, which could just fit in three beds and a cupboard. Her uncle lived on top together with his daughter. The toilet was in the veld and the



**Henia's identity card, issued by the British Mandatory authorities**





*The young Henia Fishman, shortly after her arrival in Israel*

shower in the garden. There was cold water only. The kitchen was not much more than a square metre, with a primus stove and a kettle. They stayed there for about a year.

Henia did not have to learn Hebrew, as she had learned it at school in Poland. She thus went straight to night school. However she had to find a job as well. Her uncle Moshe managed to find her a position with the English firm Spinneys, a general supply store that he worked for. As she was unable to speak English, she was given a job in the library. Henia worked at Spinneys until the declaration of the State of Israel, when the firm moved out of Israel and she was drafted into the army.

To illustrate the atmosphere between Jews and the Mandatory authorities, Henia remembers how a relationship between a young attractive German Jewess who worked on the front desk and a British man (who would take her to the English Club after work) was strongly frowned upon. She also remembers the “terrible day” when Dov Bela Gruner was hanged. Born in Hungary in 1912, Gruner was a member of the pre-State underground militia, the Irgun. He was executed on 19 April 1947 on account of “firing on policemen and setting explosive charges with the intent of killing personnel on His Majesty’s service.”<sup>7</sup>

Henia is euphoric when describing the rejoicing and the celebration in the streets on the evening that the State of Israel was declared. While they were casting the votes,

cafes on Rehov Herzl were handing out free drinks “It was medicine after the camps,” said Henia. “I didn’t mind the hut, the lack of amenities, we were free citizens.”

When the Arabs began shooting the following day, Henia immediately received her call up papers. But, she says, “There was no army! I don’t know how we won that war!” The newly established State tried to get arms. Parts of planes were brought from Europe and assembled in Israel. The army had to acquire uniforms as there was no time to manufacture them. They were donated from a variety of countries and arrived together with the arms and ammunition. The first batch came from Czechoslovakia. Henia’s uniform was from Canada. Although it was somewhat darker than the other uniforms, it fitted her “like a glove.” Unfortunately the army could not provide her with shoes so that she had to wear her own sandals. On returning home one wet weekend, her feet soaked, her family collected money between them so that she could buy herself some shoes.



*Henia's call-up papers, dated 11 May 1948*

With the fighting commenced the Arab exodus. Henia fervently maintains that the Arabs were not forced to leave:

If anybody tells you that we threw the Arabs out I can swear that it is not true. There were loudspeakers on each side of the road. On the one side the Arabs broadcast, “Join your brothers and we will throw the Jews into the sea.” And on the other side of the road the Israelis broadcast, “Stay where you are



*In uniform during the Israeli War of Independence*



*Henia's war service medal*

and nothing will happen to you." But the Arabs were scared and they chose to follow their brothers. Those who stayed had a very good life. The Druze stayed on top of the Carmel in Haifa.

Henia's younger brother served in a very dangerous capacity. He had to travel on a motor cycle into Arab villages to check if there were any snipers left there. As he was the only surviving son, the family had him moved to a safer post. He became a specialist in repairing arms and ammunition.

The women were auxiliary forces and did not go the front. Henia's camp, known as Stella Maris, was situated on the top of Mount Carmel alongside the Stella Maris Monastery. From that vantage point, she says, they could see the wreck of the *Altalena*, the ship carrying arms and ammunition for the Irgun. The ship was attacked off the coast of Kfar Vitkin on 20 June 1948 by the newly created Israel Defence Forces under orders from David Ben Gurion. Sixteen veteran fighters were killed.<sup>8</sup>

The women performed a variety of duties. Alongside their camp was the Air force base, but as there were no aeroplanes, Henia says they filled Molotov bottles [cocktails]. At one stage they were sent to look out for foreign planes. On occasion even the women were required to do guard duty. For this they were given two weeks of training in the use of weapons in Sarafand, an evacuated Arab village near Ramle. The women were given Sten guns and grenades of which they were completely ignorant ("The trainer was a Hungarian woman who barely knew Hebrew. What was more she trained us with live ammunition and could have killed us! It was like the tower of Babel .... primitive. It was not an army").

Henia served with Menachem Meyerson, son of future Prime Minister, Golda Meir (who used to visit him). He played the cello and she remembers a recital that he and three others gave. After the war, he went to the United States to continue his musical studies. Henia continually stresses the lack of formality in a rag-tag army that was all but formed overnight. The practice of saluting senior officers barely existed, for example (an officer was likely to be someone's grandson or cousin). They were more like one big family than an army.

Next, Henia was transferred to the Haifa office of the Military Canteen Shekem, the army supplies headquarters situated outside the city at Khayat Beach. She did the accounts and issued the ration supplies for every unit. "On the one side were the huge store rooms and on the other was the building that housed the offices", she recalls, "It opened at seven in the morning and I had to take two buses to get there. We were not allowed to speak about what we were doing, as we knew the location and size of every unit. It was a wonderful job and I met wonderful people." After two years in the army, she was asked to stay on to work as a civilian: "If there was a boat in the harbour they would ask the staff of Shekem to come for supper. I couldn't pass Rechov Herzl without somebody shouting "Henia do you want a lift?" Everybody knew me! Those were heady days."



Right next to Shekem was a *ma'abarah*, one of the transitional camps introduced in 1950 to provide temporary shelter for the thousands of new immigrants. They consisted of tents but were well equipped. Immigrants were provided with work and made responsible for looking after themselves.<sup>9</sup> The workers at Shekem were asked to help out in the *ma'abarah* after work. Says Henia: "At the time the immigrants were from Muslim countries. They were Arabic speaking and very dark skinned. They had lived under terrible conditions in their countries of origin and were unfamiliar with modern conveniences. They had never seen an electric light bulb before and were not used to the food. Most were sick - they suffered from trachoma and tuberculosis. WIZO sent mobile ambulances to examine them. They gave them mattresses made of straw to sleep on, and they climbed inside the mattresses!"

It was through these mobile clinics that Henia was able to change the life of a former school friend of hers from Poland. She had arrived in Israel before her, and was employed in a workers' kitchen doing manual labour. Henia knew that the mobile clinics were short of trained radiographers and were offering free training to potential candidates. She put her friend's name down, and in this way changed her life. She ended up working in one of the big hospitals.

Henia relates a special role that her mother played in the rebirth of the State of Israel. As soon as independence was declared, the first Jewish police station was opened in the harbour area in Haifa, and Miriam Fishman ran its first canteen: "She couldn't speak Hebrew very well but spoke Yiddish - they all spoke Yiddish and they loved her. She made cakes for them and got a Rumanian helper to do the cleaning. It was a simple canteen, coffee and tea and sandwiches. She worked there until she retired."

After the war, Henia's brother left Kibbutz Hulata and studied architecture, going on to become a very successful architect. As there was no money left for her to study, Henia had to make do with night school. Since both she and her mother were working, they were able to move to their own apartment.

Henia waxes euphoric when reminiscing about the first years of the State:

In the first year there was not a big celebration for Yom Ha-Atzma'ut because we were still mourning all those who had lost their lives during the war. But marching in uniform in the second Independence Day parade in Haifa was the proudest day of my life.

We never missed a concert of the Israel Philharmonic with Zubin Mehta. We heard

the greatest artists: Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, Pinchas Zukerman, Jascha Heifitz - he was the best. At one time Menuhin was boycotted because directly after the war he gave a concert in Germany in aid of German orphans. The Israelis considered it to be a slap in the face. On two occasions when he came to Israel, the orchestra refused to play with him, so he was accompanied by his sister Hephzibah, who was a pianist. Then he wrote an article in the paper and apologised and the orchestra agreed to play with him again. Besides violinists there were pianists, opera singers, Spanish dancers. We never missed a performance of the Habimah Theatre with Chana Rubiner, Yaffa Yarkoni, Shoshana Damari. I was happy in Israel. It was alive, it was wonderful. Over the weekends we would go on day outings to Tiberius or Rosh Hanikra. The men would requisition a jeep from the army. On Saturday night there were nightclubs on Mount Carmel, and we went dancing.

There were no supermarkets, but there were *makolet* (general stores). There was rationing. It was known as "*Dov Yosefs tsaytn*" (Dov Yosef's times), Dov Yosef being the government minister in charge of rationing and food distribution during the period, known as the *Tzena*, that lasted for about six years).<sup>10</sup>

There was no meat at all, only chicken for the children. But they had fresh fruit and vegetables, fish, wonderful herrings, and milk products from Tnuva. Nobody was hungry. We didn't see meat for six years. My cousin, who had a farm in Merchavyah near Afula, would send us a chicken from time to time. On the radio they used to broadcast vegetarian recipes. Eggplant was very popular as it was very versatile to make dishes such as mock chopped liver. Because I worked for Shekem I could get extra supplies. There was a biscuit factory and a chocolate factory and I was the supplier of chocolate for all the children in the family!

There were also tough times especially in Haifa where there was a large Arab population. When the British left, all the government offices and police stations were left to the Arabs not to the Jews. But there was such freedom, such a wonderful atmosphere. It didn't matter if you lived in a hut or in a villa - nobody minded.

Henia met future husband Maurice Bryer in Haifa in 1952. Together with his brother, he was on a camping holiday in Europe and had come to Haifa to visit his cousins. Henia

happened to visit the Bryers whilst he was there and, as she puts it, “that was that”.

When it came to making her wedding dress, there was a shortage of white silk, so she got married in blue. The wedding was held in a cafe in the Hadar. Henia was fortunate that she worked for Shekem and so was able to obtain sufficient rations to cater for it. Even so, it was not an elaborate affair.

The couple stayed in Israel for a few months after they were married. Maurice knew Hebrew, having studied at the Talmud Torah (Hebrew afternoon school) in Bloemfontein from Standard Two to matric with the well-known South African Hebrew teacher, Mr J. Blesovsky. He worked in Haifa for an oil company for a few months but felt that he was not sufficiently proficient in Hebrew for business and wanted to return to his family in Bloemfontein.

In 1952 Henia arrived in South Africa. She was heartbroken to leave her mother, brother and large extended family and found it hard to adapt to life in Bloemfontein. Maurice went into business with his father, while Henia became a Hebrew teacher at the same Talmud Torah where Maurice had studied. By that time, Mr Blesovsky had left to become principal of the Talmud Torah in Sea Point, Cape Town. She did not train at the Hebrew Teaching Seminary in Johannesburg, but studied by correspondence. Rabbi Klewansky and Rabbi Dr Gerald Mazabow alternately came to Bloemfontein to give her private tuition. She qualified and was admitted to the Hebrew and Yiddish Teachers Association.

In those years there were 160 children at the Bloemfontein Talmud Torah and four full-time teachers. There were four classes and students attended for an hour in the afternoon from Monday to Friday. Although there were four levels, most pupils left after bar or batmitzvah, very few continuing to matric. Classes were supervised by the Inspector of Hebrew, who came out from Johannesburg every three to six months. The syllabus comprised Modern Hebrew, *Tanach* (Bible) and the Festivals.

As time went by, the number of pupils

decreased, until Henia was the only teacher left. She finally stopped teaching about fifteen years ago, when her eyesight deteriorated due to macular degeneration. In 2012, she and Maurice moved to Cape Town, where both of their sons and their families were living. Maurice passed away three years ago, just short of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Interviewing Henia was an inspiration and a privilege. Although I came away somewhat shaken by her memories of the Holocaust, I was totally enchanted by her experiences with the Aliyah Bet and her six years in Israel. The events that she witnessed and in which she participated are the stuff of legend. They embody the very essence of the modern-day Jewish experience and the miracle of the survival of the Jewish people.

## NOTES

- 1 *In Sacred Memory: Recollections of the Holocaust*, edited by Gwynne Schrire, Holocaust Memorial Council, 1995.
- 2 An opponent of the Hasidic movement.
- 3 Yivo, Radom, <http://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Radom>
- 4 ‘a rotationally dispersing aviation bomb’ was a Soviet-made droppable bomb dispenser that combined a large high-explosive charge with a cluster of incendiary bombs. During the Bristol blitz the locals dubbed a similar German device, “Goering’s bread-basket”, see, “Molotov read basket”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov\\_bread\\_basket](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov_bread_basket)
- 5 Zionism and Israel, Encyclopedic Dictionary, Aliya Bet Definition, [http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Aliya\\_Bet.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Aliya_Bet.htm)
- 6 Immigration to Israel, “Exodus 1947”, Illegal immigration ship, July 1947, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-exodus-1947-quot-illegal-immigration-ship>
- 7 Dov Gruner, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dov\\_Gruner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dov_Gruner)
- 8 Fire in the hole: blasting the Altalena, *Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/fire-in-the-hole-blasting-the-altalena/>
- 9 “Israel, State of (Aliyah and Absorption), *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 9, pp. 536-537.
- 10 Tablet Notebook, Israel’s Mister Austerity, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/120697/israels-mister-austerity>



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# IT WASN'T ALL WAR

\*

Ellie Isserow

When the call went out from to Jews all over the Diaspora to help build and defend the new-born State of Israel, 810 South Africans volunteered. I was one of them. We formed the second largest contingent of *Machal*. South Africa provided almost a quarter of the 3500 volunteers.

The following three stories, seen through the eyes of a young man, aged 21, recount some of the incidents I experienced during this time.

## The Biggest Blip

When I arrived in Israel in June 1948, I was posted to an airfield in the north, Ramat David. However, I was 'hijacked' before I could get there. For the first time in my life I had become a desirable object – a real live qualified fitter and turner.

A group of South Africans, Americans and local Israelis sequestered in Rehovot were engaged in building a radar set, using a set of drawings smuggled into Israel in the lid of a suitcase. The suitcase was the property of Max Barlin, an architect by profession, who had served in a radar unit in the South African army.

The departing British had either taken away or destroyed all vestiges of their previous radar installations. The intention was to withhold any information about radar from the newly established Israeli state, whose inhabitants the Arab armies had sworn to drive into the sea.

I found myself huddled over a confusion of drawings, under the directions of eight amateur former engineers and radio technicians, none of whom could be described as radar fundi's. My task was to manufacture bits and pieces of whatever was lacking – a rather tall order, since everything was in fact lacking.

Our workplace was situated in what was to

become the Weizmann Institute of Science. It consisted then of three buildings, destined to be laboratories, next to the Sive Institute of Agriculture. We were housed in one of these buildings. A second was a peculiar edifice with only one door, continually under guard, through which white-coated acolytes came and went. This building was wreathed in steam and smoke, and now and then seemed to be the cause of electricity blackouts in the Rehovot area. We subsequently discovered, after getting one of the acolytes drunk at 2 a.m., that the mysterious denizen of this building was "The Golem". Our inebriated friend explained that this was a computer, which he said was a 'breeder', one of the few of its kind in the world. He proceeded to equip myself and Maurice Ostroff<sup>1</sup> with white coats and escort us inside. There we saw cabinets with wheels, pulleys and wide ribbons of paper that jockeyed back and forth, apparently controlled by people punching keyboards. "The Golem", our drunken guide told us expansively, was "a god of a million memories".

After this encounter, Maurice explained to me that this monster consumed a considerable amount of electricity and created a great deal of heat, due to its use of banks of radio valves resembling light bulbs in all shapes and sizes. It required a large water cooling system, which was the source of the steam and smoke emanating from the building.

The third building was one to avoid. It housed gaseous experiments – gases such as a "tear-gas" derivative – and created the basic explosives for the Davidka, that enormous mortar whose explosive capabilities convinced the Arabs that the Jews were in possession of the atomic bomb.

In addition to our laboratory, we were given the use of the machine-shop of the Sive Institute. However, we were only allowed to use that at night. It was in that machine-shop that I met up with my nemesis – my mortal enemy – the acetylene producer. (No bottled acetylene was then available.) This ghastly device dripped water on to a container of carbide, producing the noxious gas which, when mixed with oxygen (at least that was providentially available in steel bottles), enabled me to weld an antenna designed by Maurice Ostroff. Maurice got his just desserts, because he had to help

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*Ellie Isserow served as a volunteer in the Israeli Air Force in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, where he was instrumental in developing the first basic radar system. He has been writing for many years and has developed an extensive collection of poetry, essays, short stories as well as children's books. His most recent writing is a collection of stories, entitled It Wasn't All War, based on the lighter side of his experiences during 1948.*

me cut hundreds of lengths of piping with a hacksaw. I welded these, continually hindered by that malevolent bastard, the acetylene producer.

After one continuous 24-hour working session, suddenly there it lay in all its glory – a mattress antenna, a porcupine of pipes. I could have sworn that Rumpelstiltskin was there somewhere.

It was my good fortune to have been trained by an Italian master tradesman, who taught me that a lathe is not only for turning. I was thus able to make a fair number of parts that surprised even me. In the mean-time, the technicians had created a ghoulish thing that Heath Robinson would have been proud to own. It had a screen – where that came from, I have no idea. I fashioned a visor out of a piece of tin plate.

There the radar set stood, a series of valves, connections of wire, knobs that I had made and knurled on the lathe, and probably a bird's nest or two. Up went the antenna onto a flat roof. The radar set was rolled into position. Max Barlin, the officer in charge, seated himself in front of the screen, surrounded by a haggard crew of newly-qualified radar experts. In an expectant silence, he glued his eyes to the visor and said "Switch on!"

We watched, waited and silently prayed that we were not going to be electrocuted or hurled into the gas and explosive laboratory. Max turned the bicycle pedals, chains and gears we had contrived in the absence of a motor to turn the antenna. He grunted



*Erecting the antenna*

something unintelligible, then turned and said, "It's working!"

The quivering graphic line representing a time and distance base blipped on the movements of various vehicles and aircraft. But when the antenna was turned to the north-west, a very large blip appeared and sat solidly on the screen, without movement. We checked, again and again, but could find no problem in the radar set. However, the blip stayed put.

Mort Kaplan was an American whose presence in the unit puzzled the rest of us. His technical knowledge was nil, but he served as a comic to keep our spirits up. Mort appeared at this critical moment with a map of the Middle East.

