

**Mimi's Got a Story  
Poppa's Got a Story, Too**

VOLUME ONE  
THE ADVENTURES OF MIRIAM AND CARL BEFORE THEY MET

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# Introduction

Approximately twelve years ago, Miriam enrolled in a writing course at the Jewish Community Center (JCC), which is located on the Upper West Side of New York City. The students were encouraged by the instructor to be most descriptive in their writing, particularly when working on their memoirs. Miriam always excelled in describing situations in great detail, whether she was talking or writing. As a matter of fact, at her 65th birthday party, our children and grandchildren composed a song with the title, “Miriam Tells a Story.”

It was after finishing the writing course that Miriam decided to write the story of her life. When the first couple of chapters were completed, all of us who read them thought the story to be most interesting, so we all encouraged her to continue to go forward with the project.

It was around this time that our daughter, Edna, and our daughter-in-law, Debbie, approached me and insisted that I, too, must write my story. After some consideration, I decided to go ahead and try to write the story of my life. You will find that my writing style is quite different from Miriam’s style. Having been an accountant for most of my adult years, I was taught to be direct and to the point in my writings, as opposed to being descriptive.

The first few chapters of Miriam’s writing are devoted to her growing up in Palestine, her family and Israel becoming an independent country. I devote the first chapters to my birth in Germany in 1928, my family and our ultimate immigration to the United States in the year 1937. We both continue to describe our separate journeys through life until we meet in the year 1957 and, consequently, get married about eight months later. From this point forward, we separately write about our life together, covering just short of 60 years. It is conceivable that at times we may both recall a certain incident with some discrepancy as to the details.

After some discussion with Billa Rubenstein, our wonderful and most patient editor, and our son David, we decided to separate our writings into two parts. The first part devoted to the period before we met and the second part to our life together.

Miriam and I have frequently talked about how much fun it is to write about our past, and it is possible that for this reason it has taken us years to complete the project. We both agree that writing brings back memories and at times emotions long forgotten, which can bring a smile to your face or tears to your eyes.

Over the years we have talked to some people who were quite upset that they knew very little about their family background because their parents and other family members never discussed their past. We did not want our children, grandchildren, hopefully great grandchildren and the following generations to ever say, “We know nothing about our family background.” It is for this reason that we decided to write our stories.

We consider ourselves to be among the most fortunate parents in the world, to have such loving, caring, generous and devoted children and grandchildren. (Edna & Dan; Debbie & David; Jenna, Joshua, and Matthew) When on occasion we mention this to them, the response is always, “That is what we saw at home.” We surely tried.

With all our love forever,  
Mimi & Poppa



*The Najman Family In Poland*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER ONE

### Roots of the Najman Family

My mother Karola was born in Stopnitz, a small town in Poland. She was one of 8 children. Her mother's name was Shprinza, and her father's name was Chaim Najman. Shaya and Mayer (Max) were her two older brothers, followed by two older sisters, Rosa (Rushka) and Regina. My mother Karola was born next and then her younger sister, Rachel. They were all born in Stopnitz. A younger brother, Joseph and the baby girl of the family, Hanka, were born in the town of Topola.

The only government offices to register babies' births were in the nearest city, which was quite a distance away. All children were born at home with the help of a midwife. Chaim, my grandfather, had the responsibility of registering his children with the authorities. Because of the distance, he would go only every three to four years. The only dates he remembered were the years that the children were born, but not the actual month or day, so he made them up. My mother told me about one of her siblings who was born in the winter, during a snowstorm, but was registered as born in August.

Stopnika, or Stopnitz, was a very small town with just a few families living there, and they were isolated and far from each other. There were only one or two Jewish families and they had a very good relationship with the non-Jewish families. They always felt safe and never locked their doors. Chaim Najman was engaged in buying and selling wood and flour and was out most of the day, leaving his wife at home with the six children. He would travel to the different villages by horse and carriage. At times, he would stay away from home for several nights. He always made sure to be back by Friday, for Shabbat.

While traveling, he would do some shopping for things that were not otherwise available, such as fabrics. Farmers, who stopped by once a week, sold fruits, vegetables, eggs and milk. The family had two goats that supplied some of the milk they needed. Some vegetables were homegrown in a garden. Shprinza took care of all the household chores: cleaning, cooking and baking. Her daughters helped, and a poor village girl was hired to come once a month to help with the laundry.

One day, in 1918, at the end of World War I, when my mother was eight years old, they had a very scary experience. While my grandmother and the girls were home alone, a few Russian or Polish soldiers burst through the open door. They looked tired and dirty and their clothes were torn. Their faces were angry and full of malice. My grandmother, who was in the kitchen cooking and baking bread, spotted them outside just



*Sphrinza & Chaim*

before they came in. She immediately told the girls to run down the steps to the cellar where food was stored all year round, and to stay very quiet. She then closed the door, locked it and put away the key in a safe place. In her arms she held Rachel, who was about four years old and the youngest of the children, at that time.

The soldiers were very hungry and demanded food. There was meat, vegetable soup and cabbage cooking on top of the stove. Loaves of fresh bread that just came out of the oven were cooling on the counter. The soldiers demanded to be fed. My grandmother put Rachel down and served the soldiers, trying to stay calm. They were very hungry, and they finished all the food that was ready and available. Once satisfied, they finally left laughing, taking whatever bread was left over, even though my grandmother asked them to leave it. She waited for a long while, making sure that the soldiers were not coming back.

While all this was going on in the kitchen, in the cellar, the three sisters, Rushka, Regina and Karola, sat on the floor hugging each other. They did not talk or cry, as they understood how important it was to be quiet. They could not stop shaking. They heard the clinking of utensils and their mother's footsteps going back and forth while serving the men. Finally, they heard the soldiers leave and waited for their mother to unlock the door. They were relieved when they heard the sound of it. They understood why it took a while longer, after the soldiers left, to let them come back up to the kitchen.

When the cellar door was finally opened, they ran up the stairs, hugged each other and could not stop crying. Their mother was shaking like a leaf, and they tried to calm her down. By the time their father came home, they felt somewhat better. He sensed immediately that something was wrong. When they all started crying again and telling him what happened, he was shocked. He tried to calm them down and was amazed to hear how his wife handled the situation.

His business of buying and selling wood, flour and other items did not provide enough money to support his growing family. He was looking for something else to do. He also did not like being so isolated. So, he moved his family to Topola where he got a big job with the Squire Targofsky who owned a lot of land. The land was divided among large forests, from which he sold wood. There were large fields of wheat and a large mill to produce flour. My grandfather's father owned a lot of land in Topola. The father was quite well off and a good friend of the Squire. When the Squire needed a responsible person to run his mill, he recommended his

son, Chaim. The Squire interviewed my grandfather, liked him and hired him. His job was to supervise all the workers in all areas. The Squire knew that he could have complete trust in him and was not disappointed.

My grandfather Chaim was very loved by everyone and respected by the workers and their families. He was very fair and was always there for the employees and their families. He treated them all with respect, which was appreciated. The Squire left all decisions to my grandfather, making him feel that the properties and businesses were his own. He was paid very well for his services.

According to my mother and her sisters, their father, Chaim, was a very handsome man who looked like an aristocrat. We also have some photos of him that show that to be true. He had bright, beautiful blue eyes and a small beard that was always neatly trimmed, and he was tall and slim. He loved clothes and was always dressed in custom suits, shirts, ties and shoes according to the latest fashion. He used the same tailor that the Squire used. He wore a felt hat, and underneath the hat he wore his kippa (skullcap). In his vest pocket, he carried a heavy-chained gold watch. He liked to carry a black cane with a silver handle, which was one of the many canes in his collection. One of his canes had a handle that opened up and became a stool. He used this one when he went to the fields and stayed for a long time to observe the workers. He knew how to talk to people; how to be forceful and decisive without insulting anyone when angry. He was always up to date on the news and had many non-Jewish friends.

He was also a proponent of Zionism and tried to instill it in his children. He was a member of the Betar organization that was very active in Poland.

Betar was formed in Riga, Latvia, in 1923, by Zev Jabotinsky. He believed that Jews should have courage, self-respect and military training in order to be able to fight against anti-Semitism and protect their properties. Betar's goal was to prepare people for building settlements in Palestine, in order to eventually create a free Jewish state. Betar organized groups of young people who were ready to leave Poland and go to Palestine to settle. Before going, they had to spend two years away from home in hachshara (preparation). Young leaders from Palestine taught them to work the fields, build roads and houses and defend themselves. At the end of the two years, they were shipped out, all expenses paid. All Betar men and women wore brown uniforms at all gatherings after work. My mother's sister Rachel joined Betar and left home in 1934 to go to Palestine, just before Hitler's army started to march through Poland.

Grandmother Shprinza was much more low key than her husband. She was on the heavy side and liked plain clothes. Although my grandfather bought her jewelry, she only wore it to weddings, as she did not care for it. Because she was always busy taking care of the family, she was always wearing an apron. She was somewhat more devout than my grandfather, who was more traditional. During the week, she covered her shaved head with a kerchief. On Shabbat, holidays, weddings and other special outings, she wore one of her wigs. All the children loved and respected their mother and father, but the girls were crazy in love with their father.

Family life changed a great deal when my grandfather worked for the Squire. It was a wonderful opportunity for the Najmans to improve their life. Topola was a larger village with 17 Jewish families living near each other. Before my grandfather started to work for the Squire, my grandmother had no outside help with the cooking, baking or taking care of the children. The girls stayed home and helped. One of my mother's favorite stories was about some of her duties. Her favorite job was to wash the floors. She would ask her younger siblings to stand in the middle of the room and she poured the water around them. She wouldn't let them move until the floor dried. Rachel, Hanka and Joe repeated this story many times, but even though they laughed when retelling, they made sure that we knew that they used to get angry, but were afraid to move.

With my grandfather's new position, everything changed for the better. There was now help in the house for most chores. My grandmother had a girl that cooked and baked. At this point, they built a bigger house and there was one girl who only cleaned and another girl who only did the laundry. They also had a few carriages, drawn by four horses each, and a driver. Once a week, the driver took my grandmother and the children to a big market near the town to buy their necessities. On other weekdays, my grandfather used the driver when he had to go to different locations to check on the workers. On Sunday, my grandparents got dressed in their best outfits



*Sprintza in town of Topole.*



*Sprintza & Chaim with grandson Moniek.*

and went on outings, without the children, when grandfather drove the carriage himself.

The family was very respected in town by everyone, since they had a very good reputation as caring, responsible and generous. They were always invited to all the Jewish weddings and other celebrations.

The Squire who lived in a beautiful, large castle had many celebrations. The parties were very elaborate. There was dancing, fireworks and lots of food. Knowing the food restrictions of the family because they were kosher, the Squire always made sure to have the right food for them.

The boys, when they were very young went to a cheder (room), a traditional elementary school, where they learned to read and write in Yiddish with a Rabbi. All the studies were concentrated around the prayers, the Torah and the Talmud.

The girls did not go school, but my grandfather hired an older, poor girl from the village to come to their home and teach the children to read and write in Polish. He also hired a young man to teach them all that is part of the Jewish religion. Once the children reached the age of six, under Polish law, they had to go to a regular Polish school for three years. Later on, some of children went on to high school or learned a trade or a profession, such as printing or accounting.

When my mother was a teenager, she was sent to Krakow to learn how to sew with a known seamstress. The woman had an atelier, where in addition to having experienced women to assist her, she also taught young girls the profession. They learned how to cut patterns and sew all the different garments. When they became proficient, she let them work on garments that were on order. They worked all day with a break for lunch. My mother loved it, and she was very good. The teacher recognized her talents and creativity and listened to her ideas. After my mother came back to Topola, she helped a seamstress in town. When she had time, she sewed all her own clothes and some for her sisters and mother.

At one point, a new Polish government was formed and citizens who had a lot of land had to divide it and sell small parcels to different citizens. The Squire moved to another small village where he bought some land and asked my grandfather to come and help him with dairy products. He did, but my grandmother pressured him to leave and move to Krakow, where there were more Jewish families around. They moved to an apartment on the first floor of a two-story building. Times in Krakow were hard. The Squire sent dairy products to my grandfather, and he had to stand in the market every day and sell them. He felt degraded and was very depressed. He tried to do some business deals, but they did not work out, and he lost money. In order to help out, my mother, who was working for the seamstress, gave all her earnings to her parents. My grandmother opened a grocery store in the basement of the building they lived in with one of the older sisters. The other younger sisters were helping too. They sold dairy products and cheesecake that my grandmother baked.

My mother liked sitting on the porch in front of their apartment whenever she had a chance. One day, she noticed a young man coming out of an upstairs apartment and looking her way. He looked interesting, so she smiled at him. On the second or third time, he came over and they started to talk and keep company. This young man was my father, who told me that he fell in love with my mother the first time he saw her. She was very beautiful, had a wonderful warm smile and was very flirtatious. My mother liked his independence and his sense of humor. She was impressed when he spoke to her about the current situation and the future in Poland for the Jews.

My father was born in Geduv, a small town outside the city of Levuv that was part of Galicia. He had one brother and two sisters. When he was young, he didn't get along with his father and ran away to his grandparents' house, which was in the same town. He stayed with them for a few years and went to cheder, which he hated. He had three years of public school, where he learned to read and write in Polish.

He was very handy with his hands, like his father who worked in sheet metal. When he was 13, my father apprenticed to a roofer who was not Jewish, but who took a liking to him. That roofer had a big business, and he taught my father everything. Once my father felt confident about his skills, he wanted to start his own roofing business. When he was about 18 years old, his parents moved to Krakow. My father was then living with them and with his siblings again. He met a non-Jewish person who was in the building business. He liked my father's work, trusted him and supplied him with roofing jobs. They had a very good relationship that was almost like



*Karola & Samuel Wachsbecker.*

that of a father and son. He worked for him for about three or four years as an independent contractor and was very happy.

Then, in 1932, the contractor told my father that he couldn't give him any more work because he was Jewish. He was under great pressure from family, friends and some government officials to stop dealing with Jews. He told my father, "The future for the Jews will not be good in Poland." Upon hearing that, my father decided that he would leave Poland and go live in Palestine.

At that point, my mother and father were dating and had fallen in love. So, my father went to see my mother and told her that he was leaving. He asked her to marry him, and she accepted, knowing that they would be apart for a while. He promised to bring her to Palestine within one year.

In that same year, 1932, my father started his journey. He decided to go to Gdansk, a port city in Poland, where he could get on a boat to Palestine. He went by bicycle for a few days because he did not want anyone to know about his plight. He had no papers or passport. He was able to get on a Greek ship that was sailing to Palestine by bribing the captain. When the ship docked at the port of Haifa, he got dressed in a suit and tie and walked off the ship, looking like a tourist. He never looked back.

After two years in Palestine, he paid Moshe, a sabra (native-born Israeli), all expenses necessary to go to Poland, have a fictitious wedding and marry my mother. The British law at that time said that only a sabra who marries a Jewish woman in Europe can bring his bride to Palestine. It took him two years of work to accumulate the money, doing any job that came his way. Some of the money came from a business that he owned in the World's Fair outside of Tel Aviv.



*Samuel Wachsberger with friends before leaving Poland.*



*Karola Wachsberger (right) with sisters.*



*Samuel Wachsberger arriving in Palestine.*



*Sisters Karola and Hanka.*

A few days after my mother arrived in Palestine, in 1934, they got married at the main rabbinical office in Tel Aviv. There was a beautiful garden on the side of the office building with a permanent chuppah (canopy) in the middle. In those years, all couples got married with a Rabbi officiating. They needed two witnesses to attend the ceremony. They had no guests except for my mother's sister, Rachel, who wasn't able to be a witness, as she was a woman. My father went to the street and asked two strangers to come with him and fulfill the mitzvah (an obligatory act of kindness based on a Biblical commandment) of being witnesses. After the ceremony, they went to a professional photographer for their single wedding portrait. Then, they went to their studio apartment that had a convertible sofa with an orange crate in front of it. This was the only furniture that they owned. They shared a bottle of sweet wine that accompanied the meal that my mother cooked beforehand.

The sisters, Karola and Rachel were the only members of the family that were saved from suffering in the war. My father wrote letters, begging the rest of the family to come to Palestine, but they did not feel that it was necessary. They did not believe that anything bad would happen to them.

After I was born, in 1936, my grandparents wanted to see my mother and me badly. They all missed each other. My father promised to let my mother and I go to Poland for a visit. By the time I was three years old, my father saved up enough money for the trip. All plans were canceled at the last minute, since World War II erupted. Once this happened, my father had my mother write her family again, asking them to come to Palestine. He felt that there was still time to get out of Poland and that, if they agreed, he would find a way to do it. Again, they refused, writing my mother that they didn't think that the situation would last too long, and that everything would soon go back to normal.

For a while, my mother corresponded with her parents and with her married sisters and older brothers and their families. Only my grandparents and the two youngest siblings, Hanka and Joe, stayed in Krakow. The others, who were married and had families, lived in Sosnowitz, a village some distance from Krakow. In time, their responses became less frequent and finally stopped altogether. No one had any knowledge of what was



*Karola & Samuel Wachsberger wedding picture, 1934, Tel Aviv, Palestine.*

happening to our relatives. The only knowledge about the atrocities of the war came from newspaper reports, radio and newsreels in the movie houses. As I grew older, by listening to people talk and by reading the newspapers, I was able to understand what was happening. It also became clear to me why I saw my mother crying when she thought I didn't see it. I saw her red eyes, but never asked her about it.

The following is based on information received after the war by my aunt Hanka:

In the beginning of the war, the Nazis came to the villages where the Jews lived. They went from house to house, gathered the men and took them away, mostly for hard labor; building roads, building camps and working in the different factories that supported the war effort. Then, they gathered the women and children, who mostly were sent to the gas chambers. My uncle Shaya, the oldest brother, was married and had two children, Henia and Michael. When the soldiers came to take him, he told his wife and children to get into bed with him. He wrapped his talit (prayer shawl) around all of them and said: "SH'MA YISRAEL ADONAI ELOHEINU ADONAI ECHAD." He then told the soldiers to shoot them, and they did. Some survivors told her that my grandparents became sick (from typhoid fever) and died before being sent to the camps. Other survivors have said that they were rounded up together with the rest of the Jews in their neighborhood and taken to a field, where they were shot and buried in a mass grave. We never heard what happened to the older two sisters and their families.

Saranka (Sarah) Gole, my step-cousin, wrote the following about the Holocaust:

I was born in Skarezsko, Poland, before World War II. Life in Poland was not easy for the Jews. There was a lot of anti-Semitism. The war broke out on September 1, 1939, when I was ten years old. I remember the bombs and a big fire in town.

My grandparents, father, mother and I left to go to another town by horse and buggy. On our return home, after a few days, the Germans took the horse and buggy away from us. They also went to my grandparents' grocery store, where they sold food wholesale and retail, and took out all the merchandise.



*Saranka.*



*Moniek with his mother.*



*Max with son, Moniek.*



*Hanka with husband Pinek.*

We then were moved to a ghetto, a part of town where all the Jews were forced to live. We traded my grandparents' house, where we all lived, with a Polish family who had an apartment within the ghetto border. There were no walls around this ghetto, but we had to wear a white armband with a Star of David on it. Sometimes, I took off my armband and went to meet a friend who helped us out with food. I had a lot of time on my hands, as Jewish kids were not allowed to attend school.

In town, there was an ammunition factory. When the Germans first came to our town, they were afraid to open the factory because they thought it was boobytrapped. They looked for Jews to open it up. The SS officers chose my father and a few other Jews to go in first to open the factory. They went in without a problem. After that, they were forced to stay and work there, but were not paid for their labor. My father worked in that factory at night and came back to the ghetto during the day. We lived like that for two years.

In 1942, the Germans brought many more Jews to our ghetto. They gathered them from all the villages around our town. One of the villages that people came from was Stopnitz. Earlier, my grandfather, Chaim, his wife Shprinza and their children Hanka and Joe, had moved there to be with their son Max, and his family when the situation became too dangerous for them in Cracow. Unfortunately, the Nazis soon reached there too. Max, was transferred with wife, two daughters, Rushka and Lucia, and son Moniek. His sister Hanka and his brother Joseph were with them too. The other sisters and their families, who lived in different villages, were sent to other camps and were never heard from again. Their parents, Chaim and Shprinza died from malnutrition and sickness (or,

according to another witness, were victims of a mass shooting) before the transfers to the different concentration camps.

We then found out that we were to be sent to Treblinka, which was a concentration camp. On the night before the transfer was scheduled, on October 2, 1942, my father took me with him to work. My mother refused to go because she didn't want to leave her parents behind. Early the next morning, the Germans took all the Jews from the ghetto to the railroad station to transfer them to the concentration camp. They only kept behind those who could work, as they enlarged the ammunition factory and needed more workers. My mother wanted to join my father and me at the factory. An SS officer said that because we were already working at the factory, it was enough that the two of us would be saved, and they sent my mother with the rest to Treblinka. (I learned this information from some of the people who worked in the factory.)

My father and I never went back home, but lived and worked in the factory together with all the other Jewish workers. Several barracks were built to accommodate ten thousand people. The men were separated from the women. The barracks were very big with four bunk beds on top of each other on each side. My father was chosen by the Jews to become the liaison between them and the Nazi regime that ran the town.

I met a woman who I became very close with. That was Hanka, who with ten other women was chosen to clean offices. She always took care of me and made sure that I had everything that I needed. I introduced her to my father and, eventually, after the war was over, they got married.

One day, looking out of the window, Hanka saw a truck loaded with people being transported to the gas chambers. She recognized Max's son, Moniek. She ran to get my father and asked him to pull him off the truck. He ran, stopped the truck and told the SS that he needed Moniek for work. They knew that he was the liaison and responsible for all the workers, so they followed his instructions and let Moniek go.

My father took Moniek to the women's barracks to be hidden. He weighed less than ninety pounds and could hardly stand or talk. He was more dead than alive. Being in this condition, it was very obvious that he could not work in the factory, or do any other work. Therefore, he had to be kept out of sight. He was hidden in the attic of the barracks, which was the safest place, as no one ever went there. It was important for his safety and for my father's safety, as he who would have been shot if Moniek was discovered. My father brought food from a center, where food was cooked for all the workers. I went to the same kitchen a few times a day to keep bringing Moniek food, so he could eat more often and more than all of us. At times, when my father was able to buy food, with money that he brought from Poland, Hanka cooked it in the barracks on a small portable stove. After one or two weeks, Moniek gained a lot of weight and regained his strength. He moved to the men's barracks and went to work in the ammunition factory.

In 1944, the Germans started to lose the war, and the Russians were closing in on the Polish border. On August second of that year, we were taken to Germany, by trains, in cattle cars. Men and women were placed in separate cars. I started to cry because I wasn't going to be with my father, but then they decided to let me be with him. We were in that cattle car for a week. It was very crowded, and all they gave us to eat was cheese and water. We had to use a bucket for the bathroom. Some people died on the train.

The Germans tried to bring us to Auschwitz, where they had the gas chambers, but the Russians had already closed the camp. From there, they took us to Buchenwald, which was also a very large concentration camp. When we got there, the men and women were separated. The women were taken to Oshatz, a small concentration camp in the town of Leipzig. We were about one thousand women and no men. There were women from many nationalities, not only Jewish ones. There were Polish, Ukrainian and also some Germans. They needed all the help to work in the ammunition factory. We were told to take off our white and blue uniforms that we wore in the other camps and remove all

jewelry. I could not take off my ring and an SS officer hit me. We were told to take a towel and our shoes to go to the showers. I hid a picture of my mother in my shoes. I still have this picture today.

We had heard about showers being gas chambers, so we were sure that this was where we were headed. When we came out of the shower, I asked my stepmother if we were alive.

“I CAN HEAR YOU!!” she answered.

Then, they gave us clothes. Short and small people received big clothes and large-built people received small-sized clothing. All these clothes belonged to the people who were killed. Among them, I recognized some of my mother’s clothes.

At that point, they separated us again. Children and their mothers were in one group, and the rest of the women were in another. My stepmother Hanka said that she promised my father that she would take care of me and save me. She said that I should lie about my age and say that I was older. I was 15, but I said that I was 17.

The mothers and younger children were treated very well for three days before they were all killed. Because I told them that I was 17, I was considered strong enough for work, so I was in the same group with my stepmother, WHO SAVED MY LIFE!

They had us working in an ammunition factory. I always say “My job was to put springs in missiles that the Germans fired on London.” At the same time, the men were sent to Schlieben, a camp that also had a large ammunition factory. They gathered able men from all other camps to work in the different ammunition factories, which they kept building.

There were day and night shifts. Max was working the night shift, while my father, Joe and Moniek worked during the day. One day, Max asked to be switched to the day shift for just that one day, and his request was granted. That night, there was a big explosion in the factory, and many people were burned to death. No one could believe how lucky he was.

Before we were all separated from each other, we made a pact to meet after the war in Frankfurt, Germany. On April, 1945, the Germans let us out of the working camp and took us on a MARCH for three weeks. We walked all day, and at night we slept in the forest. We were given very little food. We were hungry and tired. We helped each other to walk, as we knew that the SS officers would kill anyone who fell. At times, we were allowed to go into the fields and pick up vegetables that were available. We did not have any tools to cook with, so we ate a lot of raw potatoes, which mostly grew in those fields. We were also allowed to go into the forest and pick mushrooms, or anything else that we could eat. At this point, the Germans did not know what to do with us anymore, so they let us help ourselves. One night, we were sleeping in the forest and, when we woke up in the morning, none of the SS officers were there.

We had to figure out where we were and what to do. We saw a few young boys. They took five of us to a nearby German house. They let us in, and we washed ourselves and ate. Once we finished, they took us to Oshatz, a town nearby. They were afraid that if it was discovered that they helped us, they would be executed. The American soldiers liberated us and, when they left, the Russian soldiers took their place.

Eleven months later, one of the women who was in camp with us saw two men whom she knew and recognized from another camp riding their bikes. One of them asked about his wife who happened to be with us, and they were then reunited. When I asked that man about my father, he knew the camp he was in. We were reunited and went back to Poland, but I refused to go to our house. My father was able to get some of our stuff, but it was not safe to stay there, and we went to another town.

From there, we went to a DP (displaced persons) camp in Zaltzheim, Germany, which was run and supported by the Americans who freed us.

My father and Hanka got married, and then my half-brother Harry was born. Some of the survivors lived in houses that were evacuated, and some shared houses with German families that

stayed. Because it was considered a DP camp, we did not have to pay any rent.

The men, in order to make a living, dealt in black market goods, such as cigarettes, silk stockings and anything else that was needed and hard to get. It was not easy or without risk, as the police tried to stop it. When caught, some were sent to prison, and some were killed.

The women mostly stayed home. A Jewish school was established where we all went. We learned to write and read Hebrew and pray. We also learned about the Bible and Jewish history and celebrated the holidays. The teachers encouraged us to speak only Hebrew in school. Outside of school, we all spoke German. At home, we mostly spoke Yiddish, which is similar to German. After school, dressed in brown uniforms, many of us went to the Zionist organization Betar. We had meetings where we learned about life in Palestine. They hoped that one day all of us would make our life in a free Jewish state. We stayed in Zaltzheim for about two years. All the Jewish families had to leave, as, by then, it was not considered a DP camp anymore.

At that point, we moved to an apartment in Frankfurt, Germany, where I lived with my father, Pinek, my stepmother Hanka and my half-brother Harry, who was born right after the war. My father went into business with a friend who opened a silk stocking factory, which unfortunately they had to shut down. Then, my father opened a kosher restaurant with a partner.

Many survivors settled in Frankfurt, including Joe, Max and Moniek. Max and Moniek had a bar outside of an American army base for many years. Many of the surviving Jewish families immigrated to the United States, although some remained in Frankfurt.

I came to the United States in 1955. We came separately, as we received affidavits from different people at various times. An affidavit was a form that had to be filled by a person who was legally living in the USA and working. It was necessary to prove that someone was ready and able to support an immigrant, so that immigrant would not become the government's responsibility. I received mine from a family member on my father's side of the family.

Joe and his family received their affidavits from their first cousin Charles Newman (previously Najman). Joe came to the United States in 1952, so I was able to stay with him and his wife Blumka and their children, Harold and Sherry. My father, Hanka and Harry received their affidavits from Charles too. When they arrived in New York in 1956, I moved in with them, across the street from Joe and Blumka.

I have recently learned from Sarenka that she and her family wanted to go to Palestine. When they asked my parents about it, they discouraged them. My mother told them that they would be better off going to the United States, as life in Palestine was very difficult. My mother went to Frankfurt to see them all in 1950. She originally went for three weeks, but ended up staying for three months. They all had a wonderful time together, reminiscing, crying, laughing, dancing and traveling to make up for lost time.

In 1945, when the war ended, everyone in Palestine was scrambling for information about their families. To make it easy for the population to get information, lists of survivors' names were hung at designated buildings. The lists were updated as the names came in, which was mostly once a week. Every week, I accompanied my mother to one of these buildings. She approached the list looking for her family, while I stayed behind waiting. It was a dramatic experience watching the different reactions of people. There were the ones who cried from happiness to see their family names, and the ones who were crying from disappointment. My mother always cried with sadness. We would walk home without talking, she crying all the way. I hated going with her, but did not have the heart to let her go by herself. I believed that holding my hand on the way back home made it easier for her.

One day, that same year, the bell rang at our apartment, and my mother opened the door to a man she did not recognize. He introduced himself as Mr. Heit and told her that he had news from Europe. He came in, and with a big smile he said, "I just came from Oshatz, Germany. Your sister Hanka, your brothers Joe and Max and Max's son Moniek are alive!"

"How did you find out?" She asked crying and laughing at the same time, since, by this time, she almost

lost hope that anyone from her family survived.

“I am a soldier in the Jewish Brigade and my unit went to Oshatz, Germany, looking for survivors. While we were walking in the street, two women approached me. They looked like mother and daughter. The older woman said, ‘Are you from Palestine? My daughter saw a Jewish star on your sleeve.’ So I told her that yes, I was from Palestine and was here with the Jewish Brigade. And she said, ‘I have a married sister in Tel Aviv. She lives at # 15 Shenkin Street. Can you please go and tell her that I, Joe, Max and his son Moniek are alive?’ I told her I would be very happy to do that.”

Sarenka remembered this episode very vividly, as she and Hanka met Mr. Heit on May 6, and the war ended on May 8, 1945. Since that day, my parents became and stayed very close friends with Mr. Heit, his wife and their children, who were the exact age as my brothers and myself. After receiving this wonderful news, my mother kept going to look at the lists for a few years, hoping to see that her parents and sisters survived. At that point, it was my brother Isaac who accompanied her. By that time, all lists were pasted on the round bulletin boards, which had been built on many streets.

Many of the survivors wanted to come to Palestine, which was under the British Mandate at the time and had a quota specifying how many people could enter. Many survivors, with the help of Jewish organizations and volunteers, were brought to Palestine illegally. Hundreds of people came on small, overcrowded boats at night and landed on different beaches. After they came off the boats, they were dispersed all over the country. When the British realized what was happening, they tried to intercept the boats. When they caught one, they put all the people in the Atlit detention camp near Haifa. They spent many months there before they were released. Once the British ran out of space in Palestine, they built camps in Cyprus to hold these illegal survivors. Most of those interned there spent a few years in Cyprus before they were released. The economic and housing conditions in Palestine at this time were not good. There was also a lot of fighting between Jewish paramilitary groups and the British.



*Miriam on the beach.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER TWO

### Growing up in Palestine

I was born on May 16, 1936, in Palestine, which is now Israel.

In April of 1936, riots broke out in Jaffa and continued until the year 1939. The Arabs led terror attacks against Jewish and British targets. The British Mandate gave England temporary control over Palestine. In order to protect the Jewish citizens, a curfew was ordered from early evening until sunrise. No one was allowed out in the street during the curfew.

My mother's labor pains started in the early evening, and my father had to walk with her to the hospital, since there was no transportation available. This hospital was the first private hospital in Palestine, headed by a known and respected obstetrician, Dr. Froid. It was a very expensive hospital, but my father wouldn't allow my mother to go to the free public hospital, Hadassah.

The hospital was a short distance from my parents' apartment. After walking for about five minutes, my parents were stopped by a British policeman. He wanted to know where they were heading.

My father, in broken English, answered, "Hospital, baby," and pointed to my mother's belly. The policeman smiled and walked them to the hospital, where I was born a few hours later. My Dad had to stay at the hospital until morning when the curfew ended.

My memories start at around the age of 4. Anything that happened previously, I learned from my parents and from looking at pictures.

When I was 4 years old, my parents enrolled me in a nursery school, where I went very happily for a week before I got sick. My parents sent me back when I felt better, but, after a few days, I became sick again. At that point, they decided to take me out of nursery school.

For the next two years, I had every childhood disease possible: sore throats with high fever, scarlet fever, and whooping cough on two occasions, which was almost unheard of and dangerous. I was taken to the hospital and could only see my parents through a round glass window, as they waved and threw kisses.

My parents bought me a light brown teddy bear that I kept for many years. Whenever I went to the doctor and got an injection, I would go home and do the same to my teddy bear. At times, I would perform operations, bandage him up and apply all kind of lotions that I found in the medicine cabinet.



*My mother and I. All clothes sewn by mother.*



*My parents and I, elegantly dressed as always.*

Just before I started first grade, my parents convinced me to give up the teddy bear. I had to know what my parents would do with him because I didn't want him to be thrown in the garbage. They promised me that they would give him away to a child who had no toys. I did not believe them, as he was in terrible shape, but I accepted their explanation. I never questioned them or talked about it again.

When I was about 4 or 5 years old, I went for a walk with my father. He took me to a barbershop and had my head shaved. He believed that I was always sick because people were giving me the "evil eye" and that, without hair, no one would look at me. In later years, seeing myself bald in pictures, I was mystified as to why I was photographed when I was bald or when my hair was growing in and I looked like a boy. When I asked my father about it, he responded that he wanted me to see the pictures when I grew older. He also told me that my mother almost killed him when he brought me home bald, without my beautiful blond locks. She cried and didn't speak to him for two weeks.

My parents' roles at home were very clear. My mother did not work. She was a full time mom and took care of everything that had to do with our home life. My father would give her a weekly allowance to cover all expenses related to the home. I always found her to be very energetic and enjoying the marketing, the cleaning and the cooking. She was very loving and lots of fun.

She made my favorite foods and read me stories from books that she took out of the library. The only book that she bought was a children's etiquette book. We went through it, page by page, looking at the pictures, as she read to me. Each time she read one of the correct manners of behavior, she asked me to repeat it. I thought it was a lot of fun. At times, I would sit up against the pillows and, when she brought my food, we would practice how to hold the utensils. It was a great way to spend time.

She taught me that if I had a seat on the bus, I had to get up and give the seat to older people. Moreover, she explained the importance of assisting older people to cross the street or to get up from a fall. It was very important to her that I learn how to respect and talk to older people and be polite and pleasant.



*Beach time.*

All of these lessons served me very well in life.

When I had a high fever, and my mom wanted me to sleep, she would lie next to me in bed holding me and telling me about her childhood in Poland. When she ran out of stories, she repeated them, which I didn't mind.

At other times, in a very soft voice, while holding me tight, she would sing in Yiddish, and I would fall asleep. Listening to my favorite songs over and over, I picked up many Yiddish words that my mother translated for me to Hebrew. I also learned Yiddish words when my parents conversed with each other in Yiddish, which was usually when they did not want me to understand what they were talking about. I liked the sound of the words and thought it was a beautiful language. In time, I started to speak it.

When I began to have a good grasp of the language, my parents took me to many Yiddish plays, concerts and movies. I knew all the Yiddish performers and, after a while, I had my favorites and became choosy about whom I wanted to see on stage.

Some of the Yiddish films were produced in the United States and some in Europe. They were either comedies or dramas about life in the Jewish towns and cities in Poland and Russia. They brought my mother's stories about her family to life. Most of the times, I was the only child in these different venues, but I didn't care since it made me feel mature. My Yiddish improved immensely and I spoke it more frequently but only at home. I never told any of my friends about speaking Yiddish or about going with my parents to Yiddish movies and shows. I thought that my friends might laugh at me because Hebrew was the official language in the country. Now, my parents had to switch to speaking Polish when they did not want me to understand their conversations. However, it did not take me long to understand Polish also, but never as well as Yiddish.

Normally, my parents spoke Hebrew and read only Hebrew newspapers. When some of their



*With my parents as my hair was growing back.*

friends tried to speak Yiddish or Polish to them, they tended to answer them in Hebrew. They were very proud of the Hebrew language and felt strongly that the language represented the people and the country.

Not long ago, I went to a Jewish film festival to see a movie that was filmed in 1937, partially in a small Polish town and partially in a large city. It was exciting, because it brought back memories. I don't speak Yiddish as well anymore, but I can still understand it and always enjoy listening to others speak it. Today, Yiddish is mostly spoken in Brooklyn or in other places where orthodox Jews live. They speak it among themselves and with their kids in order to keep the language alive. Currently, there are several universities in the United States where Yiddish is taught.

During my illness, my mother gave all her time to me. However, it was my father who was the expert at giving me my medications. I always resisted taking the medications, so my father had to find new, creative ways of making me take them. Because I needed to drink tea with lemon a few times a day, he bought different colored straws that were very expensive. In order to distract me from the medicines that he was putting in my mouth, my father would carry on, make funny faces, jump and sing and literally put on a show. He mostly used this technique when I had to take chamomile syrup for a cough, which was quite seldom. I hated the taste and the smell of the chamomile. Even now, I will not drink chamomile tea or use anything that contains chamomile.

One of the other remedies that my parents would use to relieve a congested chest was called "bunkes" (cupping). Bunkes was used as a cure in Poland, so they were probably exposed to it there. My parents believed that this treatment could cure a very bad common cold, relieve cough spasms and get rid of a congested chest. At that time, a top pediatrician in Palestine believed strongly in this treatment and recommended it. Doctors who believe in natural cures and therapies are still recommending it today.

To apply the treatment, my mother would spread a blanket on the dining room table and I would lie on it



*In my winter coat, made by my mother*

on my stomach. Meanwhile, my father would take rounded glass cups and put them all on a tray. He would then take cotton balls, soak them in alcohol and put one in each cup. Then, he would use a match to light one cup at a time and hold it for a few seconds. Once the flame died, he would place the cups, one by one, in rows, down my back. They stayed on my back for ten to twenty minutes until they cooled.

This required that I lie still. When he removed the cups, there was a funny noise, as the skin was exposed to the air. I liked the sound, since I knew that it meant that the treatment was over. My father also made funny sounds each time he removed a cup, and I had to guess what animal he was imitating.

He basically turned the whole experience into one big game. My father was very good at cupping, and I never got burned. It would only leave round red marks on my back, which went away after a few hours.

The other terrible memory that I have was when I had stomach worms. It is hard for me to remember if it was painful or what symptoms I had, but I will never forget the treatment. It was on the same table, covered with a blanket, that I had to lie down on every evening. The only way to get rid of this sickness was to have the bowels cleaned daily with a warm water enema. Sometimes, they would add garlic to the water, as that was believed to be a natural cure. As usual, my father tried many ways to take my mind off the treatment. He also promised me that it would not take a long time or too many more days. All I remember is that it seemed to me as an eternity and I cried from happiness when they told me that I was cured.

Growing up, I had no dolls or other toys to play with, except my beloved teddy bear. I remember passing by the only toy store in Tel Aviv and glaring at the beautiful dolls through the window. For some reason, I never asked for any.



*Lea who took us daily to the park (right to left: Tamar, Lizet, Lea & Myself)*

My toy collection consisted of different kinds of buttons. My mother sewed all my and her own clothes. That meant that she needed to have on hand a variety of buttons. The buttons that she didn't use, in varied sizes, shapes and colors, I put into brown paper bags. When I got bored, I would take the out the buttons and spread them on my bed or on the table. I then set them up in lines and made believe they were dancers. While I was singing, I would move them around. Arranging the buttons into couples or in circles, by size or color, or mixing them, was not easy. I had to move them in many directions, one by one, and doing so kept me busy for hours. When I would get tired and leave the buttons the way I arranged them, my mom knew not to move them, as I would get very upset when she did. This game was my most favorite one.

Another cherished time was when my father came home from work. Usually my mom would leave us alone to go and prepare supper. I used to love these alone moments with my father. Typically, he would tell me about his day and then read me some stories from children's books.

All this time, my parents very seldom went out in the evenings. When my health improved and I started to feel well, my parents decided to start going out again.

One day, my father said to me, "Ima (Mother) and I are going out to get some ice cream, and we will bring you some too."

It was summertime, which was the only time that most people in our country would have ice cream. Even now, I rarely eat ice cream in the winter.

"One of you can go for the ice cream, and one can stay home with me," I said with tears in my eyes.

“It will not take us long, about a half an hour. You are a big girl and you are not sick anymore.”

I didn't want to stay home alone and, of course, couldn't understand, at this young age, that they enjoyed going out together. In those years in Israel, once children reached the age of four or five, they were considered old enough to be left home by themselves. In case something went wrong, the neighbors were always there to help. My parents told me that our next-door neighbors were home, and they would tell them that they would be back in a half an hour.

I started to cry. My father hugged and kissed me and whispered in my ear, “You are a big girl now and we will be back soon.” Then they left.

I was angry. I took out my buttons and started to play with them. I didn't enjoy it and my anger didn't subside. I was certain that my parents were staying out longer than they promised. I went to the big window in my mother's room. There were drapes on each side of the window. With a feeling of satisfaction, I cut into the drapes, which I knew would anger my parents. In my mind, this was a way to punish them for leaving me alone.

When they came back and I saw that my father brought me ice cream, I started to cry. I felt bad about what I did.

“Miriam, why are you crying? We ran back to make sure that the ice cream would not melt. There was a big line, so it took longer than we expected.”

I took my father's hand and walked him to the window. It was difficult to see what I did, since the cuts I made were about one to two inches long and I folded the fabric so they could not be seen. “I am so sorry that I cut the drapes, but I was angry that you left me alone,” I said crying hysterically. Watching my father and mother's expressions, I knew that they were angry, and I had no idea what to expect.

With a very stern face, my father said, “Both Ima and I are angry with you, as you did a very bad thing. We will forgive you, this time, if you promise us that you will never do something like this again. We hardly ever leave you alone, but today you were feeling much better, and we needed to go out for a little while. If tomorrow you will not have a fever for a second consecutive day, you will be able to go out too.”

With much relief, through tears of happiness, I promised to be good. I never again stopped them from going out, as I had to prove that I was grown up.

In between sicknesses, my mother wanted to make sure that I spent time with other children. She got in touch with a wonderful woman named Leah, who provided care for pre-kindergarteners in our area.

We were four girls in the group. Every day, Leah would pick us up at 4:00 p.m. and bring us home at 7:00 p.m. My mother would pack a sandwich, fruit, some cake or cookies and a drink for me to take along. This was our supper and we all ate together, which was a lot of fun.

In those years, our main meal was at lunchtime and in the evening we had a light supper. After lunch, most people would go to sleep for a siesta. All stores in the country were closed between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. and so were most offices. The stores would open again from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., except on Fridays, when they would be open only in the morning. On Saturdays, everything was closed, but Sunday was a regular workday.

Leah would take the four of us to the park. We all lived within walking distance to Shderot Rothschild, which was a long boulevard, running from the south to the north of the city. It was about 30 feet wide, with big trees on each side that gave a lot of shade. On each side of the boulevard, there were benches, and in the middle of every three or four streets, there was a sand box to play in. We would each bring a pail and shovel, which kept us busy.

Every day, Leah would bring a book and read us a story. We all loved Leah very much. When she read, we all wanted to sit in her lap. So, every day, someone else got a turn doing so. We were very happy in her company.

Leah also taught us many songs. She took us walking to different areas of the park where there were fishponds and beds of many kinds of beautiful flowers. She taught us the names of the fish and the flowers and how to recognize them. We also played games that she created. After all the activities, we would wipe



*My sixth birthday party.*

off our hands and sit on a bench to eat our supper. Many times, Leah would surprise us with candies or cookies.

After spending two years with Leah, we were ready for kindergarten. We had a wonderful time with her, and our parents were happy and grateful to Leah. She never missed a day of work. She was not married at the time and had no kids. As Leah loved children, this was a pleasant way for her to earn good money. She had an excellent reputation and did not have to be concerned about recruiting a new group of children, as she was in great demand.

All four of us went to the same kindergarten. Two of the girls and I also went to the same public school, high school and army together.

I was very excited to start kindergarten, which was part of the public education system of Tel Aviv. We went in the morning from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00, had a snack that was brought from home at around 10:00 and then left for home at noon, just in time for lunch.

The school building was located at the corner of Shenkin Street, where I lived, and Rothschild Boulevard. The kindergarten occupied the first floor and was surrounded by a beautiful yard shaded by big old trees. There was a sandbox and swings and many different toys spread all over the yard. There were two classes headed by two teachers - Moriah and Tzvia. They were very loving, happy and easy going. When necessary, they were stern but never insulting. They were both tall and attractive. Tzvia had grey hair and Moriah had black hair. Moriah was my teacher.

We sang, danced, had arts and crafts and played many games with our friends. Before every holiday, we put on a play to which parents were invited. My mother always came, but my father was too busy working and couldn't come.

The most memorable event of kindergarten for me was the celebration of my sixth birthday. We were 4 or 5 boys and girls celebrating together. I think that kids born in the same month celebrated together.

My mom made me a new light blue cotton dress for the occasion with a large bow to match. We also wore

wreaths on our heads made of fresh flowers. Our chairs were decorated with flowers too, and we carried baskets with sweets in them.

Our parents came for the celebration. I remember being so excited at seeing my father, dressed in a suit and tie, accompanying my mother. Even though he promised me that he would show up, I was not sure that he would be able to make it, since I knew that he was very busy at work.

That was the first birthday celebration that I ever had a party for with other children. The birthday was in May, which was almost the end of the school year. It was most special for me because I wasn't sick and never missed a day in that first year of kindergarten. It was as if someone with a magic wand chased away all my sicknesses. I felt so good about being healthy that when we passed the street where Dr. Fiechenfeld, my pediatrician, had his office, I would turn my face and look in the opposite direction. I was afraid that if I looked toward the building where his office was, I would get sick again. I also insisted that my parents get me another doctor, which they did.

Once, walking with my parents to the beach, which was not far from Dr. Fiechenfeld's office, we met him. I was shaken and turned my back to him. The doctor asked my parents how I was doing and wanted to know why we stopped coming to him. My parents laughed and told him the reason. He laughed too and tried to talk to me, but I wouldn't answer. At the end of the conversation, he said, "I am so happy that you are feeling well and that you are happy in kindergarten. All the best to you. You are a very pretty and nice girl."

Most of the kids on my block and many in the kindergarten had siblings, and I longed for one too. I was a bit jealous and questioned my parents about it, but never got an answer. When my cousin Eli was born, I was thrilled and adopted him as a brother. Later on, I understood that, because of my many illnesses, my parents were reluctant to have another child. It took them a long time to accept the fact that I was completely cured. My brother Isaac was born when I was eight years old.

When I was four years old, my parents moved to number 15 Shenkin Street. It was a side street that started at Allenby Street and continued for about 1½ miles. Allenby street started all the way at the southern part of the city and ended at the ocean. In the 1940's and 50's, this area was considered the main commercial center of Tel Aviv. Every building on Allenby Street had stores. There were stores that sold fashions, fabrics, home accessories and jewelry. There were also two movie houses, Mugrabi and Allenby, which were owned by the Mugrabi family.

On the street level of our building, there was a liquor store, an expensive menswear store, carrying the latest men's fashions, and a radio store where radios were sold and repaired. Our apartment was right above the stores, facing the street. Items like linens, appliances, hardware, bicycles and clothes were sold in small shops that occupied the first floor of every building on both sides of Shenkin street. In addition, there were food stores, beauty shops and coffee houses. It was a very busy and noisy street from early morning until late at night. People, two bus lines, taxis, bicycles and horse-and-carriage wagons were always on the move, even though it was a one-way street.

In the building next to us, there was a ballroom dance school. Their classes started at around 6:00 p.m. and went on until about 1:00 a.m. The music and chatter of the students could be heard in the room where I slept. It was especially loud on hot days when all our windows and doors were left open and students would take noisy breaks on the school's balcony. The window over my bed faced the school. When I was tall enough to stand on the bed, I loved to watch the students dance. I would usually do it at night when I went to my room to sleep. My parents did not usually come in after they put me to bed and therefore never knew about that. When I would get tired, I would lie down, listen to the music and imagine myself as one of the dancers.

Our neighbors' children from across the street and in the apartment next door were the first friends that I played with from around age four. There were three boys and two girls living across the street, and a brother and sister living next door to us. There were other kids in the buildings surrounding us, but we did



*Our neighbors Tzipora and Avram with my parents (bottom left) at a ball.*

not play together.

We had a close relationship with the family that lived directly across the hall from us. My parents were friendly with the parents, Avram and Tzipora. Their children Chaim, who was my age, and Aviva, who was three years older, were also my friends. Their parents had a butcher shop in the main market, Shuk Ha'Carmel, and were doing very well financially. They sold many different kinds of meat from different parts of the Middle East, as they were not a Kosher store. Consequently, they had a very large customer base.

Avram was tall and slim with black hair. He was crossed-eyed and it took me a while to get used to it. At first, I was uncomfortable being around him, but, soon enough, I realized how nice, warm and loving he was.

His wife, Tzipora, was very beautiful, with long curly hair and black eyes. She was full of energy and was a very caring and loving person.

When my father wasn't doing well financially, my mother wanted to help out. She told Avram that she was looking for a job. He immediately hired her to work in his butcher shop as a cashier. She worked while I was in kindergarten, and was always home when I came home. The only time that she worked all day in the store was on Thursdays, as that was their busiest day. On Thursday afternoons, I would go to visit her and observe her at work. I was proud of her, seeing how she handled the customers, always addressing them with respect and thanking them with a smile. When I was bored, I wandered around the market, checking out the different stores and stalls.

Avram and Tzipora introduced us to other members of their family. So, I became friendly with Chaim and Aviva's cousins whenever they came to visit, as we all played together. When my father's finances improved, my mother stopped working. My parents remained good friends with Avram and Tzipora, and they went out together to coffeehouses or dancing. They always seemed to have a good time in their company.

Our apartments shared a large terrace that ran the length of both apartments and faced the main street.

A glass wall split the terrace into two sections. The terrace railing was made out of steel poles, with an opening every 5-10 inches. At times, when I forgot my keys to the apartment, or when my friends forgot theirs, we would go to the terrace, climb over the railing by the glass wall and enter our homes. One of our other habits was to call each other while leaning over the railing and carry on a conversation.

Our neighbors, Avram and Tzipora's apartment was much larger than ours. They also had a beautiful, expensive bedroom set. I remember being envious when I saw it delivered. Once our borders left and my parents had their own room, I felt better. I thought that although my parents did not have a formal bedroom and they slept on a convertible sofa, their room was much nicer. The additional two rooms that our neighbors had were for their children and a grandmother, Tzipora's mother, who lived with them.

Chaim and I became good friends. We were in the same grade but not in the same class. He had many problems in school. He didn't like to do his homework and was failing many subjects. He had no interests or hobbies and only wanted to play outside with his friends. I felt sorry for him and decided to help him out. When I sat with him to help him with his homework, he never lasted more than twenty minutes. I tried to explain why school was important, but failed in my efforts.

I also tried to get Chaim to join the scouts, explaining that it will be better for him rather than just to play outside, but it was to no avail. The only success I had was convincing him to play the accordion. Once he agreed, his parents went to buy him an accordion, taking me along. They got in touch with a young teacher who came to their home for the lessons. They hoped that the accordion would keep his interest and he would stay home more. He loved playing and spent a lot of time practicing, mostly popular music. Whenever he learned a new piece he asked me to listen to him. He turned out to be talented, and finally I felt good that I succeeded in helping him.

His sister Aviva was a very pretty girl; she looked a lot like her mother. She was always friendly to me, but was too old for us to spend time together. She also had a lot of problems in school and decided not continue her education after graduating from elementary school at the end of eighth grade. Her parents were upset and worried about her all the time. She would leave the house early in the morning and come back late at night, running around with a much older crowd.

When Aviva was about sixteen years old, we all had a terrible experience with her. One day, when we were not home, she climbed over the railing to get into our apartment. When we came home, my father turned to me and said, "Miriam, do you know what happened to the money that I had in the breakfront? It is all gone."

"How should I know? I didn't touch it," I answered angrily.

He asked my mother, and she didn't know either. We couldn't figure out what happened, as nothing else was missing, and it didn't seem that the door to the apartment was forced open. The only way that someone could have come in was from the apartment next door. My parents did not say anything in front of me to that effect, but I figured out that it was what they were thinking.

Early the next morning, we saw two policemen going into our neighbor's apartment. They stayed there for a while and then left. Avram came to our apartment to tell us that their daughter didn't come home the night before, so they called the police. They didn't know her whereabouts and were very worried.

At that point, I remember vividly, my father asked Avram, "Do you think she has a lot of money on her? Did you give her extra money?"

"No we didn't," he answered with a questioning expression on his face. "Sigmund, why are you asking me?"

I could see my father squirming and hesitating. He looked at my mother and she sent me out of the room. The door was left open, so I was able to stand outside in the foyer and listen.

"I had 200 liras in the breakfront and it disappeared," my father said in a low voice. "I always keep it there for emergencies."

I could see Avram covering his face with his hands as he said, "I think that Aviva might have taken it. I will give you back every penny," and he reached for his trousers' pocket. My father stopped him and told him that it was more important to find her in good health. He also assured Avram that none of it will be told to anyone and that he will never report it to the police. Avram got up, hugged my parents and left our apartment silently.

It took the police two days to locate her. They found her with a twenty-year-old young man in a small

hotel in Tzfat (Safed). They arrested the young man, brought him to trial and he served a short time in jail for taking advantage of a minor.

Aviva confessed to her parents that she took the two hundred liras from our apartment and used it for transportation, hotel and food. Avram and his wife apologized to my parents. They returned the money and thanked my parents for being discreet.

After this occurrence, the relationship with our neighbors cooled. They were very ashamed and that created a distance between the two families, which included their children and me. I was still able to climb over the terrace's glass wall when I forgot my key, but it happened very seldom since that episode.

The only other time that we got reconnected was when their grandmother died at home. Avram and Tzipora rang our bell and asked my parents to take their children to our apartment until the body could be removed. Aviva and Chaim came in and we spent a few hours together. We had breakfast together and talked, but it was very strained. I felt bad, as I still liked them and missed the close relationship that we had before.

Once the grandmother's body was removed, they went back to their apartment. We visited with them a lot while they were sitting Shiva. My mother was a great help with taking care of the food, as it was Tzipora's mother who passed away, and so Tzipora was not cooking.

In the evenings, my father and mother picked up Chaim and Aviva and we all went for ice cream. We all loved the American cafe, near the beach, specializing in all kinds of ice creams, American style. Their menus were very descriptive with pictures of banana splits, fruit plates and sundaes, accompanied by many different sodas. It was the first such cafe in the country. Although it was expensive, it was a very busy place. At times, it took almost an hour until a table was available, but everyone was willing to wait. We were always very happy and excited to go there, as it was a special treat.

Because the grandmother died at home, I used to always run up the steps with fear, imagining that I saw her watching me. It took me a long time to get over this fear.

On a trip to Israel, in 2008, we passed by the building on Shenkin Street. My brother Isaac and his wife Paula, who were there at same time, also went by Shenkin Street. When we saw them later, Isaac said to me, "I think I saw Tzipora sitting on the balcony, but I am not sure."

The next day, we went to check it out. I saw Tzipora, who was in her 90's, sitting on the balcony. I called her name from across the street. She saw me, but couldn't hear me. I crossed the street to get closer. She asked, "Who are you?"

When I answered "Miriam Wachsberger," she got very excited and asked us to come up.

Going up the stairs brought back many memories. Tzipora was waiting for us by the door and we followed her to the kitchen, because according to her, it was the coolest place in the apartment. Walking through, I realized that nothing had changed. The original furniture in the bedroom and living room was still in place and the kitchen looked the same too. She spoke clearly and kept smiling.

"How are Aviva and Chaim?" I asked her.

"They are both grandparents, and are very caring and loving children to me. Aviva comes to see me every day and takes care of everything. She is my angel. Chaim lives in Jerusalem, so I don't see him as much, but I speak to him frequently. I remember that you were very good friends."

I was happy that she remembered. She then asked about my parents and expressed sadness when she heard that they had passed away. When we left, she told us how exciting it was for her that we stopped by, and that she couldn't wait to tell her children.

Coming out of her apartment, I looked towards the door of the apartment that we had lived in. I had hoped that the door would be open, but it was not.

On one of our other trips, I decided to go up to our old apartment. I walked quickly up the steps in order to take a picture of the door and it was open. I knocked on the door and an elderly woman greeted me. I recognized her as the landlord's wife.

"Are you here to rent the apartment?" She asked.

"No, I am not. But could I come in? I lived here until I was 16 years old and would like to take a look at it," I answered excitedly.

She let me in. I looked at the two rooms, which now had air conditioning units in the windows. I went to see the kitchen. It looked the same, except that the window was enlarged. The bathroom looked exactly the same. The bathtub had black markings that I would later tell Carl, “must still be my and my brothers’ dirt.” The white tiles had many cracks and looked very old and dirty. The toilet seat and sink were the same, but now there was a water-heating unit hanging out in the foyer. Going out, I thanked the woman for letting me in.

As I walked out, I looked to my right and saw a door to an apartment which I used to go into frequently. The door was never locked, and I was told that I could come in anytime. In this apartment, lived Mr. Markevitch, the most famous impresario (talent agent) and producer in Palestine and Israel in the 1940’s and 50’s.

He was a short chubby man with a round, serious face. He limped slightly, walked with a cane and mostly stayed home. During the day, he always wore wide striped pajamas, in white, brown or beige colors. He wore them even when people came to see him on business matters. When he went out, he wore a black suit, white shirt and a tie. He mostly went out in the evenings to openings of plays, concerts and operas or to parties.

He was one of the few people who had a phone at home, outside of doctors and businesses. When I asked my parents about it, they explained that the type of work that he did from his apartment was considered a business. They also explained that not too many phone lines were available and therefore the authorities were very strict about giving out phone numbers.

He was a bachelor and never married, but he lived with a woman companion named Riva. She took care of all his needs and accompanied him wherever he went. She was a tall, attractive woman who was always very well dressed and groomed.

He liked my parents, and our door was always open to him. At times, he came to borrow items that he and Riva were missing, and, at other times, he would ask my mother to pick up some items for him in the store.

I never knew his first name, and I was told to address him as Mr. Markevich. He never asked me to call him by his first name, as was the norm in the country. Whenever he saw me, he greeted me with a smile, a hug and a kiss and was curious about what I was up to. I knew he liked me a lot, and sometimes I would kiss him on the cheek. I felt sorry for him that he had no family, and thought that in some way he considered us his family.

Because of his position in the arts and in the entertainment world, many actors and artists would come to his apartment. I would go to see him a lot, but when I saw that he was busy talking to people, I would turn around and leave. At times, when known actors would come, he would let me know and invite me to come to the apartment to meet them. He always introduced me as his friend. I shook their hands and left after a very short time. I cherished those times. Once I met the different actors, I was interested in seeing them on stage and read every article about them.

Many times, he gave my parents free tickets to plays, concerts and ballets. When the performances were age-appropriate, there was always a ticket for me too. When I came to thank him, he always wanted to know my opinion of the performance.

In the spring of 1950, the first magazine specifically for women, La’Isha (For the Woman), came out. It dealt with women’s issues, fashion and beauty. The magazine’s editors decided to start a beauty pageant in Israel, which is still in existence today. The original name of the pageant, “Malkat Ha’Yoffi” (The Beauty Queen), was changed a few times during the years, but the event is still the same.

Mr. Markevitch was the producer and organizer of the event. He was responsible for everything having to do with the venue; protocol, judges, music, entertainment, advertising and a big party after the event. It was the biggest and most prestigious event that he was ever involved in. At times, he came over to share his frustrations and delights with my parents. I always sat by and listened, as it fascinated me. Once, he told us that he would try to get us tickets. But he came a few days later and said he was sorry that he could not get any tickets because the event was sold out.



*At my birthday party with my parents.*

He then turned, looked at me and said to my parents: “I have to go early and I would like to take Miriam with me. She will be able to watch the preparations, be close to the contestants and watch the show from the side of the stage. I will bring her back home on the way to the parties.”

I think I stopped breathing, being so excited, hoping that my parents will let me go. Honestly, I knew that they would and I was right. It gave my mother a great excuse to make me a new dress. The next day after school, we went shopping for fabric. We decided on a light blue taffeta, which was mostly used for formal wear.

I was very excited when the time came and Mr. Markevitch, in a black suit, white shirt and black bowtie, came to pick me up. He gave me a quick look and said, “You look so beautiful and grown up. Maybe one day you will enter the pageant and become malkat ha’yoffi (a beauty queen). I didn’t answer, as I knew that I would never do it.

A big black car was waiting for us in front of the building. We were driven to the amphitheater in Ramat Gan and it was very quiet in the car, as no one spoke out of excitement and anxiety. When we arrived and were dropped off, Mr. Markevitch told the driver when to come back for us. Mr. Markevitch made arrangements for Riva, his woman friend, and myself to go into the dressing room, accompanied by a hostess. She took us through to see wardrobe and makeup. There, she pointed out some of the beauty queens who were invited to come for the pageant from some European countries. Riva explained to me that Mr. Markevitch had to invite them because there were not enough young women from Israel who were ready to participate in the pageant.

As it was the first such pageant, no one really knew what to expect. The hope was that it will be successful and eventually more young Israeli women will be ready to compete, which happened by the second year.

About thirty minutes before the show, Riva left me to join Mr. Markevitch, greet friends and sit next to

him in the second row to watch the pageant. I stood on the side of the stage next to where the curtains were closing and opening. From this vantage point, I was able to view everything clearly without any obstructions.

The excitement in the theatre and on stage was very high. The performers were top names in the entertainment business and all went very well. The contestants first paraded in swimsuits and then in long gowns. The peak of the evening was the announcement of the winner: Miriam Yaron, who was from Jerusalem. Everyone was very happy. Just the idea of having elected the first beauty queen in our independent country had a very special meaning. People were crying and laughing and the place was jumping.

Once the pageant ended and the stage emptied out, I went off stage, where I could see Mr. Markevitch. Well-wishers surrounded him, complimenting him on the wonderful evening and a job well done. I was very happy for him. After most people left, he noticed me and motioned for me to approach his seat. Once I got close, I hugged and kissed him and thanked him for bringing me. We went to the waiting car. In the car Mr. Markevitch asked me many questions about the evening and was delighted to hear that I enjoyed it so much. When the car stopped in front of our building, I left the car thanking him again and kissing him.

My parents waited up for me, eager to hear my impressions of the evening. They listened patiently to every detail. They were very happy for me. The following year, 1951, I was invited again and I went. There was no need anymore to invite beautiful young women from abroad. Since then, I always like to watch beauty pageants, knowing and understanding how exciting and nerve-wracking it gets behind the scenes.

I was very friendly with two girls, my age, Rachel and Tamar, who lived across the street. We went to the same elementary school, but we were never in the same class. My mother told me that before we started public school, at times, I would gang up on the girls and throw stones at them with two boys who lived across the street. When Tamar and Rachel's parents complained, my mother warned me to stop, or I would be punished. I realized that she was serious and I stopped. I told my boy friends that we must stop attacking the girls. They agreed and once these attacks stopped, Tamar, Rachel and I became good friends.

Rachel lived with her parents and her brother, who was two years younger than her, on the second floor, in a building diagonally across from us. She had curly red hair and a lot of freckles. She was always happy, smiling and ready to play at all times, and she was a lot of fun. I also found her to be trustworthy and able to keep a secret. She came to our apartment often, and many times ate with us. We frequently communicated with each other by yelling from one balcony to the other. Her parents liked me, especially her father.

Her father had a candy store below their apartment. For a while, all of them shared one room, where they all slept and ate. This was not unusual at the time. They also shared their kitchen and bathroom with a boarder. They had a small terrace off the one room, where they could only put four chairs. Because it was such tight quarters, Rachel never asked me or any other friend to come over.

Rachel and her family were thrilled when finally their boarder left, vacating the other bedroom, so they no longer had to sleep all in one room. Although, they now had to pay the full amount of rent to the landlord by themselves without having part of it shared with a boarder. They decided to do it, as Rachel and her brother were growing older. At that point, Rachel insisted that I come over and play. Once in a while, I would have supper with them, and afterwards we would clean up to make things easier for her mother who had to go to work in the evenings, helping her husband in the candy store.

Rachel's father, Max, was a very nice man. He was of medium height with a round handsome face, curly hair and an ever-present smile. Every day, Max wore a white, short-sleeved shirt and khaki pants that were spotless and neatly pressed. He had a lot of patience and treated old and young customers gently. Max had a big heart and, at times, I saw him giving candy and a cold drink, without charge, to persons who couldn't afford it or were temporarily short of money. When a fresh-mouthed kid or unpleasant adult angered Max, he never raised his voice.

Max was very proud of his store and kept it very clean. Every morning he swept and hosed the sidewalk. It was a large store with an open front, one step up from the street. On the right side, in the front of the store, there was a rounded counter that continued to the back in a straight line and took up half of the store. On the front part of the counter, there were shelves that could be seen from the street. On them were displays of pretzels, wrapped chocolates, crunchy fruit candies, chewy coffee candies and chocolate wafers. The newest items on the



*Me (on left) with my friends Rachel and Tamar.*

market were always displayed for a few days on top of the counter to create curiosity.

I liked watching Max from the terrace when he got new products. He would go in and out of the store, looking and moving a box or two, a little to the left or to the right, to the back or to the front, until he was satisfied with the arrangement. He wanted to make sure that all would be on full view for passersby to stop and see.

On a back wall, three feet away from the counter, there was a soda fountain for plain seltzer. Next to it, there were colorful large bottles filled with different sweet and sour syrups, made from different fruits, to be mixed with the seltzer for gazoz (a sweet fizzy drink). It was a very inexpensive and popular drink, especially during the hot summer months. Because the drink was mixed in glasses, it had to be drunk in the store. Paper cups were not yet available.

Next to the syrup bottles, there was a refrigerated case containing different flavors of ice cream, dixie cups and ice cream cones. Nearby, a shelf held silver-stemmed ice cream dishes and little silver spoons. These silver dishes were filled with ice cream for customers who chose to have their ice cream in the store.

On another shelf, there were oranges, grapefruits, a juice squeezer and tall glasses. The oranges and grapefruits were piled up on top of each other to create a pyramid. That added beautiful colors to the back wall. At the end of the wall, there was a big white sink for washing the dishes and utensils.