"Do you know," he offered, with a courtesy that would have done justice to a Shakespearean court scene, "I fancy that could be the island of Cyprus!"

It was.

The British, with all their technology, had never been able to pick up Cyprus on their conventional radar. But the Weizmann Wizards had done it.

"*Baruch ha-bah!*" Radar had arrived in the Jewish State.



*Radar is born in Israel*

### **Dayan and the Mosquito**

"Hell!" said my neighbour Sam, the Officer in Charge of the Transport Squadron Maintenance at the airfield. "It's Thursday and that means it's the bloody Officers' Night!"

Our Commanding Officer at the airfield had picked up a few of the British customs. One was gym sessions which ended soon



after they were started due to the reluctance of the participants. Airmen don't drill or exercise – they fly. Another was the Officers' Night on a Thursday, which was mandatory. Attendees were treated to a good meal and then subjected to a lecture of a military nature by some army personage of note.

Sam and I travelled daily to the airfield in the comfort of a bus on the days when I didn't carry him on the back of my motorbike.

On this particular Thursday Sam and I had come to work by bus. We had no intention of attending the Officers' Night as required, so I conjured up a story and went into the Adjutant's office to deliver it, only to find a one-eyed man seated on the edge of the desk. His sitting on the desk was a sure sign that he was a ranking officer in the Israeli army. We greeted each other cordially and I proceeded to tell our Adjutant, Mordechai, that I would not be able to attend the Officer's supper as the hydraulics of our one and only surveying-and-photographing plane, a Mosquito, was giving trouble.

Mordechai agreed to excuse us and I informed Sam of the meeting's successful outcome. We waited and watched from a hidden vantage point as our fellow officers trooped obediently into the mess. As soon as the last had entered, Sam and I hit the road, on foot, to Tel Aviv, some sixty kilometres away.

We hoped to get a lift as the road was a passably busy one, but luck deserted us, and it looked as though we would have to walk all the way to Tel Aviv or return to our base. After hiking for what seemed like hours we were relieved to see slits of light approaching in the distance. These were the headlights of a car and they appeared this way because a black-out was being observed. We waved the vehicle down and I immediately saw that the driver was the gentleman who had been sitting on the edge of Mordechai's desk, and whom, I presumed, was the lecturer for the night. He offered us a lift to Tel Aviv and was very affable, chatting easily with us in heavily accented English. He went out of his way to drive us to our apartment block and we expressed our profuse thanks as he dropped us off.

As he drove away, Sam said "Do you know who that guy was?"

"No idea," I replied.

"I think he was Moshe Dayan!"

Eight years passed. I had returned to South Africa and was now living in Port Elizabeth. There was a great hubbub taking place due to the visit of none other than General Moshe Dayan and his wife. A meeting was organised in a large hall in the town, which was filled to capacity for

the address by one of the heroes of the Israeli war. I naturally attended, with my wife, and applauded as Dayan, now Chief of Staff of the IDF, stood up to give his address. In conclusion he said how much he was enjoying his visit to South Africa and apologised for his poor command of English – which was undeniable.

The Chairman thanked the honoured guest and then to my great surprise, requested that Mr Isserow and his wife meet with General Dayan at the end of the meeting.

The audience was agog that I should be so singled out. After the meeting, as requested, I approached Dayan and his wife, Ruth, and introduced myself. To my surprise, it wasn't he who addressed us but Ruth, who earlier that day had given a talk to the ladies of Port Elizabeth – an event which my wife had been unable to attend. Unbeknown to me, Ruth Dayan had been on close terms with my mother in Israel and had been commissioned with the task of passing on her greetings to my family while visiting Port Elizabeth. She had hoped to see my wife at her talk, and humorously berated her, saying, "You naughty girl! Why didn't you come to my meeting?"

The General had been observing me closely during this exchange. Without taking his eye off me he said to his wife, "Maybe she was having problems with a mosquito."

Our wives were understandably puzzled by that remark, but I was astounded. Moshe Dayan, the man of the time, indeed missed nothing. It is truly remarkable that after eight years he remembered, and with such clarity, a brief exchange that took place in an office - and the two young officers he met on a dark road to Tel Aviv.

## The Piano

This is the story of the unknown war which took place between two wings of the Israeli Air Force on the largest airbase in the Middle East.

Wing Four was the bomber squadron, reconnaissance and transport divisions of the air force based at Tel Nof. I was officer in charge of Ground Workshops for Wing Four. It consisted of eleven workshops including armaments and all services pertaining to the servicing of the aircraft.

It started with an emergency call for Wing Four to move to the north and the fighter Squadron (Squadron 100) to the south, as there appeared to be a threat from Egypt. Once the danger had diminished, one of the two B17s, a large American Bomber, returned to base, and I was ordered to meet the plane in order to disarm it.

I duly dispatched the bomb trolley, which

was a large six squared unit, and stationed it beneath the bomb bay door. When it opened, to my amazement, a piano was loaded onto the trolley and driven, accompanied by cheers from a gathering of airfield personnel, to the mess hall.

The piano had been stolen from Squadron 100 at Ramat David, and the instigator was one of our pilots, Milton Royce Botger - the mischievous and lively Puck of the Air Force. He had joined the volunteers [in South Africa], although he was not Jewish. By his own choice, he was known to all as "Butch Ben Yok" (Butch son of a Christian).



**Milton Royce 'Butch' Botger (1924-2008)**

The piano was installed in the mess hall but it was soon discovered that I was the only one who could play it, albeit in my own peculiar way. I was self-taught and could play only on the black keys. I subsequently became the piano player of Wing Four.

To ceremoniously welcome the piano, the lid was lifted and a beer poured inside it. I played the tune 'Sarje Marais', which was applauded by the South Africans. The piano soon became the life of the mess in the evenings, the playing accompanied by raucous singing and some slightly off-colour songs.

In the meantime the Squadron demanded the return of their piano which Wing Four, by this time, regarded as its rightful property. Butch insisted that it was legitimate loot. Constant harassment and many threats were ignored, but protests grew from another quarter too. The young Israeli pilots objected to songs they believed were unfit for the

ears of the young ladies who accompanied them to the mess.

After many weeks, it reached the stage where Air Force HQ sent through an order that the piano be returned to its rightful owner. I, in turn, was instructed to load the piano onto a trolley so that it could be lifted through the bomb bay doors of the B17 and returned to Ramat David. As I did this, I was surprised to find, parked beside the aircraft, an open three quarter truck loaded with toilet paper. When I enquired I was told by a rebellious Butch that he intended bombing Ramat David with the toilet paper.

It took a tremendous amount of dissuasion to prevent Butch from loading the toilet paper, almost inviting intervention by our boss, Gidon Gordon, until he reluctantly desisted. I still believe it would have been a sight worth witnessing.

Without the toilet paper, the B17 took off. It landed at Ramat David, veered off the runway and drove through a fence onto a kibbutz which bordered the airfield. The kibbutzniks were amazed to see an enormous plane with its bomb bay doors open, gently lowering a piano onto the field they'd been harrowing. The plane turned round, taxied back onto the runway, took off and returned to our airfield.

Aware of our disappointment, and in some cases, seething resentment, Gidon reluctantly went into Tel Aviv and bought us our own piano. It was installed in the position of the previous one, but Butch was dismayed when one of my carpenters was instructed to install locks – on the lid over the keys and on the lid on top of the piano. This meant that the piano could only be played at the discretion of the young Israeli crews who could now entertain their young ladies in peace.

I returned to the base ten years later to find that it was now entirely different from the one which I left, and was now a very much up-to-date fighter base. The only thing I recognised was the piano which had been installed in a now modern mess hall – a reminder of the secret war between Wing Four and Squadron 100 of the Israeli Air Force.

## Two Bombs

Morton Kaplan was something of a comedian who felt it was his duty to make us laugh. We used to walk to work and on the way we passed the police station. Mort thought it would be a good idea to show his family and friends back home how he spent his time in Israel. He led us inside, persuaded the policeman on duty to allow him into one of the cells and then asked



Maurice Ostroff to take a photograph of him clutching the bars.

When Mort tried to make his re-entry into freedom he found the door was a self-locking one. When we made enquiries we were told that the key to this particular cell had gone on leave for the weekend in the pocket of one of the policemen.

The upshot of this caper was that Mort was confined to a weekend behind bars. He was subsequently more cautious when it came to practical joking.

Our unit had been fairly isolated from the war thus far, but we had a taste of it one morning as we walked to work. We heard the roar of an approaching plane and leapt into a ditch running alongside the road, where an American by the name of Shaul scrambled into a concrete water pipe which ran under the road. We were right to take cover. The plane, an Egyptian one, dropped a bomb, which I imagine was intended for the Weizmann, but missed significantly, and landed fairly close to us.

As the bomb exploded, we trembled as the ground shook, and when we climbed out of the ditch, we were accompanied by a very green Shaul. He was covered in algae which coated the inside of the pipe. He certainly wasn't impressed at the laughter following what had been a fairly narrow escape. Shaul was henceforth known as the Green American.

Our second experience of being bombed was in Sarafand. It was a hot day in our workshop, a pre-war barn of corrugated iron held up by wooden beams. Our first aid kit was located on one of these beams, close to the corrugated iron wall. Among the first aid items was a large bottle of mercurochrome which glinted blood red when any light fell upon it. We were engrossed in our work when we heard the very angry sound of an aircraft. Knowing well that no plane would fly that low, we all dived to the floor and were rocked the explosion of a bomb that had

dropped between the walls of a demolished cinema close to our workshop. These walls acted as a protective barrier and probably saved our lives.

As I said, it was a particularly hot day and the corrugated iron roof radiated heat, warming the bottle of mercurochrome up on the beam, which tumbled off the shelf. It landed with a heavy thud onto a recumbent Max Kangisser, who lay on his stomach directly under it. With the cork dislodged, the warm fluid spread over his back.

"I've been hit" cried Max putting his hand to his back where the bottle lay with its contents trickling through his shirt. He reached around, touched the warm wetness, and lifted up a red hand – shouting frantically "Help – get some help. They got me in the back".

The four of us were convulsed with laughter when we saw what had happened. "Are you guys happy to see me injured?" Max wailed.

Between guffaws one of the spectators said, "Max, why you don't smell your hand?"

Incredulously Max shouted, "What? Smell my hand while I'm dying?" However, when he did so, he sat up, very relieved, and joined in the laughter.

For his bravery Max was rewarded with a nomination to the post of being in charge of all fire extinguishers on the base. He was known thereafter as the Fire Chief.

I sorely miss the Fire Chief. In an obituary for him, I asserted that Satan in hell would quiver in fear at the arrival of Max, the renowned conqueror of conflagrations, with his hands clutching a large bottle of mercurochrome.

## NOTE

- 1 Also from South Africa, in later life Ostroff gained for himself an international reputation for his indefatigable efforts to counter anti-Israel propaganda in the mainstream and online media.

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## A NURSE'S STORY

\*

Audrey Benedict Meyersfeld

"There were many South African nurses amongst the ranks of Mahal. Perhaps the best known were Sisters Audrey (Bennie) Benedict and Marie Roux, non-Jewish theatre sisters whom Jack Penn had brought from home. Highly skilled medics, Bennie and Marie quickly became passionate Zionists. It was heart-warming to hear them holding forth in fierce defence of Israel's policies and inalienable right to independence"

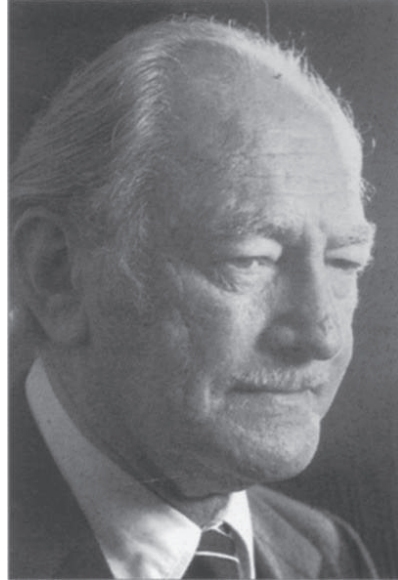
*David Susman<sup>1</sup>*

I am greatly honoured to have been asked to share some of my memories of those historical months in Israel in 1948. Firstly let me stress that I was only one of the thirty-odd members of the nursing fraternity who volunteered to serve, and who all did a magnificent job.

But let me start at the beginning. I was returning to South Africa from the U.K. From press reports in London, I was well aware that storm clouds were gathering over the Middle East and as a [non-Jewish] Zionist sympathiser I wanted to be there. This was January 1948, so when the state of Israel was declared on 14 May, I approached the Zionist Federation in Johannesburg and offered my services.

I had worked with the plastic surgeon Dr Jack Penn during the war years as theatre sister, and he was instrumental in persuading the SAZF to send me over. So in late June, with Dr Penn's theatre sister at that time Marie Roux, we were on our way. With us on that Dakota were young South African men on a similar mission. We landed on a small air trip outside Tel Aviv and I was soon in trouble, since my name 'Benedict' was to foreign ears too similar to 'Bernadotte'<sup>2</sup>, and I had no visa for Israel. That night was spent under guard. By noon next day, however, Dr Meltzer had been contacted and given the assurance that I was no Mata Hari. We were thus allowed to proceed to Haifa, in an ambulance.

We started work the next day at the Bat Cholim hospital. The surgeon to whom I was assigned was Dr Cyril Kaplan, with



**Dr Jack Penn (1909-1996)**

whom I had worked in Durban during my training. Other surgeons with whom we worked, in addition to the South Africans, were British, Canadian, American, Russian, German and Romanian. As you can imagine, language posed quite a problem! Sadly, the hospital was in a sorry state - the British had left behind wanton destruction. Lifts and sterilizers were not working and we were very short of surgical supplies, instruments and drugs. Bandages and linen had to be reused, but we managed and amazingly without sulpha drugs, antibiotics and often without gloves. While we were there, Count Bernadotte was assassinated and I attended the post mortem. I was later introduced to Dr Ralph Bunche, who succeeded Bernadotte as head of the UN delegation.

In mid-September, Marie and I were transferred to the Italian hospital, also in Haifa, and we were billeted with an Arab family. We became quite friendly, sharing the basement when an air raid siren sounded, and their coffee. Our work here was entirely military. This was a clearing station for casualties from the north and the Gallil, so our work was speeded up to the tempo of war. We were still very short of surgical supplies, and with the *Hamsin*<sup>3</sup> blowing, and no air-conditioning it was exhausting. Dr Chaim Sheba visited our hospital frequently and gave me my Hebrew name Bracha.

An important part of my work was to train girls with no nursing experience as

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*Sister Ruth Benedict served as a volunteer nurse in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. This article has been adapted from an address she gave to the Jacob Gitlin Library, Cape Town, in August 2004.*

theatre assistants. These girls were from D.P. camps - the tattooed numbers on their arms were a constant reminder of that. They were quick learners, and we shared a wonderful comradeship. They in turn taught me basic Hebrew, and together we worked out how to translate surgical terms into Hebrew. We all felt a sense of taking a small part in the making of history, and this buoyed us up to greater efforts.

The South African surgeons, including Doctors Jack Penn, Arthur Helfet, Jack Wilton and Cyril Kaplan to name a few, gained a reputation for saving and reconstructing shattered limbs rather than resorting to amputations. I had the greatest respect and admiration for them. I was once given three days leave and hitched to Tiberius to visit Dr Wilton, who was doing a magnificent job in his little hospital. He arranged for me to visit Degania, one of the oldest kibbutzim on the border, which had borne the brunt of repeated attacks from the Golan Heights. Happily, we were allowed to spend a memorable and quiet Rosh Hashanah there. Then I went on to Mayem Baruch, where I met a number of South Africans who had joined the kibbutz and were playing an important part in the military.

On my return to Tiberius, renewed fighting had broken out, and Dr Wilton asked me to take a seriously injured patient back to Haifa for intracranial surgery. That was a nightmare journey, trying to keep a blood transfusion and intravenous drip going and administering oxygen and other medication with only the aid of a flickering torch. We arrived in Haifa at dawn, but sadly our patient didn't make it to the theatre. There were many more heartaches like this, but never at any time did the faith and courage of the Jewish people flag. On one occasion I was sent up to Jerusalem, travelling in an army vehicle under enemy gunfire on the Burma Road. As Mount Scopus was out of bounds we operated in a church, "The Christian Mission to the Jews", scrubbing up in a Christening font and sterilizing our instruments in a pot of boiling water over a gas ring. Despite all the tribulations and hard work, I will remember my time in Israel for the rest of my life, and feel truly blessed and honoured that I was allowed to play a very small part in the establishment of Eretz Israel.

I returned to South Africa in December to work again with Dr Penn, now as matron of the Brenthurst Clinic. But I missed the theatre and Marie, who had returned from Israel with Dr Penn, was the theatre sister. Dr Penn made frequent trips back to Israel to operate and consult, and I was fortunately able to accompany him on two occasions,

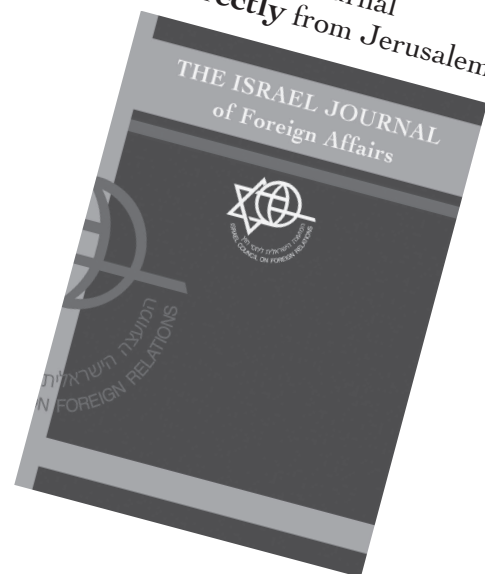
renewing contact with some old patients and meeting new ones from time to time. Certain patients requiring long-term surgery were sent out to us in Johannesburg.