The store had about three or four small ice cream parlor tables and chairs. Most customers did not linger too long, only long enough to finish their ice creams and sodas. At times, some of the older people sat longer and chatted with Max. The store was open from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. It was closed between 1:00 and 4:00 for siesta.

Only Shuk Ha'Carmel, the main market in Tel Aviv, was open from early morning until sundown. In

those years, most people lived and worked in Tel Aviv, so it was possible to go home in the middle of the day. There was enough time to have the main meal of the day, which is equivalent to our dinner, rest and go back to work from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Max's store reopened at 4:00 p.m. and stayed open until midnight. Max's wife, who was not a very happy or friendly person, usually helped him. After serving the children a light supper, she brought Max's supper to the store. Evenings were usually a very busy time. Most people liked to go out, as part of their evening entertainment. Movies, theaters and coffeehouses were also very busy in the evenings. This was the time before television came to the homes.

I liked Max very much. Whenever I came to the store, he would greet me with a smile and talk to me. He liked to show me the new items that came in. My parents gave me permission to buy from him. When I had no money on me, he would write it down on our tab and my mother would pay for it at a later time.

When chocolate-covered marshmallows were sold for the first time, I liked the way they were displayed. When I asked Max what they were, he said, "This is a kushi," which was the Hebrew word for a Black person, literally, a person from the land of Kush, or ancient Ethiopia. We only saw and knew Black people from going to the movies. The kushi became my most favorite sweet. It was very popular, and I knew he did very well with this item, as very often I saw boxes delivered.

At times, I felt bad that there were certain wafers and chocolates I never bought in his store. The reason was that the same wafers and chocolates were also sold in the grocery store, almost next door. My mother liked to keep large quantities at home for family and for friends who stopped by. I also did not buy any drinks at his store. We got our drinks from a man who drove a horse and buggy and delivered sifon (seltzer) bottles to our apartment once a week. My father bought two kinds of syrups that we liked, limon (lemon) and petel (raspberry). The raspberry syrup was very sweet in comparison to the lemon syrup that was sweet and sour. I preferred the petel because of its sweetness and its beautiful deep pinkish red color.

My friend Tamar, lived on the first floor, facing a backyard in an attached apartment building to the one that Rachel lived in. She lived with her parents and an older brother, Zev, who was paralyzed from the waist down and in a wheel chair. He was always in a bad mood and never smiled or laughed. Zev was very smart and a very good student. He had straight black hair, dark eyes and heavy, dark-rimmed glasses. He hardly had any friends come over except for one boy from his class who was friendly and nice. Zev helped him with his homework, as he had a hard time in school. Many times after finishing the homework, they would play chess or dominos. I was a little scared of Zev who loved to make fun of us and was always very cynical. Therefore, I tried to avoid going to Tamar's home.

Her father worked in the municipality and didn't talk much either. Her mother was pleasant and tried to encourage Tamar's friends to visit. She would always make sure that Tamar offered her friends homemade cookies. It was a very somber household, but I fully understood the unhappiness there. I felt sorry for all of them.

Tamar was my height, slim and had black hair and very dark eyes. She had many mood swings and often would start fights with Rachel and me for no reason. Many times, she tried to lure Rachel to her side and get her angry with me. When that happened, I would walk away from them, knowing that it will pass. My mother always explained that Tamar's family was having a hard time, and her talks helped me handle those situations.

Rachel and Tamar were the only girls my age that lived so close to us. With our parents' permission, we could play outside on the sidewalk or go to Ginat Shenkin, the park right next to where we lived. Most of the other kids who lived in the nearby buildings were boys. We played with them at times, but it was not the same. One of our most favorite pastimes was climbing a large mulberry tree, which had a big trunk where all three of us could sit comfortably. It was an old tree, very tall with widespread branches and many dark green rounded leaves. The berries were about an inch long, dark purple, sweet and juicy. The tree was located in the backyard of a small hotel and it shaded the whole area. Although there were chairs and a table under the tree for hotel guests to sit on, the owner gave us permission to climb the tree and sit there, as long as we talked quietly. Rarely did we saw any people sitting outside, as it was a business hotel and the guests were out working.

On days off, we went there in the mornings, and on some school days we went in the afternoons. We each brought sandwiches, fruit, cookies and water. Rachel always brought special candies or chocolate that her

father gave her. We picked the mulberries from the tree and ate them unwashed. At times, the juice ran down our clothes and stained them. Our mothers did not appreciate it, as it was difficult to remove the stains, but we were never discouraged from going back. We usually stayed for an hour or two, talking, playing games and sometimes singing our favorite songs.

Spending so much time in the mulberry tree gave us the advantage of finding silk worms, as their favorite food is mulberry leaves. The worms like these leaves because they have a special odor that they are attracted to. We would put the worms, about three or four, in a shoebox lined with newspapers. Small holes were punched at the top of the box so the worms could breathe. We fed them daily and cleaned their small dark droppings. Their skins were shed four times in a row. After the fourth shedding, their bodies got slightly yellow and their skins became tighter. This was the beginning of the cocoon stage. The worms enclosed themselves in an envelope of silk, which was produced by their saliva. Left undisturbed, the cocoon was eventually broken and a young moth flew out. Each cocoon broke open at different times. We were fascinated watching the developmental stages day by day. We all got together with our shoeboxes and compared notes of the progress. Most of us did it only once, to satisfy our curiosity. There were some, however, who would repeat this every year, but I could never see the reason for it.

Hopscotch was another favorite game of ours, but many times, it created big arguments, as to whether a stone landed on or off the line. We tried to find a quiet spot on a side street, so that we could mark the outline and numbers and not be disturbed by passersby. I used to hate the arguments, as they took all the fun out of the game. At times, I would come a little earlier than my friends, so I could practice and avoid the tension. I liked the game because it did not involve any running, which I never liked and was never good at.

Playing with five marble stones was another way of passing time. The stones were about half-inch in size. In order to make them slide easily on the floor, we would rub them against each other to make sure that they were smooth. The best stones were Jerusalem stones, but those were too expensive for us to buy. In Jerusalem, they could be found everywhere because all the buildings were built with this stone. There was always someone who went to Jerusalem and brought some stones back. If they were not the right size or shape, we worked hard to make them right for playing. We played the game indoors at home or out on the terrace. We sat in a circle on the terrazzo floors that were smooth and allowed the stones to slide easily. The floors were also cool and that made it easier to bear the heat. I practiced a lot at home, playing by myself in order to be competitive and win.

In late afternoons, we also liked to play hide and seek in the park and in the blocks surrounding the park. For this, we enlisted the boys to make it more interesting. We set up borders, which usually included about three or four backyards. I preferred to play only in the park, as it was more contained and so it took less time to find each other and enabled us to change roles quicker.

Rachel, Tamar, and I remained close friends until the fourth grade in elementary school, but did not spend as much time together as before. We grew older and our interests and friends changed and we started drifting apart.

From a very young age, I have very vivid memories involving my father's icebox production. Iceboxes kept food cold before refrigeration. The icebox looked like a small closet, about five feet high, three feet wide and three feet deep. It stood on four short legs. The inside was made of tin and the outside was painted in high-gloss white. Ice was delivered to the apartments by horse and buggy.

The iceman would pass by every day and yell in a loud voice, "Kerach, kerach (Ice, ice)." Whoever needed ice would go out on the balcony and tell him if they needed one-quarter or one-half a block of ice. He would then put large clamps into the ice and walk up the steps to the apartment. In the summer, when the temperature was high, the ice was delivered daily. In the winter, only about three times a week. I felt bad watching the iceman run up and down the steps, sweat pouring down his face like water.

There was no ice delivery on Shabbat or on holidays. We had to go to the ice factory, which was about six blocks away from our building, on King George Street. On Fridays, we bought coupons from the iceman and used them on Saturdays as payment for the ice. I was the one who always went with my father to fetch the ice. Many times, we stood on a long line before we got to the window from where the ice was distributed. We would put the ice in a special bag and my father and I held the bag's straps on opposite sides, as it was heavy. We walked



*My father with original color of icebox.*



*My father cutting up large sheets of tin to fit the iceboxes.*



*My father's area of work in the only snow day ever, in Tel-Aviv.*



*From brown to high gloss white finish icebox.*



*My father and his painter friend David.*

at a fast pace and sometimes ran to make sure that only a little of the ice melted. At times, my father would say something funny that made me laugh and slowed me down. It became a game and, therefore, I liked going with him. As I grew older and stronger and we only needed one-quarter of a block of ice, I would go by myself and feel very grown-up.

My father's first place of business was on Herzl Street, which was the first commercial street of Tel Aviv. It was located in the southern part of the city. It is a wide street with wide sidewalks and many privately-owned stores carrying household goods and personal items. There were inexpensive clothing stores, hardware stores, furniture stores, printing stores and other various small retail shops. There was also a large restaurant on one corner and a few kiosks. All the kiosks were on opposite sides of the street, facing each other. They sold cold sodas, juices made from fresh oranges and grapefruits, chocolates, candies, bagels and cigarettes.

Theodore Herzl was an important figure in the history of Israel. Herzl envisioned that a Jewish state would be established in Palestine. His famous saying was: "If you want, it is not a legend." Therefore the main street of the first Jewish city in Palestine was named after him.

I liked going to the icebox store with my mother and watching my father and his partner at work. They were the only two workers and they did everything. They built the iceboxes, painted them and helped customers. I liked the smell of the raw wood and the strong smells of paint and turpentine. I was fascinated to see how pretty an icebox was when it was finished in white, high-gloss paint. At times, when I went to the store with my father, he allowed me to go on deliveries with Moshe, which was very exciting. Moshe had a horse and a large buggy, on which he would load two to four iceboxes. Arriving at a designated address, he would carry the icebox, on his back, and deliver it to the customer. I waited for him downstairs and felt very important and grown-up.

Everyone referred to him as Moshe the balagoole (a deliveryman in Yiddish). I liked him because he was always very nice to me and gave me a candy every time he saw me. I felt sorry for him, watching him sweat from heat and hard work. He also smelled bad, but I didn't tell anyone about it.



*Good quality as in days of peace. Wachsberger's factory manufacturing ice box from new wood. Price 13.500. Sold at the factory, 10 Montifror, Tel-Aviv.*

Moshe wore a sleeveless white undershirt. His hair was black and he had large dark brown eyes. His skin was very tan from being outside under the strong hot sun. He had a wife and kids that I knew about from my father. He never spoke about himself or about his family, so I didn't ask him any questions. My father liked him a lot, as he was very honest and reliable. I often saw my father giving him extra money.

"Sigmund, you don't have to give me extra money at all times, as I manage well," Moshe would say.

"You are a good man and I appreciate everything you do for me," my father would answer, and Moshe, with tears in his eyes, would give him a big bear hug.

After a while, the partnership between my father and his friend dissolved. I thought something was wrong when we stopped meeting the partner's wife and their son, who was a little older than me. Until then, we used to meet them often in the afternoons at the park, where the son and I played together and became friends.

I asked my mother about it and she said, "Abba (father) doesn't work anymore with your friend's father. Abba is moving his business to another store about two blocks away, on the other side of the street."

Once my father moved, my mother took me to see his new place. It was in the back of a furniture store. In the window, there was a sign that said, "Wachsberger's Iceboxes," and, on the left of the entrance door, there was one icebox on display. I was very disappointed when I saw his new place of business, but I didn't say anything. The store that he shared with his partner was large and filled only with iceboxes, and, in the back of the display area, there was a section where my father and his partner stored the raw materials and worked. In the new store, he only had a small area for display and the courtyard to work in.

He did everything by himself, except the painting. For that, he hired a young painter named David. At work, David mostly wore white canvas pants and a white tee shirt. Outside of work, he always wore high black boots and jodhpur pants, as his hobby was horseback riding. He was very tall, handsome, warm and friendly. For years, I had a crush on him and liked flirting with him. He was single, and my father liked him very much. He was very good at his job, and no paint streaks were ever seen on the iceboxes. He was also very loyal, hard-working and never complained about long hours. My father liked to show him his appreciation, as he did with his other workers. My father knew that David had no need for extra money because he was single and lived with his parents. Instead, my father treated him to spending some vacations together with us.

Business was good, and the store he shared with the owner became too small. After a while, my father moved again, to a basement, at number 10 Montefiori street. It was the basement of a small one-family home. The owners of the building were a very nice elderly couple, who were childless and lived on the second floor. In

the front of the building, on the first floor, they had a music store. They sold records, music sheets, instruments and books about composers' lives and works. I liked the store, and they always let me browse and, at times, they invited me to their apartment for chocolate and cookies. They rented the basement to my father and gave him permission to use the courtyard for his work.

On the opposite side of the courtyard, there was a flight of steps leading to another small building that the couple owned, where they rented small apartments. Part of the yard was shaded by very big trees and part was sunny. In the middle of the courtyard, there was a dried-out water fountain. There were about five or six steps leading down to a basement that was divided into two sections. The front had a display of a few iceboxes, a small old desk and two chairs. The back room was used for storage. I remember thinking that this store wasn't a good idea, as it was on a very quiet street in comparison to where the business was located before. When I asked about it, I was told that my father needed more space and the rent was cheaper in this location than it was on Herzl Street. He had a good reputation, so satisfied customers recommended his place. His iceboxes were made well and, when he ran out of stock, his promised date of delivery was always kept.

I was very happy to see that David came with him, and that his brother Nissim was also hired to help him paint. At the same time, my father also hired Avram, who did the same work as my father. My father depended a lot on Avram who was very conscientious and good with his hands. The two of them developed a very strong relationship. In addition to his earning a good salary, my father always gave him extra money, which enabled him to get an apartment and get married. As a result, Avram felt very loyal to my father and worked long hours at his side. He was also very trustworthy, so there was never any worry about money being stolen. I remember vividly Avram and his wife having the brith (circumcision) for their son in the yard of the factory. Avram always told me what a wonderful, generous man my father was and how he made life so beautiful for him and his family

My father paid his workers very well, but he did not hire any that belonged to the Histadrut, the biggest union in Palestine and, later, in Israel. My father disliked and distrusted the Histadrut, as did all other members of the right-leaning Herut (Freedom) party to which my father belonged.

Formally known as the "General organization of workers in the land of Israel," the Histadrut was established in 1920, during the British Mandate. It became one of the most powerful institutions of Israel and was a big part of the Labor Party. The Histadrut members owned a large number of businesses and factories and, for a time, were the largest employer in the country. Most private businesses, especially large ones, could only employ Histadrut members. Their rules, which protected their members, created problems for the private sector. When a private owner went up against the Histadrut's regulations, he was threatened with the possibility of strikes. These threats were also put in force when the owner resisted paying high dues to the organization. And while the membership grew in folds, the Histadrut created a lot of anger among entrepreneurs and small business owners like my father.

I told my mother that it was so exciting to see the additional people who were hired to help my father. I asked her if he would have enough work for all of them. I guess she was surprised to hear my question. I saw her talking to my father about it. They both told me that they have an answer to my question, but I must keep it a secret. I followed them to the storage room in the basement and saw many finished iceboxes occupying a large portion of the room. My father opened one of the iceboxes and I saw that the walls, instead of being lined with tin, were lined with beautiful colored ceramic tiles. My father kept opening a few more iceboxes that were all finished with ceramic tiles in different colors. There were white, pink, yellow, light blue and light green tiles. My father explained that he wanted to improve the look of the iceboxes and make them special and different from those of his competitors. By lining the inside with ceramic tiles, he made them look nicer and easier to clean.

I was overwhelmed by what I saw and said, "This is so beautiful, I can't believe what I am seeing." He proceeded to tell me that the iceboxes in the colors that we saw would always be available for immediate delivery. He then showed me a board with small samples of many different colored tiles, which would be produced as special orders. He also explained that before he started to produce the new iceboxes, he applied for a patent from the British government and that it was granted. This patent enabled him to be the only manufacturer of this type of icebox in Palestine. It gave him a very big edge over all his competitors.

Once he received the patent, he went to an advertising company to create a campaign to be shown in all

movie houses at intermission on the same day. My father also contracted with the evening newspapers for one-page ads for the same day that the commercials were shown in the movies.

The iceboxes were also displayed in the prestigious showroom of a store selling large and small electrical appliances. Two open-door iceboxes and a large board with different colored tiles were featured in the front window. Next to the iceboxes, there was a small sign that said: "Wachsberger Iceboxes." The store was located in a freestanding one story building on Allenby Street. Allenby street being a main commercial street with many different businesses. The store would take orders from customers who were interested in the new icebox. The owners would then collect the money and bring the orders to my father. He would then make arrangements for deliveries of the iceboxes to the customers. Once a delivery was made, the owners of the store would get a commission. These arrangements saved my father from paying rent for the space that he occupied for display.

I loved passing by the store as often as I could. When I saw people standing and looking in the window, I approached close to them to listen to what they said. I felt so proud, and I wanted to tell them that it was my father's product, but I just smiled to myself.

The opening of the showroom display and the release of the newspaper and movie theater ads all occurred on the same day. Every venue had the logo of the British government on display. The message was very clear; that Wachsberger Iceboxes had the exclusive rights to this product. From my parents' conversations, I understood that it was a shock to his competitors. I was delighted to see the color commercial with "Wachsberger Iceboxes" on the movie theater screen. I had to restrain myself from yelling, "This is my father's business." Come to think of it, for a man with only three years of public school education, he had quite a vision and the ability to accomplish it.

Business was booming. I hardly saw my father, except on Shabbat (Friday nights and Saturdays). He left for work long before I went to school, and came home late at night when I was already asleep. Every day, after I came back from school around noon and ate lunch, the main meal of the day, I would go to the factory and bring him his meal. It was a fifteen-minute walk. I carried the food in a mess kit and a separate bag with bread, fruit and cake. This way, for about a half an hour, I had him to myself, and we would talk. Sometimes, I would stay a little longer, so I could talk to David and Avram who were always very nice to me. When I grew older, my brother Isaac took over the job of bringing lunch to my father.

I loved observing my father talking to customers. He was very charming and full of life. My Mom would come in the afternoons to help him. She was always nicely dressed and was also very charming and engaging. She always welcomed customers with a smile and had a lot of patience. When a customer was ready to buy, she would have my father write up the invoice, but she would collect the cash deposit and put it in a small metal box. At times, I went to the factory with my homework and did it in the courtyard. It was very exciting to watch my parents work together; writing up orders and collecting money. In those years, all transactions were done in cash only.

One thing I learned was that people were ready to wait in order to get what they wanted. I also came to realize that the business was very successful because of the big changes that it brought about at home.

The first thing that changed was that my parents let the tenant in our apartment go. The apartment had two bedrooms, a foyer, a kitchen and a bathroom. In order to afford paying the rent, they shared a room with me and rented the other room. First, we had a young man as a tenant. He was very tall, had black hair and was always smiling and friendly. He rarely ate at home, which made it nice for my mother, because any tenant had the right to share the kitchen and bathroom. I liked him a lot, and so did my parents. He didn't stay for long, and we were all sad when he left. He told us that he was moving and sharing an apartment with a friend in the north of the city, in Shderot Chen. We had to promise him that we will come and visit. My mother and I did go to visit a few times, and he was very gracious. After a while, we stopped visiting.

My parents found another tenant immediately. It was a single woman who was recommended by someone that my parents knew. It was not a good experience. My mother and she fought a lot, especially because they had to share the kitchen. One day, she was forced to leave, escorted by two police officers, after a fight with my parents. I understood that she was behind on her rent for two months, and my father couldn't get her to pay. It was a terrible scene, as she was kicking, sitting on the floor and cursing us until the officers dragged her out.

The next tenant was an elderly childless couple, Mr. & Mrs. Shpitzler. They mostly spoke German and a broken Hebrew. He had a small shop about three blocks away, where he would repair Primus stoves. The Primus was, at that time, the most important item in the kitchen for cooking. The bottom of it was filled with kerosene. By a push of a button and putting a match to the top, a fire started. The same button also controlled the strength of the fire that was needed. Big and small pots and frying pans would be placed on top. When the Primus did not function properly, our tenant, Mr. Shpitzler, would fix it at his store. He was the only Primus repairer in the immediate neighborhood and therefore was very busy.

The Shpitzlers were a very sweet couple. Mr. Shpitzler always came home with black smudges on his clothes, face and hands and with soot under his fingernails. He was tall with grey hair and a big grey mustache. He smiled and laughed a lot and spoke loudly. I still remember his face, but not his wife's. She was the complete opposite, somber but nice and soft. My mother and Mrs. Shpitzler got along very well, as she was very considerate.

When Mr. Shpitzler came home from work, he would go and clean himself up and always put on a white, clean undershirt and shorts. When the door to the Schpitzlers' room was open, I knew that I could come in. They always had hugs, smiles and kisses for me. I used to love sitting on Mr. Shpitzler's lap, listening to him. The Shpitzlers were always sitting very close to each other. This enabled his wife to hold my hand or hug me too. At times, my parents would let me eat supper with them. I was like the child they didn't have, and I was heartbroken when my parents told me that they would be moving out. I remember crying a lot, and my parents trying to explain the reason for their leaving. They wanted to have their own room, as they could afford it at that point.

My parents assured me that I could always go and visit the Shpitzlers, which I did. On the way from school, I would always stop at his shop. His face lit up when he saw me, and although he was full of smudges, I let him kiss me, and I would kiss and hug him back. I visited them twice at their apartment, which was on top of the shop. After a while, I would only stop to see him at work. The last time I went to see him was when I was in my army uniform. He was very happy to see me and called for his wife to come to the store. I had to tell them all about my army experiences, and they were thrilled as any grandparent would be. It was from them that I learned some of the German that I know.

One of the stores on Shenkin Street was a large furniture, upholstery, drapery and accessories store. Their window displays were very beautiful and were changed often. I always stopped to look at the window. They also employed an interior designer to help their customers. It was the first such store in Tel Aviv. After the tenants left, my parents began making plans for redoing the apartment, and that's where they went.

I asked them to take me whenever they had an appointment that involved the redecorating. I accompanied them most of the times and felt very rich. I sat quietly, listened to every word and looked with them at every fabric sample. They looked at different club chairs, cocktail tables and sofas. I was amazed when we were shown a convertible sofa, as I didn't know that something like that existed. The room that they were discussing had a double purpose, a bedroom at night and a salon (living room) the rest of the time. The second room was designated for me and would be filled with the old furniture. We waited to see a rendering of the room, which I thought took them too long to do. I was very impatient and couldn't wait to see it. When we finally saw the beautiful colored rendering, we all loved it. I hoped my parents would approve the plan, but I didn't say anything, I just smiled. I was so excited when they placed the order and gave a deposit. I jumped up and hugged and kissed them.

It took a very long time for everything to arrive, but it was most exciting and beautiful when it did. Against one wall, a beautiful convertible sofa was placed. A cocktail table in a black glass frame was in front of the sofa; light enough to be moved every day. In front of the sofa, stood a low breakfront with two club chairs, one on each side of a cocktail table. Over the breakfront and over the sofa, two of my mother's large needlepoint canvases were hung. The large window and door to the terrace had open-weave, off-white long drapes.

Just before the furniture arrived, I went shopping with my parents for an oriental rug. We went to a few stores on Dizengoff Street, where all the rug stores were next to each other. All rugs were hand-woven in Iran, Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Some were antiques and some were newly-woven. The merchants



*Always about style, showing off another of my mother's creations.*

believed that the more you step on the rugs, the more beautiful they become, as the threads get softer. Therefore, the sidewalks in front of the stores were covered with rugs. I thought it was a lot of fun to step on them, and I loved the colors they added to the street. They were mostly in very dark colors like deep burgundy, blue, green and gold, and also beige.

Competition was very keen among the merchants, but they were also very friendly with each other, as many of them were relatives. Inside the store, the merchant would explain where the rugs came from, how many stitches to an inch, what yarn was used and where and when it was woven.

A rug that my parents pointed at was pulled out from the piled-up rugs, taken outside and spread on the sidewalk. It was believed that the best way to see the true colors was in natural daylight, as the stores were too dark. Price was discussed only at the end of this exercise, with enough room for bargaining. We spent a few days going back and forth to different stores. Finally, a rug was decided on.

I loved going shopping with my parents and, whenever I walked on this street, I made sure to walk on the side where all the rugs were spread out. I was very excited when the rug was delivered and placed in the room. Sitting in the room by myself and taking in its beauty was my biggest pleasure. It made me feel proud, rich and privileged.

Once this room was done, my Mother started to buy beautiful dishes, tablecloths and other accessories.



*Benjamin Gordon Bar mitzvah party. On the left next to Benjamin is my friend Rina. Standing on the left are Uzi and Boaz his best friends. Both Benjamin and Boaz were killed in 1956 in the Sinai Campaign*

Many times, my father would come home with something new for the room, a crystal candy holder, special cake and fruit plates, a vase and much more. He also would frequent a small antique shop nearby. One time, he brought home a fine porcelain figurine of a ballet dancer, standing on her toes and wearing a beautiful tutu. My father told me that he bought it for me because I loved ballet so much. Unfortunately, it was broken a few years ago by a cleaning lady. I don't ever remember being so angry when something broke. Even now, I feel sadness when I think about it and, at times, passing an antique store, I stop to see if I can find something similar. This ballerina had a very special place in my heart.

Once, on a holiday, my father came home with a wrapped package. He gave it to me and said, "This is a special gift for you." I took off the newspaper wrapping, opened the box and took out a dancing couple, which I still have. I was very excited holding it when my father said, "I know how much you love to dance, especially the Russian dances. Although it was made in Poland, their dances are very similar. When I saw it, I couldn't resist." I hugged and kissed him and thanked him. It still is my favorite piece in our home. I always smile when I look at my dancing couple, remembering the day I received this gift from my father.

Although I was not the most popular girl in class, I had a group of very good friends. They were all different from each other, but we meshed well. One of my friends, Sarah, lived one block away from school. Her parents came from Egypt and she was an only child. Every summer, she would go to Cairo and spend the summer with her grandparents and cousins. She would come back with great stories about Arabic customs, outlooks and opinions that we didn't know about. She also had a wonderful voice and could sing all the popular arias from operas. My father loved to listen to her. She knew that whenever she came to us, she would have to sing for him. She never refused him, and we all enjoyed listening. She never took any singing lessons because her parents could not afford them. None of the other kids in the class were interested in listening to opera, so our home became her stage.

Her mother baked and cooked according to Arabic traditions, and I was always invited. I didn't like to go there, as I felt that her mother was very cold and only worried that we might mess up their home.

My other good friend, Ada, was very popular with the teachers, who all loved her. She was a top student and a great actress. She was always called on in class to read aloud, as she was able to dramatize every reading. She also always landed the most important part of any play, which made many of us angry and jealous of her. She was an only child and did not have very close friends. Her parents had to go out of their way to have friends come to her house. It was always in perfect order and very quiet.

Most of the times, only Sarah and I came over. Her mother was not too welcoming and others always found an excuse not to accept an invitation. It was her father who was very warm, friendly and smart. When we were invited, he made sure to be home, and he always opened the door with a smile. He was the manager of the very popular Migdalor movie theater. Every time that an appropriate movie for our age group was shown, he would give his daughter free tickets for me and Sarah.

Another close friend that I had in class was Rena. She had long dark hair and dark eyes and a wonderful warm smile. I found her to be very down-to-earth and could confide in her without worrying that she would gossip about our secrets. She was not a very good student, but she tried hard. Her parents were not very well off, and they lived in a poorer neighborhood than us. They were the nicest people; warm and welcoming. I liked them very much and, at times, I stopped by to visit, even though I knew that Rena was not home. Rena had a younger brother whom I used to play with while waiting for her to come home.

Esther was a girl in our class whose parents were divorced, which was very unusual in those years. She was an only child, very beautiful and quiet. Her mother was a pediatrician and her father was a businessman. She was the only kid that we knew who lived in a big beautiful villa. It was not too far from Rena's home. Esther mostly stayed home with a maid. Many times, Rena and I would ring her bell and ask her to join us. Her mother, who knew us, allowed her to go and play with us, which made her very happy. She was overprotected and therefore did not have too many friends. Sometimes, all three of us walked over to my father's factory and I showed them around and was very proud doing so. My father always welcomed us with a smile and took off some time to talk to us.

Rena was not always invited to some parties and I felt bad for her, as I liked her a lot. At times, when I was invited to a bar mitzvah or a friend's house, I would ask them, without letting Rena know, to invite her too. When they did, it made me very happy.

One of these occasions that stands in my mind was Benjamin Gordon's bar mitzvah party at his home. Benjamin's father was one of the best and most popular photographers in Tel Aviv. His studio was part of the apartment they lived in; on the first floor, one flight of steps lower than the street. On the street level, he had a showcase where he displayed some of his photos. He changed them often to make the display interesting.

Benjamin's parents were Holocaust survivors, and he was born in Europe. Their apartment/studio was very small. At the entrance, there was a small area where Benjamin's father would meet his customers and show them the proofs. Studio pictures were taken in the living room. Next to the kitchen were the dark room, his parents' bedroom and a bed for Benjamin set in the hallway against the wall.

Benjamin's father was a very handsome, friendly and happy man with a constant smile on his face. The mother was very attractive, but seemed to be very unhappy. Benjamin was not a good-looking guy, but he had a wonderful personality. He was the most popular boy in our class and also a top student. He was nice to everyone and was not what we called a shvitzer (showoff). He was kind, laid-back, very warm and had a great sense of humor. Therefore, everyone in class loved him.

When he had his bar mitzvah, none of us were not invited to attend services in the synagogue that was across the street from his home. Only fifteen of us were invited to his home for the afternoon party that followed. When I received the invitation, I went to Benjamin and asked him to invite Rena too. Being who he was, upon hearing that it would make her so happy, he sent her an invitation.

When we arrived, we went directly to the living room, where all the furniture had been moved out. A long table was set with a white tablecloth and topped with large platters of cakes and cookies baked by his mother. Our favorite chocolates, candies, ice cream and lemonade were served too. We had a great time talking and laughing and his father took many pictures. When we were finished, we all went out to the park across



*At a piano recital.*

the street to play. It was a great party, and it left a lot of kids in our class wondering why they were not invited, especially the popular kids.

Once I started high school, I lost touch with him. Because he was an excellent student and had excellent teachers' recommendations, Benjamin was accepted to a public high school where tuition was free. When he joined the army, he went to the air force and became a pilot. In the fall of 1956, on my way to Jerusalem in a taxi, I read in the newspaper that his plane fell and he was killed. I tried to control my emotions in the crowded taxi, but couldn't. I told the surprised passengers about it, and we all joined in mourning together. A few months later, I read about another pilot friend, whom I dated for a short time, who was killed. It is so many years ago, but whenever I think about them, it still hurts.

I belonged to the scouts, danced ballet and, later on, played tennis. I realized that I had a monetary advantage over some of my friends, but I didn't boast about it. I was grateful to my parents who were very generous to me, and wanted me to have a good time. From a very young age, I spent a lot of time with my parents. I went with them to the theatre, opera and concerts. At the age of 12, I told them that I would be ready to go by myself to any performance that they saw and liked and thought that I might like too.

All they had to do was buy me a ticket without even asking me. I trusted them completely. I was always interested in everything in the arts and did not want to miss out on anything. I knew that my friends were not interested or could not afford it. My parents agreed and always bought me a ticket in the third or fourth row in the theatre or concert hall.

It gave me the opportunity to enjoy performances of ballet, dance groups, musicians and orchestras from all over the world. Some performances were in a large tent, out of town, in the suburb of Ramat Gan. To get there, I had to take a bus from Tel Aviv. Among the shows I saw there were Lionel Hampton and Benny Goodman concerts and the circus.

Classical music with the Israel Philharmonic and many world famous soloists was performed in the first concert hall in Tel Aviv, Ohel Shem. The most exciting recitals I ever attended were with the violinists Yehudi

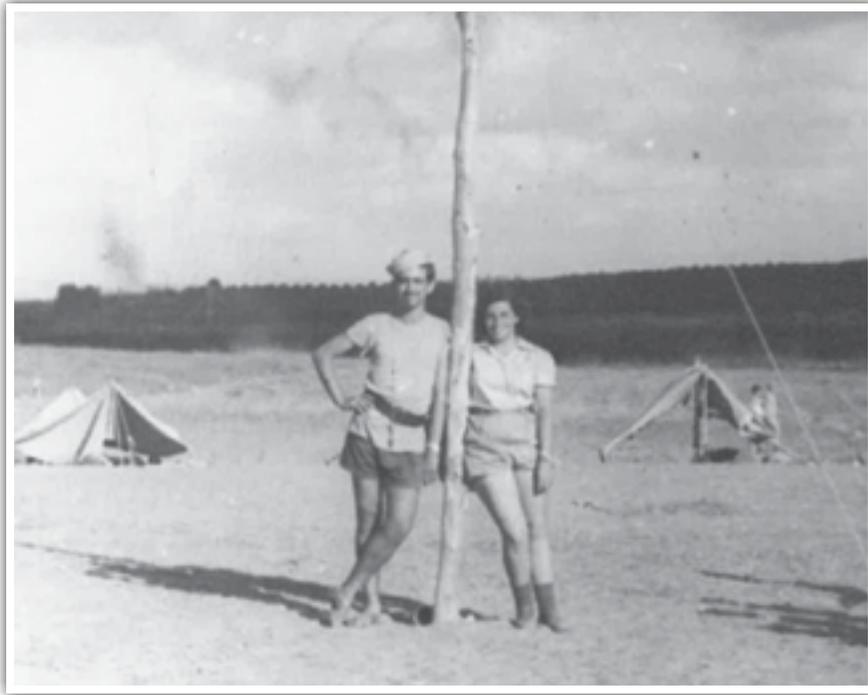


*My parent's best friend Lea on the beach; watching her daughter Rachel (on right) and myself (on left).*

Menuhin and Yascha Heifetz. They had different personalities, but both were unbelievably talented musicians. Yascha Heifetz was very stern and never smiled, and Yehudi Menuhin was all smiles and personality. Their choice of music at their recitals in many ways represented their personalities. I always loved when they played a few encores, which were mostly familiar pieces, and I hummed them quietly to myself. I also saw many wonderful dancers from around the world and this way learned about music from different countries.

Being exposed to all these talented performers strengthened my love for the performing arts. I knew how privileged I was, so I never shared it with my friends. I did not want to show off and make them feel bad. When I became a teenager, and later on, I kept accompanying my parents to the theatre, the opera and concerts. I liked the idea of getting all dressed up, as it was part of the culture. At intermission, my father was proud to walk in the lobby, back and forth, holding my mother's and my arm, all of us dressed in our finery. Tel Aviv was not a big city, so most of the time we would meet people that my parents or I knew, and we would stop to chat. It was an important part of the evening. The memory of those evenings still brings a smile to my face, and I feel thankful to my parents for all this exposure.

In the summer, the beach was my most favorite place to be at, and it still is. When I was about seven or eight years old, my parents permitted me to go to the beach by myself. They insisted that I sit near the lifeguards and swim only in designated areas, which I did. In the morning, I walked slowly on Allenby Street, as that was a direct route from our home to the beach. I liked window shopping, alternating sidewalks in order not to miss anything, so I'd be able to give a full report to my mother. I left the beach at noon when the sun was very strong and it was very hot. I had on a wet bathing suit and some sand all over my body. I was also tired, so I took the bus back home. Coming home and taking a cold shower was a double pleasure. I loved the experience, and I



*Arik the head of camp on left with our group leader Dalia with the tents that we lived in for the week.*

used every opportunity to go back to the beach. For some reason, at this early age, I don't ever remember asking a friend to accompany me.

My parents always gave me money that enabled me to rent a beach chair. The beach chairs were made of a canvas fabric and had a roof on top that could be adjusted for protection from the sun. The chairs were lined up in rows, starting at the lifeguard's stand near the water and continuing down to the end of the sand strip. When the tide came in, the chairs would be set further away from the ocean.

Young guys walked back and forth selling tickets, as the chairs were private concessions. The guys were dressed in shorts, were shirtless and had a bag tied around their waist for tickets and money. They were very good at remembering their customers' faces. When they saw a new person sitting in a chair, they would have him or her buy a ticket. If the person refused, with the excuse that he or she already had a ticket but lost it, they forced the person to leave, usually after a loud and heated argument.

I always preferred to sit in the first row, so no one could block my view. Therefore, I used to look for an available chair by myself. If I could not find one, I would go to one of the guys and ask for help.

Many times, they would find me a chair by removing a person who didn't belong there. When an argument occurred, I turned around and took a few steps away and watched the water until a chair was available.

I felt happy just staring at the ocean and all the ongoing things on the beach. I liked the changing colors of the water and the playful white waves that were never the same in height or direction. Observing children and adults running in and out of the water was a lot of fun too. I admired the lifeguards running to save a drowning swimmer with their surfboards. They were constantly watching the people in the water and using their whistle and loudspeaker to keep everyone within safe areas.

I also liked to watch the people playing madkot, a game similar to paddleball that uses a small racket and a small hard rubber ball. Many times, the beach walkers had to duck to avoid getting hit. In my teens, I became a very good player and therefore always found someone to play with. Another thing I liked to do was to look at the

horizon and imagine what country was on the other side, dreaming of visiting it one day.

In the summer, the water was very warm, but still cooler than being out of it in the hot sun. When the ocean was quiet, I would stay in for a very long time, swimming and threading water. When the waves were a bit high, I enjoyed jumping underneath them and feeling them swoosh over me.

It was also a great way of getting very tan, after applying baby oil, or any other oil on the body. Getting a deep tan was very important, as it was a sign of good health and it enhanced the look of the light colors of my summer outfits. No sunscreen was used and therefore most of my generation is covered with sunspots, including myself.

In the mid 1940's, Tel Aviv beaches were closed to the public. The water became a health hazard, as overflow sewage was spilled from the pipes into the ocean. In those years, the city expanded quickly, and the sewer pipes were too short to hold the large bulk. The city had to build new, wider and much longer pipes to do the job. It took a few years, and the closing of the beaches was a big blow and disappointment to the public. The only beaches that could be used for swimming were about 10 to 20 miles south and north of Tel Aviv. Many bus lines were added to help the public get to those beaches. The outside communities gained from this situation. Coffeeshouses, restaurants and small hotels were built quickly and created many jobs for the locals and extra money for the municipalities.

My father arranged for the Carmel taxi company to pick us up three times a week to go to the beach. We left at 7:00 a.m. and came home by noon. The beach we went to was called Bat Yam, and it was south of Tel Aviv. At that beach, there was a large rock that stuck out in the middle of the water. The water surrounding the rock was deep, and you could only reach it by swimming. It was mostly calm and easy, but, at times, the undertow was a little rough and hard to swim. It became a challenge to reach and climb on the rock, but it was also a lot of fun. If the undertow was too strong, the lifeguards did not allow anyone to swim to the rock, which was a big disappointment.

I always had enough money to buy something to eat or drink. My favorite foods to buy on the beach were tiras (corn) or arctic (chocolate or vanilla ice cream popsicles). The corn salesman pulled his horse and buggy along the beach, near the water, where the sand was hard and even. In it, there were two large pots with boiling water, where the corn was cooking slowly.

He would shout, "Tiras, tiras," and stop whenever he saw people coming towards him. We pointed at the corn we wanted, small or large, soft or hard. He took it out of the pot with large thongs and sprinkled salt with a large saltshaker. He worked fast while the sweat was dripping from his body, as he didn't want to lose any sale. It tasted delicious and smelled great, but I always felt sorry for him working so hard in the heat. In the summer, there were a few areas on certain streets in Tel Aviv where corn was sold as well, but not during other seasons.

The arctic salesmen, worked hard too. They carried large, heavy ice boxes, shouting, "Arctic, arctic." Customers would call them, and they would run quickly to them, their feet sinking slightly in the soft, hot sand. They had to be very quick too, as there were several guys selling at the same time, and they had to grab the customers fast, or lose a sale. It felt good when the ice cream box was opened and cold air came out. Quickly the popsicle was taken out, the money collected and they were on the lookout for the next customer.

I only went to the beach by myself in the middle of the week. On Saturdays, I often went with my father early in the morning. He would take his bike, and I would sit on the bar in front of him. His bike was his main means of transportation, as it was for most people.

I loved the beach so much that I always found an excuse to go there all year round. In the spring and fall, whenever I had a chance, I would just walk to the beach, sit on a bench, and look at the ocean. At times, walking from one destination to another, if the beach was not too far, I would take a detour, just to pass by. I knew every street that led there from south to north. The ocean is still my favorite place to be at, as it makes me feel calm, free and happy. I never tire of it. I always feel that it is one of the many wonders of nature's creation.

There are two events that always stay with me from those times when I went with my father to the beach. The first one was when I was about six years old. It was during the Arab revolt against the British Mandate and the Jewish people. It started in 1920 and ended in 1936. There were still skirmishes in Tel Aviv after 1936, when the Arabs who lived in Jaffa would come to Tel Aviv to demonstrate.



*At a cafe with my mother, Aunt Rachel, and baby Eli.*

One Saturday morning, on the way home, about two blocks from the beach, on Ben Yehudah Street, there was such a demonstration with people yelling and fighting. Suddenly we heard a few gunshots. We immediately ran into a building, left the bicycle on the ground floor, and ran up four stories to the roof. I was very frightened and started to cry. My father calmed me down and told me that there is some kind of a fight, and we will not leave until things quiet down. We stayed on the roof for a short while. After the police disbursed the crowd, we left.

The following Saturday, I didn't want to go to the beach but my father told me that it will not happen again and insisted that we go. We went and this episode never occurred again.

The other event happened on another Saturday, again as we were on the way home from the beach. I was about eight or nine years old, sitting on my father's bike, on the front bar, and my leg got caught in the wheel. We fell off the bike in three different directions, in front of the Tel Aviv cemetery. I was bleeding from my mouth, so my father stuffed a towel in it to stop the bleeding. I do not remember how we got home, as I was crying hysterically. When we got home, the bleeding stopped, and we realized that one of my two front teeth was broken in half.

It was the beginning of a few years of some misery. My parents took me to Dr. Katz, the best-known dentist in Palestine. His excellent reputation went beyond Palestine, and half of his practice consisted of wealthy Arabs from Egypt and Jordan.

He was a very handsome man; tall with light brown hair and a perpetual dark tan. His fingers were yellow from nicotine, as he was a heavy smoker. He had a warm personality and spoke in a soft voice with a smile on his face. I liked him immediately. I was very upset when he told us that he couldn't repair my tooth until I was thirteen years old. He felt that the mouth, until that age, was still forming, and it was not wise to replace the broken tooth earlier.

I cried bitterly, as I couldn't see myself living with half a front tooth. I was afraid that my friends would make fun of me. He took out a model of a mouth and took his time explaining his reasoning. He also explained that I was fortunate because the nerve was not damaged. I had to have it checked every few weeks to make sure that there was no change or infection. His explanation did not calm me down too much, but I realized that I had no choice in this matter.



*My cousin Eli & I.*

He promised me that once I reached my thirteenth birthday, he will take care of my tooth immediately, and that it will not take a long time to replace the broken tooth with a new one. All through those years, I smiled with a closed mouth and tight lips, unless I forgot myself. I made a special effort to do it when I was photographed. My friends, after hearing my explanation of the situation, never poked fun at me, which was a big relief.

On the day of my thirteenth birthday, I was in his office and ready to get started. I think it took about two months for the procedure. In the beginning, I had an appointment once a week, while he was slowly chipping away the leftover tooth. He could not do it all at once, as he had to be careful not to touch the live nerve. At that time, there were no medications to numb the mouth and, at times, it was very painful when he accidentally touched the nerve. I did like the temporary tooth that I had during this period.

When finally he measured my mouth and made a mold of it, I knew it was the beginning of the end. When he was ready to put in the new tooth, he became slightly frustrated, as he looked for perfection. He was unhappy with the color and the shade of the new tooth. He had to send it back and forth to the lab, a few times, in order to match the different shades of my other teeth. At this point, I was the one who had to calm him down, telling him that I have patience to wait. He always laughed and hugged and kissed me when I left his office. I was thrilled when it finally was done and I could smile freely.

Because of this incident, my parents forbade me to ride a bike and never agreed to buy me one. Many times I rode my friends' bikes but never told my parents.

On Saturdays and holidays, before my father had a car, he would have Carmel taxi pick us up, with my cousins, Ely, Avram and Billa, at nine in the morning. My father had an account with the company and paid them monthly, so they were always very reliable. We would all go to Galei Gil (Happy Waves), the first large private swimming pool in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv. The pool was busiest on Saturdays and holidays. It was so crowded that most people just waded, sat or tried to float in the water. It was a little less crowded in the deep water where a few strokes were possible.

Sometimes, my father stood in a long line to buy us ice cream or a cold drink. At times, he just gave us the money, and we stood on line. There were hardly any chairs to sit on, but the times my mother joined us, which was not always, he managed to find a chair for her. We and the cousins went to sit on a large lawn that was also very crowded and filled with many ballplayers, mostly soccer players. Even with all this tumult, we were very happy to be there. Exactly at 1:00 p.m., the Carmel taxi waited for us at the gate and drove us back home in our wet bathing suits. It was just too crowded to go and change.

My father's first car was a four-door green Fiat that could seat only four people comfortably, including the driver. When he bought it, he discontinued the Saturday arrangement with the taxi company. My cousins kept going with us to the pool. We were seven or eight people in the car, depending on who else joined us. We sat on top of each other, in the back seat, and watched out for the police.

Whenever we saw the police, or thought that we did, whoever sat on top of another's lap had to slink down. We always laughed hysterically when it happened, but we were never caught.

After a short while, seeing the success of this pool, another pool opened in Givataim, a bit further from Tel Aviv. It was a much smaller adult pool, but they added a children's pool. Because of the longer distance from Tel Aviv, it was not that crowded. We stopped going to Ramat Gan, and went to the new pool instead. That was more enjoyable, and I was able to swim. My mother joined us every time because it was not crowded and easier to manage.

One of the events that I will never forget was the Maccabiah games in 1950. The Maccabiah games were organized for men and women athletes from Jewish communities all over the world to come together and compete. The first games were in 1932 and 1935 in Palestine, and were held in a large stadium in the north of Tel Aviv. The games that were scheduled for 1938 were cancelled because of political events in Europe and Arab violence in Palestine. The British authorities who ruled Palestine were concerned that the games would create huge illegal immigration.

I was 14 years old when the third Maccabiah games resumed, in 1950, in the independent state of Israel. Nineteen countries sent a total of 800 athletes. The opening parade, exercises and track and field events were held in the new 50,000 spectator stadium in Ramat Gan.

One early evening, on my way home from tennis, I passed by the Maccabi House that had classes and activities in gymnastics, track and field, soccer and basketball. I heard loud music and exercise instructions coming from a loudspeaker positioned on the roof. It peaked my curiosity, and I decided to check it out.

I ran up three floors and reached the roof. When I opened the door, I saw a very large group of girls exercising in unison to music. There was a man standing idly by watching. "What is this group doing?" I asked him, as I never saw or heard about such a large group exercising together.

"They are training for the opening exercises of the Maccabiah games," he said.

"Can I join?" I asked with excitement.

"Only if you are a paid member at Maccabi. If you are not, you can join Maccabi and be a part of it."

With the information at hand about the dues that I would have to pay, I quickly went home all excited about joining. I waited for my father to come home before saying anything. After supper, I told my parents all about it, gave them all the information and emphasized how much I wanted to be part of this event.

"How often would you have to go for rehearsals and at what time?" asked my mother.

"For now, it will be twice a week at seven o'clock in the evening. Then, two weeks before the opening, every evening, except Friday nights."

My mother looked at my father and at me and said, "How are you going to do everything you do and homework? It is just too much at this point. You can join the next Maccabiah games".

"The next time the Maccabiah games will be on, I will be serving in the army. This is my chance, and it is very exciting. I promise that I will stop going to the tennis club for the duration, and will also skip meetings at the scouts. I will do my homework and study immediately after school before I go to rehearsals. Please let me go," I begged.

My father looked at my mother and said, "Miriam is right. I think it is an exciting experience, and I can understand her. I would say that we should trust her and give her the chance to participate. But, the minute we

see that she is not keeping her word, we will stop her from going.”

My mother nodded her head in agreement, and my father gave me the money to register. I jumped from happiness and hugged and kissed them both. In school, I asked some of my friends if they wanted to join, but no one had any interest. The next day, I went to register as a member of Maccabi and joined the group the following evening. They were already ahead of me, but I caught up quickly.

The rehearsals went on for two hours. There was one main person who was the leader and was on the loudspeaker. Two assistants walked around to make sure that everyone did the exercises correctly. It was very important that we all exercise in unison, and that the vertical and horizontal lines of all the participants be perfectly aligned. We were stopped many times and had to repeat parts until we got it perfect. It was annoying at the time when only one person got out of line, and we had to do it all over again.

When we were finished at nine o'clock, another group followed us until 11:00 p.m. Two weeks before the opening day, we all brought money to pay for our uniforms that consisted of navy blue shorts, a white tee shirt, white socks and white sneakers. The excitement grew, especially when we started training every evening. All together, we were about 200 hundred girls. At this point, we all practiced on the basketball field from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. and were exhausted at the end of each evening, but no one complained. We were a very determined group and our leaders were tough, but encouraging.

On opening day, we all met in the morning and were bused to the stadium. We rehearsed a few times and were ready for the opening. We had some time to rest and were all bubbling with excitement. From our resting place, we watched the stadium filling up with people. When the time came, we were marched to stand at the side of the space where we were going to appear.

The opening ceremony started with the national anthem “Ha’Tikva.” Everyone stood up erect and sang loudly with much pride. President Chaim Weitzman opened the games. Then, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion told the competitors, “Existence in our ancestral home requires physical might no less than intellectual excellence.” The crowd applauded for a very long time. When the applause subsided, we were motioned to go and take our places while the announcers introduced us as “the Maccabi youth group.” We all walked in with straight backs and heads up, ready for our exercises. The music started and our performance began. It was very exciting, and we all made sure that no mistakes were made. After a twenty minutes of performance, we walked off the stadium accompanied by the music and a roar of applause. It felt so good!

Our leaders, with tears in their eyes and big smiles, waited for us. They welcomed us back and praised us for an excellent job. Once we heard them, we all started to cry from happiness, releasing tension. We all felt that the hard work paid off, and that we were part of a great and very important celebration, for the first time in our own independent state. We felt very proud. We stayed to the end of the ceremonies and were bused back to Tel Aviv late in the evening. When we came back, we didn't want to leave each other and go home, but our leaders made sure that we did. The next day, we had a great party at the Maccabi House, where our leaders read to us the newspaper's review, which was accompanied with great pictures. We all agreed that it was a once in a lifetime experience. I felt so good then about my decision to join by myself without any of my friends.

When I came home, my parents were waiting for me, and I described every minute of the ceremony and every feeling that I felt. I hugged them and thanked them for letting me go.

“You kept your promise, and we are happy for you,” my father said. “So, now, are you going to keep going to Maccabi meetings?”

“No, I am going back to the scouts and tennis. I only joined in order to be part of the opening ceremonies,” I answered.

My father smiled and said, “I knew that from the beginning. I bought some tickets for track and field events and basketball games. Whenever your mother wouldn't go, you could come with me. In order to do it, you would have to stay away for a while longer from your regular activities.”

I was thrilled, as I knew that my mother would not go too many times. I was right. We went to a few track and field competitions and some basketball games. One evening, going to a basketball game at 8 p.m., we did not get back home until 2 a.m. There were two games scheduled. One was Canada against Britain and the other was USA against Russia. The last one was the more exciting and had a few overtimes. When we finally got home, we

found my mother in tears, yelling that we were irresponsible for coming home so late. She did not know what happened to us. We did not have a phone, so we had no way of letting her know, and she thought the worst. She didn't speak to my father for two days.

Being a member of the tzofim (scouts) was a very enriching and wonderful experience for me. The Israeli scouting organization was founded in 1919 and was the first Zionist youth movement in Israel. It was also the first scouting movement in the world where boys and girls participated together on an equal basis. I joined the scouts when I was in fourth grade, and left when I was in tenth grade.

The shevatim (troops) were located in different neighborhoods of the city. My troop was in a large, wood tzrif (shack) with a large area around it to accommodate the different groups when they had their meetings. Most of my friends, especially in my group, were also my classmates. The groups consisted of boys and girls, divided by age. Meetings were held once a week in late afternoon and on Shabbat at 3:00 p.m.

When I originally joined, I resented the 3:00 p.m. meeting on Shabbat because it meant missing my Shabbat afternoon nap, which I liked. Once I put on my uniform, however, very quietly in order not to wake up the rest of the family, and got out, I felt better. I walked for about four or five blocks by myself before meeting other friends on the way. I liked the quiet empty streets, making me feel that the city belonged to me. I found this feeling repeated in different stages of my life. As we got older, our meetings were scheduled later in the afternoon or early evenings.

At meetings, we had to wear the basic tzofim uniform, which was, and still is, a khaki shirt and khaki pants. We wore shorts in the summer and long pants in the winter. On top of our shirt we wore the aniva (neckerchief), which was blue with two white stripes. In the 1940's, scouts and their leaders wore the same anivot (neckerchiefs). The leaders were distinguished from us by wearing a whistle around their neck that, when not in use, rested in their left shirt pocket. We wore sandals in the summer and closed shoes in the winter.

When we came to the tzrif just to socialize, dance or rehearse for plays, we didn't have to wear our uniform. The place was open every day from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m., and the head of the troop was always there to supervise activities and be available to anyone for any discussion.

These days, each grade level has a different aniva that indicates the age and the group level. The leaders' positions are distinguished by tie and stripe colors. Also, patches and pins are worn on the uniform. They signify the passing of special scouting requirements that need to be fulfilled.

In the summer, we had a special way of wearing our scout shorts. We all liked our shorts very brief. The girls rolled up the shorts as high as they could and made sure that the pockets' lining wouldn't show. Most of the times, our mothers had to alter and shorten the pockets' lining. On the other hand, the boys would roll up their shorts making sure that about an inch of their pockets' lining showed. I had problems rolling up my shorts too high. My first problem was that I had heavy thighs, although they were very solid from all the physical activities that I engaged in. The second problem was that I had a large dark birthmark on my left thigh, which I wanted to cover. I was very self-conscious about it. In trying to cover the birthmark, I looked ridiculous, as it made the shorts look too long. I was always envious of my friends who had thin thighs and legs. I knew that I had to make a decision as to what length to keep the shorts.

"Why do I have this mark?" I asked my mother. "None of my friends have one," I continued bitterly.

"You were born with it and I have no idea why," she answered.

"Can it be removed?" I continued.

"No," she answered, "There is no way. It is not that bad. The less you pay attention to it, the less it will bother you. You have a beautiful face, a wonderful smile and figure. You are very beautiful and very nice. I am sure that some of your friends envy the way you look."

With tears in my eyes, I went back to the mirror and decided to shorten my pants to the same length my friends did. My mother followed me. She stood behind me holding my shoulders saying, "You see how good it looks. No different from your friends."

I looked back at her and smiled. She was so encouraging that I hardly ever looked or thought about



*Watching a cook preparing a meal. On left Dalia, my friend Rina and myself.*

my birthmark after that. With time, it started to fade and was less obvious in the summer when I was tan.

Each scout group had about fifteen to twenty members of boys or girls. To distinguish the groups, each had a name and a distinctive whistle. Our group was called “Zamir,” which meant the singing group. Whistling was a means of communication. To get friends’ attention in the street or when they were home, we’d whistle. If they were home, they’d come out on the balcony, and then we could talk to them. It worked mostly on nice warm days, when doors and windows were open. When the cold weather started, we had to go and ring the bell. Many families had their own distinctive whistle and our family did too.

Another way of communicating was by keshet (contact). It was a very important way to pass information among all the group members, as none of us had a phone at home. Whenever our leader gave us instructions, in between meetings, we used this system.

Our leader Dahlia was about four years older than us. She wrote her message on a piece of paper, listing everyone’s name. She delivered the paper to the first person on the list and then it was delivered from one to another, and the last person delivered it back to Dahlia’s home. When you received the paper with the message, you signed it. If someone was not home, you had to continue to the next person on the list, leaving a written note to the one you missed. The speed of passing the information was an important part of this exercise. At times, our leader would forward unimportant information, just to train us to move it fast. The army used this method of communication efficiently. It prevented the enemy from finding out when the reserves were being called to duty.

Our meetings always started with a half an hour of marching as a group in the street. We were taught how to march in straight lines, waving our arms back and forth, straight up and down, body erect and head and face looking up front. We also did many half turns and full turns in unison. Little did we realize how many more hours of marching we would do in parades, in high school and in the army.

After marching, we sat outside in a circle, on benches, ready for the actual meeting that usually lasted

for about two hours. Every meeting started with singing. At times, our leader started the songs for us to follow, and other times, we started them. We often learned new songs. Many of the songs were translated from Russian to Hebrew, keeping the Russian melody. Other songs were the ones that were sung by the pioneers in the 1920's and 1930's. With time, more new music was written by new local songwriters, describing life in the country. There were love songs, war songs, political songs and biblical songs. Singing was a major part of the culture. The singing was always followed by talks and discussions on different subjects and also by game playing.

Camping was also a major activity. We had to learn all the tools that made it possible. That included the different ways of tying and knotting heavy strings and cables, starting a fire and using it to cook our meals. Putting up tents made out of two blankets joined together was a difficult task. We had to make sure that the blankets were very tightly pulled and knotted to four special posts.

Using water sparsely, so we never ran out of it, was something we had to know how to do in the field and at home. In those years, the water supply was much more limited, but it got better with the years, as a lot of work was done to improve it.

Pulling ourselves out of a deep wadi while holding on to heavy cables was a great exercise. When the climb was completed, we felt very accomplished, as the walls of the wadi were straight up, with no place to rest the legs. Looking for shade in order to stay out of the hot sun, after a while became second nature to us.

Using sand instead of soap to wash our dirty plates and utensils was at first a big surprise, especially when we realized that it worked. Because there were no bathrooms at the camping sites, we learned how to go to the bathroom outdoors and use leaves instead of toilet paper to wipe ourselves. Periodically, we were tested on what we learned to make sure that we knew how to use our acquired knowledge whenever it was needed.

When we reached the eighth grade, after passing all the tests, we were ready to take the scouts' oath. The swearing ceremony was impressive and took place at night. We marched into an empty lot to the sound of drums. Burning flames surrounded the lot. The only other light came from the stars in the sky. The atmosphere was serious and moving. All the groups surrounded a flagpole. The head of the tribe called the meeting to order. The trumpet sounded, and the flag was raised. He then announced the beginning of the swearing ceremony. We all raised the elbow of our right hand holding our fingers the way we had been taught. All together, in strong voices and in unison we said: "I promise to do my best to fulfill my duties to my people, my country and my land to help others at all times and to obey the scout's law." The ceremony ended with the singing of the national anthem, "Ha'Tikvah." It was very dramatic and exciting. At the end of the swearing ceremony, we marched proudly out of the lot to the sound of drums. Once our leaders released us, we fell on each other's shoulders crying, happy to be sworn in and to be official scouts.

We went camping at least once a year. I loved the experience and never wanted to miss it. My mother always tried to talk me out of going. First, she would tell me that sleeping in those tents might leave room for snakes to come and bite us, knowing how scared I was of them. If I wasn't swayed, she tried to bribe me by saying, "I will buy you a special gift. We will go shopping and do anything else that you desire." I always refused, although it was very tempting.

My father sat, listened and smiled. He always waited for my answer, as he knew that I would not give up camping. "Karola, this is a good experience for her. She will appreciate home and everything else she has even more. I will sign a letter of permission," he'd say. I used to get so excited when he said that that I'd jump up and hug and kiss him.

My mother would give him a dirty look and say to me, "I hope you will not regret it."

And I never did.

Our camping experience started with two nights away and as we grew older it extended to six nights. Camp was always situated near a forest of eucalyptus trees, in order to protect us from the sun. The trees also gave off a wonderful smell, especially on very hot days.

Once our tents were erected in a circle around the flagpole, it was amazing to see how a bare space came to life. We installed our tents with two large dark gray or black army blankets. The top of the blankets aligned along their longer sides, tied together, stretched and attached to two five-foot poles. Then, four of us, each holding a corner, spread each side to its fullest, in order to accommodate eight girls. The ground was marked and

four short pieces of wood with sharp edges were hammered into the ground, and the four lower corners of the blankets were tied to the wood.

Blankets were spread directly on the ground, with no mattress underneath. Our knapsacks with our clothes were our pillows. Whatever blankets were left over, we used as our covers. I always chose to sleep at the end of the tent. No one opposed me, as the others preferred the middle. We mostly went camping in the summer when it was very hot. The spot in the tent that I preferred enabled me to stick my feet and hands on the outside and feel cooler than my friends. I liked it most when it turned cooler in the early morning and I felt the breeze. I never told anyone my reason for choosing this spot, as I never wanted to lose it.

The other reason I preferred this spot was because of forbidden pranks that we tried to pull on each other. One of the pranks was to sneak out in the middle of the night and put down the tent on top of its sleeping occupants. It was mostly done as a war between the boys and girls. We thought the middle of the night was the right time for pranks, as we assumed that our leaders were fast asleep and we wouldn't be caught.

Another prank was smearing shoe polish on the boys' faces while they were asleep. The boys tried to do the same to us, sneaking to the girls' side of camp. Many times it was easy to accomplish, as we were all very tired from the non-stop activities and fell into a deep sleep. The first person to be smeared was the one sleeping in my position. If it worked, the second person would be smeared too. Knowing that, I always held in my hand a piece of fabric filled with polish. It happened to me twice. When I sensed that somebody was approaching, I opened my eyes and rubbed some of the shoe polish on the tip of my fingers. I moved closer to the opening and waited. In order for the attacker to be successful, the person had to lie on the ground. I knew that. So, the minute I saw the hand coming towards me, I stuck my fingers at the person's face. This maneuver saved our tent from further attacks.

At my last camping experience, my friend Rena and I tried to sneak to the boys' area. We put our shoe paste boxes in our pockets in case we got caught. It was around two or three in the morning, so we hoped that no one was awake. We walked next to the trees, so no one could see us. We walked holding hands and slightly bent down. We were more than half way there when, suddenly, a figure jumped towards us wanting to know where we were going. It was the head of the camp, who all the girls had a crush on, and my friend and I became very flustered.

"Where are you going in the middle of the night?" he asked.

"To the bathroom," we answered while shaking our bodies, making believe that we couldn't hold on.

He looked at us smirking, as the toilets were on the opposite side from where he'd caught us. "You are going in the wrong direction. I will take you to the bathrooms, wait for you and walk you back to your tent. I don't want you to get lost again." Of course we were very disappointed that our attempt failed. We never mentioned it to anyone and were grateful that the head of the camp didn't mention it either.

Our camping days started very early in the morning. We slept with our clothes on and, when we woke up, we had to change behind the trees or in the tent into a fresh khaki outfit and put on our high-laced shoes. We brushed our teeth and washed our faces with water that was stored in a big barrel and washed down our body with some water that we held in the palms of our hands. There were never any showers available.

We would then line up around the flagpole, listen to the trumpet and watch the flag go up. The same ceremony was repeated every evening, lowering the flag for the night. We had very strong feelings towards our national flag and the scouts' flag. They were feelings of pride, loyalty and respect, at all ages, from the very young to the very old. It was very important that the flag never be abused or stolen. Therefore, when we were out camping, the flags were guarded at all times.

Most youth movements would go camping at the same time, because of the same school vacations. Sometimes, when most of the scouts and their leaders were away from the camp, other scouts and leaders tried to sneak into the camp and steal their flag. Once or twice, the guards who stayed behind hid behind the trees and surprised the group that tried to steal the flag. They were chased away and the guards were cheered by all of us when we came back from our activities. It was a big triumph for the troop that was successful in their mission and a big embarrassment for the one whose flag was stolen. We were always very proud that we never lost our flag.

Meal preparations and eating was another interesting experience. We were assigned to bring from home certain food supplies like rolls, bread, jelly, olives, salt, olive oil, cookies, chocolates, candies, lemons, oranges, bananas and apples. In addition, some of us brought different vegetables for Israeli salad, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, onions and radishes. We had to chop the vegetables for the salad and add the dressing of salt, olive oil and fresh lemon juice. Others brought potatoes to be roasted in the fire. We were allowed to bring any food that did not need refrigeration. All the food was stored in big metal boxes and kept under the trees in the shade. Each tent had a different responsibility every day. By alternating duties, we all had a chance to learn many tasks.

We had outings in the evenings outside of our tents, which we called kumzits (campfires). We usually went to an open field and made a fire. We all brought with us potatoes and sweets. The potatoes were thrown in the fire, and we waited for them to be cooked and ready to eat. We sat on the ground, in a circle. To keep ourselves entertained while waiting for about the two hours it took for them to cook, we sang or played games. Once the potatoes were ready, their skins black and their insides soft, we ate them. It was the only hot food that we had, so it was worth waiting for. When it was time to leave and go home, the girls went ahead of the boys. To extinguish the fire, boys stood up in a circle and peed on the fire. This outing was the most popular one at all ages.

When the food was ready, it was put on large platters that were placed on a long wooden table, buffet style. We then formed a line and put the food in a mess kit made out of aluminum and divided into four compartments. We put water in our canteens and used utensils that we brought from home.

We sat in a circle on the ground and waited for everyone to start eating. It was not that easy to have a meal. As we started to eat, someone would say something disgusting about the food. Once this started, others joined in with worse descriptions. A lot of it was also accompanied with disgusting gestures, like vomiting and running noses. The idea was to see who was able to ignore it all and keep eating. At times, it started heated arguments with some people trying to stop this crazy habit. Our leaders forbade us to do it, but unless they ate with us, or suddenly showed up, it wouldn't stop.

Coming home filthy, I stayed in the shower for a long time getting myself clean. After that, I ate and immediately went to sleep. I slept for about twelve to fourteen hours, to make up for lost sleep. Once I woke up, I shared everything with my parents.

Once a year we also went to a jamboree. It was a gathering of all the tribes from all over Israel. There were many competitions among the different tribes in sports and games. It was a very exciting time. We had the opportunity to meet other scouts from different parts of the country. Although competition was fierce, the mood was great. The day was packed with activities that also included a lot of singing and dancing. We always came home happy and exhausted.

Dancing was also a very important part of our social activities. We spent many hours dancing the hora, the national and most popular circle dance. We put our hands on each others' shoulders, sang and jumped with a lot of energy. When we tired of this position, we dropped our hands to each others' waists. When accompanied by an accordion player, we danced much longer.

Much time was also spent dancing the favorite Eastern European folk dance called the polka. Two people danced it, one hand on each other's shoulders and the other hands clasped together. The steps were very fast and required a lot of energy and it was very tiring. We liked competing to see who could dance the longest. It was my favorite dance. I always chose a partner with a lot of energy and staying power so we could be the last couple to quit.