At that time we were using a relatively new type of anaesthesia originated at East Grinstead, the famous plastic surgery hospital where Sir Archie McIndoe performed miracles. The patient's blood pressure was lowered to allow easier surgery. However, it was imperative that post-operation cases be kept in bed at rest until the pressure returned to normal. Imagine my shock when doing a round of post-operation cases to find one such patient, a certain Colonel Moshe Dayan, sitting up in a chair. "Please go back to bed immediately", I ordered. With a twinkle in his one remaining eye he growled, "This is the first time I have been ordered into bed by a woman".

## NOTES

- 1 Susman, David, *An African Shopkeeper*, Fernwood Press, 2004, p61. A leading South African businessman and philanthropist, Susman (1925-2010) served with distinction as an officer during the Israeli War of Independence. He was for many years Chairman of Woolworths in South Africa, which had been co-founded by his father, Elie, and Max Sonnenberg.
- 2 Count Folke Bernadotte was at the time the United Nations Security Council mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He was assassinated in September 1948 by members of the militant Zionist group, Lehi.
- 3 The expression, taken from Arabic, refers to the burning, dry desert wind that occurs in the Middle East during the summer months.

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# ELI ZAGORIA – MACHALNIK AND ARTIST

\*

David Solly Sandler

Seventy-one years ago, an historic UN General Assembly resolution was passed to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The voting took place late on Saturday night on 29 November 1947, South African time. Telephones rang late into the night and there was great rejoicing as the news spread.

In January 1948, four emissaries from Israel arrived in South Africa, followed by four more the following month. The emissaries set about recruiting Jewish ex-servicemen as volunteers to defend the soon-to-be-declared Jewish state. Volunteers were despatched clandestinely to Israel with the active support of the South African Zionist Federation.

By April 1948 there were over 5000 young men and woman from Zionist youth movements under training on weekends, many on the farm of Koppel Bacher (father of Ali) located outside Johannesburg on the way to Krugersdorp. While shooting was forbidden, training was held in the assembly and disassembly of small arms and many instructive lectures were given. Only a small percentage of these youth were sent to Israel, after they protested that only ex-servicemen were being sent. In Germiston, a secret pilots' training school was established and attempts were made to buy aircraft to be sent to Israel.

South Africa, with 810 volunteers, was by a considerable distance the largest per capita contributor to the total number of Jews in the Diaspora who served as volunteers in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. 24 of these *Machalniks*, as they were called,<sup>1</sup> were from Arcadia (the South African Jewish

Orphanage in Johannesburg). There were approximately 300 Canadian volunteers, 350 British, 600 French, 950 US and 600 from other countries (including 16 listed as Australians on the Machal website).

The story of the South African volunteers is comprehensively told in the book *South Africa's 800* by Henry Katzew.<sup>2</sup> This article will focus on the story of just one of these volunteers, the artist Eli Zagoria (1922-2013).

Born in Riga, Latvia, Eli Zagoria immigrated to South Africa at the age of 14. While still at school and in the care of Arcadia, he was encouraged to pursue his artistic talents. During World War II, he served in a medical unit and was captured at Tobruk. As a prisoner of war in Stalag IVB, Germany, he met a British prisoner who was an artist. He became Eli's first art teacher and advised him to take up art as a profession. After returning to South Africa in 1946, Eli was given a full three year scholarship in the Art College in Johannesburg. He then volunteered for service in the Israeli army in the 1948 War of Independence. Once again, he served in the medical corps.

In 1949, Eli married Estelle Kaplan, with whom he had three children, Michael, Ilan and Karen. The family spent seven years in Israel and 23 years in Zimbabwe before returning to Johannesburg. In 1992, they settled in Perth, Australia, where Eli continued to work as an artist. He estimated that he had completed over 15 000 portraits during his lifetime. Eli Zagoria passed away early in 2013, leaving his wife of 64 years, three children and seven grandchildren.

## Extract from the memoirs of Eli Zagoria

Israel had just been born and was already fighting for its life.

The Zionist Federation in Johannesburg put out a call for men with wartime experience to join the Israeli army. The influence of my formative years in Riga with Hashomer Hatzair was still strong, so once again I came forward, gave notice and flew off to Israel via Italy.

Soon after my arrival in Israel I was sent to a camp near Haifa and helped to establish a medical aid post attached to a regiment with half-tracks and a couple

*David Solly Sandler grew up in Arcadia, the South African Jewish Orphanage, and immigrated to Australia in 1981. He worked as an accountant until his retirement in 2007, since when he has compiled and published numerous books on aspects of South African and Lithuanian Jewish history. These include Memories of Arcadia (2 vols.), The Ochberg Orphans (2 vols.), The Pinsker Orphans and Memories of Oranjia, Our Litvak Inheritance, Our South African Jewish Inheritance, The Keidan Memorial (Yizkor) book and the Memorial Section of the Rakishok Yizkor book. He has also reprinted This was a Man (about Isaac Ochberg) and South Africa's 800 (on the 1948/9 Machalniks).*

of armed cars. The half-track vehicle had wheels in front but tracks at the back. Dr Rosenberg was our M.O. There was a motley crowd of Americans, South Africans, British and Sabras (a native born Israeli). All had combat experience and there was a minimum of drill for its own sake. It was hard to distinguish men from officers.

Within weeks our unit left its base in the early evening and drove in a long convoy into the hills of Western Galilee. When it became dark, the whole convoy switched their lights on and continued along a narrow twisting road towards Safed (Tsfat). At the outskirts of Safed we stopped and rested a while. All the men got out except the drivers. I was a driver as well. Most of the convoy was ordered to return to base camp in total darkness, not showing any lights whatsoever. The road kept twisting and turning around the hills, and even at a snail's pace it was very hard to see the edge of the road. Men were walking in front of a vehicle to give directions but not all had co-drivers to do that. Several vehicles were lost that night when they tumbled down off the road.

The following day before the sun set, we did the identical trip again, with lights blazing, towards Safed and other villages held by the Arabs. To me the whole exercise seemed idiotic and a terrible waste of petrol, vehicles and effort. Much later I learned the reason. This was a totally different sort of war. It was confined to narrow roads with steep sides, flanked by olive plantations. Unlike in the desert of North Africa, movement had to be along the roads only and therefore was much more dangerous.



*Eli Zagoria (standing, hand on hips) in 79 battalion, Israeli Defence Force, 1949.*

The next incident was rather strange. This was a more conventional ground action, also at night somewhere in the Western Galilee. I walked with the rest of the men over some fields into plantations and open ground. Another guy and I were told to remain near a road while the rest went on. There was some light from the moon. We remained there about an hour. The whole operation as far as I was concerned was total confusion as to what we were supposed to do. A vehicle came along the road. The driver asked us to look at two wounded men in the back. He said he was going for some supplies to a town not far away, where there was also a hospital, and asked me to accompany him, which I did. The two men did not seem to be badly hurt, but they needed reassurance. My Hebrew was extremely poor - almost non-existent. They knew more English than I Hebrew.

Driving without lights the driver took us to the hospital. The wounded men were taken, the truck went off and I tried to make my way back to my unit. After walking for about an hour and feeling completely lost, a huge shape came rumbling along the road behind me and came to a halt. It was a large breakdown truck with a tall crane. I climbed into the cab with the lone driver. He thought I knew the way or what was going on. At least he seemed to be familiar with the area. I could not tell him where my unit was but we decided to stay together as I might be of some help later. His task was to recover an armoured vehicle that had gotten stuck somewhere, and we drove slowly looking for it. As dawn was breaking, we found ourselves among the hills on a road with a sheer drop to one side. There was not a soul in sight. As we proceeded around the curving road, we saw the armoured car. It was perched on the edge of the road with its front wheels in the air over the drop into a large valley below. I cannot see how my companion would have managed without me to attach and pull the car back on the road. This was enemy country, so we kept the vehicles between us and the vast open area to which we were exposed. Eventually, after much manoeuvring on the narrow road, he took the armoured vehicle in tow and we made a hasty retreat. In broad daylight now, I also saw my unit as we drove back. This was the extent of my action in the Israeli War of Independence. I returned to the base camp near Haifa and continued with the dull routine of attending to the daily sick parades and patients.

About this time I learned that the Ministry of Defence in Tel Aviv was looking for artists and architects for a military project. I obtained leave from my M.O. and went

to Tel Aviv, taking with me a number of photographs of some of my best work at Industrial Displays that I had made before leaving Johannesburg. I do not know how many other artists in the army applied, but do know is that I was accepted to join a special small unit attached to the Ministry of Defence to work in Tel Aviv. Obtaining the permission of my M.O. was the most difficult hurdle. I finally convinced him he could manage without me and in case of the remote possibility of further action, I would return immediately. The whole of the northern part of Israel from the sea in the west along the Lebanese border to the uppermost corner at Metula was firmly under our control by then, even though this area had more Arab villages than any other part of Israel.

The special unit consisted of the director, two architects and myself. The idea was to prepare plans and drawings for what was to become a victory exhibition for local but mainly international visitors. My art and exhibition experience as well as the photographs I had shown them had clinched the job for me. Moshe, the young architect

I was to work with, was a Sabra born in Jerusalem. He had recently done a post graduate course in America with the famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The first job was to find a suitable area for such a project. It was agreed to investigate the area north of Tel Aviv along the sea shore. So I went on my own one day with the bus and a lot of walking to the area to make sketches of suitable spots. As I was sketching among the sand dunes, two armed soldiers approached me. I was not in uniform. My story seemed far-fetched and the area I was drawing was restricted. Would I come along with them? They took my sketches and escorted me to their unit not far away. Having repeated my story to their security officer who also did not believe me, he telephoned the Ministry of Defence. Nobody had heard of me and there was no one there who could confirm what I said. It was late already. So in the nicest possible way I was under arrest for the night. In the morning another call confirmed my tale, but I was also told that the area was too near a large power station and could not be used. Back at the ministry, everyone had a good



*Detail from mural by Eli Zagoria in the Noranda (South African) Shul in Perth, Australia*



laugh at my arrest.

My next assignment was to design a mural for a very long wall, two meters high by sixty meters long. I worked on this for about a month, while Moshe prepared design and drawings for the various pavilions of the exposition.

During this period I became friendly with another South African, Solly Ossin. He had been in the same unit that I had served in the Galilee, although we had never met. He and several other South Africans, all members of the Habonim movement in Benoni, were now serving in Israel, and had plans for settling there. Their idea was to establish a brand new settlement on kibbutz lines but with some major differences. Simply put all the members, either as families, couples or singles, would live as private units but all the work and duties would be as in a kibbutz. They called many public meetings in Tel Aviv at the premises of the S.A. Zionist offices and explained all the details to prospective members.

The scheme was well received and many American, English and South African

volunteers in the IDF joined.

The war seemed to be over for the time being. The more I thought about my work at the ministry the more sceptical I became about the whole business. I thought anyone with half a brain would be mad to embark on the enterprise I was involved in. I finished my working drawing of the mural to scale. It took about three weeks work and decided to keep it. Should I prove wrong and the project was still on, the design would still be intact with me. Later, I visited the Defence Ministry and as I expected my small unit had disappeared. I kept my big design, and still have it to this day, in a roll.

## NOTES

- 1 Machal (or Mahal), from *Mitnadvei Chutz LaAretz* – “volunteers from outside the country”.
- 2 Katzew, H, *South Africa's 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's war of birth*, (Revised and Reprinted October 1998, edited by Joe Woolf). To order this book, contact David Solly Sandler on [sedsand@iinet.net.au](mailto:sedsand@iinet.net.au). All proceeds go to Arcadia Children's Home in Johannesburg.



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## “ONE SUNDAY IN MAY 1948...” – BLOEMFONTEIN’S FIRST YOM HA’ATZMA’UT

\*

Glenda Woolf

I remember well that first Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration in Bloemfontein. The most lasting memory I have is the prediction my mother made about the future. Other memories too, come flooding back. So, to start at the beginning: I remember waking up early one Sunday in May 1948, and hearing, “Wake up. Quickly, get up. Today is a very special day. We Jews have our own country again. Soon we are going to the shul to celebrate. The children must wear fancy dress. Hurry, we don’t want to be late.”

So the day began. We went to the enclosed porch where my mother kept a bagful of old clothes. My sister and I were dressed in old woolen skirts. A flowered tablecloth was draped around my head and shoulders. My sister had a scarf draped around her shoulders and a scarf tied on her head. So off we went.

My father had gone off to attend to a patient. He had practiced medicine in Thaba N’chu and recently moved to Bloemfontein. We were new in town, bereft of the warm supportive Jewish country community we were used to, and thrust into a larger Jewish community consisting then, I think, of about three hundred families.

People were gathering around a high flag pole talking to one another excitedly. Girls and boys in the khaki uniform with a blue and white tie were busy assembling a home-made blue and white flag on the rope of the flagpole. Girls in sparkling dresses from ballet performances pranced around. Little boys in a variety of costumes ran about. We stood in a tight small group and watched them.

To our right was the beautiful old shul, to our left the shul hall and classrooms. Silence was called for. Speeches began. I don’t recall who spoke or what they said. Then the children were told to parade before a group of judges. Well, I was mortified.

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**Glenda Woolf**, a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a novelist and essayist whose articles and stories on Jewish themes have appeared in Jewish publications worldwide. Her novels, published under the name Gita Gordon, include: *South African Journeys* (2002), *Flashback* (2007), *Mystery in the Amazon and Scattered Blossoms* (both 2008) and *Guest House* (2012).

There were my sister and I, in a motley collection of old clothes and scarves and tablecloths, and there were the girls, our contemporaries, in their glittering costumes.

When the names of the four prizewinners were called out I was hardly paying attention, but suddenly I heard my name. So off we went, two boys and two girls, to have our photos taken. I have the photo still: myself, my friend Rosalind Kayceff, in a nurses uniform adorned with Magen David badges, a boy wearing an old gown, clutching a large staff and a small bundle, and another boy, false beard and a *kippa* on his head and a *tallis* covering his shoulders.

Afterwards, we returned to the main group. The flag was raised. We sang Hatikvah, and slowly a murmur of sobs came from here and there among the crowd. It was then that my mother said, “You must always remember this day. For the first time in thousands of years we Jews have our very own country. Your generation will be different to our generation. Our parents knew all our laws and kept them. But we, who grew up here, went to non-Jewish schools. We didn’t learn our laws and we don’t keep most of them. We are the lost generation but your generation will learn all the laws again and keep them. You will live again like our grand-parents and parents did.”

I remember our lifestyle. Like most Jews in the town, we kept strictly kosher. We were very aware of the concept of “*Chillul Hashem*” (desecration of the Divine Name), though it was usually phrased as “Jews don’t...” So we knew that we had to be honest and polite at school, otherwise it would reflect badly on the other Jewish children. True we didn’t keep all the laws of Judaism, but looking back, I think that what my mother called the “lost generation” was not so lost after all. They did succeed in transmitting to us a pride in being Jewish, and a basic Jewish lifestyle.

Was there a dramatic change in our lives overnight? The answer is a resounding ‘no’. Jewish girls continued to go to Eunice Girls School. We walked into the hall, and listened to announcements. We heard “Jewesses lead out” and went into the small entrance hall. We stood and peeped through cracks in the door until we heard, “Jewesses may now

lead in". We went into the classroom for our names to be read out, and marked as present, and then we went out of the classroom to stand at a closed door, while, the rest of the class had scripture lessons.

The rest of the day was divided into lessons and two breaks, when we ate sandwiches brought from home, the Jewish girls generally playing together.

In the afternoon we went to ballet and tap and speech and music lessons. The boys, of course went to *cheder*. Every afternoon, the redoubtable Mr Shiffman taught large classes of boys how to read and daven as well as *Tanach* and *halachot*. This, of course, ended when they were barmitzvah. Then the ladies committee would make a special Kiddush after shul, and everyone came, and there were speeches

On Sunday morning we went to Habonim, girls and boys in separate groups, together only for the opening ceremony, ending with "*Chazak*", from our leaders, and our reply of "*Chazak v'ematz*".

Country Jewish children, in their high school years came to the town, to boarding school, the girls mainly to Eunice, the boys mainly to Grey College. So it seems, that events continued for us, much as they had in my mother's "lost generation".

We left school, went to Johannesburg or Cape Town to attend University and lived in Residence there. Still, little change.

Then in 1967, our Jewish state was under threat. Jewish awareness worldwide rose up. Once victory was assured change began, slowly at first and then with ever increasing

vigor. Now my generation began to fulfill my mother's prophecy, with the phenomenon that became known as the "*Baal Teshuva* movement."

Our children grew up in homes where Jewish law was more closely followed. Was I leading a life like my great grandparents? Maybe we observed the laws more closely, but, I think we could not suddenly catch up on their vast fund of Jewish knowledge.

So now, looking at South Africa seventy years later, I see virtually all Jewish children attending Jewish schools, learning Hebrew and *Tanach* and *halacha*. There are no longer girls without a Jewish education. Boys no longer forget about Jewish learning the moment they turn thirteen. The whole range of Orthodoxy is available in shuls.

Ohr Somayach came to Johannesburg many years ago, and began a congregation in a small house with Rabbi and Rebbetzin Auerbach and their family, Professor Charles Isaacson, recently returned from a year at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva, and a handful of Jewish students. Today, Ohr Somayach has a large, beautiful shul and a campus that includes a school. Indeed, a whole range of shuls now exist, both in Johannesburg and other major cities, where all the congregation have the knowledge of their grandparents and lead Jewishly observant lives just as they did.

My mother's predictions all those long years ago have come to fruition.

But there is more. From Johannesburg the "Just one Shabbos" movement has spread worldwide.

More than that, the Jewish Lithuanian



*The writer (left) with the other best costume winners, Bloemfontein, 14 May 1948.*



heritage of South African Jews has now come full circle.

When the Lithuanian immigrants came to South Africa, they left behind a culture rich in learning, with many yeshivas. From these institutions, rabbis went out to serve different communities throughout the world.