I especially liked Russian music, dances, songs and literature. I felt their culture was exuberant, lively and dramatic. Sometimes it was tragic, at other times happy. During the many years I spent in dancing school, I learned special Russian dance steps. I always chose to dance the man's part, as the energy and strength required satisfied me more than the woman's part. I also liked the male's outfit, rather than the female's. Therefore, I choreographed many performances and danced at our socials. At times, the dance stood on its own, and at other times it was part of a play or a special reading. It took a lot of preparation and rehearsal time, but I never wanted to miss the opportunity to organize and teach the dancers. My parents didn't mind me spending so many

evenings away from home, as long as my schoolwork was done.

As time went by, many new Hebrew songs were written and new dances created. In order to bring us up to date, a dance instructor was hired. Her name was Margalit. She was a Yemenite young woman and the head of the Inbal dance company. The Inbal dance company was created in 1940. It choreographed the authentic steps of the Yemenite Jews who had brought their own dances with them. Margalit was a petite young woman with dark eyes and long curly black hair. She was very graceful. She had a lot of patience, never got upset and always encouraged us with a smile to keep trying until we were proficient with the new dances.

Margalit took this job in order to supplement her living expenses. All the meetings with her were conducted mostly in the evenings. This arrangement worked well for her, as it freed her days to take care of running the Inbal dance company, which was her idea. We all loved her and appreciated her teaching techniques. She made us very comfortable and ready to learn all the different new dances. After a while, she decided to form a group of twenty people to learn additional complicated dances, including Yemenite dances. I was very excited to be part of this group. Our group met once a week, for about two hours, during which time we learned many new dances, which Margalit created and choreographed. Only girls were in the group, as no boys were ready to join. She taught us how to express our feelings using facial expressions. She showed us how to move gracefully with self-confidence when facing crowds on parade routes and on the stage.

When Margalit was happy with our dancing, we started to perform. First, we danced in front of our troop and then advanced to perform for other troops. We all had special outfits for our performances. They were mostly ankle-length, full skirts in bright blue and white, short-sleeved blouses. Around the waist, we tied belts made out of wide ribbons in various colors. On our heads, we wore colored kerchiefs or colorful ribbons.

In many performances, we used tambourines in addition to being accompanied by an accordion player. Sometimes, a few flute players replaced the accordionist. Flowers, flags and many other objects connected to the season of a parade were interwoven with our dances. Margalit always insisted that we keep our heads high and smile to the crowd in a gesture of welcome. We participated in many different parades for which she created special dances. We always were the first group when our tribe marched in a parade. The crowds' applause filled our hearts with happiness and pride. Our smiles never left our faces, as we knew that our hard work and dances were appreciated. We felt so good that we were sorry when a parade ended. I loved to participate in parades, especially as a dancer.

One year, our dance group was a part of the May Day parade. It was a holiday for the labor movement in the country and labor movements all over the world. This celebration started in Russia, which at the time was a Communist country. I was aware that if my parents knew that I would be dancing in this parade with our group, they would be furious with me. They were part of the right wing movement in the country, so this act would be considered a betrayal of their ideology. I decided not to tell them of my participation in the parade, figuring that none of their friends or family will be watching.

Our dancing was accepted with much enthusiasm by the crowd. We were dressed in blue skirts and tops with blue ribbons in our hair. We also held large red silk scarves that were integrated into our dances. The red represented the Communist and Labor parties.

When I came home, after changing back into my own clothes, I heard my mother's angry voice saying, "She is home!!"

Both my parents came towards me without any greeting, looking very angry. My father, in a loud voice, almost yelling, said, "How dare you participate today in the parade. You know how we feel about the Labor movement. You insulted both your mother and me doing it. We were ashamed when one of our friends saw you and came over to tell us. She couldn't believe what she saw, knowing our feelings toward the Labor party."

I tried to find out who that friend was, but they would not tell me. I was astounded to hear it, being so naïve, not thinking that someone they knew might see me.

"The only reason I participated was because for us it was a group performance, which I was part of. It was not intended to hurt you. You know that I don't believe in the Labor party and their philosophy," I answered. "I am very sorry. It will not happen again".

My father got even angrier and said, "You knew very well that you were wrong, otherwise you would have

told us about it. We thought you went to school, as the schools were open. So, you basically lied to us.”

“You are right,” I said. “Please forgive me.” My mother walked away without saying anything and didn’t speak to me for two days, which she knew I hated.

My father said, “I hope you had a good lesson and I will forgive you this time.” I went over and kissed him. I only told Margalit about it and she was amazed. I didn’t tell any of my friends about it, as I did not want it to become an issue with them.

After a while, Margalit left us, as the Inbal dance company grew and became more important. We were very saddened, as we liked her very much. She told us that she couldn’t let the opportunity to grow her company go, and thanked us for being part of her growth and advancement. We understood, bought her a gift and cried on her shoulders at our last get-together. The Inbal dance company became well-known and was successful for many years.

I stayed in the scouts until I was about 15 years old. At that point, our leaders started to talk about the future. The goal of every tribe was to start a new settlement either in the south or north of the country. Every youth group was appointed land by the government and they hoped to get enough people to come and build a kibbutz. I thought it would be a great place to live. My parents explained patiently that it was not for me, and that they would not allow it. I didn’t argue this point too much, because even though I felt that it was a patriotic thing to do, I also loved city life. Once I knew that it was not my goal, I left the scouts. At this point, I was already in high school and was having a good time with a new group of friends.

I loved spending time with my mother. At times we went fabric shopping for the clothes that she sewed, and, at other times, we spent an afternoon in a café. Sitting in a café for a few hours was part of the culture. It was a way of communicating with people, as hardly anyone had a phone. During the day, it was mostly women friends who met at a cafe to talk about their daily lives, family, politics and gossip. The busiest times were from ten in the morning to around twelve-thirty when everyone rushed home for lunch, the main meal of the day. The cafes were empty until about four in the afternoon, the end of siesta. Then they got busy again with some men showing up, as well. The cafes got somewhat emptier around six in the evening when it was time for supper. Then, they would get very busy again from eight until after midnight.

In the evenings, the cafes were occupied by a mixed crowd of all ages. The menu was light, consisting mostly of hot and cold drinks, ice creams and assorted cakes. Once you were served with your first order, the waiters didn’t bother to return unless they were signaled. It was not unusual to sit in a café for quite a few hours.

The cafes were in different parts of the city, along the main streets and along the ocean. Some cafes were known for their Polish or German crowd, some for artists, actors or journalists, some for a younger or older crowd. Waiters were mostly dressed in black pants and white shirts. Around their waist they wore a belt with an attached bag, where they stored the monies they collected from the customers.

The largest space of each café was outdoors, taking up some of the sidewalks. A smaller enclosed area was set-aside inside for cold and rainy winter days. As many days in winter are mild and sunny, the outdoor space was more useful. Tables were set close to each other and the conversations were overheard from one table to another. Many times, before you knew it, one table would expand, as other empty tables and chairs were attached to accommodate more people who knew each other and had happened to come by. It was very noisy, as everyone spoke in a loud voice in order to be heard.

There were also restaurants in the city, but not too many. They were very expensive and not too many people could afford them. The cafes were the center of entertainment. Some of the cafes had dance music, which was a very popular way of having a great time. Movies were also very popular and were shown three times a day; one movie in the afternoon and the others at seven and nine o’clock in the evening. There were also a few theaters, an opera and a concert hall.

Until my brother Isaac was born, when I was 8 years old, I went with my mother at least two to three times a week to a café. I always preferred to go to the ones by the beach. There were many of them along the ocean, and all were slightly different. Some of these coffeehouses had an orchestra consisting of about 8 people playing classical and dance music between 5:00 to 7:00 in the afternoons. Most of the musicians had come from Europe and settled in Palestine. They studied music there and were very good.

My favorite cafe was “Ginati Yam,” which translates to “My Garden by the Sea.” After coming from school at about 1:00 p.m., we would have our main meal and take a nap. Then, my mother and I would get to the cafe by 4:30 p.m. because I always wanted to sit in the first row of tables. From these tables, you could see the ocean and smell it too. I always had a special love for the ocean, which didn’t diminish. When we ordered, I always got any ice creams or cake that I wanted.

I was the only child who ever went there with a parent, so all the musicians would talk to me and I considered them my friends. I spoke to them and found out where they came from and where they used to play when they lived in Europe. They always started their playing with classical music after naming the piece and the name of the composer. The music in the café was my introduction and the beginning of my love for classical music. Around 6:00 o’clock, when more couples would show up, the orchestra switched to dancing music.

My father always tried to come when my mother and I went there. He would show up at about 6:00 o’clock, in time for the dance music. My parents were very good dancers and loved dancing. I always told them that I didn’t mind sitting by myself because I loved watching them. These were good times for them, and as a child I drew a lot of happiness seeing them so in love.



*Elementary school with leather backpack and food in bag.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER THREE

### Public School and Friends of that Time: Age 6 -13

The Balfour elementary public school was named after the British Lord and Statesman, Arthur Balfour, who opened the door for immigration of Jews from Europe to Palestine with the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The school was about three blocks from our home and admitted all the kids living within a radius of one to two miles. The government supported the schools, so education in public school was free and mandatory from kindergarten through eighth grade. High school education was not mandatory, and most of the high schools were private and very expensive. Only one high school in each city was government-supported, available only to the top students.

The school buildings at Balfour were three stories high, all connected and painted white. They formed a U-shape facing three different streets and creating an inner courtyard. On the open side, in the middle, there was a one-story building, which was the gym. On the right side, facing the gym, there was a small, unattached house with a garden, where the superintendent of the school lived with his family. On the left of the gym, there was a fenced area, which created an extra play area in addition to the large, square inner courtyard.

In front of the middle building, facing the street, was a fenced-in garden, reserved for the use of students of the higher grades. In this area, we planted tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, zucchini, cabbage, scallions and radishes. Before planting, we had to turn the earth, mix it with a fertilizer and divide it into sections for the different vegetables. On the day assigned for gardening, we would bring an old pair of shoes and old clothes in order not to ruin our good outfits.

For some vegetables, we put seeds in the ground and for others we planted baby plants. We watered the new plants with watering cans that had a gentle spray, turned the ground and raked it. It was very exciting to see the first leaves coming through the ground and to watch the plants grow. It was even more exciting when the time came to harvest them. Once we did, the harvest was given to the school kitchen to be used for lunch preparation by students who were assigned to cooking classes. The food they prepared made up some of the subsidized lunches that the school gave to poor students who could not afford to pay.

There were two entrances to the school. The main entrance was on Balfour Street. There was a wide gate that was opened in the morning and closed at the end of the day. A few meters further down, there were about ten very wide steps that came up to a side double-door entrance. I always liked this entrance, as it felt grand to me. Raising my head and straightening my body, I would make believe that I was a queen



*First grade final party - Teacher, Geula.*

entering her palace.

The other entrance was on the other side of the school, on Mazeh Street, next to the superintendent's house. At the end of the school day, students would go out through this gate. The superintendent would open the gate and stand next to it until everyone was out. He would lock and open the gate at different times, according to classes' dismissal times.

I never liked Mazeh Street because a block away there was an entrance to the emergency room of the Hadassah Hospital. All funerals started from this side of the hospital. Many times, we would hear the ambulance sirens or mourners' cries and it was depressing. Whenever possible, I would avoid this block and definitely never looked in that direction.

The school superintendent was of medium height and always dressed in khaki pants and shirt. He wore long pants in winter and short Bermuda pants in summer. Around his waist, he wore a belt with many keys hanging down from a big round ring, ready for any emergency. He was a pleasant man and liked to talk to the students. Some of us would greet him on the way out and he would respond with a smile. After a while, I told him my name and he remembered it, which made me very happy. Little did I know how handy it would be when I would forget a needed book or notebook in the classroom.

The few times that it happened, I was afraid that my mother would get angry with me when I realized I forgot to bring home a book or notebook, I would look for an excuse to get out of the house for a short while and run back to school. I went through a small gate and knocked on the superintendent's door. The first time I went to his house, I was very nervous, as I didn't know how he would react to me. I apologized for disturbing him and explained my problem. On the way to the classroom, he told me that he wouldn't do it again because I had to learn how to be organized and not forget things. I listened and promised that it would not happen again, but to no avail. After a while, he stopped lecturing me and would open the door with a chuckle. He just nodded

his head, from left to right and wagged his finger at me. I would thank him and run back home. It started a nice friendship between us that lasted all through elementary school.

My first day of school was very memorable. I wore a new dress that my mother sewed for me. It was made of a sheer floral fabric in pastel colors. The front of my dress had little bows. I only remember this from a picture that was taken by a professional photographer along the way to the school. On my back, I wore a dark brown book bag. It held one notebook, one pencil, color pencils, a sharpener and an eraser.

On the first day of school, mostly mothers came to school accompanying their children. In the center court, we followed the signs that marked the grades and the teachers' names. My mother approached my class teacher and introduced herself.

"Shalom and welcome. What is your name?" the teacher asked me with a smile.

"Miriam Wachsberger," I answered, smiling, and she checked my name off her list.

She asked all her students to form a line, in pairs. The mothers stayed with us and when all the students were present, the teacher asked the parents to leave. From that day on, we all went to school by ourselves.

All classes started at 8:00 a.m. First to fourth grades ended at 12:00 noon, and higher grades ended at 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. The only time the entire school went home at 12:00 noon was on Friday for Shabbat. The school week was Sunday through Friday.

In grades one to four, we had one teacher for all classes, including gym. Her name was Geulah. It was her first job after graduating from Levinski Teacher's Seminary. At the time, it was the only school in the country educating students to become teachers. The school was situated in the north of Tel Aviv, on Ben Yehudah Street, and students came to study there from all over the country. Geulah was young, short, pretty and very energetic. She had dark brown eyes, shoulder-length, curly black hair and a nice warm smile. She was always dressed well, mostly wearing colorful floral dresses or skirts with white blouses. Her clothes were very neat, clean and well-ironed. She always wore high-heeled shoes to make her look taller. She was single and lived with her mother.

Her mother, Yehudit Harrari, was the school principal. She was the first and only female principal in the country. She was a big, tall woman, with a beautiful face and grey hair. She had a reputation for being tough and we were always afraid of her, hoping not to be sent to her office. Through the years, I was sent to her office once or twice for bad behavior. She would first ask for the reason for my bad behavior. Then, in a quiet, even and firm voice, looking straight at me, she'd warn me not to let it happen again and I was sent back to class. When she came outside to mingle with the students, she was very warm and friendly, perhaps because her daughter Geulah was our teacher.

On that first day, once our parents left, we followed our teacher to the classroom. We were a class of 45 students. All first grade classrooms were on the first floor. As the grades got higher, the students were assigned to classrooms on the higher floors. One wall in each classroom had large windows that kept the classroom naturally bright. It was only on rainy days in the winter that the lights in the classroom were turned on.

The desks were set up in four rows in front of the teacher's desk. Each desk could seat two pupils. On each side of the desk there was a round hole to accommodate an ink pot, for when we were ready to move on from writing with a pencil to writing with a pen. We were assigned to our seats by height. The short kids were seated in the front and the tall ones in the back of the classroom. When necessary, a disruptive student would be moved closer to the teacher's desk. Most years, I would sit in the back, except on some occasions, when I was moved up front.

Once we were all in our seats, Geulah introduced herself again and welcomed us. Walking between the rows smiling, she told us how we should behave in class and when to raise our hand in order to get permission to speak. She immediately made us feel very comfortable and we were encouraged to participate actively in class. She also encouraged us to speak clearly and in a strong, loud voice and to be polite at all times, for our sake, as much as for the teacher's sake.

After this introduction, she turned towards the blackboard. It was very exciting to see the first words written for us to read: "shalom" (hello), "abba" (father) and "ima" (mother). She taught us how to sound them out, which was the method of reading used at the time. It was very exciting to receive the first booklet with the alphabet to use in class and at home.

Geulah was a wonderful teacher, and learning how to read and write was a lot of fun. I found it exciting to walk in the street and try to read the signs. As I was getting more comfortable reading, my father and I would take different streets to walk through, so I had to read different signs. Both my mother and father were very encouraging and were always happy to sit and help me read.

We learned many songs and sang a few times a day. Our teacher was very creative and used a lot of music, drama and drawings in our studies, which made the four years with her wonderful. I don't ever remember her raising her voice. When she got angry, she expressed her anger in a very low, cold voice and a serious facial expression. She was also very gentle when a student had a problem and was very encouraging. She hardly had any bad behavior problems, as we all loved her.

At around ten o'clock in the morning we had our snack. We took out from our snack box a fabric placemat and spread it in front of us. The placemats were made of plain white fabrics and some had fine embroidery around the edges. It was the first opportunity that my mother took to teach me how to embroider. My favorite stitch was a cross stitch and once I mastered it, I embroidered all my mats, using different colors of cotton embroidery yarns. I was proud to embroider my name on each mat.

Before we could start eating, the teacher would pass by each student, to check the mats for cleanliness. We also had to show her our hands and nails, and she made sure that the fingernails were cut short and were clean. When she was done, we would take out our snack, which was usually a fruit and some chocolate or cookies. The teacher would wish us a hearty appetite and we'd thank her and start eating, without talking. When we were finished eating, we went out to the yard for a break. It was the only break of the day and was around twenty to thirty minutes. We would play different games with our friends. We jumped rope, which I wasn't good at. I was a little slow and couldn't compete with the kids who could jump in many different ways. We also played catch and hide and go seek, which let us release our pent-up energy. As we got older, the games changed. The girls usually just stood around in groups talking about boys and watching them, while the boys tried to impress them by playing ball.

Once a week, the school nurse would come to the classroom. She would check for cleanliness of our arms, ears and neck. She would also part our hair looking for lice. If any were found, she immediately sent the student home with a note. The student was able to come back to class only after being checked by the nurse first. It was very embarrassing for whoever was sent home. My mother made sure that she washed my hair thoroughly and combed it with a metal comb. I never had the problem, and I was very proud of that.

At the end of the first year, for the final day, we all had to dress as sailors and perform a play in front of our parents. The play, which our teacher had written, was all about a sailor's life and was accompanied by songs. Many times, during the four years, we would get busy with similar performances to which parents were invited. It was a great learning tool for many subjects.

Gehula was absolutely the right teacher for us. We learned a lot from her and we all loved school because of her. The parents realized it and gave her a lot of help whenever she needed it. We were very sad and upset at the end of fourth grade, knowing that she would not be our teacher anymore.

Whenever we had a chance, we would go to visit her, and she was always happy to hear from us. Most of us also kept track of her after public school and through high school. In later years we found out that she never married and didn't have children. It was hard for us to understand that.

In the fifth grade, we had a new homeroom teacher, who was strict and serious, but very interesting and warm. Her name was Sonia and she was older than our previous teacher. She taught us the Bible, history and literature. She was dramatic and was able to keep our interest. She made all of us read aloud parts of the lessons, always insisting that we read in a loud voice and with drama. She would stand in different parts of the classroom to make sure that she heard everyone loud and clear. She was also our homeroom teacher, which meant that all the other teachers who taught us different subjects had to report to her. The homeroom teacher also signed our report cards and wrote remarks and evaluations on them. She was also the one who took care of all problems and was the contact with the parents. This system continued all through high school, too.



*My teacher, Zvia on my right and my teacher, Moria on my left in kindergarten on my 6th birthday*



*4th grade with teacher, Geula.*

Some teachers left a very strong impression on me, and I liked the subjects that they taught. Bible study was one of my most favorite subjects, and I liked history and literature, as well. Geography was another favorite, as I was always imagining visiting the countries we learned about. My father bought me a wonderful atlas book that enabled me to draw great maps and to study it in my spare time. I was on my best behavior in these classes. I didn't talk to my friends during class, always did my homework and liked to get involved with special projects. I always participated actively when I liked a class. I never cared too much for science, but, in the early years, I didn't have too many problems handling it. I also liked music and art very much.

Up to the fifth grade, our homeroom teacher was also responsible for gym. Every morning before starting our studies, we would do a few exercises at our desk, following the teacher's instructions. At times, it was done twice a day. That all changed in fifth grade when we started to have gym classes twice a week with our gym teacher, Daniel. We were also very excited that for the first time we had to get special gym uniforms. They consisted of navy blue shorts, white tee shirts, white socks and sneakers. The sneaker's top was made of canvas; the bottom had a rubber sole. We all had the same kind of sneakers, as there were no different varieties, as there are today. They were basic deck shoes, like today's Keds brand.

Daniel, the gym teacher, was tall with broad shoulders and muscular arms and legs. His face was slightly elongated. He had big blue eyes, curly black hair and a beautiful smile. He was a very handsome man. He always wore sneakers and had a whistle hanging around his neck at all times. He had a lot of energy that was contagious. His lessons always started with calisthenics and runs around the courtyard. I liked the calisthenics part the most. I was very flexible and the teacher would tend to put me in front of the class, most of the time, as an example for the other students to follow. The calisthenics mostly were followed by various ball games or other group games of competition. Daniel would appoint group leaders who, in turn, would choose the kids for their group. This method created some tension. Being picked at the end of the process meant that one was not a good enough player, and that was very embarrassing. At times, Daniel would interfere and assign an upset student quickly. We also realized that some of us were picked to be in a certain group, not for our ability, but out of loyalty to an existing friendship. Daniel also introduced us to the different exercise equipment that gymnasts use. These were not very good exercises for me, but I tried my best to manage them.

During summer vacation, Daniel managed a day camp that he owned on the beach. We would all go to meet the bus in front of the school at 7:45 a.m. to take us to camp, and we were picked up at 1:00 p.m. to go back home, exhausted but happy. The camp was located in the north of Tel Aviv, right next to a neighborhood called Shechunat Machlul. The area consisted of one and two-bedroom shacks made out of wood. It was occupied by low-income, old and young families who were proud of their homes.

The streets were clean with beautiful flowers growing in front of each home. The people living here were moved into this area, which in the 1930's was considered the north of Tel Aviv. By the middle of the 1940's, as Tel Aviv expanded north, their meager homes became an eyesore in the middle of the city and the municipality moved them further north, near the beach. In the 1950's, they were told to move again, when big hotels were built along the seashore. At this point, they were given enough money from the municipality that enabled them to buy an apartment in any place they wished.

My mother's second cousin, her husband and two sons lived next door to the camp. I loved Mirka, but couldn't stand her husband who was very orthodox, never smiled and spoke to her without any respect. I also thought that he looked dirty and unkempt. He hardly ever spoke to his sons. He seemed to only care about religion. I couldn't understand why she married him.

Mirka was pretty, and although they did not have a lot of money, she dressed nicely and was very neat and stylish, wearing clothes that suited her slight build. She had black hair and smiling dark eyes. She was lovely, warm, friendly and very loving. Outwardly, she was always in a happy mood, but I knew that she was covering her unhappiness. She was very close with her sons who had their mother's personality. I liked them a lot, as they were always nice to me, although they were a few years older. I stayed friendly with them for a long time.

At times, I would ask Daniel for permission to go visit Mirka when we had a break from our camp activities. When I came to see her, we would sit next to each other, on a sofa, and I had to tell her everything about myself. She was a very good cook and baker and always had fresh salad, cookies and chocolate for me. I

liked having her to myself, and always felt as if I was the adopted daughter she didn't have. I kept spending time with her over many years.

My most favorite time in camp was exercising and ball playing on the beach, followed by a long swim in the ocean. The counselors would form a u-shaped fence in the water and we had to stay within it. Daniel served as the jumping board at the deepest part of the water. We would climb on his shoulders and dive. It was imperative that every diver know how to swim. He taught us different dives and corrected us when necessary. We had to swim to shore and turn around quickly for another dive. I loved diving because of the attention I got, climbing on his wide, strong shoulders and seeing his smile. It made me feel good and very accomplished. This was the only activity I was interested in doing, and would not just swim or play with my friends.

The camp consisted of an area in the sand, which had a roof made out of heavy canvas fabric to provide shade. There were long tables and benches for us to do art projects on and to eat. It was always very cool because of sea breezes. This camp was a wonderful addition to my other activities during the long summer vacation.

In the fifth grade we also started shop classes in school. The boys had wood shop classes and the girls had sewing classes. At the start of the year, we learned how to cut and handle fabrics, sew by hand and embroider. I was ahead of the class, because my mother taught me how to embroider when I was in first grade. My most favorite stitch was a cross stitch, as I found it easy and quick.

The first item that we made in class was a gift for our mothers, for the first Mother's Day designated by the Israeli government. It was a pillow to hold a woman's handkerchiefs. The teacher supplied us with a silky fabric that had a white background with small printed pink and red flowers. We stuffed it with cotton, folded it and tied it with a silk ribbon. I remember how excited and proud I was to present my mother with this gift. She used it for many years and I would always check inside it to see her handkerchiefs. She always had very pretty ones for different purposes. Some were to wipe her nose, some to hold in her hand to wipe off sweat on hot days and some to display in a blouse or a jacket's pocket. Some were scalloped with small flowers, some were finished with lace and some with ribbons. They were always ironed without a wrinkle. When my mother taught me how to iron, it was the first item that I practiced on.

A few years ago, on one of our many trips to Israel, we went with my cousin Udi to Akko (Acre). We stopped at a small modern art museum. The exhibit was about childhood memories that influenced the artist's imagination. The items themselves, like Shabbat candlesticks, a tea kettle or a knitted baby blanket were part of the art. We walked around and I was amazed at how much I was able to identify with the art in the exhibit.

I stayed in front of one collage for a long time, having a hard time tearing myself away. It fascinated me. It was a large canvas boxed in plexiglass, containing fanned handkerchiefs glued in lines, covering the whole area of the white-painted canvas. There were about 24 to 30 different handkerchiefs. Some were lace, some scalloped, some floral and some striped, all in many different colors, no two alike. Each exhibit included a small essay describing the artist's memory, which inspired him or her to create their piece of art. This particular artist wrote about her loving relationship with her mother who had many handkerchiefs that she loved. As she grew older, and her mother started using tissues, she asked her mother to keep all her handkerchiefs. After years of studying art and becoming an artist, she decided to create this collage in memory of her mother.

Standing in front of this piece of art, with tears in my eyes, I remembered my mother's handkerchiefs and was sorry that I did not have any of them. I had used the pillow that I made for her for a few years, until it came apart.

By the seventh and eighth grade, we were ready to experiment with anything that we wanted to sew. I chose to make myself an embroidered blouse and a jumper. By then, we had learned how to cut and sew skirts and blouses without using a pattern. We also learned how to take measurements, mark them on paper and create a pattern that was ready for cutting.

The next stage was learning how to use a sewing machine; how to thread it, clean it and sew in straight lines. This was frustrating and more difficult than I expected. We had to coordinate our leg movement with the hand that held the fabric and also to control the speed of the machine at the same time.

In the beginning, we received a white cloth, on which we kept going back and forth until the seams were straight. Most of us had a sewing machine at home, so we were able to practice after school. Once the teacher felt

that we mastered the technique, we could choose to sew whatever we wanted.

My mother sewed all my clothes and she was very good at it. She would buy fashion magazines for ideas and would then make the garment from start to finish. I liked watching how she took my measurements. She would measure my shoulders, my neck, my arms, my waist, my hips, the length from my shoulder to my waist and the length from the shoulder to where the dress would end. As she took every measurement, she wrote it down on a piece of paper. She always had her tape measure hanging down from around her neck, which made it easy for her to use it quickly. She would then spread the fabric on a table, on which she would pin down white see-through paper. Once she had all her measurements, she would mark them on the paper with a pencil. It was very exciting to watch how the garment was taking shape. When she was satisfied with the way it looked, she would follow the penciled lines and cut the fabric. First, she would cut the back, then the front and, lastly, the sleeves. Once done, she would unpin the paper from the fabric. She would then take all the parts that were cut and pin them together. Then came the basting of the different parts with a heavy white thread.

When all that was accomplished, I would slip it on and my mother would adjust it according to my body. I would try to stand very still in front of the mirror, which was not always easy for me. When she made the adjustments, she had the box of pins next to her and always held a few in her mouth to quicken the pinning. At times, I was pinched and bled a little. She would tell me that it was a sign that the outfit will be beautiful. When I asked her where she got this belief, she would answer laughing, "from my mother."

Once satisfied, she would sit by the sewing machine and sew along the basted lines, using a colored yarn that matched the fabric. If the fit was good, she pulled out the basting stitches. I usually had to try it on two or three times before the garment was completely finished.

Many times, she would get an idea from a magazine, changing it to fit her own ideas. She had excellent taste, and I loved going shopping with her to the different fabric stores. She always asked my opinion, which made me feel very important.

She had three favorite fabric stores that she frequented, and all were considered to be the best ones in Tel Aviv. They had very beautiful fabrics, mostly imported from Europe. There were cottons, silks, taffetas and wools; printed and textures fabrics. The salesman and the storeowners always greeted us warmly. She was a good customer and always knew what she liked and made quick decisions. There were always very friendly conversations going on while we pointed at fabric bolts that my mother or I wanted to see opened on the counter. Once the bolt was put on the counter, the salesman would tell us what fabric it was and ask us to touch the fabric to see its quality. I loved feeling the fabrics and, with time, I could tell the difference between them. Once she decided on the fabric and they started to cut the yards she needed, she would smile and ask them to add an extra half a yard without charge. They would look at her, trying not to fulfill her request. She would keep smiling and, at the end, they usually gave in. Most of the times, she would try to bargain them down, which at times worked and at other times didn't. I remember being very embarrassed when I saw it for the first time, but, after a while, I realized that it was part of the deal. This knowledge came in very handy, and I was able to use it myself in later years.

Usually, my mother and I agreed on the fabrics and the styles of the skirts, blouses or dresses that she was sewing for me. A problem started when I joined the scouts at age 11. Being in a youth organization, we all tried to emulate the clothes that were worn by men and women living in the kibbutzim and the villages. Their clothes were different from city clothes. On the farms, the most popular outfit for a woman was a navy jumper worn with an embroidered blouse, a style that was influenced by Eastern European countries, mostly Romania, Russia and the Ukraine. Men mostly wore embroidered shirts influenced by the Russian style. All my friends had at least one of these outfits. My mother refused to sew or buy it for me. She didn't like anything that had to do with workers or clothes that were worn on the farms. She was a city woman who loved everything about the city, including the latest, elegant fashions.

Therefore, once I felt confident in my sewing ability, I was ready to make my own jumper and embroidered blouse. My mother gave me money for the fabrics, because she was not going with me to buy them. I had to go by myself to purchase the fabric. I had no problem with that, as it made me feel very grown-up and independent. I knew exactly what to buy and how much, as I received this information from my teacher. I went

to the store, where I liked the salesman the most, knowing that I would get all the help I needed.

When I arrived at the store I asked for my favorite salesman.

He welcomed me and said, "Are you waiting for your mother?"

"No. I am here by myself to buy white fabric for a blouse and navy blue fabric for a jumper that I will sew at school," I said.

He pulled a few different bolts of fabric in white and navy off the shelves for me to look at. He opened them for me, so I was able to touch and see a large piece. They were all cotton fabrics in different textures. I knew exactly what I was looking for. I needed soft, white cotton for the blouse, as I had to embroider the collar and part of the sleeves. For the jumper, I needed a soft, dark navy fabric, without any sheen. When I found what I liked, I proudly told the salesman the amount of fabric I needed. He cut the fabrics, adding some extra, without my asking for it, and wrapped them up.

After I paid, he said, "Miriam, you know your fabrics and it was great helping you. Give my regards to your mother. How is it that she didn't come with you?"

I told him the reason and he chuckled.

My next stop was the trimming store. It was a big corner store on Allenby Street, which was a main street running from the south of the city all the way to the beach. The merchandise in the store was divided in departments for buttons, ribbons of all kinds and everything else that was needed for sewing. I had to buy white and navy threads to use for the sewing machine. I opened my package and matched the colors. I also had to get special threads for embroidery. I decided to embroider red flowers, which I had to sketch, with black in the middle and green leaves on each side of the flowers. The last item that I had to get was a special navy ribbon, made as a shoelace, for the front of the jumper, to be put in a crisscross style. It would enable me to open the jumper in order to put it on and to adjust it to my body, finishing it with a knot. It was the same principle as lacing shoes.

In class, I decided to start with the blouse. I took my measurements, wrote them down and marked them on thin paper. With the teacher's help and approval, I proceeded. I pinned the paper on top of the fabric and cut along its lines. It took a few lessons until I was able to put all the pieces together with pins. I then tried it on for the first time to see if the blouse will fit. Then came the basting with a dark thread and taking out the pins. When all this was done, I took the blouse to sew on the machine. It was very important that the stitches be straight. I had no problem with that. I sewed along the dark thread that was my marker.

Once I finished, the teacher checked the results and gave me the go-ahead to take out the dark thread. It was very exciting and unbelievable to see the final product. It was especially exciting after getting over the frustration of trying on, adjusting and completing the most difficult task of putting in the sleeves.

At this point, I was ready to outline the flowers on the collar, down the front of the blouse and on the cuffs of the short sleeves. Once I had the first flower embroidered, I was very proud of myself, knowing that the blouse would be beautiful.

"Miriam, you can now take it home and finish the embroidery faster, so you can start your jumper," the teacher told me one day.

"I can't. I will take it home when both the blouse and jumper will be finished and I can wear it and show my parents," I answered. "I don't want to hear any criticisms, as I don't want to have to change anything."

Cutting and sewing my jumper was a much easier, faster task. At times, my mother would ask me about my project, offering her help, if necessary. I refused and told her that I will bring it home when it was ready and that my teacher was very helpful. When I was done, I wrapped it all up and took it home. My mother asked to see it, but I told her that I would like to wait for my father to come home from work. Waiting for my father to come home seemed never-ending, as my anxiety increased. When he came home and we all had our supper, I went to the bathroom and changed. I came out with a big smile on my face looking for approval. They both clapped their hands and complimented me on my job. My mother came over, kissed me and told me how beautiful it looked and how proud she was of me. It made me very happy. I wore this outfit many times, mostly going to the scouts, where I felt very good that I, too, had a Ukrainian blouse and a halutzke (pioneer-style) jumper.

I always liked going to school and do not remember ever trying to find an excuse to miss a day or two.

I had a very good year in the sixth grade. I absolutely loved our homeroom teacher who taught us math and science, my weakest subjects. He had a lot of patience and took his time teaching and explaining everything using different methods to keep us interested. He never got upset when asked to repeat something.

His name was Jacob Krieger. He was a thin, short young man with black hair and blue eyes. At times, he liked to kid with us and also share some of his habits and personal life. He was a bachelor and had his own apartment, not far from school. We all loved him and rarely did he have any behavior problems. I had a big crush on him. I remember flirting with him in class, and he flirted back. The class decided that he was in love with me. I would laugh and tell them that they were out of their minds, but, to myself, I hoped they were correct. My homework was always perfect, and I always volunteered for additional projects. I also made sure that I wore my most flattering outfits.

That year, I was only absent for one day, after receiving a typhoid shot. We would get it every year or every other year, to avoid an epidemic. The nurse set up a table in the hallway with cotton and injections on top. We stood in line and put our left arm on our waist, ready for the shot. One by one, we got injected. Most of us tried to put on a brave face, but there were some frightened faces and some crying students. The reaction to the shot was some swelling and redness. For the first day or two, it also hurt to some degree, and wearing a sling made out of a large scarf helped. In extreme cases, it was accompanied by fever.

Most of the time, I had no fever, except this one year. I wanted to go to school, but my temperature was too high and I had to stay home. Once I agreed not to go to school, I enjoyed having my mother hover over me trying to make me comfortable. For some reason, the only food that I could always eat after getting an injection was fresh strawberries with sour cream that my mother sweetened with a lot of sugar. She would laugh at me, not understanding why I couldn't eat anything else.

After school that day, one of my friends came to visit. She was very excited and waited for my mother to leave us alone. She said, "First thing in the morning Krieger asked if anyone knew why you weren't in school. I told him that it might have been a strong reaction to the typhoid shot, and he accepted it. He was in a bad mood all day, which hardly ever happened. We all decided that he missed you and that he is in love with you."

I laughed and told her that they were all crazy, but I liked hearing it. The next morning, I was surrounded by some of my friends repeating the same thing. I laughed it off again. When Krieger walked into class and saw me, he immediately asked how I was feeling and then went to his desk, all smiles and happy. I could feel my friends glancing at me, smiling. At the end of the year, we were all sorry to hear that, for the seventh and eighth grade, we would get a new homeroom teacher who will see us to graduation.

Our Bible studies, literature and history teacher was Neeman. He was a good and interesting teacher, but very serious. He and our homeroom teacher were very good friends, but complete opposites. He was dressed to perfection. His shirts were ironed perfectly and his pants' creases were always straight and perfect. His hair was always neatly combed and he wore brown-rimmed spectacles. He always sat very erect behind his desk and rarely smiled. The atmosphere in his class was very serious. We liked his lessons, and he assigned us a lot of reading and research papers. I liked these subjects very much and was always ready to take on additional assignments.

I was a slow reader and many times had to read a sentence at least twice to understand it. It also took me a very long time to study portions of the Bible or poems that we had to recite from memory. My father realized my problem and started to buy some books for me, as our fees for late returns of loaned books from the library were very high. First, he bought a complete encyclopedia. Then, he bought books that provided clear explanations of various subjects. Studying at home also enabled me to stand up often or stop for a while, as I was not able to sit too long. It was the beginning of putting together a nice library at home. But because my father couldn't buy every book that I needed for research, at times I did have to go to a library.

The nearest library to our home was the Bialik Library. It was the previous home of one of the most admired poets of Hebrew Literature, Chaim Nachman Bialik. He came to Palestine in his fifties from Russia, where he wrote most of his poems. He had a very extensive library of Hebrew books in most subjects. When he died, his house was turned into a library. (It has since been remodeled and turned into a museum.)

The library was a two-story building, surrounded by a beautiful garden with many fruit trees, such as orange, lemon and fig. There were many other trees all around the building that gave a lot of shade and sported

beautiful flowers. In front of the building, facing the street, to the right, was a large bench surrounded by white latticework. At the entrance foyer of the library, facing the door, was a large old antique desk. Behind the desk sat the librarian. He was an elderly, handsome man with grey hair. Upon entering the library, we had to sign our name in a large open notebook on the desk. The librarian would then ask us what subject we were working on and would direct us to where we could find the right books. If the books were not within our reach, the librarian would get up and climb on a small ladder and give them to us.

There were two or three rooms, where all the walls, from floor to ceiling, had shelves covered with books arranged by subjects. There were long, narrow tables in the middle of the room, with benches on each side. The lights were not too bright and because there were so many trees surrounding the house, it was dim inside.

There were two strict rules that we had to adhere to in the library. The first rule was no talking at any time. The second rule was that once you got up and left your spot, for any reason, all books had to be returned to the librarian who held them for a while. The seat itself was open to anyone who was waiting in line for an open seat. No empty seat was held in reserve.

I didn't like the atmosphere and knew that I would have to break up the long stay and go out for a while. My dilemma was that I didn't want to give up my seat and have to wait again in case someone else took it. I decided to get friendly with the gentleman that most kids were afraid of. So, I always came in with a smile and said, "How are you?" I also asked him for advice and recommendations of books on the subjects that I was researching. His advice and knowledge was always very useful and shortened some of my stay. I would also share with him the grades that I received in the subjects that I worked on in the library. I basically got him very involved and he seemed interested. I knew that I got through to him because he always smiled when I came in and when I left.

In a very short time, he came to realize that I couldn't sit too long in one place. One day, as my stomach was churning, I asked the librarian if I could leave my books on the table to save my seat. He looked at me from the side of his eyes, smiled, and said, "Yes." I knew I won him over and it was a good deal for me. Mostly, I would go out for about ten minutes to walk in the garden or sit on the bench outside, and then I was able to concentrate again. At times, an angry student who was waiting for a seat would question me, as to why was I so privileged and why my seat was kept for me. I would just shrug my shoulders.

Years later, when I stopped coming there for research, I would go to visit him and we would talk. I learned from him that he was not married and had no children and I could see how happy he was to see me. I will never forget the day I came to see him in my army uniform. He stood up, came over to me and, with tears in his eyes, hugged me. I stopped going there when I found out that he passed away. It made me sad, as I liked him and always felt bad for him being so lonely.

A few years ago, on one of our trips to Israel, we stopped at the library, which had by then been converted to a museum. Although it was the day of the week that the museum was closed, we were able to go in because there was an open door. A young woman, the museum director, greeted us, explaining that the museum was closed. I told her about my childhood experience and she let us stay. There was a young couple with us. I told them about the place and how the librarian ran it.

When I told them and the director, who was also the docent, about my relationship with the librarian and how much I liked him, she laughed and said, "You can't imagine how all the people from your generation who come to visit tell me how much they hated him. They were all so scared of him and will never forget it. You are the only one who ever said she liked him. When I take people around, can I tell them your story?"

"Absolutely," I said and then asked her, "By the way, what was his name, I never knew it."

She couldn't believe it. She laughed and answered, "Mr. Unger. He came here from Hungary, where he was born. He came with his parents at a very young age and was educated here, and this was where he received his knowledge about books. He was an avid reader and a very good student."

Another specialty teacher from fifth to eighth grade that left a mark on most of us was our music and art teacher, Mr. Rivkes. Many of us give him the credit for our interest and love in those subjects.

Girls, at that age, are very impressionable. We were happy when our teachers, especially the men, were handsome, pleasant and had a warm and friendly personality. Mr. Rivkes was very handsome. He was of medium

height, muscular, with light brown hair and blue eyes. He had a lot of patience and was very enthusiastic. He played the accordion, which was one of the most popular instruments in those years. He taught us many new songs, which he sang and played for us before he began teaching them. His voice and the rich sound of the accordion encouraged us to learn quickly so that we could join him and sing together. We would also discuss the meaning of lyrics, which added to our learning and enjoyment.

Occasionally, he'd play short selections of classical music for us and teach us about the composers, their lives and their music. It was our first introduction to classical music. At the time, there were also many movies made in Hollywood about the composers that he encouraged us to see. At the movies, we would again hear the music, and by becoming familiar with certain selections, we acquired our first interest in classical music.

Mr. Rivkes was also a wonderful art teacher. He encouraged us to draw and taught us about colors and their uses. He let us experiment with crayons, colored pencils, pastels and watercolors. When teaching art history, he always brought to class prints of an artist's paintings and showed us how a particular artist's painting style evolved over time. He also hung prints on the blackboard and taught us how to look at details. We would discuss light and dark, shadows and movement and it all came alive for us.

He encouraged us to draw or paint using what we learned. At times, he displayed some items on his desk and had us try to paint them. Some of us didn't think that we could do it, but he always encouraged us not to stop and to keep trying. He explained that two artists might look at the same scenery or object and paint them differently. This approach made us more comfortable and we kept painting. For coloring, we had a choice of using any medium with which we felt comfortable. My favorite medium was pastels. I found that, because of the nature of pastels, I was able to correct what I did with my finger and create interesting shades of colors.

It made me very happy when he asked us to use our imagination and paint whatever we liked. I mostly found myself painting two subjects. One was the windmills of Holland. The other was the ocean, surrounded by palm trees, with sail boats, the sun in blue skies, flowers and birds. At times, I kept the water in my ocean all blue and very calm. At other times, I would add white lines to create a feeling of waves. When I started painting this subject, every item was disproportioned and I was disappointed with the results. In time, with Mr. Rivkes help, my paintings came to life and looked right. I always felt very calm and happy when painting this scene. At the same time, I realized that working with colors gave me a lot of pleasure. I was never happy when we were asked to draw in black and white.

The only time that I had some problem in art class was when he started teaching us how to draw with a third dimension. I tried very hard to follow his instructions, but I couldn't do it. I was very frustrated and it brought me to tears. Seeing my problem, he told me to forget about it, as it was not the end of the world and I will do nicely without it. I was very thankful to him because I didn't want to disappoint him.

In one of our trips to Israel, we were invited to dinner to the home of very good friends. When we came in, their daughter, Navah, was having a music lesson in her room. When her lesson was finished, she and the teacher came out of her room and it was Mr. Rivkes. I got very excited to see him and was happy to have, after all these years, the opportunity to tell him how much he influenced me and all his students. He smiled and thank me for it.

The sixth grade was a very happy year for me and I loved going to school. But a very big change occurred in the seventh grade when our homeroom teacher was changed. The new teacher was new to the school, and no one knew anything about him. He was assigned to teach us math and science. We knew that he had a sister in the eighth grade who was nice and liked by her friends, so we hoped that he would be as nice as her.

On the first day of school, after welcoming us, he told us that his name was Shaul. He was a young man, tall and thin, with blond hair, an elongated face and cold blue eyes peering behind round glasses. His clothes were very neat and perfectly ironed. His face was very stern without even a hint of a smile at any time. It made him look sinister. He immediately told us his strict rules of conduct and homework. He then asked each one of us to say our names, which he put down on paper, according to our seats. By this time, we usually sat with a friend that we liked, at whatever seats we preferred. At recess, we all expressed our disappointment and fear of him. I personally had a problem looking at him, as he sent shivers through my body.

He gave us our books and started the lessons. The first hour was math and the second hour was science.

We threw glances at each other, showing our disbelief at his style of teaching, as it was very dry. It was a complete opposite to what we were used to in the previous year. We quickly found out that he had no patience for answering our questions. At times, he would ridicule the student who asked what he considered to be a stupid question. He would get a smirk on his face while answering, or just ignore the question altogether. That made us afraid to ask too often. He told us that there was a lot of material to cover for the year, so there was no time for stupid questions.

As I couldn't stand him and it was difficult for me to grasp these subjects, I got into trouble from the beginning of the year. I was afraid to ask questions, so I started talking to my friends or making hushed remarks while he taught. He was upset with me, and when he said something to me or asked me a question, I would answer him in a fresh and ironic way. There was definitely bad chemistry between us from the beginning, and it almost seemed that we were at war with each other.

It was the first time that I didn't want to wake up in the morning and go to school. My father, who was the one to wake me up, had to work very hard. I would cry and yell that I was not going to school. My parents knew about my dislike for the teacher, but didn't expect such a strong reaction. They never had a problem before. They told me that I will have to adapt to the situation, and that they will get me a tutor for both subjects. But I still didn't want to go to school.

One morning, my father, who had a great sense of humor and was creative, came to wake me up. He sat on my bed and said, "Miriam, wake up. Kofiko the monkey is waiting for you! You have to get up and get dressed." I opened my eyes half asleep and saw him smiling.

"Who is Kofiko?" I asked.

"Your teacher Shaul," he answered imitating a monkey. I couldn't help but laugh. He took this opportunity and pulled me out of bed. Every morning he changed his facial expressions and laughingly I got up.

It didn't take a long time until the teacher gave me a note asking my parents to come in for a conference with him. It was my mother who went. She was told that I misbehaved and was very fresh to him. He also suggested that I should have a tutor in both subjects. My mother told him that she and my father thought the same thing. I was at this meeting, as my mother always insisted that I should listen with her to what the teacher had to say, reasoning that I was the student, not her. She insisted on this policy all through my school years.

When my mother asked my teacher to recommend a tutor, he said, "I will be her tutor, in both subjects. She will come to my house, twice a week, two hours at a time."

My mother agreed on the spot, asked as to his fee, and set up the timetable with him. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, but I kept quiet and held back my tears. The minute we got out of school, I started to cry, telling her that I don't believe what she did, especially knowing how much I hated him. I left her and ran away to the park near our house. I sat on a bench and kept crying. She stopped by and tried to talk to me, but I turned my head away. She left me and went home. After a while, I couldn't sit anymore, so I just started walking the streets. I walked for a long time to calm myself down. I mainly walked down one street, hoping to see my father riding his bicycle on his way home from work. It didn't happen. I was sure that once my father came home, it would all change. I finally went back home.

A short while after I came home, my father arrived. We all had our supper and nothing was discussed about school. My mother always believed that upsetting subjects should not be discussed before or during the meal. She also didn't like to tell a person bad news in the evening, unless it was very necessary, believing that it might disturb a good night's sleep.

Once we were finished with supper, my father asked me about school. I started to cry, which I didn't want to do. My mother told him what happened. Before he could say anything, I yelled, "I am not going to his house and will not study with him. I can't believe that Ima agreed to it and made the arrangements with him. You know how much I hate him. I have enough of him in school and now I have to sit with him, by myself, four hours a week. He just wants to make extra money and this is a great opportunity for him. There are many other math and science teachers that can tutor me."

I wanted to keep yelling, but my father stopped me. I hoped, at that moment, that he would find the right solution to the problem. "I agree that this arrangement is the best," he said.

I looked at him not believing what I heard. “How can you say that? You know how much I hate him. It will never work.”

“If this is what he recommended, nothing else will ever work. This way, I am sure you will be able to improve and pass the two subjects,” he explained. “Otherwise he will make you more miserable. Apparently your dislike for each other is mutual. You have to be extra careful how you speak to him in class. We know that you can do it, as you have no problem with any of the other teachers.”

It was absolute torture for me going twice a week to his house. He lived with his parents and sister. His house was a block away from home, on the same street where I would walk to school. Many times, I would change my route, just to avoid seeing him on the street. The room I had my lesson in was their dining room. We sat next to each other by the large table. The shutters were always half open, which gave the room a depressing feeling. The two hours seemed like ten hours. I tried not to look at him, but, when it happened, I would shudder a little seeing his piercing eyes and slight smirk.

For some reason, his sister was always waiting at the end of the lesson to say goodbye to me with a smile on her face. I figured that she felt sorry for me that I had to deal with her brother, as she was a very sweet girl. I didn't change my behavior in class too much, although I tried. I knew that nothing would help to change the relationship between us, even if I tried. At the end of the year, I passed both subjects.

At that point, he gave me a note for my parents in a closed envelope. I couldn't wait to get home for my mother to read the note. In the note, he asked for both of my parents to come to school for a meeting, without me. We thought that he just wanted to tell them about my progress and make the same arrangement with him for the eighth grade.

Impatiently, I waited at home for my parents' return from the meeting. I watched their faces when they came in, but couldn't figure out what I saw. I immediately started to ask questions. My father put his arm around me and asked me to sit on the sofa next to him. My mother sat by us on the armchair.

“We had a big surprise at this meeting. Your teacher asked us to take you out of school for the eighth grade. He told us that you did okay in math and science, but he just can't stand you, and he knows that it is mutual.”

“Being shocked, we told him that it was important for you to graduate with your friends and his reasoning was completely wrong. We got angry and said that he had no right to demand such a thing because you passed all the subjects and some with very good marks. Knowing that we might go to the principal, he said that nothing would help, as he, being the homeroom teacher, signs the report cards recommending the students for graduation. His last sentence to us was, ‘I recommend strongly that you move her to another school, as I will not let her graduate.’”

Later on, we found out that he was dismissed from another school, under strong parental pressure, for mishandling students and using methods that alienated students and parents.

I cried in disbelief. I had a very nice group of friends, boys and girls, and we spent a lot of time together. We all lived and grew up in the same neighborhood. Most of us went to the same youth groups, the scouts, the beach, the movies and to parties. It looked to me as if the whole world was coming down on me. I was afraid that I would lose all my friends. I knew that my very best girlfriends would remain close to me, but what about the rest of the group? I was also ashamed that it happened to me, but it looked as if I wouldn't have any other choice.

I knew that I was going to apply to a private high school after graduation, as my parents were in good financial position to pay the high tuition. I also knew that I had good enough marks to get into the high school of my choice. I never imagined starting a year earlier, in the eighth grade. I wasn't sure that I would be accepted and was unsure about being able to make new friends.

My father held my hand and explained that there was no choice. He told me that both him and my mother would go to the high school that I was considering, which also had a private elementary school, to see what they could do. It was Herzliya High School that I was considering, knowing that the level of studies was right for me. It was the first Hebrew high school in Palestine, and was located in the south of Tel Aviv, at the end of Herzl street.

The next day, my parents made an appointment with the principal of the high school. They had my report

card with them. The only problem that the principal could see was the mark for behavior, which my “favorite” teacher marked as “Unsatisfactory.”

My parents explained the situation, and he asked to see me. I came with my mother. He asked me to explain this mark. I told him the same thing my parents did, and repeated that the problem was only with the homeroom teacher’s class. When I was finished explaining, I was very nervous to hear his decision.

“Miriam,” he said. “Your report card is not bad. I am worried about your behavior. It takes a lot of provocation for a teacher to give a student such a low mark.”

My heart sank. I tried to figure out what I would do if I was not accepted to the eighth grade at this school. But then, he looked straight at me and added, “I will accept you to our school on a trial basis. If your conduct is not good, you will have to leave the school.”

“There will be no problem. I promise you,” I said.

We all stood up, shook hands and my parents and I left his office. My mother went directly to register me for the new year in the new school. I walked out flying, feeling so happy that I was accepted. I told all my friends, and we all spent a great summer together. By the end of the summer, I became somewhat anxious, but was ready to face the challenge.



*Dancing on terrace.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Dancing Ballet

I started taking dancing lessons at a very young age. At that time, there were only two or three dancing studios in Tel Aviv. The most known and respected one was the studio that was owned by the top dancer and choreographer, Gertrude Kraus. She was born in Vienna, Austria and immigrated to Israel in 1935. At the time, she was famous all over Central Europe and was at her peak. She left Europe, as she thought that the Jewish population would be in trouble and would be attacked, and she was not going to take a chance on her life. When she arrived in Palestine, she founded The Folk Opera Dance Company. To make a living, she also opened a ballet studio, which also served as her home. She accepted students starting from the age of five, all the way to adults.

She was a very slim woman of medium height with a flexible body. She walked very erect with a bounce in her step. As a ballet teacher, she was very strict and spoke Hebrew with a heavy German accent. Gertrude ran most of the classes in the same way, no matter the age of the students. The first part of the class was dedicated to barre exercises in front of mirrors that covered every wall in the big room. We wore tight tee shirts, very short white skirts made out of a silky material that swished with every move and pink ballet slippers. At the far end of the room, there was an upright piano played by a female pianist. The second part of the hour was usually dedicated to learning new dance steps. Each lesson always ended with the same waltz, for which we knew all the steps. This way, our frustration with new steps was forgotten.

Gertrude had a lot of energy and a loud voice, which was full of authority. She clapped her hands constantly, according to the tempo of the music, and counted at the same time. At times, she used a beautiful cane, tapping on the floor while counting. It kept our energy level very high and helped us to concentrate. The studio was on the ground floor with very large windows on the side. Sometimes, kids would come around to peek in, but one yell from Gertrude would chase them away.

The studio was located on Frug Street. It was a small, quiet street, located a block away from Dizengoff, a busy main street. There were buses going in both directions, connecting the south of the city with the north. There were many sidewalk cafes, fabric stores selling imported and domestic fabrics to dressmakers and women who sewed their own clothes, shoe stores and jewelry stores. I had to take a bus from home, twice a week after school, to go to ballet lessons. For a while, my Mom would go with me on the bus and would wait for me in one of the cafes or in a park across the street from the studio. She didn't think I was old enough to go by myself. She was mostly worried about me crossing Dizengoff Street because it had no traffic lights.



*Dancing on terrace.*



*Dancing on terrace.*

When I was about eight years old, after learning how to cross the street by looking right and left first, I convinced my parents that I could go by myself. I was not aware that my mother followed me to see if I was careful. I learned about it when, one day, I didn't look both ways and a bus driver honked at me. Suddenly, my mother showed up next to me, scolding me. After a while, I was able to go again by myself. I made sure to be careful, not knowing if my mother was hiding and watching me. I tried to spot her, but was never successful. A lesson was learned.

As we grew older, our lessons were scheduled later in the day. We felt grown up seeing the younger girls in the dressing room with their mothers. It was a very small room, maybe 15 feet by 12 feet. It had one small window and wooden benches along the walls. There was a ten-minute break between classes. It was a very hectic and noisy time because the outgoing class and the incoming class shared the room at the same time. The room smelled of sweat and oranges. Most of us brought water and whatever citrus fruit was in season to eat after the workout.

Rivka, Gertrude's loyal secretary and good friend, was always in the dressing room, acting like a traffic manager to make sure that everyone moved in and out quickly. Rivka was a very nice woman, sweet but stern, with a smile on her round face. Rivka took care of all the financial matters, dealing with the students and their mothers and all the scheduling of lessons and performances. She was Gertrude's watchdog. Gertrude was very short-tempered and impatient. She considered herself the "queen" of ballet and acted accordingly. She didn't want to deal with any business matter or with the parents. Whenever there was any problem or complaint, the person was directed immediately to Rivka. Once a month, when parents were allowed to observe a lesson, Gertrude would talk to the mothers for a few minutes. She would quickly tell them about their daughters and their standings. I always could tell by the mothers' facial expressions what they were told. My mother was always smiling, and I knew that she got a good report.

The school grew in folds, and we had to move a few times to larger studios. I always had very fond memories of the first studio. As we got older, we kept learning new and more complicated steps. With the new steps and moves, Gertrude created different dances using wonderful ballet music. She was very innovative, and the end-of-the-year performances were always different. I was always very happy going to ballet lessons. When I danced, I was completely into the music and the dance, never thinking of anything else. I still feel the same way watching wonderful dancers on stage in any dance performance. I almost feel myself in their bodies, as if I'm dancing with them. This feeling stays with me well after the performance, until I go home and fall asleep.

I knew I was good. Gertrude would always appoint me to be the first dancer in line for the other girls to follow. In one of our lessons, we were introduced to a new dance. It must have been around 1944 or 1945, while World War II was going on. Gertrude was telling us that she choreographed a dance of people trying to get out of prison and running for their freedom.

At this point in time, I was dancing with an older and more advanced group of girls than in my former class. When Rivka, asked me if I would agree to switch to an even older group, I hesitated for a moment, but accepted the offer. I knew it wouldn't be an easy situation for me, because my contemporaries would be jealous and the older girls will not accept me. I was the youngest in class and I was correct in my assumptions, but I never complained. It was a much better class for me, and I loved the challenge. I also knew that being in this class, I would have a quicker opportunity to learn how to dance on my toes.

Gertrude set up a group of girls in line, holding on to each other, creating a human wall. These were the least talented of the group, and I was part of it. I got very angry, but didn't say a word. I was waiting to see the end of the setup. Five girls were left who were supposed to try and break through the wall.

When she walked away to speak to the pianist, I released myself from the human wall, followed Gertrude and said, "I am much better than any of the girls that you put me with and even better than some of the girls that you chose to break through the human wall. I don't want to be part of the wall. I want to dance the part of a person who is trying to be free."

She answered in anger, "Go back to your position. I am not changing anything."



*After dancing solo at a wedding with my mother standing on the right*

I burst out crying, ran out of the studio, took all my belongings and went home. My mother was very surprised to see me. She asked, “How come you are crying and home so early? What happened?”

I told her, and I could see that she couldn’t believe what she heard.

She said to me, “You should have waited until the end of the class and spoken to Rivka and eventually to Gertrude, but not run away like this.”

I answered with anger, “But I should be where I belong, as I am better than some of the others.” I then locked myself in the bathroom. I stayed there for a long time crying and wouldn’t come out. My mother kept knocking on the door and asking me to come out, but I wouldn’t.

About a half an hour after my arrival at home, our doorbell rang. My mother opened the door and I heard Rivka’s hysterical voice, “Is Miriam home?”

My mother answered that I was. Rivka came running from the dance studio because we didn’t have a phone. I could hear her sigh of relief through the bathroom door. She sat down and my mother gave her a glass of water.

Rivka said, “She cannot do it to me again because we are responsible for the girls. Do you know why she ran away?”

“Let me have Miriam tell you,” said my mother, as she knocked on the bathroom door and asked me to come out and tell Rivka why I ran away.

I came out still very upset, but no longer crying. In a very angry voice, I told her my reason and added, “I was moved to this group to advance and not to be held back.”

“But you are the youngest. You just started with them and Gertrude couldn’t help herself. She had to give this role to the older girls. Please come back and please don’t ever run away like this, as I almost got a heart attack.”

I promised her that I would because I really liked her a lot. Then, I apologized. I said that I would not come back right away, but eventually. I stayed away for about two lessons. For those two lessons, I went back, but never entered the studio. I peeked through the window, making sure that no one saw me. I was convinced that I could do a better job. It hurt me not to be dancing, but I needed some time. I told my mother the truth, so she knew what I was doing. She didn't get angry with me, but she hoped that I wouldn't stay out too long; that I'd go back to the ballet lessons, as I loved dancing so much. She needn't have worried. It hurt me too much not to go to the lessons. I was also afraid that if I stayed away too long, I would not be able to be part of the end-of-the-year performance.

When I resumed classes, I found myself enjoying myself even more than before. We had to rehearse a lot and Gertrude always had great ideas for new dances. It depended on the age of the girls and, as we got older, our dances became more sophisticated.

One of my favorite dances was the minuet. It was a dance from the 17th and 18th centuries. It originated in the palaces of Europe. The clothing and jewels of the period were a very integral part of the dance. We would be facing each other in the center stage, one row of ladies and one row of men. After recognizing the partner with a slight bow, we would start dancing. The music was always very baroque, so the dancing was slow. As there were no boys, Gertrude would pick who would dance as a man and who would dance as a woman. The slight girls would always be the women, and the bigger ones danced as men. I was always dancing a man's part. That suited me fine, as I couldn't see myself as a dainty dancer. I also liked the male costume, which consisted of long socks covered with three-quarter pants, closed under the knee with a button or a ribbon. We wore a brocade jacket over a ruffled shirt. We also wore wigs of the era. I loved this costume, as it was not as bulky as that of the girls. The girls wore big dresses with a crinoline under their skirts. Their clothes, jewels and wigs were also from the same period.

With time, I became friendly with one of the girls who was the best dancer in the group, Aviva. She had red hair, was always smiling and was very warm. Being friends with her made it easier to endure the other girls' cold shoulder. After a while, the rest of the group warmed up to me and I was very happy. My friend Aviva asked me why I ran out from the studio back then. I made her promise not to tell the others, and she didn't. She did say that I was correct and that, at the time, she couldn't understand why I didn't get the part that I wanted.

Sometime after this episode, the ballet *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was going to be staged at the national theater, Habima. Gertrude was the choreographer. She held an open audition to which dancers came from all over the country. She needed four young girls our age to participate. The whole class auditioned for the roles. My friend Aviva, another girl and my-self were picked from our studio, and a fourth participant was picked from another ballet school. I remember running home very excited. My mother thought it was great and was very happy for me.

When my father came home, I couldn't wait to tell him. He didn't seem too happy. He just smiled and said, "We'll see. I am not sure you should do it. It will take up too much of your time."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. My mother tried to say something about it, but he stopped her immediately. "You can watch the ballet from the audience. I will make sure to get very good tickets," he kept saying.

I started crying, but to no avail. I ran to my friend Aviva's house very upset. She couldn't believe it either. She was so happy that we'd be going together to rehearsals and to perform.

I went to the studio looking for Rivka. I asked her to speak to my parents, and she agreed. So, I asked my parents to come to the studio. They did and, to my surprise, Gertrude was waiting for us. I stayed in the room with them.

"What is the problem Mr. Wachsberger that you wouldn't let Miriam perform?" Gertrude asked.

"I don't mind her taking lessons and I don't mind her being part of the end-of-the-year performance. I just don't want her to start thinking that ballet is her future," he said.

I could see that Gertrude was upset with my father. In a serious tone of voice, she told him, "I think your thinking is wrong, and I know that it would make Miriam very happy if you will change your mind. It is a wonderful experience." He didn't answer. He just thanked her for seeing them, and we all walked out.

I kept going to lessons, but I was uncomfortable, knowing that everyone knew what happened. I told my parents that I would like to switch to another studio. I found another studio called Margalit. I didn't stay there too long because I didn't like it. That studio concentrated mostly on rhythmic exercises, which included a combination of various instructional methods, a lot of gymnastics, acrobatics and some ballet. While I was at Margalit, I started looking for another ballet studio. I heard from some girls about a studio called Mia Arbatarova. I got the address, and went peeking through the first floor window to observe a lesson. I liked what I saw, as it was strictly ballet. Mia's studio was in stiff competition with Gertrude's studio. I thought that it would be a perfect place for me.

Coming home very excited, I said to my parents, "I want to switch to Mia Arbatarova. I went to check it out through the window and liked what I saw. I also have friends who dance there, and they like it a lot."

My father said, "I don't want you to take any more ballet lessons."

My mother looked at him, but didn't say anything. I finished the year at Margalit, hoping that I could persuade my father to change his mind.

A while later, I heard from a friend that she was going to try out for a new ballet school that was going to be started by a former Russian dancer. On the day of the tryouts, I snuck my ballet slippers, pointe shoes and short white skirt in my school bag. I told my parents that I was going to my friend's house after school. In the afternoon, we went to the audition. We were very surprised to see a large group of girls, of all ages, waiting in line. The door opened and we all went into a large dressing room to change. We then went into a very large hall. One after another, we gave our name and address to a young woman who was the school's owner's assistant. Each of us received a number and we auditioned. After the last round, the owner told his assistant his impressions in Russian, so we couldn't understand.

The head of the school was a very tall, handsome man with blond hair. He was very Slovak looking. He walked very erect and all his movements were those of a dancer. He told us that he would run the school like dance schools are run in Russia. It will be six hours a day of dancing and two hours a day of studying. He will have teachers in all subjects and we would not have to go to a regular school. It sure sounded wonderful to us. We were also told that in order to run the school the right way, there was no room for too many pupils, which is the reason for the audition. He told us that in a few days we would get a letter at home, letting us know if we were accepted or rejected.

This is how the audition went: At first, he asked us to stand in the middle of the room. He started us with basic positions. He then asked us to plie (bend), tendu (stretch) and eleve (rise). These movements are usually performed holding on to a ballet barre, but there were no barres or mirrors here. It made it very difficult to follow his orders.

After doing the basic movements, we were told to line up in one corner of the room. We had to follow each other in different jumps, like attitude, jete and arabesque in a diagonal line to the opposite corner of the room. He had us finish the audition in a pirouette. It is very difficult, as you have to spin on one leg while the other leg is lifted and held against the spinning leg.

The girls who had pointe shoes had to do a lot of the movements on their toes, which was very challenging. I felt good doing it because it was one of my favorite movements. As we were twirling, we could hear the head of the school speaking Russian to his assistant who wrote down whatever she was told.

All of us in the group received flyers and information about the "Alexandrovich School of Ballet." The information included his philosophy about the learning of ballet. The schedule of six hours of dance a day and two hours of regular school hours was explained as a way to train and develop future ballerinas. Tuition, which was very high, was spelled out and had to be paid in full up front.

We all walked out of the studio very excited. Deep down, I knew that my parents would never let me go to this school, but I decided to give it a try. I remember waiting for my father to come home in the evening and have supper before saying anything. When both my parents were sitting on the terrace together, I told them about the afternoon. They both didn't say a word and just listened to every detail of the test that we had to go through. When I was finished, I took out the papers with all the information.