South Africa now has its own yeshivot. Many graduates continue to spend more years learning in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Holy Land. Rabbis from South Africa, great- and great-great grandchildren of those Lithuanian immigrants, exert their influence on many different communities worldwide. Rabbi Akiva Tatz in London and Rabbis David and Daniel Lapin in America come immediately to mind, but there are many more.

So I am left a full seventy years later, with my photo of four children in fancy

dress, and the memories of a flag slowly being raised and the sounds of Hatikvah filling the air, here, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, gazing out of my window waiting for the sound of the siren to celebrate the beginning of Yom Ha'aztmaut.

Our generation regained the lifestyle of our grandparents and great grandparents. Our children and grandchildren, the boys with their long *peyos*, the girls in their modest dresses, have regained the deep Torah knowledge lost to my mother's generation, lost to my generation. Maybe my children and grandchildren can take these things for granted. But each time the siren sounds ushering in this special day, I feel again that sense of awe and wonder that enveloped all of us that very first Yom Ha'atzmaut in Bloemfontein.

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# ONE DAY ON HACHSHARAH, 1940

\*

Florrie Cohen

Every morning, the alarm clock would ring at 5.30 am and awaken me. Thus would my day begin on *Hachsharah* at the David Eder Training Farm in Harrietsham near Maidstone in Kent, England. I recently came across part of a notebook that I had kept which described a typical day in the winter of 1940, one that I had recorded because the unusually heavy fall of snow offered a little humour, which I had enjoyed.

We *chalutzim* needed to have a lot in common to be able to live together as one *chevra*. We all shared the aim of settling one day on a kibbutz in Eretz Yisrael. This is the reason why *Hachsharoth* were set up in the Diaspora - to teach us to live together, to share in each others' joys and sorrows and to shoulder together the responsibility of making our future kibbutz self supporting. Those members who found that they did not fit in dropped out of their own free will.

We were living through the first year of the war and our farm was approximately twenty miles from Dover. Where originally there had been 12 to 14 English *chaverim* running the farm, we now had an additional 40 from all over Europe, who had managed to escape their tormentors but had had to leave their loved ones behind. After a short period of getting to know their new surroundings and us, they had settled down well and shouldered responsibilities gratefully. We learnt from them many things as they did from our group and we became one happy *chevra*.

On this particular day when the alarm sounded on a white and freezing morning, I had to jump to it and wash and dress in my long trousers, sweater and knee-high gumboots, then rush off to the *chadar haochel* (dining room) for a quick breakfast. There was no need for me to check on the work roster as both my dear friend Miriam and I had a permanent job tending to 2000 chickens. The snow was knee deep and freezing and our teeth were chattering as we made our way to the *Look* (food storage

for the chickens) to collect two buckets each which we filled with water. As we knew that the water in the troughs in the chicken houses would be frozen solid, we also took along a small hammer with which to break the ice. We would have to return to the store to fetch the chicken food. T

We began our journey with two full buckets of water each, but the going was difficult because of the knee-deep snow. As we placed one foot forward, it would sink in until the snow was at the top of our gumboots. As it was hard going and time consuming to extricate each foot, it was difficult to bring up the other foot. Sometimes I thought that I would have to pull my feet free and finish the journey barefoot. Miriam and I shared a wonderful sense of humour, and we laughed because we must have looked like two drunks battling against the odds. But we had to get going because the chickens were waiting for us to open up their houses. However, by the time we had reached the chicken houses, there was much less water in the buckets than there was when we had started. Truth to tell, we were lucky to get to our cackling friends safely and with our gumboots still firmly on our feet.

At this point Miriam and I parted ways because we had reached her chicken houses whereas mine were in a different field at the bottom of a steep dip which we named "the Bank". I arrived to a loud cackling welcome as my little friends were really ready for their breakfast. I set to and broke through the ice in the troughs with my hammer, cleaned out the scraps, refilled them with fresh water and unlocked their doors. Their delight to be free was very evident.

I left as soon as possible to get their food from the food store. On the way I met Miriam battling along on the same journey. It must have been funny to see us two stragglers leaving the food store soon afterwards struggling through the deep snow, with a large sack of food over our shoulders and a bucketful of food on each arm.

Miriam had some things to attend to at her chicken houses so I carried my load down the bank myself. I did not mind the weight of the sack on my back and the buckets on my arms but what I did mind was the reception I got when I finally got to the top of the "bank" field. I was met

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*Florrie Cohen (1920-2015) was born to Louis and Rachel Cohen in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In 1939, she married Barnett Morris while both were on hachsharah. After Barnett's death in 1941, she married Arnold Cohen in 1945. The couple immigrated to South Africa in 1947.*

by a flock of hungry sheep who thought that the sack I was carrying contained their food. They surrounded me and pushed me from the front and back. I was stuck knee deep in snow. You can imagine my panic when I realized what would happen should the sheep not understand my language, and they didn't. I sunk deeper and deeper into the snow with my face on a level with the sheep's faces. I yelled at the top of my voice for Miriam. The sheep continued pushing me while I swayed backwards and forwards. It looked as though I was *davening* and believe me, I really prayed that help would come soon. Miriam arrived just in time and with her help I eventually escaped but with little food left in my buckets to share with my own charges. I had to go back for more food, which delayed the rest of my morning tasks.

After returning to the chicken houses and feeding them to their satisfaction, Miriam and I carried on to our next port of call, a field completely fenced in on all sides where we kept our breeding stock with the required number of cocks and hens. Our job was to check on the nests every two hours. This was a specialized job. Each nest had a special door with a hook that sprung off once the chicken walked in and settled down to lay her egg. Each hen in this flock was numbered, so that when we came to open the nest we had to be careful to remove the egg first, then the hen, check the number on her leg and release her and then write the number on the egg. Our hands bore witness to the many scratches we receive in this operation. These eggs were stored until an incubator was free. We had a special room holding three incubators, a large one holding 320 eggs and the other two with 100 eggs each.

Miriam and I loved the work, although it was very time consuming. We did a four-hourly check of all the chicken houses, a two-hourly check on trapping the fertile hens in their section and then the brooder houses where all the new baby chicks were busy chirping away and getting to know their new friends. Twice a day, we had to turn the eggs in the incubator house and test them through a special gadget to see whether they were fertile. If after three days they were not fertile, we removed the egg, took its number and removed the matching hen from the special breeding pen and placed it with the other hens either in my lot or Miriam's. We had to watch the temperatures in the incubator and brooder houses most carefully because in those days paraffin was used and the flame could easily flare up if left unattended. The most rewarding time for us was after 21 days when we would watch the baby chicks chipping through their shell and

emerging all wet for a few minutes before falling through to the drying shelf in the incubator where they become beautiful little furry chicks. We felt as though we were responsible for their coming into this world.

At 10 o'clock it was time for our morning tea break, so off we rushed to the kitchen to the big coal stove to thaw out a bit. After working outside for four hours in the snow we would have a beautiful glow on our cheeks. We would find a long toasting fork and a chunk of bread and toast it at the fire and that together with a steaming mug of tea – it was heaven! Soon the gong would sound and it was time to go back to work.

The rest of the morning would be taken up with cleaning out the brooder houses in readiness for the new chicks we were expecting to hatch out. The walls and floors had to be scraped, scrubbed and blow-lamped, then paraffin stoves would be lit and kept burning constantly for a couple of days to dry out the houses thoroughly. By then it would be lunch time and we would return to our billets, have a nice wash in icy water, then with sixty other *chaverim* sit down to our first real meal of the day. One *chaver* would announce that after our Hebrew lesson that evening, a sing-song would take place in the dining room. After lunch we go to our rooms for a half hour rest.

When we returned to the chicken houses, the same procedure would begin all over again with the water and the feeding of the chickens, the collecting of the eggs and for the 20<sup>th</sup> time the breaking of the ice in the troughs and the re-filling with water. Before finishing our day we had to check on all the paraffin stoves and settle the chickens in their houses for the night.

We were experiencing the heaviest fall of snow in many years and our van, which was filled with produce for the market, got stuck in six feet of snow just outside the gates of our farm. Even with all hands shoveling it free, we realised it was useless to try to drive it the nine miles to the market place, so we unpacked and made other arrangements. However, we depended on the van to bring supplies for the kitchen and other needs, so our Continental *chaverim* set to and made themselves skis. Then, with haversacks on their backs and home-made skis fitted, they gaily set off on their three-mile journey downhill to the village to do the shopping for us. It was lovely to see them go, like a real picture postcard it was, but we didn't realise the trouble they would have coming back up that hill fully laden. Still, they made it and it gave them much pleasure to come to our rescue and help out in this way.

Rene, one of our European *chevra*, came to visit me at the chicken house to give me

a demonstration on her skis. The steep hill above my field made an ideal ski run and she did a few really graceful turns. Rene then climbed up to the top of the hill and we waited patiently down below for the run down and quick turn, which she promised us would be special. It had to be a very quick turn otherwise she would go head first over the fence and into the next field. I kept looking and so did the chickens. Rene looked wonderful coming down that hill but something went wrong - perhaps I blocked her view - for as she came hurtling down, she did such a beautiful turn that her feet ended up where her head should have been and her head ended up where her feet should have been. She looked more beautiful then and her audience cackled more than they had cackled for a long time. Our egg production went up that day and the honour must surely go to Rene's fine performance.

In the evening Miriam and I took shifts to check on the temperatures in the brooder houses as well as in the incubator house. I am sorry to admit that I was frightened when the responsibility for the night shift fell on my shoulders as we had very large grounds to cover. I was always very glad when it was over, although truth to tell I somehow or other managed to recruit a few of the men to keep me company. However, one night my luck was out as my friends were too comfortable under their warm blankets to leave them so I had to go out on my own. I got as far as the farm gate when I saw a light moving in the direction of our chicken field. When I had started out I was scared but now I was trembling, and in haste I ran back to our sleeping quarters and woke up a whole brigade of boys and girls. We armed ourselves with spades, picks and anything we could find and off we ran towards the spot where I had seen the light. By then the stillness of the night was broken by the cackling of the chickens. Unfortunately, as the ground was covered with snow, we were easily detected and by the time we got to the chicken houses, we found only footprints and feathers. The thieves had beaten us to it and stolen a number of our birds. This was a great blow to us. Not only would we miss them (we knew and recognized every one of our birds) but they also contributed a great deal to our income. We had on a few occasions lost a few of our chickens to foxes that left their gruesome leavings for us to find in the mornings, but this theft was a very serious matter indeed and was dealt with the following morning at an urgent meeting. It was decided to form a roster in which every member of the group would have to do a spell at night guarding our livestock.

That night we all dressed in readiness for supper and as you can imagine there were a lot of questions from the other members around the tables about what had happened. Nevertheless, we all joined in the sing-song after supper and the Hora went on and on, not just for five minutes. The music was Hebrew music, the dance was an Israeli dance, we were going to go eventually to Israel to become *chalutzim* and build up our homeland and, best of all, we were Jews, with Israel in our veins.



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# HAHAM MOSES GASTER AND ZIONISM

\*

Cecil Bloom

“My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to say, before I say another word, that the reason I am interested in this movement is that I met one some two years ago who is now upon this platform, and who has opened my eyes as to what this movement meant. He is on the list of speakers; you will hear him presently; his name is known to most in the records of Zionism: I mean Dr Gaster”.

Thus spoke Sir Mark Sykes when addressing the audience at an event celebrating the issue of the Balfour Declaration, held at the London Opera House on 2 December 1917.<sup>1</sup> Sykes’ comments, together with his son Christopher’s later writing how he believed that Moses Gaster opened his father’s eyes to the meaning of Zionism in the last days of 1915,<sup>2</sup> have resulted in some writers suggesting that Gaster was the prime motivator in getting the British government to formulate a policy that led to the Balfour Declaration. But is this a correct assessment of history?

Moses Gaster (1856-1939) was born in Bucharest, Romania. After being ordained as a rabbi in 1881, he became a teacher at the University of Bucharest. He gained an international reputation as a Master of Romance Philology, being considered to be the greatest Romanian philologist of his time, and he also made many great contributions to the cause of rabbinic learning.<sup>3</sup> After his expulsion from Romania because of his support for pro-Jewish protests, he immigrated to England. There he taught Slavonic literature at Oxford University until, in 1887, he was appointed *Haham* (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic community, an appointment he retained until his resignation following disagreements with his congregation in 1918.

Active in *Hibbat Zion* and then in the international Zionist movement, Gaster became one of Herzl’s early supporters at a time when Herzl was not welcomed by some

Anglo-Jewish leaders.<sup>4</sup> Most of the notables of the Sephardi community were not in favour of Herzl’s Zionism, which led to his problems with his flock.<sup>5</sup> A Vice-President at the first four Zionist Congresses, he was President of the English Zionist Federation in 1907, the year he visited Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

Despite his eminence, Gaster was never popular due to his attitude of superiority towards many of his contemporaries, something that eventually diminished his importance to the Zionist movement. He was often at odds with other Zionist leaders in Britain and made many enemies. In his renowned book *The Balfour Declaration*, Leonard Stein wrote that there was no doubt about Gaster’s eminence as an outstanding figure in the Zionist movement. His powerful personality, imposing presence and gifts of oratory made him an important figure.<sup>7</sup> However, as Stein sees it, he was kept out of the mainstream by an autocratic temperament that made him a difficult colleague.<sup>8</sup> Weizmann once described him as a good



**Rabbi Moses Gaster, when he was *Haham* (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic, or Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London**

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Zionist but one who suffered from jealousy. In his view, Gaster considered himself more fitting than even Herzl for the position of President of the Zionist Organisation.<sup>9</sup> Weizmann was further of the opinion that Gaster's view was tainted by an ingrained personal opposition to Herzl.<sup>10</sup> There were some, apparently, who wanted Gaster to succeed Herzl on the latter's death in 1904.<sup>11</sup>

As for Herzl, his early comments on Gaster were favourable but later he changed his view. After addressing an audience in London during his first visit there in 1896, he wrote in his diary that Gaster, as chairman, made 'a fiery speech'<sup>12</sup> and, at the first Zionist Congress in 1897, he told delegates that he had received several letters and telegrams but specifically referred only to the one sent by Gaster, who wrote to express his sympathy with the objects of the Congress.<sup>13</sup> But subsequently, there are several indications in his diary that his opinion had changed. In March 1899 he sent Gaster a telegram "in which I gave him a piece of my mind"<sup>14</sup> and in April 1900 he wrote that Gaster came to his London hotel and "welcomed me with a bitter-sweet expression with forced enthusiasm".<sup>15</sup> In June 1901 Gaster was said to be "loyal to my empire again".<sup>16</sup>

The veteran English Zionist Harry Sacher, a close friend of Weizmann, wrote that at an English Zionist Federation conference, Gaster declared, "I am the greatest Jew of the century". In Gaster's defence, Sacher added that this was wrung from him by a private but audible gibe but he believed that it did represent Gaster's own deep conviction and which left no-one in doubt as to the value he set upon himself.<sup>17</sup> It was Sacher's opinion that although he was seen as one of the great figures at any Congress, Gaster contributed nothing of enduring value to Zionist thought and literature.<sup>18</sup> One of the great American Zionists, Louis Lipsky, supports Sacher's views. He perceived Gaster as being filled with the vanity that afflicted all great orators and, as a proud, egotistical man he never had many devoted followers or disciples for long.

Weizmann's view of Gaster also changed over time. There must have been a strong bond of friendship early on because Gaster was *sandak* at the circumcision of Weizmann's second son.<sup>19</sup> In 1904, writing to Menahem Ussishkin, Weizmann commented that Gaster was more intelligent than the other Zionist leaders and above petty political intrigue. A year later he told Gaster that he was the only man to whom he could turn to "in frankness and friendship". However, by 1913 Weizmann was writing that Gaster was "seeing ghosts" and probably harbouring ambitious plans;

he questioned whether it was worthwhile to attempt to elevate him to the Zionist leadership.<sup>20</sup> His reservations hardened as the Zionists got closer to achieving their principal objective with regard to *Eretz Israel*. In a letter to Gaster on 5 February 1915, he complained at the manner at which he had been criticised by him, saying further that he desired harmony and confidence in his colleagues and was clearly under strain. In actual fact, he threatened to drop out because he did not wish to entangle himself in any quarrels.<sup>21</sup> In a letter dated 8 February 1915, he again showed his displeasure with Gaster, who clearly had needled him by complaining that Weizmann had been twice in London without seeing him.<sup>22</sup>

There is no doubt that Gaster was a very difficult person to work with. He frequently accused others of tricking and betraying him and never admitted that he was ever in the wrong. Other Zionist leaders, especially *Jewish Chronicle* editor Leopold Greenberg and Joseph Cowan, complained that Gaster was unique in finding compromise difficult to accept. He quarrelled with all his colleagues from time to time ("there appears to have been virtually no-one with whom the learned *Haham* did not quarrel eventually")<sup>23</sup> and the eventual elimination of his influence in the Zionist movement resulted from the successful efforts of his old colleagues to dismiss him from any leadership role. Gaster was one of those responsible for Zionism becoming an important part of Anglo-Jewish politics,<sup>24</sup> but eventually he transformed himself from being a widely respected influential and politically aware leader into a peripheral figure.<sup>25</sup>

The breakthrough in Zionist dealings with the British government occurred when Gaster became involved with Sir Mark Sykes soon after Lloyd George became Prime Minister at the end of 1916. Sykes had been appointed to the War Cabinet Secretariat as an Assistant Secretary with special responsibility for British policy towards Palestine.<sup>26</sup> Prior to this, in March 1915, Herbert Samuel gave him a copy of a memorandum that he had put before the Cabinet on support for Zionist aims in Palestine. This document impressed Sykes. In March 1916, Sykes visited Moscow with Francois Georges-Picot to negotiate the final stages of the Sykes-Picot agreement. The visit showed him that Zionism was an important element in Jewish life in Russia. He even discussed with the Russian Foreign Minister the possibility that Zionism could solve the Jewish problem.<sup>27</sup> On his return from Moscow he asked Samuel to put him in touch with a Zionist leader with whom he could hold discussions. Samuel recommended Gaster, who had advised him on his memorandum. Samuel was said to

admire Gaster as a man with adroit political sensibilities. He considered him, rather than Nahum Sokolow or Chaim Weizmann, as the man most suitable to meet Sykes.<sup>28</sup> It is likely that Sykes and Gaster already knew each other. Sykes' son, Christopher, has written that they probably came to know each other as members of learned Oriental societies to which they both belonged.<sup>29</sup> Curiously, in *The Balfour Declaration* in which he speculates at length on why Samuel chose Gaster and not Weizmann or Sokolow to speak to Sykes, Leonard Stein adds a note that Samuel once told him (Stein) that he had no recollection of his suggesting Gaster and not the other two men.<sup>30</sup>

Sykes first met Gaster on 2 May 1916<sup>31</sup> and early on clearly had a favourable impression of his value to him. For example, he arranged for Gaster's correspondence to be exempt from censorship and entrusted him with highly confidential and delicate matters.<sup>32</sup> He further introduced him to Picot. Sykes originally had great difficulty in persuading Picot to recognise the importance of Zionism, but Gaster understood and played upon the key issue that could be used to advance the Zionist cause with both men.<sup>33</sup> At his first meeting with Sykes, Gaster advised that Jewish opinion in the United States could be won over by a *fait accompli* with British soldiers occupying Jerusalem and then, in talks with Picot, he emphasised the importance of bargaining for Zionism and world Jewish opinion by showing how Jewish influence could be tied to the Allied cause.<sup>34</sup> His contacts with Sykes lessened after July 1916, however, in line with Foreign Office policy.<sup>35</sup> The Foreign Office decided to step back from its discussions over Zionism in the context of French opposition to a suggested pro-Zionist statement regarding Palestine's future. But Sykes, still anxious to pursue a pro-Zionist policy, then met James Malcolm, an Armenian representative, who advised him to use Weizmann and Sokolow as the Zionist representatives in any negotiations. Sykes met them both and liked them and they became significantly involved. Sykes began to have reservations about Gaster when the latter suggested that Germany and not France might be preferred as a partner in a condominium in Palestine. Gaster's contacts with Sykes certainly lessened from July 1916 onwards.<sup>36</sup> Sykes' attitude towards Zionism was further reinforced after meeting Aaron Aaronsohn, leader of the NILI espionage group that provided key intelligence data to Allenby in Palestine. Much impressed by Aaronsohn's attitude and objectives, he confided in him his view that Gaster had assumed "pontifical airs" and had tried to assure him he was able to make the

whole of Zionism work. Sykes thus believed Gaster at first but finally realised he had been mistaken and that the latter's egotism was ruining him.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Sykes was disturbed by Gaster's saying that he did not trust Aaronsohn, as he was an "ambitious man".<sup>38</sup> This did not fit in with Sykes' assessment.

As it happened, Gaster's contacts with Sykes were not that well-known by other Zionists. Weizmann apparently only heard of his meetings with Sykes at the end of January 1917, although Sokolow had been aware of them soon after they took place.<sup>39</sup> Despite reservations regarding Gaster's involvement, Sokolow joined a committee, comprising Weizmann, Herbert Bentwich, Joseph Cowen and himself, formed to sketch out a programme for Zionism and to serve as a foundation for the official representations contemplated.<sup>40</sup> By now, Gaster was being strongly criticised as a dictatorial man who was peripheral to the Zionist leadership. Sokolow became the recognised leader of the World Zionist Organisation and was chosen to have further regular consultations with Sykes and Picot.<sup>41</sup> Gaster found himself side-lined by Weizmann, Sokolow and by his especially bitter enemy Leopold Greenberg. Sykes then contacted Sokolow and Weizmann on how to pursue the Zionist question and entered into a close relationship with them from the beginning of 1917. He suggested the key meeting that was held on 7 February. Not wanting to offend Gaster, he proposed it be held at Gaster's home, with Sykes attending in a private capacity and not in any official role. Lord Rothschild, Bentwich, Cowen, James de Rothschild, Sacher, Samuel, Weizmann and Sokolow were also present. Gaster was allowed to preside,<sup>42</sup> but Sokolow was in control of the meeting.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Samuel makes no mention whatsoever of Gaster in his autobiography, *Memories*; of this key meeting he wrote, "I remember being present at a conference [sic] in February 1917 between Sykes and the Zionists".<sup>44</sup> At the meeting, Sokolow was chosen as the person to have further regular consultations with Sykes and Picot and, because all the Entente powers were now seeing the Zionist question as an important one, he was called to Paris in March to outline the principles of the Zionist programme to the French.<sup>45</sup> Not surprisingly, Gaster was furious at the way he had been out-manoeuvred and side-lined, later referring to his displacement as a *coup d'état*<sup>46</sup> (although he comments in his diary, "The most important meeting ever held concerning Zionism was held *here* under my chairmanship").<sup>47</sup>

Gaster was resentful because he claimed to have been superseded by Sokolow after



carrying out discussions with Sykes for nearly a year. Weizmann's reply to this was that Gaster had not conducted the negotiations for almost a year prior to the meeting in his home,<sup>48</sup> and reminded him that he, Weizmann, had proposed before that meeting that Sokolow be chosen to negotiate with Sykes et al.<sup>49</sup> In a letter to James de Rothschild, who had suggested Sokolow because he had the advantage of being a Russian and a layman, Gaster said he "hotly resented" the choice of Sokolow.<sup>50</sup> He later wrote that he saw the Balfour Declaration as being a deliberately vague and tenuous document issued to justify the British occupation of Palestine and gain Jewish support for the war while constituting no tangible achievements of the goals of the Zionist organisation or the realisation of the Basle programme. He bitterly observed that "it was now time for Jews to crawl on their bellies and express unbounded gratitude"<sup>51</sup> (although he did, however, speak favourably about the Balfour Declaration at the celebratory meeting at the London Opera House in December 1917). In 1920, he tried to form a rival organisation.<sup>52</sup>

Notwithstanding the way in which Gaster became perceived by British Zionists, he was very well thought of in the United States. In 1916, Stephen Wise thought he had the stature to enable him to persuade American Jewry to support the Allies in the war, be acceptable to the Yiddish masses and be able to talk to Wall Street. On Gaster's retirement as *Haham* in 1918 following tensions with his congregation, the *American Jewish Chronicle* in 1918 described him as an "international figure of high regard".<sup>53</sup>

How sincere were Sykes' comments about Gaster? Christopher Sykes believed that Gaster opened his father's eyes to the meaning of Zionism in the last days of 1915,<sup>54</sup> but this does not mean that he considered Gaster to be pre-eminent in the discussions and negotiations that later took place. Gaster played a part in Sykes' conversion to Zionism but Sykes was sharp enough to realise that others, such as Sokolow and Weizmann, had more to offer. It is clear that the publication of the Balfour Declaration, in which Sykes played a key role, did not result from any special involvement on Gaster's part. It is, however, worth noting that Herbert Bentwich sent Gaster a letter of congratulation ten days after the Balfour Declaration was published.<sup>55</sup> He, at least, appreciated Gaster's contribution despite the differences between him and other Zionist leaders.

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- 2 Sykes, Christopher, *Two Studies in Virtue* (London: Collins 1953) p176.
- 3 Lipsky, Louis, *Memories in Profile* (Philadelphia: JPS of America 1975) p165.
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- 5 Ibid, pp110-11. Gaster nevertheless opposed Herzl on the Uganda scheme (Sacher Harry, *Zionist Portraits and other essays*, London: Anthony Blond, p72)
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- 7 Stein, pp286-7
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- 12 Herzl, Theodor, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl Vol 1* (Herzl Press, Thomas Yoseloff: New York and London 1960), p419
- 13 Ibid, p272
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- 29 Sykes, Christopher, *op. cit.* p176
- 30 Stein, p286
- 31 Renton, *Weizmann* pp143/4
- 32 Renton *Masquerade* p56
- 33 Renton, *Weizmann* p147
- 34 Ibid, p146
- 35 Renton *Masquerade* p56
- 36 Ibid, p56
- 37 Verrier, A (ed.), *Agents of Empire* Part 3, London & Washington: Brasseys, 1995, p260
- 38 Schneer, p173
- 39 Stein, p287
- 40 Sokolow, p51
- 41 Renton, *Masquerade*, pp56-7
- 42 Weizmann, p238
- 43 Cohen, p222
- 44 Samuel, Herbert, *Memories*, (London: Cressett Press 1945)

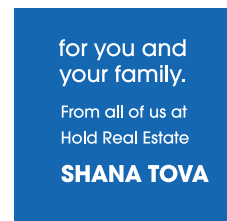
p145. It is worth recording that some key books likewise make no reference to Gaster's involvement in Zionism. These include Walter Lacquer's *History of Zionism*, Israel Cohen's *A Short History of Zionism* and Shane Leslie's *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters*.

- 45 Sokolow, p52
- 46 Renton, *Weizmann* pp149
- 47 Schneer, p197
- 48 Weizmann, *Letters* p408
- 49 Ibid, p404
- 50 Ibid
- 51 Renton, *Masquerade* p71
- 52 Cohen, p299
- 53 *American Jewish Chronicle*, 13 September 1918.
- 54 Sykes, *op.cit.* p176.
- 55 Cohen, *Op. Cit.* p79.
- 59 Cohen, p79

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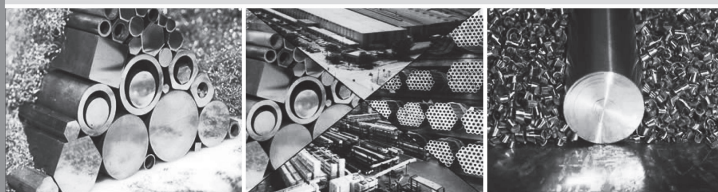
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## WORKING FOR ISRAEL -

\*

Mary Schrire

*Both of my parents, Dr Louis and Mary Schrire, were keen Zionists. My late mother was the longest serving member of the Bnoth Zion Association-WIZO in Cape Town and my late father was named an honorary member - but felt too sheepish to get his certificate. The section below comes from a series of interviews I conducted with my mother to get her life story. I have added some material from other sources - Gwynne Schrire.*

After being demobbed at the end of the war, my husband Dr Louis Schrire decided to go to England to specialise in ophthalmology. Once he got settled I joined him. We spent two years in London and one in Cardiff.

At this time the United Nations were meeting and to their horror they discovered that there were Jews in Auschwitz the Germans had overlooked – no one wanted them – not even the USA! The British did NOT want Jews in Palestine – it would upset their friends, the Arabs, who were giving them oil!!!

Meanwhile, Jews from Russia were sneaking off to Palestine but the British caught them and put them in a concentration camp in Cyprus. Some Jewish settlers fought the British. The Irgun kidnapped three British soldiers and threatened to hang them if Britain hanged three Jews convicted on charges of illegal possession of arms. Both sides followed through with the hangings. The British were outraged, the British press went to town with the “cold blooded Irgun murders” and anti-Jewish violence broke out all over. The antisemitism was horrific – I thought I was living in Nazi Germany. A wooden shul was burnt down in Scotland, London shuls had their windows broken and received telephonic death threats, bricks were thrown through the windows of Jewish shops and “Hitler was right” was daubed on properties.

I was travelling on a bus and was furious when I heard the good British citizens sitting around me discussing the hangings and saying that Hitler “should have killed the lot of them”. I made a vow then that if the United Nations gave the Jews their land, I would use every bit of my energy to work for it.

We returned to South Africa after three years and settled in Kimberley. Three weeks

later I went to a meeting – World Jewry had decided to form a women’s campaign and Doris Kaplan came to speak about it. She asked the lady who ran the Blue Box and JNF Trees Fund to do it, but she refused – she said she helped her husband in his clothing business in the Market Square. (In her old age I discovered them both living in Beit Protea in Israel!)

Doris looked down. I was sitting in the front row, and she recognised me – she and I had been at university together. Later she was to marry Eliahu Lankin, who became Israeli ambassador to South Africa. Doris asked other women, but they all declined, so she said “Mary Katz” will do it.

“But I don’t know anyone,” I said, “I only arrived three weeks ago.”

Someone yelled out, “It’s better to collect money from people you don’t know.”

Then it hit me – I had made a commitment and here it was.

“Yes,” I said, “I’ll do it!”

I have been a campaign collector ever since. They made me vice-chairman and the following year, 1951, chairman, and I held that position until we left Kimberley for Cape Town four years later.

We came to Kenilworth and I joined the Kenilworth Bnoth Zion Association. I was asked to join the executive of both Bnoth Zion Association and the Union of Jewish Women, but refused both. In the Kenilworth branch, the campaign convener left for Ottawa so I took over and the following year became chairman as well, a position I held for practically the whole time until the Kenilworth branch closed.

As there were originally a lot of Southern Suburbs branches we formed a Southern Suburbs committee and Barbara Sandler and I were co-chairmen – we even ran our own Yom Tov market – held in the Claremont Civic Centre. I was repeatedly asked to join the executive but repeatedly refused until I was pressed by Sylvia Winnikow (her aunt was married to my uncle) and gave in. I have remained on ever since.

I used to be in charge of the clothing drive and after we stopped sending the clothing to Israel we ran a shop. When we discovered our sales ladies were helping themselves, we gave the shop up. I put up rails in a spare room and would sell to dealers who would come to my house,



For our AGMs we would find homes in the Southern Suburbs with large gardens and hold "Garden Parties." Being in the Southern Suburbs, it fell to my lot to organise these parties – it was a big headache.<sup>1</sup> It meant finding the necessary homes, hiring a bus to transport the people from Sea Point, hiring tables, chairs, crockery, urns, sun umbrellas - all had to be counted before and afterwards. Extra power sometimes had to be laid on for the urn.

Different branches would be responsible for the catering and serving. My branch made the sandwiches. The day before they would come to my house and we would set up a production line to make sandwiches for two to three hundred people. I was known as the Sandwich Queen. In those days pre-sliced bread was not available so it was my husband's job to slice twenty loaves of bread the night before. I would get up early in the morning and take my maid and gardener along to wipe the dew or rain off the chairs.

In 1981 rain forced us to move at a moment's notice to the Claremont Civic Centre. In 1983 Myra Osrin phoned the night before the AGM to tell me that rain was forecasted for the following day and I had to cancel the idea of holding a function in a garden. Panic - but Rabbi Hoffman of the Wynberg Temple Israel agreed to let us go there and I roped in my grandchildren to help to move everything. The next morning we woke to

a beautiful hot sunny day - indoors we did not need the hired sun umbrellas.

Twice we held the garden party in the home of Phyllis Sachar. She recalled that 700 women attended the garden party in her home in 1970 because they had just moved into their new home and everyone came because they wanted to see what it looked like. The next time was in 1987 as they were moving to Israel. After the garden party they held a lunch for the Country Communities who had their AGM. As they finished each course, the dishes were washed and sent downstairs to the packers for shipping to Israel.

Then the hire of the bus became too expensive. By that time hiring costs had become so high that garden parties had become impractical - not to speak of the vagaries of Cape Town weather, so we moved to the Albow Centre which meant no problems with the weather and I could relax! There everything was accessible and available.

In 1967, we were all anxiously anticipating trouble because Egypt was behaving badly and closed the Straits of Tiran.<sup>2</sup> We decided to collect more funds and have a bumper fete - we went around collecting from everyone and asking them to give something of value. We went to one woman's house and asked her for something valuable to sell. She looked around and said - 'OK - take that Persian carpet.' So we did.



*A B'nai Zion fete, circa 1960. From left: Renne Rakin, Maisie East, Mary Schrire*

Sylvia Smaller-Winnokur was in the chair when the war began.

"It seemed my fate to be chairman during the crises of both the Suez Campaign in 1956 and the Six Day War of June 1967. The Israeli Cavalcade was our response to Israel's thrilling achievement on the field of battle. The entire Jewish community was brought together in a statement of unity and commitment rarely experienced before. My phone used to ring until all hours of the day and night with people offering 'to do something to help'. Although all offers were graciously accepted, I couldn't help feeling that we shouldn't need wars and crises to "want to do something to help". The lessons of history have been wasted on us if we need disasters to stir us into action. The corridors of Zeeland House, where our offices were, were choked by volunteers wanting to join the Israeli Army but the speed and success of Israel's remarkable forces left most of the volunteers frustrated. They weren't needed. Israel did however need volunteers to help rebuild the disturbed economy and to help with the agricultural needs of the kibbutzim and moshavim whose men were retained in the Army for nine months after the war ended. Only those volunteers who were able to offer a minimum of six months service were subsequently considered and many remained as *olim*. We were deluged with contributions of goods and valuables of a quality and quantity never offered before. In order to do full justice to what was showered upon us, we sat around the clock with experts in such fields as paintings, sculpture, silverware, antiques, jewellery, furs, stamps and coins. The Israel Cavalcade itself was a happening and the outpouring of emotion, support for Israel and real hard work by our army of workers has never before or since been equalled or excelled."<sup>3</sup>

At that time the old station concourse was going to be demolished and we heard that another charity organisation was going to use it for their annual fete so we decided to do the same. We asked them if they would leave all their decorations up so that we could use it the following day. The Jewish convenor said he would only do so if we paid him a considerable amount of money. We explained that we were trying to collect money, not spend it.

"If you don't pay me I shall tear them down," he said - and he did.

When we arrived the next morning to set up the fete we found the decorations

hanging in shreds. It looked dreadful. We asked Robert Krafchik the caterer for advice and he tidied it up for us without charging and made the place look lovely at a moment's notice.

Bella Silverman recalled<sup>4</sup> that 'It was fantastic because the station was totally empty - we had the shell of the station and we put out wonderful stalls. I had to fetch Mary Marcus (Raymond Ackerman's mother) - she had a stall and made doughnuts the whole day. Everyone was helping."