My father looked at me and said, "This is the end of any ballet lessons for you. I will always get you tickets to

see performances, but you are not to dance anymore.”

My mother looked at me with a very angry face and said, “I agree with Abba. You will not get out of school and you will not become a ballerina.”

At that point, I didn't even cry. Reading beforehand the school's philosophy and tuition, I knew I had no chance. Though, I felt good about giving it a try. My friend and I received a letter of acceptance. We found out that not everyone was accepted, so that made us feel good. The school never opened. None of the parents agreed to let their daughters join.

As they promised, my parents bought me a ticket to every dance company that came to Tel Aviv from all over the world. To some of the ballets, I went with my parents, and to some I went by myself. I was appeased by all this and never complained about not going to dance lessons anymore. My mother and father promised me that they will find something else to take the place of ballet and soon they did.



*On vacation with parents on the Kinert.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summers in Kfar Vitkin and Tzfat

When my father owned his icebox factory, he had a few distributors in different parts of the country. The distributor delivered the ice-boxes to their customers from a central warehouse. Some distributors were paid in advance for extra iceboxes before they sold them, in order to allow for quick deliveries. One of them lived in Kfar Vitkin, where he and his family had a large farm.

Kfar Vitkin was a community of individual, independent small farms that was founded in the 1930's. Each family owned their own home, farm, and land. The marketing of their products, whether milk, fruits or vegetables, was communal. Everything was brought to a main warehouse, from where it was distributed to the different markets. The profits were distributed individually to the farmers, according to how much they brought in to the main distribution center.

Right before the summer of 1947, my father asked me: "Would you like to spend the summer with a farming family in Kfar Vitkin? I think it would be a wonderful experience and a wonderful way to spend the summer."

"Absolutely, I answered. "Who is this family? Do you know them?"

"I will give you more information in a few days, I just needed to know if you were interested," my father answered.

Two days later, my father came back with the information. He sat me down and told me the following:

"I have a distributor for my ice boxes in Kfar Vitkin. He lives there, with his wife, a daughter, who is hardly home, and a teenage son. They have a farm with a large chicken coop and a number of cows, right outside their house. They also grow their own vegetables. In addition, they own tomato fields and orange groves. You would have the opportunity to try working in all of these places. You can stay with them as long as you like. What do you think?"

"I love the idea. Just to see firsthand how farmers live and work is exciting. The life in a small village is so different from city life, and I would love to experience it. By the way Abba, do you have to pay for me? and, if so, how much?"

"Yes I am paying. I am giving the distributor three ice boxes for free as my payment," he chuckled.

"This is all I am worth?" I asked smiling. Before he could answer, I hugged, kissed and thanked him.

Once the school year ended, I packed my clothes and was ready to go. All I took with me were



*With my parents on the Yarkon River in Tel-Aviv.*

shorts, blouses and a skirt, and the halutzke (pioneer-style blouse) that I made myself at school. As always, I made sure that I had my bathing suit because the village was not too far from the sea, if going by car.

Before I left, my mother told me that I must always help with house chores, make my bed, do my own laundry, and assist with anything else that was needed. She explained that the woman of the house, in addition to doing housework, shopping and cooking, had to help on the farm. All this was done without any hired help. I assured her that she didn't have to worry about it, as I do understand.

On the first Shabbat after school ended, my father drove me to Kfar Vitkin. I was excited, but also somewhat apprehensive. I was going to stay with strangers and did not know what exactly to expect. In my head, I tried to let go of this worry, as I knew that I wanted to give this experience a chance, and so I told myself that it will all work out.

As we entered the village of Kfar Vitkin, I was fascinated to see that the main street had no stores or cafes. It consisted of small one-story houses with red roofs, large trees and gardens and a school. Passing cross streets, we saw signs leading to a central warehouse, a large enclosed food market and a large social hall that served the community for meetings, dances, lectures, performances and the like. Outside that building, under large trees and surrounded by flowers, there were benches and large picnic tables. At the end of the street, we made a left turn and stopped in front of a small house shaded by very large, old trees with a hammock slung between two of those trees. In front of the house, there was a low fence. We entered through a squeaky gate.

It was a warm day and all the windows and the entrance door of the house were wide open. My father rang the bell and his friend came to the door. He was a tall, big man, on the heavy side, and he had a big smile on his face. He welcomed us and introduced us to his wife, who was sitting on the sofa reading the paper. She was also a tall woman with dark hair that was pulled back. She was wearing a black skirt and a white blouse. When she saw us, she got up to shake our hands.

In the dining room, a table was set with homemade cake and cookies, fruits, nuts and cold drinks. The woman invited us to join them at the table, as it was mid morning, between a very early breakfast and



*Summer in Kfar Vitkin.*

the midday meal. Their daughter and son also joined us and I was asked many questions. They were all friendly and gave me a good feeling. I noticed that my father was watching me carefully, trying to evaluate my feelings. As we were eating, I smiled at him to let him know that I felt comfortable. I was told that I will be one of the family and help them in all the different jobs of the farm, the groves and the tomato fields. The head of the family also told me that if any of the jobs were not to my liking, I would not have to do them. I felt good hearing that. I thanked him and told them that I am happy to have the opportunity to spend time with their family. On the way out, I told my father that I am happy and have a feeling that I will enjoy my stay.

Once my father left, the son, Yehudah, who was sixteen, took me on a tour of the farm. Our first stop was a very large chicken coop. I entered with him, and he showed me how to feed the chickens, give them water and collect the eggs. It seemed easy. There was one big rooster in the coop that Yehudah said was watching out for all the chickens, and is the one who crows very early every morning. When we both went in and out of the chicken coop, none of the chickens paid any attention to us. I thought they looked cute. They made a lot of noise together. The chicken coop was cleaned every day, except on Shabbat. I told Yehudah that I would like to try this job as my first one, the next day.

The next morning, I told the farmer that I could take care of the chickens by myself, as I was shown how to do it, and he agreed. I opened the door to the chicken coop, feeling happy, when suddenly I felt the rooster jumping on me and crowing. I got panicky and ran out of the chicken coop shaken. I ran to the house, not understanding what happened. The farmer laughed and explained that I was a stranger to the rooster, whose job it is to protect his hens. The farmer suggested that I go into the coop for the first few days accompanied by one of them, and the problem will stop, which it did. After a few days, the rooster apparently finally recognized me. I was ignored by him and never attacked again. I loved that job. I was amazed to learn about this protective behavior, as I never knew about it before.

I liked doing everything that I was asked to do in the chicken coop. Luckily, I did not have to clean it, as one of the men that helped the farmer with different jobs, took care of it. I thought I was fortunate, as it was not the most pleasant job.

After we finished in the chicken coop, Yehudah and I went to see the cowshed. At midday, when the

temperature was high, the cows stayed inside the barn. When weather permitted, they went out to the corral outside the barn. They had quite a few cows that had to be milked three times a day, starting very early in the morning when the sun was just beginning to rise in the sky. I wasn't sure that I would like doing this job, but I was ready to try. I watched the cows being milked. The farmer sat on a very low stool on one side of the cow. With alternating hands, he repeatedly pulled on the cow's four udders. I was amazed to see how still the cow stood while the milk was flowing into a large pail. When the farmer asked me if I was ready to try, I accepted his offer. I was fearful and very nervous, but I took his place on the stool. He took my hands and showed me the right way of milking. He told me to relax and not to be afraid. He explained that the cow will sense my nervousness and might react. I breathed deeply and tried to relax. The farmer let go of my hands. I was on my own, holding my breath, when suddenly the cow tried to kick me. I got scared and immediately jumped off the stool with a cry.

"I can't do it. I will only take care of the chickens."

The farmer laughed and it took him a few minutes to calm down the cow and get her ready to be milked again.

On my walk with Yehudah to the cowshed, we passed many square bales of hay mounted on top of each other. He explained that they were used to feed the cows. He also told me that it was fun to climb on top of the bales and to stay there for a while. It was a favorite place for teenagers, like him, to spend time. Couples would climb up there for privacy. To me, it just seemed like a fun thing to do. One day, he helped me to climb on it and we sat there for a few minutes. It was the only time that I did that, as I wasn't old enough and the one girl I befriended was not interested. She was my age and lived next door. At times, I went with her and some of her friends for walks, or to the community house to dance, mostly after the evening meal. We also went to movies that were shown outside the community house, free of charge. My friend's family had a car and they would take me to the beach. The family I stayed with never went, so it was wonderful that I could go, as I missed the beach a lot.

During the day, I was very busy working. The first place I went with the farmer was to one of their orange groves. Another day, he took me to one of their tomato fields. They employed a group of male workers to help them with the work at all their locations.

At the orange grove, I wore an apron with a large pocket in the front. The farmer handed me a small stool so I'd be able to reach the oranges. He stood next to me and taught me how to decide when an orange was ripe, mostly by looking at its color. They had to be picked gently and placed in the apron pocket without being squished. Then, when the pocket was full, they had to be transferred very gently to a large round straw basket on the floor. He explained that in order to get a good price when sold, the peels couldn't be damaged. Once the baskets were filled, they were loaded up on a truck driven by one of workers and taken immediately to a central warehouse.

My arms quickly started to ache, and I had a hard time picking. I was also nervous that I might damage the oranges. I was working extra slow, as I was busy watching the other workers. It was a very beautiful sight watching all the others standing on their stools, with white aprons, picking the oranges. When I told the farmer about my arms he told me that I would get used to it, which I knew. I was not sure if this job would be my choice, as I still had to go with him to the tomato field. He told me that we were going there the next day. I was very excited, as tomatoes were my most favorite vegetable.

We went early in the morning. There too, there was a group of his workers. Picking tomatoes turned out to be a good job for me. I went every day, only in the mornings. I found it easier and my arms did not hurt. I sat on the floor, which I liked. Sometimes I picked while on my knees, whereas at other times I had to lie down in order to get the tomatoes that were hanging low on the vine, hidden by the leaves. Here too, the farmer sat on the floor next to me and showed me how to tell if they were ripe for picking. Once picked, I put them in a straw basket next to me that I dragged along while I moved. At times, I had to stand up and stretch my legs. Once the basket was filled and I came to the end of a line, I called for the supervisor who picked it up in exchange for an empty basket.

This was a different picture than in the orange grove. All that was seen here were shoulders and heads.

Only a few people picked while standing with a bent body. They were all very fast and I did not try to keep up. I loved the fresh smell of the tomatoes. At times, I picked one, wiped it with my shirt and ate it. This was my biggest pleasure, as it tasted so good.

Picking tomatoes was my daily job in the mornings, while in the late afternoons I worked in the chicken coop and helped the farmer's wife with chores. I used to go with her shopping. Sometimes we walked, but if she had a lot of errands, we would ride the horse and carriage. One day, I asked her if she would teach me how to handle the wagon. She laughed and told me that she would ask Yehudah to teach me, which he did. I learned quickly, which made us both happy. I was good at it, and at times I was sent shopping. My most favorite job was to take the milk, which was stored in large metal cans, to a central cold building to be processed and readied for sale all over the country.

I would wait in the wagon, while the cans were downloaded and taken immediately into the building. The full milk containers were replaced with empty ones and I had to wait for a receipt. Most of the time, I took the early evening delivery and only once in a while, the midday delivery. I used to feel happy and proud doing this job.

Because of the summer heat, all work started between six and seven a.m. There was a short break around ten and work stopped between eleven and twelve, depending on the heat level. Then, no one went out until four p.m., when work started again and continued until seven p.m. The main meal was served at lunchtime. Everyone laid down for a rest after lunch, and the village was very quiet.

My favorite place to rest was outside, on a hammock, in the shade under the large trees. I was the only one who was ready to do it, as there were many flies out there, which I ignored. I usually covered my arms and face with a piece of light fabric, so I wouldn't be disturbed. I was exhausted from the morning's work, so this siesta was very welcome.

I loved being in Kfar Vitkin and having all these experiences. I was going to stay to the end of the summer, but my plans changed. One day, the farmer told me that I had a message from my father. There were many rumors that Israel expected a big attack by the Arabs. My mother, who was on vacation in Haifa, was cutting it short and was going to pick me up and take me home. I was very upset, but had no choice about the matter. I did not know exactly when she was coming. I knew she would have to come by bus, as my father had our car in Tel Aviv.

A day after I was told that my mother was coming to pick me up, I was by myself riding the horse and wagon that was filled with empty milk cans. A bus was coming and I moved to the side of the road to let it pass. Suddenly, I heard my name called and saw my mother waving a kerchief through an open window of the bus. I was not happy, but she was. I went to the bus station and waited for her to get off the bus. When she came over, she was laughing and crying at the same time. A young man helped her with her suitcase and she climbed to sit next to me in the carriage.

"I saw the wagon through my open window. I never imagined it was you. When the bus got closer and I saw the red kerchief on your head, I realized it was you. I couldn't believe what I saw," she continued bubbling. "I can't believe this is my city girl."

"Yes it is. These are the clothes I wear everyday. I never wore the skirt or even the halouzke. I only wear shorts like all the other kids. Ima, must I go home now? Can't I stay until the end of the summer, as we agreed?" I asked.

"No. You have to go home with me. You know there are many attacks all over the country, and the rumors are that they will get to be more widespread. Everyone needs to be with their own family, without having to take care of others. It is not fair to the host family. I am so happy that you had such a wonderful experience," she said.

By the time we arrived at the house, everyone was getting ready for supper. They were happy to see my mother, and I realized at that moment that my mother was right. The farmer's wife immediately set another plate for my mother.

While we were eating and talking, their neighbor from across the street came in. After greeting everyone he said to me, "Miriam, the cow is going to give birth this evening. I promised you that I will tell you when because you wanted to watch. You have time to finish the food and you don't have to rush."

Once we finished eating and helped to clean up, a cot was put in my room for me to sleep on, as my mother was staying for the night and would use the bed. We were leaving by bus early in the morning.

I told my mother that I was going across the street and that she does not have to go with me.

“Don’t go,” she said. “It is not a pleasant sight. Stay here.” Halfway through the door, I said that I was curious, and if she would like she could join me. She did, and we hurried across the street. We went directly to the cowshed, where the cow was lying on the floor on her side. The farmer was there and one of his sons was next to him to provide help. At this point, the cow started to push.

After a short while, the farmer said, “I see the calf’s head coming forward. Hold the cow’s legs apart so it will be easier for the calf to be pushed out.” The son followed his father’s instructions. The calf slid out, with the farmer’s hands holding first his head and then his body. The cow was covered with sweat. After a short while, the calf stood up. It took a few steps and bent down to lick his mother. Then, the cow stood up and the calf went to her udders for milk. I was so happy that I was able to watch it from beginning to end. It looked like a miracle to me.

I thanked the farmer for allowing me watch this birth and went back with my mother to our farmer’s house. On the way, I said, “I saw you turning around and not watching this miracle. Why did you do that?”

“I never watched it when I grew up either. I don’t like to see it and that was why I didn’t think you should watch it either,” she answered.

“Ima, is this the way children are born?” I asked. “Yes,” she answered. And that was the end of that exchange. I realized that she felt very uneasy.

The next morning, we had breakfast with the farmer and his wife before we left. I thanked them and told them how much I enjoyed living with them. I loved learning about life on the farm and how much hard work it takes. I also told them that they were the nicest people to be with and they made me feel very welcome.

“Miriam, we would love to have you back anytime. You were a hard worker and became one of us. Sorry you have to leave early,” the farmer told me.

“I hope I will,” I answered. We hugged and kissed, and with tears running down my face I walked with my mother to the bus station.

Unfortunately, I never went back to stay, but after the War of Independence my father took me there for a visit.

## **Tzfat**

Tzfat (Safed) is located in the north of Israel, in the upper Galilee. It is the highest city in Israel (Elevation of almost 3,000 feet). Since the 16th century, Tzfat was considered one of Judaism’s holy cities, along with Jerusalem, Hebron and Tveria (Tiberias). It is still a center of Kab-balah (Jewish mysticism). Many important rabbis and scholars lived in Tzfat. It was the center of Torah learning in the northern part of the country. It was settled by a few hundred very orthodox Jewish families, with many children and old people. There were many more Arabs living there than Jews. Tzfat is surrounded by beautiful high hills, covered with olive trees. The surroundings are very scenic and beautiful. Through the years, many artists lived there, as well, and the place has many galleries. Because of its high elevation, summer days are warm, evening and nights are very cool and it often snows in the winter. It is a popular summer resort.

After my brother Isaac was born, and the War of Independence was over, it became a favorite place for my parents to go with us on vacation for two weeks in the summer. There were many small hotels in old stone buildings that were originally built centuries ago. Most of the buildings were two or three stories high with very steep steps. The rooms were large and had very high ceilings. Families occupied some of the buildings and some were homes to various yeshivas (orthodox day schools). Two modern hotels were built in the mid-forties. They were modern structures, constructed entirely from cement. These two hotels had the latest modern innovations, including heating systems for the winter. The buildings look out of place but were welcomed. One of the hotels was on the main street of the city, facing the beautiful scenery. The other hotel was on top of a mountain, Mount Canaan, ten minutes away from the city. These two new hotels were much more expensive than the small ones,



*On vacation with my parents, Zafat, with brother, Isaac.*



*Zafat in winter with mother and father.*

almost double the price.

Before my parents started to go to Tzfat regularly, my parents and I went there for a few days to see and learn more about this part of the country. We stayed at the Herzlia Hotel owned and operated by two brothers, who my parents became friends with and kept in touch with for many years. The hotel was in a remodeled old home, located in the center of the main street. It was hidden from the street, as it was set back. There was one flight of stairs to climb and then one had to go through a yard shaded by very old large trees, to get to the main entrance hall, lobby and dining room. The yard was full of many folding, fabric lounge chairs, and cards and chess tables, for use by hotel guests. All meals were served at the hotel, including coffee and cake, which was served between 4 and 5 p.m.

The first day after breakfast, we went exploring in the city. Because Tzfat was built on hills, there were many areas with many steps, to make walking easier. My father, who had just gotten his first camera, a Leica, which is an expensive German camera, was very busy and excited to snap pictures. We went back to the hotel for lunch and for our nap. In the afternoon, we went to a small forest, in the middle of the city, at its highest point, which was called the Metzuda (Fortress). It gave us a most beautiful 360-degree view of the entire area. The next morning we took a tour in a taxi with other people all over the Galilee. We visited many points of interests. The taxi driver, Avram, was also a tour guide. He was very knowledgeable, warm and friendly and we learned a lot about the Galilee and its history. After supper, we took a walk on the main street, which was very crowded, as walking was the only activity available in Tzfat, in the evenings. After sundown, it became very chilly and we all had to wear sweaters. It was unimaginable for the temperature to drop so low in mid-summer when it was so very hot in the rest of the country. It made the nights very comfortable to sleep, even though air-conditioning was not available yet. The only other place that was known for dry weather and cool nights was Jerusalem. Therefore these two resorts were very popular in the summer.

On the last day in Tzfat, we took a quick ride to Mount Canaan, which was scarcely populated. There was only one hotel up there. There were, however, many forests and stunning views covering the entire north, all the way up to the Syrian borders.

When my parents told me, one summer, that they made arrangements to go for two weeks to Tzfat, to the Herzlia hotel, I was very up-set. I told them that it was not a place for someone my age (I was around ten at the time), and I would be very bored. My father told me that he will arrange activities for me and that I would probably meet other kids my age.

When we arrived, we found out from the owners that I was the only kid. I was very upset and walked

away from my parents.

“I am not going to sit in the garden and read books with all the adults. Please let me take the bus back, and I will stay with my cousins,” I said. But they refused to let me do that.

“Would you like to go tomorrow morning on a tour of the area with the taxi company we used a few years ago?” my father asked. I answered positively. It was late afternoon and my father and I went to the tour company office to sign up for the next morning. When we entered the office, we saw Avram, the same driver we went with a few years before. He signed us up, and my father told him that he would like me to go on the tour by myself, and he agreed. I was thrilled. Avram picked me up at 9 a.m., and I was the first person in the cab. He told me to sit in the seat next to him. Once he picked up all the other passengers, from the different hotels, he told everyone that I was his niece and he was responsible for me for the entire summer. I thought he was smart to explain why I was sitting next to him, as I knew everyone was wondering about it. I remember turning my head away from the passengers when they came into the cab, as I knew how they felt about it. They must have been upset that the most desirable seat in the cab was occupied by a little girl. Once he explained the situation, the tension that was there was gone and everyone was very friendly to me.

The first stop was an overlook, located on the main street, from where we could see most of the town and its surroundings. Avram started talking about the ancient history of the city. He quickly went on to talk about the battle over the city, between the Arab and Jewish populations, during the War of Independence, which lasted for a few months. There was a small number of soldiers that were stationed in Tzfat to protect the meager Jewish population, which consisted mostly of old people and the many children born to the very orthodox families. The Jewish community was very small compared to the large Arab population. They also faced a large army of soldiers from Syria and Iraq. The Arabs were equipped with a large amount of the latest weapons against the Israelis who had a very small amount of old weapons. The British mandate was coming to an end and the British army handed the Arabs all the strategic high points of the city. Tzfat was getting ready to surrender. Thirty-five soldiers were sent to help, carrying a new weapon, the Davidka (Little David). It was a homemade Israeli mortar that was used in Tzfat and Jerusalem only. It did not do much damage, as it missed most of the targets it aimed for, but it made an extremely loud noise.

There were two stories circulating around about the Davidka and its contribution to the war. The first story is one I've known since I was very young. When the Israelis decided to use the weapon, they gave the orders over the walkie-talkies. “Shoot Alef Bet.” The Alef Bet (AB) stood for Ain Brera (no choice). The Arabs who were listening in on the walkie-talkies thought it was code for Atom Bomb. Therefore, the Arab soldiers who were occupying the Metzuda ran away. The word that the Jews have the Atom Bomb passed quickly through the entire Arab population. They deserted the city in droves and left Tzfat to the Israelis.

The other story I heard later on. The Arab women and the Jewish women on late afternoons would go to the market and yell at each other. The Arab women knew some Yiddish for dealing with the Jews, and the Jewish women knew how to yell back in Arabic. Mostly they cursed at each other. When they heard the noise of the Davidka the first time, an Arab woman asked in Yiddish:

“Vous is das? (what is it?)”

“An Atom Bomb,” answered a Jewish woman. The word spread quickly and the city was completely emptied of Arabs immediately.

I thought Avram was very smart to start with the two stories, as everyone was very attentive. The Metzuda, was also his first stop. From there, we went to many points of historic import in the upper Galilee, to kibbutzim and beautiful nature spots with rivers running through them.

My father paid Avram to take me on the tour every day for that week. After about the third trip, listening to Avram explanations, he told me, “From now on, I want you to tell the passengers what I tell them. Do not be afraid because I will help you and we will basically do it together.” I wasn't sure about it, but did not want to refuse Avram. After starting doing it the next day I enjoyed it very much and felt very important. The only day that Avram did not go and I stayed at the hotel with my parents and brother was Friday.

On Friday night, the Shabbat candles were lit at the hotel and blessings over the wine and challah were made in the dining room before dinner. On Shabbat morning, the main street in front of the hotel was

very quiet, as no cars were allowed to be on the road. Groups of people were on their way to synagogue for Shabbat morning prayers. Most people were walking in the middle of the road. To me, it looked almost like a demonstration on the part of the orthodox for the secular Jews; showing them how to fulfill the rules of keeping the Shabbat to its fullest.

Our plan was to stay at the hotel for a two-week vacation. The hotel was not completely full during the week. By Friday noontime, however, every room was occupied ahead of Shabbat. Breakfast was available in the dining room buffet style and was served for a longer time than during midweek, in order to give the guests a chance to sleep later. There were only cold dishes, vegetables, fruits, cheeses, different herrings and all kind of cakes laid out on large platters. The only eggs available were cold hard-boiled, as no cooking was allowed. Coffee and water for tea was kept hot in large containers that had been prepared before Shabbat started.

Waiters served lunch, which was the main meal of the day. Therefore, everyone had to be in the dining room at the same time. Every table and chair was taken. It seemed that the hotel did not hire enough waiters to serve, so lunch took a very long time. My father was getting restless and angry. He kept saying in anger, "I didn't come here to sit for hours in the dining room."

My mother tried to calm him down. It worked for a very short time but he finally, stood up and said, "I am leaving, I had enough."

We stayed and finished eating. It took over two hours in the dining room. Afterwards, we went up to the room for a long rest, expecting my father to be there. My mother had some food for him, thinking he might be hungry. He was not in the room. We were surprised and somewhat uncomfortable. My brother and I asked my mother, "Ima, where do you think Abba is?"

"He probably went for a walk," she answered.

The three of us fell asleep. When we woke up, we were surprised to see that my father was not back. We went down to the reception and asked one of the partners, Moshe, if he saw my father. He said that he did not. By six p.m., not having heard from him made us panicky. We sat in the small lobby, not wanting to leave in case he walked in. Finally, my mother got my brother and I to wait outside in the garden. It was after eight p.m. and dark outside. Shabbat was over and many of the guests were leaving.

Suddenly Moshe came out and told my mother, "Your husband just called. He is okay. He is at the Dafna Hotel in Tveria and will stay there to the end of the week. He gave me hell for not having good service and not being ready for a large crowd on the weekend. He said he will call again in the morning to speak to you."

We were shocked. My mother said to Moshe, "I must go home tomorrow morning. I have no money to pay you for last week and the next week. You will have to lend me some money to go home. Once I get home I will sent you the money."

"No, Mrs. Wachsberger. You stay here as you planned. I don't worry about the money. Please stay with the children."

My mother agreed to stay until Thursday instead of staying over Shabbat. We went back to our room not understanding my father's behavior. My mother looked in the closet and drawers to find out that he did not take any of his clothes with him. Apparently he went directly to our car and drove to Tveria. He called the hotel on Sunday morning to speak to my mother. She was very upset with him and let him know it. When she asked him how he was managing without his clothes, he told her that he bought some to carry him over. She told him we were leaving to go back home on Thursday and told him to come home too. He told her to stay for Shabbat in Tzfat, but she refused. He told her that he'd be home on Friday, which he was. The atmosphere that Shabbat at home was very tense, and I was very happy to go out to my scout meeting.

My father loved the Dafna Hotel, which was owned and run by a family. For many winters, he used to go to the hotel for two weeks. He became part of the owner's family. Whenever he came, they would reserve for him his favorite room. In Tveria, the winters were much warmer than in Tel Aviv. He also was able to take hot mineral cure baths, which made him feel better, as he had a bad case of arthritis. At home, he tried to help himself with exercises that he did religiously every morning to keep his body agile. He also had daily massages with a masseur named Zigi, someone we all became friends with and got to know his family, as well. Those massages helped him, and there were times when he went to see Zigi twice a day.

While I was in the army, I went to Tveria once to spend a Shabbat with my father. Most couples in those years did not go on vacations together. When I came to the hotel on Friday, there were red roses left for me by the management in my father's room, which I shared with him. I was the youngest guest that weekend and they wanted to make me happy. I loved it and felt very spoiled. Although the owners were orthodox, they did not mind that my father and I went traveling in his car on Shabbat.

On Saturday night, after Shabbat, my father and I went dancing in a very big hotel, which had a beautiful outside patio. They had a large orchestra that played dancing music there. I made sure to wear a red dress that my father loved. He was a great dancer and loved to do fancy steps and put on all kinds of facial expressions. I went along with him and loved it. We did not miss a dance and had a great time.

At one point, getting off the dance floor, another couple stopped us. The other man and my father recognized each other after many years of not seeing each other.

"Please meet my daughter Miriam," my father said.

"If this is what you call it, it's okay with me," he said, looking me over from head to toe. My father laughed, bid him goodbye, and we both walked away laughing hysterically. We stayed at the café, until the orchestra stopped playing. We had a most wonderful time. We left very early Sunday morning, after breakfast. It was a four-hour ride back home.

The next day at supper, my mother said:

"I need to tell you a funny story. I was walking on Dizengoff street to meet a friend. On the way, I met a woman that I knew. She stopped me and told me that she had to tell me something important. I could not figure out what it could be, because I hardly had anything to do with her. She told me that she heard that my husband was seen in a cafe in Tveria dancing all evening with a very young woman and they left together for the night. They were very good dancers and had a wonderful time. It looked like they had a close relationship. He introduced the young woman as his daughter but he was not believed."

"What did you say to this woman?" my father asked.

"I said, 'Oh really?' with a smile. 'Did she wear a sexy red dress?'"

"How did you know?" the woman said.

"I know," I said. Then, after a pause, I added, 'because she is our daughter.'"

The woman said her goodbye quickly and walked away.



*Ship with Holocaust survivors on the way to Israel .*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER SIX

### Living Through the War of Independence

The British ruled Palestine, which was one of their many colonies, from 1917 to 1948. They kept a relative peace between the Arabs and the Jews. Many roads, oil refineries, government buildings and army camps were built in different parts of the country. Through the years, there were many discussions in the British Parliament concerning immigration of Holocaust survivors and the establishment of a Jewish state next to a Palestinian state.

In World War II, Hitler's army attacked Britain and they fought them back vigorously with their army and air force. Many of the young Jewish men living in Palestine expressed a strong desire and willingness to join the British army in their fight against the Germans. Some of the young people volunteered to the regular army and served together with the British soldiers. Others belonged to the Jewish Brigade, consisting only of Jewish soldiers from Palestine. One of them was my uncle Shalom. They wore British uniforms. Their black berets symbolized that the part of the army they belonged to was the Jewish Brigade. Their sleeves were marked with a Jewish star. They went through the same training as the regular army. They engaged in fighting the Germans all over the Middle East and Europe.

My uncle Shalom, who was my father's brother, served in the engineering corps for seven years. He also fought in Italy, Libya and Egypt. Our son-in-law Dan's father was a member of the Haganah, in Palestine. In 1939, he was sent by the Haganah to join the regular British army. He, too, fought all over the Middle East and ended his service in Italy, in 1945, when the war ended. When the Germans began to lose the war, the Jewish Brigade joined with the Anglo-American and Russian armies who went into the death camps to save the survivors.

The war was over on May 8, 1945, and immediately trouble started between the Jewish population of Palestine and the British. The Jewish Brigade had gone into the camps and were horrified to see the death and destruction. They did a lot to help the survivors who trusted them, once they saw the Jewish Star on their sleeves. It was very important to get the survivors to Palestine, to rebuild their lives. The quota for Jews, who were allowed to come to Palestine legally was very low. At the time, the British Foreign Secretary, Bevin, was afraid that having too many Jews in Palestine would overwhelm the Arabs. Therefore, he put many restrictions on immigration. He was also afraid that the Jews in Palestine would rebel against the British, chase them out of Palestine and create their own independent state.

At that point, the Irgun, Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang) and the Haganah organized. The Haganah

and its striking force, the Palmach, were supported by most of the population. They focused on bringing the “illegal immigrants” to the shores of Palestine. They bought old boats that were out of circulation and overloaded them with Holocaust survivors. The boats docked at night, on different beaches, where they were met by locals and disbursed quickly around the different settlements in the country.

After a while, the British wised up to it and started to patrol the waters. When the boats were caught, the survivors were brought to Atlit, a camp near Haifa, where they were held for a long time, behind barbed wires. Once the camp was filled, the illegal immigrants were diverted to newly built camps in Cyprus, where they stayed for many years. It was a terrible situation, as the survivors, who hoped to restart their new life in freedom, found themselves in camps again, denied of freedom.

While all this was happening, the Irgun and Lehi, right wing militant organizations, increased their terrorist attacks against the British. They used explosives to blow up many important, strategic facilities and government offices and killed high-ranking officers. The British were forced to increase their ranks in order to gain control over the terrorists.

Our family, including my aunt Rachel and my uncle Motek, were supporters of Lehi and the Irgun. My father sent the Irgun money to help them buy weapons. My aunt Rachel and my uncle Motek, were actively involved in Lehi and in the Irgun. My uncle went a few times to Europe to bring illegal immigrants. Both my aunt and uncle were also engaged in smuggling weapons. Had they been caught, they would have been thrown into prison.

I remember one day when I walked through the door to their apartment and saw my uncle jumping off the terrace. A few minutes later, British soldiers stormed in and were looking for him. It took about a week or more before he was able to return home. At the same time, another group of soldiers ran up the steps to another apartment and came down with a neighbor who they thought he was a terrorist. He was in prison for about a week or two and finally discharged. It was always very scary to watch these arrests. It felt like we were under constant siege.

Another tactic the British used in order to regain control was to force curfews on the entire population. Some curfews were overnight only, starting at 7:00 p.m. and lasting until 5:00 a.m. Some curfews were over two consecutive days, during which, for a period of two to three hours in the morning, we were allowed to go out shopping, mostly for food. It all depended on how big the terrorists’ attacks were, as to whether the curfews would be short or long. Once the curfew was on, no one was allowed out, not even on the balconies. British tanks patrolled the streets with soldiers pointing their rifles towards the buildings. It was a scary feeling, although we understood why it was happening.

During curfews, my friends and I got bored and restless and wanted to get together. We figured that the safest way of going from one building to another was through the backyards. In order not to be seen from the street, we stopped at the openings between the buildings, watched out for passing tanks and listened to hear if they were nearby. Once we felt safe, we would climb the fences from one yard to another. After a while, the soldiers realized what we were doing. They announced through their loudspeakers that they would shoot at anyone seen in the backyards, which put a stop to that idea.