Esther Rabie<sup>5</sup> from the Bishops court branch went to Percy Sieff, the actor, and asked him to do a show for us. He agreed and organised the whole thing for us, called The Best of the Big Shows with Jerry Bosman. We held it in the Alhambra. It had two and a half to three thousand seats, but somehow we managed to sell the tickets.

When it came to the Yom Kippur War the B'nai Zion decided to hold a sacrifice sale at the Temple Israel hall assisted by the Union of Jewish Women and Kenny Finberg agreed to be the auctioneer. The Jewish community was approached to donate objects of value and they responded with open hearts - we thought we would never sell some of the things that were handed in.

We decided to ask people for their campaign money in advance, even asking, in view of the war, if they would agree to double up. Mrs X was childless and lived in a smart flat beautifully decorated with antiques, and had a very spoilt poodle - she used to ask my husband to look at its eyes. She always gave a minimal amount. When I asked her if she would double up, she said to me, "Mary, are you trying to bankrupt me?"

Her husband who was standing in the doorway said, "Give Mary what she wants."

She turned on him, "This is women's business. Just get out."

She did not increase, but her personal circumstances were not my business. When Mr X let me out of the front door, he said, "It is hard asking for money, isn't it, Mary?"

Twenty years later my daughter phoned me on the First of April to say that someone had told her that a lawyer was trying to find "the woman who runs a charity group virtually single handed."

"Isn't that your Mother? Phone the lawyer", the man had said.

Gwynne thought it was a practical joke but suggested that I phone just to be on the safe side. I said to the lawyer: "I know it is April Fools' Day, but I have been asked to phone you."

He told me that I had been left a large sum of money for my 'charity'. I told him I would only believe him when I saw the cheque. When it arrived I really could not

believe my eyes - it was for a very large sum of money indeed, and it came from the estate of Mr X, his wife having died before him.

The next day I went to our Bnoth Zion Association meeting waving the cheque. Our branch, Kenilworth, had decided we wanted this money to go to a specific project. The home in Neve Amiel in the Jezreel valley which we support needed a dental clinic, so today there is a clinic with a plaque saying that it was erected by the Kenilworth branch of the Cape Town Bnoth Zion Association through the generous donation of Mr X.

Some years later I was at a dinner party where the conversation was about ingratitude. One man told the story of his childless uncle to whom he used to give lifts and when he died, what did the old man do? He left his money to "a stupid old lady for her stupid charity". I turned to him and said "I feel

sorry for you. I know exactly how you feel."

I think he expected a similar story, but I added that I was that stupid old lady, and the money was not for a charity, it was for Israel and if he went to Neve Amiel he would be able to see his uncle's name memorialised on a plaque in a dental clinic which treats disadvantaged children from the slums of Tel Aviv, from Ethiopia and from Russia. He turned the colour of the borsht.

#### NOTES

1. Interview, 7.4. 2000
2. Interview 26.12.1999
3. Sylvia Winnikow, Bnoth Zion's 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, August 1981
4. Interview, 7.4.2000
5. Esther Rabie, interview, 31.5.2000. Soon after this Esther was killed tragically. She was much mourned by her fellow Bnoth Zion associates.

WIZO's work in Israel's 70th year is as viable and important today as it was in its early days. Through its 800 projects and programmes throughout Israel, WIZO is still the biggest social safety net for families in distress.

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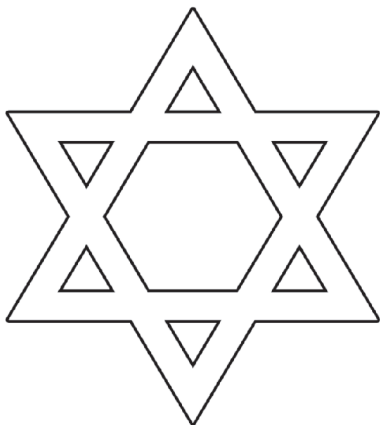
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best wishes  
to our  
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## HASHEM'S EMISSARY HEALS ISRAEL'S CONFLICTS

\*

Abigail Bagraim

A central tenet of Judaism is that Abraham is regarded as the father of the Jewish people, and that through him and his descendants a covenant was transmitted to future generations.

We first meet Abraham as an adult, at the end of Chapter 11 of Genesis. We are told that his father Terach journeyed with his family from Abraham's birthplace in Ur of the Chaldees (placed by some archaeologists as near Basra in modern Iraq) and then settled in Haran, which is today in Turkey near the Syrian border.

In Chapter 12, Abram becomes the central character of the narrative. G-d instructs him to leave behind all that he knows and to go to "the Land which I will show you". If he accepts that challenge, Abram is to be blessed with a special relationship with G-d throughout his lifetime and his descendants, too, will be chosen for greatness. His original name, 'Abram', meaning 'exalted father', becomes 'Abraham', 'father of many'.

The Torah offers no reason why Abraham was selected for this particular honour so Midrash, Jewish interpretation and elucidation of the Biblical texts, has provided us with possible explanations. One Midrash on Genesis recorded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE, tells the story that Abraham's father was a manufacturer of idols, and that the child beheaded the idols and placed the hammer in the hand of the remaining idol, prompting his father to admonish him. Terach says that Abram must have done the damage since (he admits) the idols are only made of clay. Interestingly, this is a story which also appears in the Koran.

The merits of Abraham are demonstrated throughout his adult life, as described in the Biblical text.

He leaves behind everything he has known in order to begin a new civilization in an unknown land. This is an act of faith. When his shepherds have a dispute with those of his nephew Lot, he allows Lot to choose which portion of land he will take and agrees to go in the other direction. Later,

he risks his life in battle to save Lot, who has been kidnapped.

He reluctantly takes a second wife in order to fulfil his destiny, because Sarai, his first wife, is believed to be unable to have children. He loves the child from that relationship (Ishmael) and Ishmael, although later superseded by Isaac as the heir of the covenant, is bequeathed a special blessing.

He accepts the burden of circumcision even though he is a very old man by the time it is commanded of him. In return, G-d changes his name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning 'princess'.

Even when recovering from the circumcision, he is fastidious in his duty to take care of strangers and to welcome visitors. When he sees three strangers approaching, he jumps up to greet them. This is despite the fact that he is in the Divine presence at the time. He knows that the duty to one's fellow human-being is the priority that G-d wants.

When he is told that the city of Sodom is to be destroyed, he pleads with G-d for it to be saved if there are just 10 good people to be found there. In doing so, he 'takes on' G-d, saying that if G-d is to consider Himself the G-d of Justice, he would not agree to destroy the righteous along with the wicked. His arguing with G-d as an advocate for his fellow human beings is seen as the greatest measure of Abraham's goodness.

He is prepared to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, if required. Isaac is the child miraculously born to the previously barren Sarah and destined to be the direct heir of the promise G-d has made to Abraham. This difficult and moving text (Chapter 22), known as the Binding of Isaac, is seen both as the ultimate test of Abraham's faith and a renunciation of human sacrifice.

When his wife Sarah dies, he takes great pains to ensure that she is given an appropriate burial in Hebron, on land that he purchases for future generations as a family burial place.

### The Covenant

Genesis tells how G-d establishes a 'covenant' with Abraham to be passed on to future generations. The first statement of this special relationship appears in Chapter

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12, in which Abraham promises to forego all allegiances to his previous idolatrous community and to make a new life in the "Promised Land":

And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.

And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great...and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.

The covenant is restated in Chapter 15 with a dramatic contractual ceremony featuring a divine fire passing between sacrificial animals, and a promise that the descendants of Abraham will be restored to their land after four hundred years of slavery.

The covenant is sealed in Chapter 17, when Abraham agrees that the sign of the covenant will appear on the bodies of all his male descendants through circumcision. At the same time, G-d promises:

And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings will emerge from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and between you and between your seed after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be to you for a God and to your seed after you. And I will give you and your seed after you the land of your sojournings, the entire land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be to them for a God.

Abraham's covenant is handed on to his son, Isaac, whom G-d explicitly blesses in Chapter 26, and through him to Jacob and his descendants. In Chapter 32, Jacob wrestles with an angel. Henceforth his name becomes 'Israel' - 'He who wrestles with G-d'. His descendants become "The Children of Israel", and the land is known as "The Land of Israel".

The painting features one of the central episodes of Abraham's life, the 'Binding of Isaac'.

The reason why I chose the colour pink as the principal colour to surround and hold the holiest city of Jerusalem is because it represents compassion, nurturing and affection. It relates to unconditional caring and understanding, and the giving and receiving of nurturing.

A combination of red and white, the colour pink contains the need for action of red, helping it to achieve the potential for success and insight offered by white. It is the passion and power of red softened with the purity, openness and completeness of white. The deeper the pink, the more passion and energy it exhibits.

Pink is feminine and romantic, affectionate and intimate, thoughtful and caring. It tones down the physical passion of red replacing it with a gentle loving energy. And this again is the intention for my choice of the colour pink to represent the country, Israel. To cushion the land in all that is feminine, romantic, affectionate and intimate, thoughtful and caring.





“No other nation in the whole of history has wept for Zion.”

\*

Bernard Moses Casper

## Rabbi Moshe Dov Casper

1916-1988

On the occasion of his 30<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit*

Rabbi Bernard Moses (Moshe Dov) Casper was born and educated in London and obtained his rabbinic ordination in Israel. During the Second World War, he was commissioned as senior chaplain to the Jewish infantry brigade in the British army. Rabbi Casper held a number of important posts in the rabbinic and educational fields, including as Chief Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues of South Africa from 1963-1986. He retired to Jerusalem and passed away on 10 Tevet 1988.

In 1983, the South African Zionist Federation hosted a panel discussion on the subject of the future of Jerusalem with a Protestant clergyman, Reverend Bond, and Archbishop Cassidy on behalf of the Papal Nuncio. Rabbi Casper was asked to present the Jewish position, an edited transcription of which follows. It is an eloquent and emotional response relevant to the present debate on Jerusalem.

*Isaac Reznik*

In 1954, at the close of a visit to Israel, a very distinguished theologian and prelate Monsignor Francesci said some very warm words just as he was about to leave the country. He said, “We understand that the Hebrew people have a spiritual connection with us; that their strange survival goes beyond the customary norms by which an ordinary nation evolves. And we Christians, if we have not lost the sense of Christianity, cannot but perceive to what a profound extent modern Israel is linked to our own salvation.”

I can’t help feeling that those are sentiments which perhaps explain why it is possible for a panel such as this arraigned before you here this evening and that we should be able to meet together in order to discuss what might be considered the best steps for the future course of Jerusalem and its situation. Jerusalem has occupied a central position in the life of the Jewish people for 3000 years and more. Now this central position of Jerusalem in Jewish history, religion, law, and tradition is fully recognized by enlightened world opinion. In the 1944 edition of the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible prepared by Christian theological authorities, Jerusalem is

described in the following words: “The sacred city and well known capital of Judah, of Judea, of Palestine and of the Jews throughout the world.”

We have come here this evening to talk apparently about the future of Jerusalem. Yet, surely, so far as we are concerned, we are all believers, and surely would agree that the future of Jerusalem has already been determined long ago by the authority wherewith, no less than Scripture itself! We are not going to quibble with what is written, for example, in the book of Samuel, where we are told how David, after he had reigned for seven-and-a-half years in Hebron, moved to Jerusalem and took Jerusalem from the Jebusites and established it as the capital of his kingdom because it was in a very convenient position. It was high up in the mountains surrounded by hills. It was possible from there, because of its relevant position to Judea and Samaria [and] because of the fact that it was in the position between the south and the north of the country, it was possible for him to rule the whole of the country. And so he made Jerusalem the capital of all Israel. His son, King Solomon, sanctified it. And I want to say very clearly that it was King Solomon who sanctified not

only the place in which the Temple itself was built, but he sanctified the whole of the city. If you look in the Book of Kings in the third chapter, you'll find the words which tell us how he married a strange wife, the daughter of Pharaoh: "And he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his house and the House of the Lord and the wall of Jerusalem roundabout." The city was known as *Ir David*, the City of David. It was known as *Metzudat David*, the Fortress of David, because David actually lived for a while within that fortress so that he should be safe. It was known as *Tzion* [Zion], and of course it was known as *Yerushalayim* [Jerusalem]. The texts I have quoted refer to Jerusalem in all of those terms.

When King Solomon had finished building the Temple, he assembled the people and consecrated it, and prayed a very long and distinguished prayer which you will find in the eighth chapter in the Book of Kings. He referred there to "Their land which Thou gavest to our fathers ... the City which you have chosen - and also this House which I have built for Thy Name." So Solomon consecrated the city as a whole, not merely the Temple Mount.

In order to avoid a long historical record, you know that after some few hundred years that commonwealth and state was destroyed, in the year 586 BCE. It was in relation to this that the psalmist spoke that magnificent psalm, "By the river of Babylon there we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Zion." *No other nation in the whole of history has wept for Zion.* "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, let my right hand be cut off." *Which other nation in the world has had that kind of sentiment?* Zion, Jerusalem, was the soul of the nation.

It wasn't very long, barely half a century after that destruction that the whole of the Babylonian empire was itself conquered by the Persian empire, and the new emperor, Cyrus, issued his famous edict (of which we read in the first few verses of the Book of Ezra, as well as in the Book of Chronicles and elsewhere) in which he says: "Now I be made emperor over all these nations." And he calls upon the Jews within his empire to rise up and go back where? To Jerusalem! "He has chosen me to build Him

the House in Jerusalem. Who is of His people that want to go back, let them go back."

Jerusalem and which people? The Jewish people, all in exile. Go back to the city which is yours. Already at that time there was a clearly established link between Jerusalem and the Jewish people. And it wasn't very long after that that Nehemiah was charged to go back also in order to re-assist in the rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

If we are talking in terms of the future of Jerusalem, we must turn our minds back to what has been said in that relevance by Scriptural sources. There are the well-known words from Isaiah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people. *Dabru al lev Yerushalayim* - Speak to the heart of Jerusalem" It's all in one verse - the people and Jerusalem. Again, the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter: "It shall come to pass in that day, there will be as great shofar sounded and those who are lost in the land of Assyria [*Ashur*] shall come and those who are oppressed and scattered in the land of Egypt." They should all come back. "*Vehishtachavu laKodesh* - and they will worship to the Lord in the holy city on the holy mountain *beYerushalayim* - in Jerusalem." Who shall come back? All the scattered ones of the people of Israel. Again in the 52<sup>nd</sup> chapter: "You open, broad places of Jerusalem, open your mouths and speak forth with song, [all of you together], for the Lord has comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem." Over and over again - His people and Jerusalem. Psalms 88: "*Bonei Yerushalayim Hashem*, The Lord doth build Jerusalem, He will gather in the scattered ones from Israel." Perhaps one more from Zachariah (8<sup>th</sup> Chapter): "I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country, and I will bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem."

When we read Scripture we read it meaningfully and directly. No roundabout ideas and suggestions as to what it might have meant or what it could be suggested to mean, later on, a thousand years later or something like that. We read it directly straight as it says. We understand it.

Jerusalem, or Zion, is spoken of very frequently, and the Jewish people are spoken of very frequently as the Daughter of Zion. In the year 70

AD, when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and the Second Jewish Commonwealth, Jerusalem itself was orphaned, its mother people scattered into exile.

And from then it was ruled by a succession of foreign rulers and conquerors, step-fathers and step-mothers and treated by them as the proverbial orphaned child. It was beaten; neglected, left desolate, dirty, despoiled, devastated and uncared for. The Romans not only destroyed it, but razed it to the ground. They even tried to change its name, to Aelia Capitolina, so that the very name Jerusalem should be forgotten. Then came the Byzantines. After their conversion to Christianity, Byzantine rulers began to look back to Jerusalem. And they went and tried to mark out certain places and certain spots in the city in which certain events according to their tradition had taken place which were of sacred meaning to them. They wanted to mark those spots with chimes, churches, convents and monasteries, and to make them places of pilgrimage. They did not think of Jerusalem only as a place where people live. It was thought of mainly as a spiritual center, hence they wanted to have a link with those special spots which meant something to them.

After the Byzantine period came the Arab-Muslim period. And what happened during that period? Please note: that was only in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, 638 C.E. For so much as we are concerned, that is only around the corner. Jerusalem had already been the capital of Israel for over 1000 years before that and the world had accepted it as the capital of Israel for all of that period. When the Arabs ruled it, they didn't regard Jerusalem as their main city. Their main city was Mecca and their second was Medina. Mohammed turned away from Jerusalem and towards Mecca and since then when they pray followers of Islam have turned in the direction of Mecca, not of Jerusalem. Only Jews turn in the direction of Jerusalem when they pray.

The Arab Muslims did in fact build that very beautiful building known as the Dome of the Rock. It is a very fine, big mosque, but people were never encouraged to go there for their pilgrimage. When Muslims go on a pilgrimage - their *hajj* as they

call it - they go to Mecca. Jerusalem was not even the capital city when they ruled the country. They built themselves a special new town to serve them as their main city, the town of Ramle.

The Christian theologian Professor Stendow has written as follows: "For Christians and Muslims, the term 'holy site' is an adequate expression of what matters. Here are sacred places hallowed by holy events. Here are the places for pilgrimage. But Judaism is different. Its religion is not tied to sites, but to the land. Not to what happened in Jerusalem, but to Jerusalem itself. And that I can't help feeling is a fundamental difference between Judaism and the other religions. As far as Judaism is concerned, the whole of Jerusalem is holy and sacred and fundamental to its belief."

A little later, in 1099, the Crusaders became the new foreign conquerors and rulers of the land. Their period was marked by what? By murder and pillage. They tried to prevent Jews from coming into the city of Jerusalem altogether. The Jews managed with a bit of bribery and were allowed in sometimes for special occasions like *Tisha b'Av*. In 1517 the Ottoman Turks came on the scene, and ruled it as part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years, from 1517 until 1917, when towards the end of the First World War the British under General Allenby marched in and took possession. During that whole 400-year period, Jerusalem was little more than a backwater, so far as the Ottomans were concerned - a neglected, distant province. And even during the time when the British were in charge, from 1917 until they gave it up in 1948, there was discrimination against Jews too. I'm sorry to have to say it, but it is true. I'll give you one or two illustrations. The majority of the population during the whole of that period was Jewish. Jerusalem has had a majority Jewish population for well over 100 years, yet they insisted that the mayor of Jerusalem must always be an Arab. The climax to all this came in 1948 and for the years that followed up until 1967. That is the period marked by what is called Jordanian rule. It should more correctly be called the rule by the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, since it was Transjordan that unleashed war and conquered that



part of Jerusalem - I mean the old, original part of Jerusalem. They also conquered the rest of the territory on the West Bank - the euphemism for Samaria and Judea - conquered and misruled it for nineteen years.

It is not easy to speak about that period without a certain amount of emotion. During the whole of those nineteen years Jews were literally forbidden to enter the city of Jerusalem. I'm not talking about the new city outside the confines of the walls. I'm talking about the original, Old City of Jerusalem which is now in our hands. Almost all of the synagogues were reduced to rubble. On the Mt. of Olives, some 38 000 s tombstones in that ancient cemetery of Jewish sacred interest were pulled up and broken and used for terrible purposes - for making roads, for building bunkers, and for constructing, if you'll excuse me, latrines. Sacred scrolls of the law, which had been preserved for hundreds of years were torn and burnt and destroyed and left lying as part of the rubbish. There was an attempt made during that time period to obliterate every trace of the Jewish past. The city was divided and it was disfigured. It was made *Judenrein*; the only time in the whole of its history when that was successfully carried out. Where was the voice of protest at that time with regard to the Jewish holy places? We waited in vain to hear such a voice.

In light of this historical record, I am driven to ask the question, is there any other nation apart from ours that has any basis for a claim to rulership over the Holy City? Is there any other faith, any other group of people, any other central authority that has an entitlement to say how the city as a city be ruled and controlled? Never! In 1967, came the end of what might be termed the Arabization policy. There was an end to all bans and restraints at that time and the beginning of freedom of movement for everybody. There was a religious freedom to all faiths and an accessibility to all the holy places was immediately guaranteed.

I had the privilege of being in Jerusalem in those days. I remember when the wall dividing the Old City from the New City was pulled down. I remember how thousands upon thousands of people - Jews, Arabs, Moslems, Christians - all came down

to see each other. Not only Jews, [but] Arabs living in Israel flocked to the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque to pray for the first time in nineteen years. It was for them a homecoming too, in a way. Christians from Israel who had had difficulty in crossing from the New City of Jerusalem to the Old City, were now free to do so, and have been ever since.

Now, something very special has been said with regard to the internationalizing or the policy otherwise [know as] the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem. I want to voice what appears to me to be the basis of Jewish, and more particularly of Israeli objections to this policy which has been proposed and apparently is still the avouched policy of the Holy See. Let me go through this very quickly. First, we claim that there are Jewish rites in this city, which are historic rites going back 3000 years, and that can likely not be set aside and there is nobody else in the world that can claim that. Secondly, if we had any sort of international control, there would presumably have to be an international body to control it - a commissioner, a counsel; some governmental machinery in order to control it of an international character would it not necessarily and inevitably reflect the politics of the states comprising that body? And if it is to be under the auspices of the United Nations, for example, would we wish a country like Russia to have a direct say in the control of the holy city?

The safety of the holy places does not require a policy of internationalization. The government of Israel soon after 1967 made it abundantly clear that the holy places would be respected of all religions and it's a wonderful thing to say that to this very day sixteen years have gone by [and] I don't think there has ever been a period in the entire history of the city of Jerusalem where there has been such openness and such freedom of worship and of religious tolerance and of availability and accessibility of all holy places and shrines. Why to suggest that there should be an internationalization of Jerusalem because there are holy places in it? One might as well suggest that Italy should give up and internationalize the city of Rome because The Vatican is in it. True, it's a very


important center and seat. There is no reason whatsoever, it seem to me, to encroach upon the civil liberties of Jerusalem's population because of holy places. Israel, the government of Israel, has granted administrative powers. The government of Israel says that we don't want to rule the holy places of India, or any one of the great faiths or religions. They must rule the holy places themselves. We grant them administrative rights and powers and let them arrange what has to be arranged and let them manage their affairs. On the contrary, the government of Israel has assisted in restoring many of the damaged places of worship, [and] other holy places: of putting them into a play, a situation of dignity, and of honor and of reverence, without, at all, a policy of internationalization.

The present system is one of a peaceful co-existence: people of all faiths intermingle freely.


There is a regularity and normalcy of social and commercial intercourse in the whole of the city. People do business together, talk together. They have cultural activities and go into the streets together. Go into the marketplaces and you will see them all

mingling, thousands of them together, crowds of them together. It is true that there are problems as well. Can you tell me one country in the world where there are not problems? But I would say that this is the first time in 2000 years that there has been such an air of peaceful coexistence in the holy city of Jerusalem. Why? It reminds me again of that verse in Zachariah: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts, there shall yet old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem. Every man with his staff in his hand for very age, and the broad places of the city shall be filled with boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." That is Jerusalem today.

We are facing a world today which seems to be threatened with lengthening shadows. In the midst of this darkness, the time is ripe for us to join hands and to build and strengthen and expand that Holy City of Jerusalem to be the beacon of light that it was intended to be so that it may illumine the world. Let us all join hands in promoting that openness and freedom of the city of Jerusalem. And let a free and united Jerusalem proclaim redemption to all mankind.



**COMMUNITY  
SECURITY  
ORGANISATION**



**Protecting Jewish life and the Jewish way of life while empowering the community to protect itself.**

Terrorism and Anti-Semitism are characteristics of modern life and while the South African Jewish community has been spared a successful terrorist attack, we are not immune to this reality, especially over the High Holy Days.

The CSO is constantly working to increase the security of the community while striving to maintain our beautiful Jewish way of life.

Some basic Security Tips:

- Be aware of your surroundings and be alert to suspicious activity.
- Report possible information gathering or anti-Semitism in whatever form.
- Avoid congregating in the streets outside your Shul.
- Walk together in groups; always on pavements or on the right-hand side of the road, facing oncoming traffic. At night wear reflective clothing.
- Keep your walking routes to well-lit streets.
- Women and girls should be escorted by a male, particularly at night.
- Volunteer to assist your security team. Stand security shifts at your Shul.

Shana Tova U'metuka and G'mar Chatima Tova to you and your loved ones from all of us at the CSO.

**FOR ANY SECURITY OR MEDICAL EMERGENCY, SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY OR POTENTIAL THREATS SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OR JEWISH INSTALLATIONS, CONTACT THE CSO ON**  
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SHANA TOVA  
FROM ALL OF US AT THE CSO

# ISRAEL, A MORAL STATE, RISES ABOVE ANTISEMITISM.

\*

Rodney Mazinter

...[W]e have now entered a new era of global antisemitism.<sup>1</sup> The continued scapegoating of Israel and of European Jews by multiple groups simultaneously, the systematic shedding of Jewish-Israeli blood, has reached a dangerous, contagious level. Even as civilian Israel is attacked literally every day, anti-Zionists and antisemites deny that this is so and falsely accuse Israel of atrocities it has not committed.

“Let me be clear: the war against Jews is being waged on many fronts - militarily, politically, economically, and through propaganda - and on all continents. In my opinion, anyone who denies this, or who blames the Jews for provoking the attacks, is an antisemite. Anyone who falsely accuses Israel of committing atrocities and massacres it has not committed is an antisemite. Anyone who cannot talk about Israel’s mistakes, failures and imperfections without demonizing Israel is an antisemite.

... I am forced to conclude...that the new antisemite is an anti-Zionist...someone who is willing to deny a national refuge to only one group in the world: the long oppressed Jews. They assume that every other group on Earth deserves its own nation, no matter how barbaric its leaders and citizens may be.

Flying home from Israel to South Africa I had time to ponder Phyllis Chesler’s words in the book I was reading.<sup>2</sup> Coupled with the rise of antisemitism in the world I had a moment of sudden insight against the backdrop of my life growing up in a secular environment in South Africa and what I had experienced on this visit to the Holy Land.

In the row in front of my seat sat a middle aged Israeli couple who, while he wore a kippah, did not require a special kosher meal on *El Al*. The family across the aisle,

comprising father, mother and two children did order a special kosher meal and spent the entire flight reading from religious books and praying.

Behind them sat my travelling companion, Elad, a 30-year old native Israeli now permanently resident in South Africa. Elad displayed all the fine leadership qualities of an Israeli who after school had graduated through the hard-knocks of obligatory three years army service and emerged as an independent thinker set to improve by dint of hard work the wealth and growth of any country that enjoys his talents. Alongside me sat a pretty young Israeli woman, modern, self-assured, with a stud protruding from her nose, listening to music on her i-Pod. Towards the back of the plane was a group of excited young South African Jews returning home after a year in Israel under the auspices of Bnei Akiva.

To my mind you could not find a more interesting and inoffensive representation of humanity anywhere. And yet, these are the people that the world is growing to hate. I had arrived at Ben Gurion airport ten days previously to attend the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, held at Jerusalem’s Crowne Plaza Hotel. It was my first time back in Israel after eighteen years. My taxi sped along the main traffic artery between Tel Aviv and the capital. A few kilometres from the airport at the *Shar Ha Gay* Interchange we came across deeply forested slopes that stretched away on either side and ahead, unbroken as far as the *Hemed* Interchange where the road started its ascent to Jerusalem. A few days later as I retraced my steps on my way to Tel Aviv I would have the distinct pleasure of forgoing the highway and driving through those forests punctuated by fields of intense cultivation.

I might just as well have been driving through the Knysna forests back home in the Southern Cape; there was that same feeling of tranquillity and peace. The difference was that the forests in South Africa took thousands of years to establish themselves and were now under threat because of human encroachment, while those in tiny, crowded Israel had sprung from the ‘infertile’ desert just seventy years ago. Israel is the only country that has shown an increase in the number of trees on its land. I am not an

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observant Jew, but I nevertheless could not prevent the thought that here indeed was God's work carried out by the inspired and loving hand of man.

### Growing up Jewish in South Africa after World War II

I was born ten years prior to the founding of Israel, and raised and educated in South Africa. I grew up in a period that was one of unprecedented worldwide sympathy for Jews far removed from the killing fields of Europe. The details of the Holocaust and tiny Israel's struggle to survive the early days of its existence saw global public opinion shifting in favour of Jews, who were increasingly recognised as being innocent victims of an unrelenting and unreasoning hatred. This natural tolerance impacted on my life and formed my opinions.

My formative and adult years led me to believe that at long last, antisemitism was a thing of the past, a bad memory. I remember reading Thomas Friedman's *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, and what an impression it made on me. It so beautifully and compellingly put both the Jewish and Arab sides of the question, finding justification in each, and concluding that Israel, because of its military advantage, was in the most favourable position to accommodate the most important demands of the Palestinians and thereby bring about peace - a truly liberal, humanitarian concept that resonated at the time with my feelings of justice being served for all. At no stage of my life had I ever felt more at peace and optimistic about the future.

Then occurred a new sequence of events, starting with the Camp David-Taba debacle in 2000-01. Prime Minister Ehud Barak's unprecedented offer of giving virtually everything the Palestinians had been demanding was inexplicably rejected and the world watched in horror as Arafat took his people down the slippery slope to poverty, disease and war. In Arafat's mind, there was simply no compromise when dealing with the Jews - it was everything for the Arabs or nothing. However, and inexplicably, instead of sympathy remaining with Israel for having made so far-reaching a peace offer, international public opinion shifted away towards the Palestinians with a vengeance. The world's brief flirtation with the Israeli position was over; it reverted to what can only be described as a paroxysm of hatred not seen since the 1930s. Once more, antisemitism was stalking the university campuses and academic circles of the so-called civilised countries of the West.

Those of us still hopeful of the wisdom of the silent majority being able to see through the slander, distortions and lies, were quickly



disabused by the excesses of Durban 2001, the UN General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and its infamous Goldstone Report and its continuing biased infatuation with Israel, and myriads of op-eds written by journalists and media commentators on Israel in particular, and Jews in general. There was the resurfacing of the vile antisemitic Russian fraud *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The one single matter that Thomas Friedman does not explain in his book is how to counter the hatred that is the driving force of the Arabs. Hatred of Jews is enshrined in the Hamas and PA charters, tracts acting as a model for those intent on lies, distortions, vilification, delegitimation and antisemitism for the sole purpose of killing Jews.

The fast spread of antisemitism has as much to do with the easy availability of information, true and false, over the Internet, as with the commensurate lack of interest among the general population to concern itself with the issue. The truth is no match for lies. To invent a lie is easy and to spread it around even simpler. All one need do is repeat it often enough for it to take hold. Churchill famously said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." Countering untruths with a riposte, "that's a lie", is no argument. To put the facts requires much reading, firstly to educate oneself about the general situation and then to research the lie in order to rebut it, and only then counter it with the verifiable truth. By that time the lie is "halfway around the world" and has secured a limpet-like hold aided and abetted by a hostile Western press.

People have come to rely uncritically on the media, so that when newspapers, TV, radio and websites support a lie about the Jews and Israel, or are even complicit in a lie's invention as is too often the case today, that is antisemitism pure and simple. Too many Western intellectuals and academics who pride themselves on being non-racist do not make a stand against the orgy of racism against Jews. On the contrary, they are traitors to their own non-racist principles when it comes to the Jews and Israel and are often found to be leading the racist mob. They have deserted

the path of objectivity, neutrality and sanity.

Today you find antisemitism not only among the illiterate, indoctrinated or unemployed, but also among the intelligentsia and Muslim immigrants to Europe, the USA and the United Kingdom. The new antisemite is also, as described by Chesler, (*The New Antisemitism*, 2003, pp178-9): "...an Egyptian physician or journalist, a Saudi Arabian prince, an Iranian cleric, a North American college student or his esteemed professor, or an Islamic terrorist in Indonesia, Africa, Chechnya, Lebanon, Iraq or Syria. The new antisemite can also be a Nobel Prize winner, an international scholar, an activist, a journalist, or a poet."

### The Hate Industry



Boycotts of Israeli goods and academics are neither logical nor morally sustainable. Their oxygen can be found in the heady atmosphere of lies and distortions. It can only be explained by being based on conditioning; feeding on a dormant hatred that confounds reason and rational thinking.

When the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, all accuse Israel of purposely targeting innocents, the West should recognise immediately that this Jew-hatred is based on lies. However, as we are well aware, if repeated often enough, lies come to be accepted as truth. This fact is exploited by people, especially Europeans and the political Left, with a malevolent agenda targeting Jews and Israel.

In March 2014, French Interior Minister Manuel Valls called anti-Zionism "an invitation to antisemitism". He made this remark on the two-year anniversary of the fatal shootings at a Jewish day school of Rabbi Jonathan Sandler, his two sons, Ariele, 6, and Gabriel, 3, and Miriam Monsenego, 8.

"The old antisemitism of the French extreme right is renewed," Valls said, "It feeds off hate for Israel. It feeds off anti-Zionism. Because anti-Zionism is an invitation to antisemitism."

Antisemitism did not just disappear with the end of World War II. Like most Jews, we got used to having ugly things said about us from time to time. Mostly we were lucky and grateful for the many Christian friends who stood up for us, and still do. But nothing

prepared us for today's misinformation, demonisation of Israel, and the gut-wrenching, anti-Israel, antisemitic hostility expressed by many students, professors, church members, and even erstwhile "liberal" newspapers – and now, even Jews who act out their anti-Israel stance for heaven knows what reason.

I was shocked by how unaware the Jewish community is and how little they are actually doing to counter this rising antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism.

This new form of bigotry against Israel is called the "new antisemitism," with "Israel" replacing "Jew" in traditional antisemitic imagery and canards, singling out and discriminating against the Jewish state, and denying the Jewish people alone the right to self-determination. The new antisemitism is packaged in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which claims to champion Palestinian rights though its real goal is to erode support for Israel, discredit Jews who support it and pave the way for eliminating the Jewish state.

Many anti-Israel advocates deny that they belong to or support the BDS movement; this despite the documented fact that they on many occasions speak in support of boycotting, divesting from and implementing sanctions against Israel. They use subtle language that if pursued to its logical end would mean the end of Israel as the Jewish homeland because it would turn Israel into a Palestinian-Arab majority state. For Israel to retreat to the lines that as a border would make Israel completely exposed and almost impossible to defend, would be national suicide.

It is surprising that an extremist group like BDS is ever taken seriously, yet its advocates have found receptive audiences in some circles. Their campaigns are well organised and in many cases well financed. They have lobbied parliamentarians, universities, corporations, food co-ops, churches, performing artists, labour unions, and other organisations to boycott Israel and companies that do business with it. Even if many don't agree to treat Israel as a pariah state, BDS activists still manage to spread their anti-Israel misinformation, lies and prejudice simply by forcing a debate on their false claims. Those who fall for this in the spirit of hearing the other side find themselves in a trap of having to debate a lie, thereby lending credibility to it.

To give you a taste of the viciousness of the BDS attacks, let me cite just one of many shocking examples. At a BDS event in Portland, USA, a professor from a Seattle University told her audience that the Jews of Israel have no national rights and should be forced out of the country. When asked, "Where do you want them to go?" she calmly answered, "I don't care if they

don't have any place else to go. They should not be there." When it was pointed out that she was calling for ethnic cleansing, both she and her supporters denied it. On other BDS occasions Jews were repeatedly accused of being killers, while at others, anti-Israel activists called Jews rapists.

In my own experience, at the BDS anti-Apartheid week at UCT in 2011, I heard members of a panel declaim against Israel in the most offensive way. The empty rhetoric goes beyond being absurd – in one case, a very courageous young woman who defended Israel was asked by one of the panelists if she knew how many Palestinians have been raped by IDF forces. She answered that as far as she knew, none. The panelist triumphantly responded, "Israeli soldiers don't rape Palestinians because Israelis are so racist and disgusted by them that they won't touch them."

Such irrational argument is symptomatic of dangerous antisemitism. Yet, alarmingly, many Jews living in South Africa and elsewhere are completely oblivious of this ugly movement and the threat it poses. They seem to be unaware that this bigotry is peddled not only on campuses, but also by speakers in high schools, churches, and political meetings, deceptively camouflaged in the rhetoric of human rights.

### **Awareness and Morality**

Jews in South Africa have a moral duty to defend Israel, a country that for decades has pursued peace with the Palestinians, and who consistently appeal for cooperation and negotiation despite rebuffs leading to murderous attacks being launched against them by an enemy whose sole motivation is its destruction.

The final point I wish to make is, I believe that this whole edifice of hatred has been tackled in entirely the wrong way. I agree that when the Arabs, supported by the international press, tell lies they should be confronted, but not in a manner that makes the entire issue one of "how many were killed?" Whether it is a thousand Arabs who died or a hundred Israelis, you are still talking about dead people.

That is the Arabs' game, not the Israelis'. We are constantly giving those who would pillory us home ground advantage. David Ben Gurion said, "Jews did not take readily to bearing arms. As a people we have an ingrained abhorrence to violence....Our weapons were intellectual, based upon reason and persuasion. ...for Jews to take rifles and defend that which they had sown seemed at first as going too far."

To effectively combat antisemitism, why

emphasise death when Jews can promote what they are best at doing: celebrate life? Israel and Jews worldwide have by any standard an enormous amount of moral capital, and yet we hide it in a display of false modesty, or unconcern. We should be telling the world about how many lives we have saved – the thousands of Palestinians and others who are today walking and living with their families who, but for the medical genius and humanity of Israel would be dead or too severely ill to function normally.

As just one such example: There is an organisation in Israel called Save A Child's Heart (SACH) that has saved over 400 Palestinian children and many thousands from other countries. SACH is an Israeli-based international humanitarian project, whose mission is to improve the quality of paediatric cardiac care for children from developing countries who suffer from heart disease and to create centres of competence in those countries.

Today Syria continues to disintegrate in a brutal civil war that has left nearly 500 000 dead and millions displaced. Israel initially responded by providing medical treatment to Syrian wounded, treating more than 3000 people in field hospitals on the border and in Israeli public hospitals. Israel works to keep starvation away from thousands of Syrians and provide basic medical treatment to those who cannot access it in their own war ravaged country. Over 600 Syrian children, accompanied by their mothers, have come to Israel for treatment. Two Israeli constructed clinics within Syria, another inside Israel, support 80 000 Syrians refugees. The quantity of food sent to Syria has increased more than tenfold in the past couple of years.

Syrian civilians tell of their enormous gratitude for the aid that came from a country they had been educated to believe was their enemy. "Israel is the only country that has done something like this with the Syrians," a wounded Syrian man who had been brought to Israel for treatment said. "Israel is the friend of the Syrian people, a humanitarian country."

These are the numbers we should be displaying on billboards and shouting to the rooftops, not how many have been killed, albeit in self-defence. Let us tell the world what tiny Israel has given, and is still giving, to all people in medical research, medical care in natural disaster areas, succour and medical help in war zones, water security and technological genius.

Meanwhile, venture capital continues to pour into Israel. The business world, the engine of growth, education and prosperity, is voting with its feet to seek investments in the only reliable country that consistently



points the way for the future of humanity. The hate-mongers will not be able to stand up to the bright light of truth. Let them skulk back into their corners confronted by a vigorous presentation of the facts.

The future may look bleak. Hatred, jealousy, power-broking, bloodshed and antisemitism are still abroad on Earth. The world's redemption lies through Israel and the effective combating of antisemitism. It won't be easily done, certainly not by combat alone no matter how much Israel's qualitative superiority of arms and men may be. This only retains the semblance of security. The countries of the world must be brought around to face the truth and face up to their responsibilities in combating antisemitism. Our only hope of doing that is to emphasise what Israel really stands for and what it can bring to the world. Israel is a legitimate country. It is also a moral country that can hold its head high in the company of the most moral in the international community. It has tried for peace and has failed only because of the recalcitrance of the Palestinians, who have no wish for peace or show any care for their own people.

After the Holocaust, the Jewish people recognized that they must reclaim their own state, their historic homeland where they could forever be safe from a repetition of such horrors as an antisemitism that inevitably would lead to a Holocaust. Putting their trust in Western civilization was never again going to be enough.

Since then, Israel has had to fight no fewer than five major wars for her very existence. She has been on the front line in the War against Terror and has been fighting the West's battles, decades before 9/11 ever happened. Until radical Islam accepts the concept of an Israeli State, so will the struggle be likely to continue for another seventy years. There are those who seek more and more concessions from Israel but the Jews know that it is dangerous entrusting their security to anyone else.

Very often in the West, especially when faced with the overwhelmingly anti-Israeli bias endemic in our left-leaning media, we fail to ask ourselves what we in South Africa would have done placed in Israel's position? The population of South Africa is seven times that of Israel. In July 2006, to take one example, Hezbollah crossed the border with Lebanon into Israel and killed eight patrolmen and kidnapped two others, and that summer fired four thousand Katyusha rockets into Israel which killed a further forty-three civilians.

To put that in perspective, If we multiply those numbers by seven to get the South African equivalent, just imagine what we would do if a terrorist organisation based in

Zimbabwe were to fire rockets into Pietersberg and Messina, killing 300 South African civilians, after killing fifty-six South African servicemen in an ambush and capturing fourteen. There is absolutely no lengths to which our government would not go to protect its citizens under those circumstances, and rightly so.

Why should Israel be expected to behave any differently? What right has anyone to expect Jews and the Jewish state to place themselves in a position where they would without doubt be contemplating another Auschwitz-Birkenau, invoking a memory of the infamous huts, slave labour, railway sidings offloading their human cargo, and crematoria? In case anyone reading this thinks that such a scenario is highly unlikely, just envision what has happened in Syria where hundreds of thousands have been killed and the economy and infrastructure all but destroyed.

The state of Israel today guarantees that the obscenity of genocide which killed six million people in Auschwitz and camps like it will never again befall the Jewish people, to whom the rest of civilization owes so much. Can anyone deny this observation: No people in history have needed the right to self-defense and legitimacy more than the Jews of Israel, and that is what we, Jews, Christians and people of goodwill, demand today.

Nothing ever seems to change in the Middle East. Still today at Masada the scene where freedom was deemed to be more worthy than life, where supreme sacrifice was chosen by the Jewish warriors, who believed truly that it is noble to die for your freedom and country. Troops called up to the Israeli army today still take the oath of allegiance as aircraft fly over, saluting those warriors enlisting for freedom. The same tradition of the Jewish people fighting for their freedom reinforces the need in every Jewish breast that they must have a homeland, and its achievement that led the League of Nations, and then the United Nations and, most importantly, the United States, that led President Harry Truman to proclaim that Israel would once again be an independent state and that the West, and especially America, would always be there to defend this brave nation against the threat of barbarism..

## NOTES

- 1 *Editor's note:* Chesler in fact uses the traditional rendering of the term, viz. 'anti-Semitism'. As has become the practice with *Jewish Affairs*, the expression, with its variant forms, has been changed throughout to 'antisemitism'/'antisemite'/'antisemitic' (there is no such thing as 'Semitism').
- 2 Phyllis Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism*, Jossey-Bass, 2003, pp178-9.

# new POETRY

On certain nights  
the hills of Jerusalem  
stop singing.  
The evening cups the ears  
of all who sleep –  
and God sits  
on the hills  
surrounded  
by the whisper  
of small wings.  
On that night  
the secret notes  
in the Western Wall  
turn to doves.  
All the notes  
except mine.  
Instead of wishing  
I wrote my fears....

*Honey Gluckman*

## **Too Much, Too Fast** (Information Overload Syndrome)

Smart-phones, laptops, Whats-App, T.V.  
Internet, E-mails, downloading the P.C.  
Folders, letters, deadlines, data  
electronic communications  
Memos, messages, magazines, meetings,  
lectures, notifications  
Pamphlets, schedules, booklets, brochures  
rules and regulations  
Data, questionnaires, newspapers, lists,  
forms and configurations  
So much to assimilate and digest  
and assemble and see  
A bombardment on the strings  
of one's sanity –

Telling us what we should do  
and where we should buy  
and how we should think  
and asking us why  
and where we should stay  
and when we should go  
and how to improve  
and what we should know ...

With my cheek pressed softly against his chest  
I listened to the tales that they knew best  
No prescriptive persuasions  
No information still to file  
The words were simple  
The time spent worthwhile

My mind needs a rest  
to perform at its best  
It's too much  
It's a strain  
It taxes my brain

*Charlotte Cohen*

## **Recollections of Jerusalem**

Garbed flesh firm pressed against the seat,  
Beyond the wind, great engine's song.  
Ranked poles flash swiftly in retreat;  
The hov'ring moon slow, sweeps along.  
Tel Aviv magnet-like draws me far away  
from Temple Mount.  
Yet, I'm content, for there I saw, and there  
I drank at beauty's fount.

The humming tyres revive the beat on  
which that week my soul had dined,  
Recalling early, bustling feet — in primal  
caverns of my mind,  
Conjured a temple's fine wrought column  
Still Overseeing Jerusalem.

Resting firm in Jewish pride, wide,  
whitewashed walls reflecting hues  
Of colours splashed by spot and flood -  
A riot of reds twixt boldfaced blues.  
A paean to life - music, song - passion stirs  
the roiling blood;  
Amidst the heady herbal scent, Semitic  
smells perfume the soul.  
Strong sounds find solace in the dust stirred  
in that sublunary bowl.

A heav'nly place 'neath northern skies, built  
on dry, Judaic soil,  
Jews praying in wondrous guise that ancient  
customs disembroil.  
What Godlike spell was put in train  
To forge this endless Jewish chain?

*Rodney Mazinter*

## READERS' LETTERS

\*

The illuminating article in your Pesach 2018 edition about Jews in the South African press contains a few errors in regard to the *Rand Daily Mail*. For the record:

- I doubt that the editor, Laurence Gandar, was a “Schlesinger protégé”, as described. He spent his journalism career with the then Argus company, owned by Anglo American Corporation. He was editor of Anglo American’s prestigious magazine, *Optima*, when he was appointed as the *Rand Daily Mail*’s editor. His courage and vision as editor transformed the newspaper and South African journalism. I was fortunate to have him as my editor, mentor and friend.
- Ralph Cohen was never deputy editor, but an assistant editor. He did not go to the *Citizen* because of disagreement with the Mail’s liberalism but because he was offered a lot of money. He told us about it.
- Percy Baneshik was arts editor and a drama critic of the *Mail* for some years before he went to *The Star*.
- My exposé of prison conditions, published over three days, ran to about 11 700 words, not 2000.
- There was indeed an unspoken tradition that no Jew could be editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*. In my case, it was more than unspoken: Gordon Waddell, when he was the boss of the *Rand Daily Mail* and its sister papers - again, with Anglo American as the owner - told me bluntly that I could not be editor because I was Jewish. This apart, I always felt astonished to have the job of deputy editor as I was aware that several of the company’s directors and management did not like my views, my friendships with black leaders and my promotion of non-racism in the *Mail*’s policies.

I could mention many journalists who happened to be Jewish and who played distinguished roles on the *Mail* - Barbara Ludman, Vita Palestrant, Pat Tucker, John Mattison among them, and Joyce Ozinsky. Dora Sowden was not only the cultural icon for the Jewish community but for the whole of Johannesburg. We also had the sub who was outstanding but was on drugs and liquor. When he was on only one of them he was OK; when he went on both at the same time he went into orbit. He was fired during one of these episodes for calling an Afrikaner assistant editor who was standing in for me as night editor a “hairy-back bastard”. A couple of years later, clear of drugs he returned and was an outstanding sub. There was also Harold Sacks, the country’s greatest-ever crime reporter - which was ultimately his downfall because he reported effectively as a policeman; he committed suicide.

Johnny Johnson was a brilliant journalist. He wouldn’t survive today: he was too abusive. He was my news editor at one time and I have never worked harder in my life - it was easier to chase an impossible story than have to face Johnny’s wrath at not getting it, which could include grabbing me by my tie and snarling, “Now you can go and tell the union that your news editor assaulted you”. We got on well and I did a lot of work on the *Sunday Express* when he was editor there. He hated Gandar and the *Mail* - total jealousy. I would walk into the newsroom and he would insist on opening that day’s *Mail* and complaining about Gandar’s column/editorial (which were in fact invariably brilliant).

**Benjamin Pogrund, Jerusalem**



I have just enjoyed reading the Pesach edition of *Jewish Affairs*. I wonder if you would please pass on to Irwin Manoim the following anecdote: My great-great uncle (brother of my maternal great-grandmother) was one Joseph van Gelder who was editor of the *Transvaal Critic* and was closely associated with the *Standard and Diggers News* at one time. I think he was also associated with the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*. He was prominent in pro-Boer politics during the period of the Boer Republics and was a supporter of President Reitz. He came from Woerden in the Netherlands. There is a reference to him in the *Jewish Chronicle* of October 1903.

**Richard Freedman**  
Cape Town

I always get great enjoyment from reading your Jewish Affairs publications from cover to cover and see there are mountains of research going into the writing of the articles.

I read the article *Unlikely Vigilantes - Extra Judicial responses to Nazism in South Africa* written by you [David Saks] with great interest. Gerald Sacks, an Old Arcadian boy, in his chapter in *More Arc Memories* (published 2008, p432) also wrote about "The German Beer Hall Incident" in Hillbrow. See his article below

The German community in Johannesburg had decided to celebrate Hitler's birthday by having a large party under the Hippodrome in Hillbrow. Several of us young Jewish men were not going to allow that to happen. I was part of that group, that included Anthony Lipschitz, Harold Jankelowitz and Basil Platzky.

About fourteen of us managed to get into the beer hall which was down stairs, by using broken Yiddish sounding like German. The place was packed with young Germans.

Outside my brother, Solly Sacks, who at that time was head of Bnei Akiva, arranged for several hundred youngsters to demonstrate outside on Kotze Street. Their numbers kept increasing until there were a thousand protestors outside.

When the Germans stepped onto the long thick bar in their Nazi uniforms shouting, "*Raus tzu de juden*" and the like we started throwing our bar stools at them causing them to fall back bringing everything including the big mirror that was behind the bar and holding all the ceramic mugs crashing down. Of course, all hell broke loose. We were fighting with everyone.

We managed to get up the stairs and out of the beer hall and into the big crowd outside. The police arrived with dogs and using a bullhorn, asked for me by name. Harold and others came with me to stand in front of the police captain. He noticed the bag Harold was carrying and asked "*Wat het jy daar in jou sak?*" I told Harold to open it. It was full of rand notes. The captain asked immediately "*Het jy hulle gerob?*" We told him that it was our bond money in case we were arrested. He could not believe it.

I could not get to my car to go home - at the time I lived on Hagen Road in Greenside. Stanley Seeff was able to pick me up and take me. My wife, Gloria, had received several phone calls threatening her and our young children.

After a few days, Harold Jankelowitz and a few others went with me to the flat where the head of the young German community lived. It was dinner time when we arrived. We burst in and in front of his wife told him that if one Jewish person was attacked in any way we would make German biltong out of him. That ended this episode.

The *Sunday Express* had a full page picture of us holding up a sign we had taken from the beer hall that was celebrating Hitler's birthday.

**David Solly Sandler**  
Australia

Recently, on going through my treasured collection of *Jewish Affairs*, I came across a photograph that was on the cover of the Pesach 2000 issue. It shows the famed Herman Tobiansky, his wife Sophie, sisters-in-law and daughters. Herman was an entrepreneur who amassed much property in early Johannesburg and was a close associate of President Paul Kruger. He was responsible for owning and naming a township on the west side of Johannesburg, Sophiatown, called after his wife.

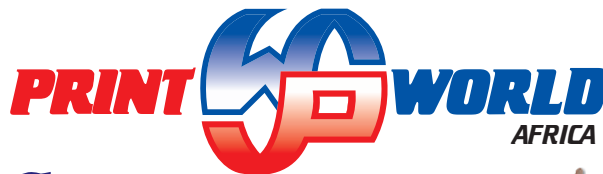
Somewhere in a little town in the Free State, Herman had a brother - Benjamin. He was different in many ways to him. Lacking Herman's drive and ambition, he landed up in Vrede, selling milk, white cheese and butter and using a little trap and horse for delivery. On his rounds he delivered his wares to an Afrikaans family, whose daughter Dolly rather fancied him and he her. They fell in love and decided to marry. However, Dolly came from a very strict church-going family, while the small Jewish community also objected to one of theirs "marrying out". Thus, both were excommunicated. They married and eventually settled in Brakpan, where Benjamin re-established his dairy business. Their first child, Stella, had by then been born.

When their second child was on the way, Dolly made a brave decision. Coming from a very religious home, she determined that her children should grow up as Jews, and made enquiries about "megaiering". After meeting with Chief Rabbi J L Landau of the Great Synagogue in Johannesburg, she began a course of consulting with him to convert to Judaism. I have no idea of the length of time spent, but eventually she and her three children - Stella, Golde and Rachel - were all converted.

Dolly was an expert seamstress and dress maker. As a young boy, I often visited them at their house whenever my mother or Bobba went there to have dresses fitted for Yomtovim. Dolly's work always stopped on *Erev Shabbat* or holy days, when she donned her black coat and hat, walked to shul a couple of blocks away and ensconced herself behind the *bimah*. Dolly knew every page in the *siddurim* and *Chumash*, and other ladies would gather around her to follow the service. She was an excellent example of what it is to be a *geir tzedek* - true convert - and I cherish and respect her memory.

Maurice Skikne  
Johannesburg

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Celebration at Arcadia, the South African Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg, on the day when the State of Israel was declared, 14 May 1948. The image appears on p426 of *Our South African Jewish Inheritance*, compiled and published by David Solly Sandler (August 2016) and is reproduced here by kind permission.



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