We were a spunky group of friends and found a new way to aggravate the soldiers, as we hated them. The most popular singer at the time was the beautiful, vibrant Yemenite singer Shoshanah Damari. One of everyone’s favorite songs was about red flowers, growing wild in the fields at springtime, called kalaniot (poppies). Someone changed the words to describe the British soldiers with their red berets in an unflattering way, and the song caught on fire. Every time we heard the tanks approach, we all ran to the open windows and sang very loud for the soldiers to hear. We knew that they did not understand the words, but it was our show of mutiny against curfews. We also sang it when we passed soldiers on the street. After a while, they found out the meaning of the song, and we were ordered to stop singing.

While the curfews were on, we could see soldiers surrounding a building looking for terrorists. Many times, in the middle of a regular (non-curfew) day, we observed similar situations. A street would be blocked to pedestrians and traffic to allow soldiers with guns to surround a building, run in and look for suspected terrorists with their guns drawn. It was a frightening sight, and I always hoped that they would



*Shoshana Damari a very popular singer*

come out empty handed. It was not always the case. Throughout that time, many terrorists were caught and many were hung.

Café Lenchner was the only café on Shenkin Street. All they served was cake, fresh rolls and drinks. The baked goods were made on their premises. The cafe had a very good reputation. It was located about three buildings away from our apartment, on the other side of the street. I was able to see the people who occupied the outside tables. It was a very popular café for all the famous soccer players, mostly from Maccabi. It was known in the street that some of the players were associated in some way with the terrorists' organizations. This café was very often surrounded by the British who would pick up some of the players and take them away. If the British had no proof of any wrongdoing, they players would be back the next day at the café. At times, it took a few days before someone would be back. Because these guys were famous and some of the most popular players in the country, the British had to make sure that they had definite evidence against them. Whenever I saw these arrests, I became very angry and used all the curses I knew, some Hebrew but mostly Arabic ones. We all used more of the Arabic curses because they were more expressive and bad, compared to the Hebrew ones. I always hoped that the people arrested would be back immediately.

Because of the many arrests, all the prisons in the country were filled with Jewish prisoners. The worst prison was in Akko (Acre). It consisted of a few buildings from the seventeenth century. Most hangings of terrorists were done there. Those days were very sad and upsetting. I remember being home, listening to the radio and reading the papers about those hangings and crying hysterically.

Many years later, when we visited Israel with our children and another family, I insisted that we go to visit the prison that had become part museum and part insane asylum. Our guide was excited about this prospect of visiting the prison and arranged everything needed for the visit. When we entered, we expected all the signs to be in English, but were surprised to see that they were in Hebrew only. When we questioned the guide about it,

we were told that the ruling Labor government and the tourist ministry did not want the guides to bring tourists over, only to do so if they were specifically asked.

When a right wing government came into power, it all changed. The signs were changed to English and photos of all the guys that were hung were on display. Also, the tourist ministry began to encourage the guides to bring tourists for a visit and to tell the history of the fight the terrorists fought against the British. I always believed that without this fight, the British would not have left.

It was a very tough visit for all of us, especially the kids, as the place was very dark and depressing. Our guide's and my explanations of what happened there was frightening, but we felt that this part of history was very important and one that people needed to be aware of. It was because of the vicious terrorist groups' attacks that the British could not endure any more and were persuaded to give up their rule. In order to get even with the Jewish population, they were very helpful to the Arabs until their last day in the country. Our guide told us that through the years no one knew that he was a supporter of the right wing, as he feared losing his job if it became public knowledge. I must admit that it was a tough visit for me too, reliving that period.

It was November 29, 1947 when we all waited anxiously for the UN Assembly meeting in New York to vote on whether Palestine should be divided into two states, an Arab state and a Jewish state, in order to settle their differences. Early in the morning, city employees installed loudspeakers on the buildings on Allenby Street, in the center of the city, which was one block away from our home on Shenkin Street. It was in preparation for the upcoming evening vote at the UN, so everyone who was in the street or in nearby buildings would be able to listen to the voting.

My mother was very busy in the kitchen baking cookies, and my father came home for lunch with a few bottles of cognac and wine. I was told that it was in preparation for a celebration if the vote was going to pass for the creation of the two states and for us to have an independent state. I was very excited and hoped to be able to go with my parents to Allenby Street and listen to the UN assembly meeting with everyone else.

My father said to me: "You will have to stay home with your little brother Isaac. The loudspeakers are so loud that you will be able to hear the votes standing on the balcony."

I was angry and disappointed knowing that I couldn't convince my parents to change their minds. I stayed up, standing on the balcony and watching droves of people walking towards Allenby Street.

The meeting in the United Nation started at about 9:00 p.m. our time. Country after country was called on to cast their vote on the proposition. "Yes" or "No" votes were cast and the crowd in the street was counting. The last ones to be called were Russia and the United States. They were the deciding votes. As both cast a positive vote for the creation of two independent states, Jewish and Arab, the crowd burst out shouting in unison "WE ARE INDEPENDENT, WE ARE INDEPENDENT!" This was followed by the singing of Hatikva, the national anthem. I stood on our balcony very erect and still with my head held high and sang. Across the street, I saw my friend Rachel and other people on their balconies doing the same. We all had tears rolling down our faces.

About 10 minutes later, my father came home. With his face shining from happiness, he hugged and kissed me and kept repeating: "Miriam, we are free. We have our own State." We both kept crying and laughing from happiness.

He then went to the kitchen and pulled out the cakes and cookies that my Mother baked earlier, putting them in brown paper bags. He also packed all the wine bottles, which he bought in the morning. He said to me: "I am going back to share it with our friends. Wait up for us and we will celebrate with you too."

After a while, my parents came home empty handed. I looked at them upset, but they went back to the kitchen and pulled out more cookies and wine. We took it out to the balcony and celebrated. Every balcony was filled with people celebrating and yelling: "We are independent." There was dancing and singing in the streets. It seems that everyone at that moment was drunk from joy.

Immediately, the next day, trouble started. Because the British had a mandate over Israel, they didn't like what was happening. They did not vote for a Jewish independent state because it meant giving up their mandate by May 15. Also, Palestine was one of the last countries that was under their control. The big British colonial empire was shrinking.



*Israel declares Independence.*

There were many attacks by the Arabs, assisted by the British. They attacked kibbutzim, ambushed buses and tried everything possible to hurt the Jewish population. There were also retaliation attacks by the Irgun, Lehi and Etzel. The Palmach was busy fighting alongside the people in the different settlements. Most of the population preferred the Palmach over the terrorist organizations. Although, until 1946, the Palmach was allied with the Irgun and Lehi and participated in many terrorist acts, including the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. After 1946, however, the Palmach's mission became to protect the population from Arab attacks and to fight with the people when necessary. The terrorist organizations remained determined to attack the British and chase them out of the country. Our entire family was behind them and this is how we grew up.

Although the War of Independence started in May of 1948, when Israel was officially declared a state, the Arabs initiated a civil war in 1947 when the U.N. adopted the resolution calling for the end of the British mandate and partition of the country into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. Arab gangs attacked Jewish buses all over the country. Arab snipers fired at Jewish houses, pedestrians and traffic. Arabs also planted bombs and mines along urban and rural roads.

One of the big tragedies of that civil war was the attack on the four kibbutzim of Gush Etzion, an area about 12 kilometers outside of Jerusalem. The four kibbutzim were surrounded by many hostile Arab villages.

The first attack came in January 1948, when a group of Haganah and Palmach members were attacked on the way with food and other supplies for the surrounded kibbutzim. The battle lasted for a day and a half, until the last member of the group was killed and their bodies were mutilated.

The battles between the kibbutzim and thousands of Arabs continued for five and a half months. We were following it very closely on the radio and in the morning and afternoon newspapers every day. It was heart-wrenching, hearing about the killings and the destruction.

On May 12, 1948, two days before the proclamation of the State of Israel, thousands of Arabs and Arab Legionnaires from Jordan attacked all four of the kibbutzim again. After two days of fighting, the last kibbutz,



*Rothschild Avenue in the 1940s.*

Kfar Etzion, surrendered. Most of the residents and the Haganah and Palmach soldiers who were there to help with the fight were killed, and their bodies were mutilated. The survivors were taken to prison in Jordan. The four kibbutzim were totally destroyed. The area was taken back in the Six-Day War, and today there are 18 thriving settlements on it.

The other big battle that was one of the toughest was the battle over Jerusalem, which started one day after the United Nations approved the plan to partition the country. On the morning of Friday, May 14, the loudspeakers were installed again on Allenby Street for the formal declaration of the State of Israel. People of all ages stood on the street to listen to the announcement. My friends and I stood together as the excitement mounted. Although we were very young, we followed all the news on everything that was happening in the country. We read the newspapers every day, both the morning and the evening editions. We also never missed the news on the radio. There was always a heated discussion around the dining room table. We were part of everything and were very idealistic and nationalistic. We could hardly wait for the announcement.

On Friday afternoon, May 14, 1948, at 4:00 p.m., members of the National Committee gathered at the Tel Aviv Museum on Rothschild Street for the historic announcement of the establishment of the State of Israel. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, head of the caretaker government, excitedly read out the Declaration of Independence. Thousands were standing outside the hall, and tens of thousands listened to Kol Yisrael (Voice of Israel) Radio, which broadcast the 40-minute ceremony.

We were all very excited, laughing and crying and hugging each other. My parents took out one of their Persian rugs, hung it on the terrace and put a large Israeli flag on top of it. It was a very exciting sight to see everyone on their terraces hanging flags. People went out to the streets, all over the country, dancing and singing. I met up with my friends and we were out dancing, nonstop, until the wee hours. I didn't have too many hours to sleep, as we had to get up early on Saturday morning and set up for my Bat Mitzvah celebration. In Israel, a girl's Bat Mitzvah is celebrated at the age of twelve. No religious service is performed; only a party marks the occasion. I expected my class, which consisted of 50 kids, and some of my parent's best friends to come to the party.

On Saturday morning, at 6:30 a.m., we woke up to a tremendous noise, which sounded like bombs, and

heard the sound of airplanes. We realized immediately that the enemy attacked us. We quickly found out that the power station in the north of Tel-Aviv was bombed, and two people were killed. Tension was very high, and my parents tried to calm me down. I was very scared and understood that none of my friends would show up. I remember telling my parents, "I understand that no one will come because I, myself, wouldn't leave home either." Neither my friends nor I had telephones, so nobody said they were not coming, but it was obvious.

"What are we going to do with all the candies, cookies and all the other goodies that we have?"

"Let's see how the day progresses and we'll decide later," my Mother answered.

Some time passed, and my parents' best friends showed up with their two children. The streets were very quiet, with hardly any people or cars in them. About 2 hours later, we heard noises from the street. We ran out to the terrace and saw trucks with soldiers going to war. We then decided to take all the goodies, wrap them up in small packages and throw them to the soldiers in the trucks. We got started immediately, and it made us feel real good seeing the excitement and hearing the soldiers calling to us with big smiles on their faces, "Toda raba, toda raba (Thank you, thank you)." It took no time to use up whatever we had because a lot of trucks were passing by, one after the other. We were sorry that we did not have more. We ended up raiding our pantry for whatever cookies and candies we could find and giving those out too, as we saw how happy it made the soldiers.

As of that morning, at age 12, I and my friends learned and adjusted quickly to living while war was raging all over the country. Many changes occurred. In order to protect ourselves against enemy attacks, we had to do some tasks immediately. There were no shelters in the buildings, so they had to be created. First, all the tenants of every building had to find one space, on the lowest floor, where everyone in the building could go down and stay the minute the sirens were heard. We had to stay there until we heard a second siren, the all-clear signal, which meant that we could all go back to our apartments and the streets.

Shelters had to be in an area where there were no windows or doors, or, if not possible, at least not more than one window. A female dentist, who lived and worked in our building on the first floor, volunteered to let us use the foyer of her apartment as a shelter. The entrance foyer to her apartment was long and narrow with two doors on opposite sides, leading to other rooms. As it was a long and narrow space and unfurnished, we sat on the floor. It could only accommodate about 10 to 15 people, everyone else had to sit on the stairs. We were advised by the civil defense to stay on the stairs of the first floor only.

The building entrance was a side entrance, as stores occupied the front. It was a very wide opening, in a half semi-circle, with six steps leading up to the first flight of stairs. This wide opening had to be closed, for protection, with big heavy canvas bags filled with sand, which created a wall. The canvas bags were delivered to every building by the city. It was the building's responsibility to fill the bags with sand. In our building, a small window located at the end of the first floor was covered with one bag. We all felt that it was a good safe shelter. The logic was that in case of a bomb falling in the immediate area of our building, flying shrapnel would not penetrate inside.

Also, all glass doors and windows in the apartments were covered with black fabric, in order to make it difficult for enemy planes to spot their targets at night. In addition, all windows were taped in all directions, with five-inch heavy-duty brown tape. This was to prevent broken pieces of glass from flying outside to the street or into apartments. Headlights on buses and taxis and streetlights were all painted in black paint. Store windows were not allowed to be lit. All apartment lights had to be shut in case of a bombing attack. A group of older citizens, who were too old to join the army, volunteered to the civil defense. Their job was to make sure that all of the above procedures were carried out. They were on duty all night in order to make sure that all was in order. Many times, they could be heard walking the streets after dark yelling, "Kave at ha'or (Shut the light)." Whenever they saw a crack of light, they pointed out exactly from where the light came from, so it was easy to correct the problem. If not followed instantly, they kept shouting, adding a curse, "Hamor (Donkey), shut your light." This sentence became the subject of many popular jokes. They would also come around checking the sand bags and making sure that they were done correctly. They were a big help to the authorities and were respected by the public.

Very quickly, many shelters were also built in public places and some were dug underground. During the day, when the sirens went on, everyone had to take shelter, and all vehicles had to stop. All passengers had

to leave wherever they were and run to the nearest shelter or into the nearest building. When the second siren sounded, every citizen returned to whatever he or she left, and life went back to normal. It was very important for the entire country to keep the daily life going.

The only Arab country that had an air force was Egypt. Their pilots were well trained, pretty brave and daring. They had many new planes, compared to Israel, who at the time had only two old planes. In the beginning, the Egyptian air force attacked only at night. Later on, realizing that we had no organized air force, they started attacking during the day. At times, unfortunately, the Egyptian planes were able to sneak under the radar and attack before the sirens went off. This created a lot of casualties. For me, a twelve-year-old child at the time, it was very scary. The minute I would hear the noise of planes, my stomach would turn and hurt. When we heard the sound of planes, we tried to identify if the planes were Israeli or Egyptian. Sometimes, we picked out and tried to identify the planes by the flags that were painted on their tails.

Fortunately, a group of American and British pilots were determined to come and help Israel in its fight for survival. They organized and acquired some old planes and parts of planes that they had to assemble and smuggled them to Israel. All of the pilots in the group were very experienced, fighting in World War I and II. They were the ones who eventually organized the Israeli Air Force. They bought all the equipment that they needed with their own money and with money that they raised from Jewish communities all over the world.

Daily life was kept as normal as possible. We all went to school and played in the neighborhood park. The park had a large underground shelter, and we would run to it as fast as we could the minute we heard the sirens. We all understood the importance of obeying the rule if we wanted to be outside after school. The only time that we had to stay home was in the evening. After a while, many people upon hearing the sirens would stand at the entrance to the shelters to see how many enemy planes were in the sky. Sometimes, we could also see the Israeli planes chasing the enemy. Once in a while, we witnessed a dog fight and saw an enemy plane downed. This was exciting to watch, and we'd yell out with pride. Because the west side of Tel Aviv nestles along the Mediterranean coast, the enemy's planes always went down into the sea. Sometimes, the sirens went on, but no planes were sighted, as they were intercepted before they were able to enter the city skies. At other times, the sirens went off just because the authorities were being overcautious.

False alarms caused many people to ignore the warnings. Some people kept walking until they were stopped by the civil defense volunteers who came out of their work places and chased them to the shelters. There were also people who stayed in their apartments instead of leaving them. Instances like these caused unnecessary casualties and death.

One time, the sirens sounded in the afternoon. My father was at work. My mother, my brother Isaac and I left the apartment and went to the shelter on hearing the sirens. We lived at 15 Shenkin Street, and I had two friends who lived at number 11. My friend Ruthie lived on the second floor, and my friend Chava lived on the third floor, which was the top floor of the building. Chava, Ruthie and I went to the same public school and spent a lot of time together outside of school. We were good friends, although we did not attend the same classes. Chava had two brothers, and Ruthie was an only child.

In the basement of their building, there was a large print shop that did the printing for the first evening newspaper in Israel, Yediot Hachronot (The Latest News). Chava's father managed the print shop. He was a very nice man, always happy and friendly. He always invited Chava's friends to come to the print shop and observe, while he explained the process. Chava's mother was a quiet woman and not very friendly to us. She was heavy and didn't go out of the house too much.

That afternoon, in the shelter, we waited anxiously, hoping that it was a false alarm, but it was not. We heard planes passing over us, and we were relieved not to hear the noise of falling bombs. But, a few minutes later, we heard falling bombs in the distance and were somewhat relieved that it was not our building. When we heard the planes getting closer again, we were sure that the attack was over, and the enemy planes were going back to their base. Suddenly, we heard the tremendous noise of a falling bomb and the destruction of a building. At first, we thought it was our building. We all let out a cry, and I remember holding tightly to my mother and



*Atlit*

my brother and crying. We all waited for the building to collapse, but it did not. When the sirens sounded again, we all ran outside to see which building was hit. It was number 11, where my friend Chava lived. The top third floor was almost completely destroyed. Outside the building were my friend Chava, her brothers and father and all the other neighbors who came out of the shelter. My friend's family was crying hysterically. Chava's mother did not go down to the shelter and was killed instantly. We all were devastated when we saw and realized what happened. We were all in shock.

We stayed with our friends for a while, and after giving information to the emergency people, we convinced Chava's family to come to our apartment. Chava's father tried to do his best to calm the children, but it was very difficult. I do remember Chava being very angry. She was angry with her mother for not going down to the shelter. She kept crying and saying, "We always begged her to go to the shelter with us, but she always refused."

Chava, who had always been a happy girl and a lot of fun, became very quiet and cried often. In school and outside of school, we all tried to make her feel better and to help her get over this terrible tragedy. The teachers were also very helpful.

Many times, Chava, who was angry and upset, would say to us, "If my mother really loved us, she would have come with us to the shelter."

We would listen to her, but at times did not know exactly what to say. She used to come to our home and tell my mother the same thing. Hearing that, my mother would take her into her arms, hug and kiss her and tell her not to think that way, because their mother did love all of them. She would let my mother hold her for a while. She would then kiss her and, with a slight smile, would turn to me, and the two of us would go outside to play, talk or do our homework together. I always felt so good watching my mother and Chava together like this, as I understood how helpful and nice it was for Chava.

After the destruction of their apartment, Chava, her father and brothers lived somewhere else in the neighborhood while the apartment was being rebuilt. When finally the apartment was ready and they moved back in, Chava's father always encouraged us, her friends, to come up and spend time in their renovated apartment. Being that her father was so nice, he made sure that the time we spent together was pleasant. As time

passed by, Chava's anger subsided and eventually was gone, and then we had our old friend back. Chava was very much like her father: warm, happy and very nice.

In 2008, my brother Isaac, who lives in Florida with his wife Paula, met Chava's youngest brother at a party in their community. A friend introduced them to each other, as he knew they were both Israelis. They wanted to see if they had lived not far from each other in Israel. Within minutes, they realized that they had been neighbors. Chava's brother was very young when his mother was killed, and did not remember being at our home. It was his older brother who might have remembered. When Carl and I were visiting Florida, we also met Chava's younger brother and his wife, and it was a touching experience to talk about it.

My other friend, Ruthie, lived in the same building on the second floor. Their apartment stayed intact, but was covered with dust and debris. Ruthie's father, who was a dentist, couldn't work until everything was cleaned up. Ruthie was an only child, and we spent a lot of time together. She loved coming to eat and sleep over. She enjoyed watching my four-year-old brother, Isaac, running around and talking. It was the opposite of their home, which was always very quiet. We were very good friends since kindergarten and through public school.

Ruthie was petite and very pretty. Because she was an only child, her parents watched her closely. Her piano teacher found her to be very talented, so her parents insisted that she practice at least three to four hours every day after school. She was also a very good student and at the top of her class. Because of the time she spent playing the piano and doing homework, she hardly had time to come outside to play. She only had one other friend besides myself, and she lived a little further away. This friend was also a very good student and at the top of her class.

There was a lot of tension between Ruthie's mother and father, and she hated it. Her father was very serious and somewhat arrogant. At times, her mother would ask me to come to their house while Ruthie was practicing on the piano, so she could finish a little earlier and spend time with me. Seeing what close friends we were, she would let me come up many times and almost never stopped Ruthie from going out with me.

After the attack on their building, their apartment was put into order pretty fast, and their life went back to normal. Ruthie wanted to stay with us more and more, but her father decided that it was too much. I never liked to sleep over in their apartment. I loved her mother, who was very sweet and warm, but couldn't stand her father. After the bombing, I forced myself to visit with them more often. Their building had a very wide staircase and I remember running up the steps very fast, as I always saw Chava's mother's face in front of me and I was scared. I never told anyone about my fear until a few years later. After the bombing, a few more friends were allowed to come to Ruthie's apartment and spend time with her. She tried to take full advantage of the situation. As she was very liked, the two of us were happy to organize a few gatherings at her home. We went to different high schools, and when I was 16 and moved to a different neighborhood, we lost touch.

Living through bombings seems to stay in one's memory. On nights when I was in deep sleep, it was always very frightening to hear the sirens go off. My mother made sure that we all had a bathrobe and slippers on a chair next to our bed. This way, we never had to stop to get dressed, and we could run to the shelter with our pajamas on. My mother, who was very fashion conscious, made sure that my pajamas all coordinated with my bathrobe. As she sewed all my clothes, I went shopping with her for the fabrics. I did think it was funny, but it was important to her. Her bathrobe matched too. I still have the habit of making sure that every night my bathrobe and slippers are next to my bed, but they don't necessarily match.

Being teenagers and so happy to finally have our independent country, matured us quickly. Living through war, we were thirsty for every piece of news. We wanted to know everything that was happening on the front, in the Knesset (Parliament), all the politics among the different parties and what everyone thought about the war and what was likely to happen. As kids, we held strong opinions about our stands towards the different parties, and we had heated discussions on the subject.

Every day, when we came home from school, we would first read the morning newspaper. We were very idealistic and war and politics were our main subjects of conversation at school breaks and outside of school. Although we did not always agree about politics, we were always united in our feelings that concerned Israel's fight for survival.

In the late afternoon, my parents would buy the evening paper. We were also glued to the radio whenever

the news came on. In those years, we didn't have the news all day, only at certain hours. Basically, we could hear the news in the morning, at midday, in the early evening and in the late evening. At the time, all businesses, stores and offices would close from 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. Everyone would go home at midday for their main meal of the day. Afterwards, people stayed home resting or sleeping. There were no transistor radios, so home was the place where people got their news updates.

I remember very well the day Jerusalem fell to the Jordanian Army. The fight over Jerusalem started in December of 1947. From this point on, Jerusalem was totally isolated from the rest of the country. It was easy to cut off Jerusalem quickly, because there was only one main narrow road leading to the city. The road was built between hilly ridges. It was known as Bab-el-Wad in Arabic, or Shaar Ha'gai in Hebrew (Gate of the Valley in both languages). At the entrance to the road, on top of a steep hill, there was Latrun, which was a large British police base. The British handed the base over to the Arabs. The British were supposed to be neutral, but that was not the case.

Convoys from Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas were sent to Jerusalem with supplies of food, water and medicine. They were attacked and stopped from delivering all of it to a starving public, who had to be on food and water rationing. The convoys were immediately attacked from Latrun, and the ones who were able to advance were attacked by more Arab troops further down the road. Many soldiers were killed and burned in their tanks and vehicles on Bab-El-Wad. The burned tanks were preserved and are lying along the road as a memorial to the fighting and the tragedy. There were three attempts to reach and take over the Latrun police station from the Arabs, to no avail. Many young soldiers were killed trying. It was absolutely heartbreaking to hear all that was happening day by day. It was difficult to believe that, eventually, the residents of Jerusalem would be helped.

A way had to be found to get supplies to Jerusalem. One day, we heard on the radio that convoys of supplies arrived in Jerusalem, and that, from now on, the supplies will continue to arrive every day and night. A new road was built, the Burma Road. It was a tough terrain; on top of the ridge, on the right side of the lower road. Jordanian sharpshooters spotted the workers and started shooting at them. What was most important was to move critical parts of the road away from the sight of the Jordanians who tried to shell it. The road was finally finished, after non-stop day and night effort. There was no way that the enemy could reach the Burma Road and disrupt the convoys reaching the city. It was a difficult road to build, as some sections were so narrow and steep that only mules could initially make the climb. It took several weeks, but after many setbacks, the road was finally completed, and was now negotiable by vehicles throughout.

Inside Jerusalem there were fights to take over and defend the neighborhoods with the help of the Haganah and Etzel (the Irgun), and Lehi who joined them. The fights over the West Bank and the Old City with the Jordanians were furious. The Jordanians took over every area in the West Bank. The only area where the fighting continued was the Old City of Jerusalem. Most occupants of the Old City were the very orthodox. They were not ready to fight. There were soldiers doing most of the fighting, but they were a small number in comparison to the Jordanians. On June 2, the Old City finally waved white flags that meant surrender. The Jordanians occupied the Old City, the citizens were expelled and the fighters were taken prisoners of Jordan. Many of the synagogues, schools and buildings were destroyed. We were all heartbroken to hear the news. After this defeat, Jerusalem was divided into two sections: West Jerusalem remained a part of Israel, whereas East Jerusalem, which comprised the Old City, became a part of Jordan. This remained so until the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel took back the Old City and a large portion of the West Bank, after bitter fights and many losses.

Another terrible and brutal ambush occurred on buses going to the Hadassah hospital on Mount Scopus. The buses carried with them relief nurses and doctors for the group that was in the hospital working for many days. They also had with them supplies and medicines. Midway, the buses were ambushed by a very large group of Arabs, and a fight ensued. The people on the convoy were completely outnumbered by the attackers. They tried to fight them off, but, at the end, everyone on the convoy, about 78 people, were murdered in cold blood. The news of this attack devastated everyone, and the mood in the country was one of the lowest during the war.

One of the worst memories I have of this time happened while I was in school. Across the street from our

school and the classroom we occupied was the Teachers' House. In this building, teachers could come to meet their friends, listen to concerts and lectures and discuss educational subjects. When the war broke, it was decided to use the building as a funeral home for fallen soldiers, their families and others who were killed in the war.

While we were fighting a war against the armies of seven Arab nations, our buses, private cars and trains were often ambushed and attacked. The first such ambush was not far from Tel-Aviv near kibbutz Ben Shemen. A bus, filled mostly with young students from an agricultural school, was attacked at midday, and everyone was killed. It was one of the first attacks on innocent citizens. The funerals for all the dead took place across the street from our classroom. The cries and screams of friends and family members went on for a long time. It probably seemed longer than it was. We tried to listen to the teacher, but it was very difficult. We tried to be strong, but couldn't hold back our tears for too long. Our teacher asked us all to stand and go to the window to observe the mourners. She went to each one of us and put her hand on our shoulder without uttering a word. When the bell rang, we were told that the entire school could go home early. I don't remember us ever walking home before without talking to each other. When I came home, I started to cry, and it took my mother a long time to calm me down.

The next morning, when we came back to school, we had a good discussion about the war, the sacrifices and the results that might come out of it. After talking about our feelings and fears, the teacher had a message for us. She said, "Unfortunately, yesterday's experience was the first, but not the last. We are at war, and there will be more days like it in days to come. Our lessons will continue as before. It is very important for all of us to keep living a normal life."

She added, "I would suggest that, on days of funerals, we stop for a few moments of silence and then resume our studies. At certain times, we will discuss current events and hear everyone's opinions and feelings." It was a good talk, and it helped us to live through those terrible days.

War was going on all over the country. Many towns, kibbutzim and villages were attacked by the Arab countries, which were very well equipped with the latest light and heavy ammunition. The Israeli forces, which were much smaller in manpower and did not have much of anything, fought hard. Young World War II refugees who arrived in Israel were immediately inducted into the army. By now, a regular army was organized, where all newcomers and volunteers from many countries went through a very short training and sent to fight. There were also many professional volunteers who had much experience from other wars that they participated in.

Israeli forces also engaged in heavy fighting against many Arab villages, and once a village was taken over by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces), its inhabitants were expelled from the country. Many ran away from the villages to the different Arab countries, but mostly to Jordan, where camps were built to accommodate the refugees. These camps still exist, after all these 68 years. None of the Arab countries in the region were, or are now, interested in remedying this situation.

With time, the Israeli Army also received support from abroad, much of it from the Jewish communities, which enabled Israel to buy the planes, tanks and other military equipment that was needed. Unfortunately, many lives were lost in battles, but there were also many heroic stories of survival. The radio and the newspapers always tried to report them in order to keep the mood in the country somewhat uplifted. It was difficult, but life kept going as close to normal as possible.

This part of my friends' and my life made us grow up fast. We understood quickly that we needed to defend our country, that it would be hard, difficult and sad, but that we needed to do it to survive.

Fortunately, the war ended after about a year, with some short ceasefires negotiated by the United Nations in the interim. Since then, Israel fought 8 wars, which claimed the lives of many soldiers. There were also many terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of many citizens; men, women and children.

It is now 68 years of Israeli independence. In spite of everything, Israel is a vibrant country, number four in the world in developing start-ups and a giant in developing new medicines and medical equipment. Their economy is booming and the list of achievements and discoveries is unending.

One of the very heated arguments I had with my father, and there were not too many, was about peace with our neighbors. He used to tell me: "Peace will be achieved in Israel, only when hair will grow on the palm of my hand," which meant that it will never happen.

It always infuriated me when I heard him say that. Many times, I stormed out of the room, yelling, "You are wrong. We will have Peace."

Israel has signed a peace agreement with Egypt and Jordan, which took a lot of courage on the part of the leaders at the time. But, trying to settle a peace agreement with the Palestinians is far from being achieved. I hate to say it, but it is in the last few years that I began to think that maybe my father was right! I hope I am wrong, and that PEACE will eventually come.



*Aunt Rachel and Uncle Motek on vacation.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Reisses

From a very young age I have wonderful memories of times spent with my uncles and aunts and, especially, with my cousins. Our closest relations were with my mother's sister Rachel, her husband Motek (Morty) and their children Ely, Avraham (Abe) and Billa.

My first recollection of the Reisses is at my aunt and uncle's wedding day. I was probably only about 3 or 4 years old. Rachel and Motek lived on Hebron Street in the heart of Tel Aviv. Their apartment was on the ground floor with a door going out to the backyard. The living room was a very long and narrow room, and I remember a big wall with a large painting or a rug that had a lot of animals in a forest, mostly deer with large horns. In the middle of the room, there was a long table covered with a white tablecloth and many chairs. There were plates, silverware and small wine glasses ready for use.

I was wondering where Rachel was when the bedroom door opened and she came out. She was wearing a short white dress made of a silky material, as it had a slight sheen. The skirt had a slight flow, her waist was cinched with a belt, and the sleeves were short. She wore high-heeled sandals. Her black hair was held back with a large pin, and some of it fell behind her ears. On top of her head, she wore a short white veil. I thought she looked very beautiful. Behind her was her best friend Rushka.

Suddenly my father came running in from the street yelling with excitement, "Let's go, the taxi is here."

The four of us, me and my mom, Rachel and Regina, went outside to the taxi. All I remember is being squeezed in the back seat. The taxi took off, when I suddenly saw Motek, my father and Regina's husband coming out of the apartment and starting to walk. When I asked my mother how come they were walking, she answered, "The taxi is very expensive and the groom should not see the bride until the wedding ceremony."

Of course, we arrived at the rabbinate before the men. We came out of the taxi and were whisked off to a corner of the backyard under a big tree, which protected us from the sun. When the men arrived, they wandered off to the opposite side of the courtyard where more men, male friends, awaited them. Slowly some women friends joined us. From our corner, we were able to see the men signing some paper in front of a Rabbi with a long beard.

After a while, the Rabbi went under the chupa and waited for Rachel to join him. My mother and Rachel's best friend held her arm on each side, and I walked directly behind by mother. Once we got there, my father and a friend walked with Motek to the Chupa, and all I remember of the ceremony is my uncle stepping on a glass and everyone yelling: "Mazal Tov."

The next thing I remember is being back at the apartment. People were raising wine glasses and a lot of



*Aunt Rachel in Tel Aviv.*

food was put on the table. Everyone was eating, drinking and laughing. Before I knew it, everyone went out to the backyard and started to sing and dance in a circle. The hora was the main dance, and I joined in, jumping with everybody.

After the wedding, the next recollection I have is of their move to Michal Street, which was a small street not far from a very noisy, busy street, King George. They rented a room from another couple that occupied another room in the apartment. That couple shared a room with their son who was a baby at the time. The couple shared a kitchen and a bathroom with my aunt and uncle. It was a normal thing to do in those years.

Their apartment was in the back of an old building. There were stairs leading directly to the entrance of their room, which was the largest one in the apartment. I liked going there with my parents because in the summertime I was able to sit or play in the backyard. I also liked the small, quiet street consisting of a mixture of four-storied apartment houses and one-story private homes, some trees and flowers. It was the complete opposite to Shenkin Street, which was always noisy, had a lot of bus traffic, many stores and no trees or flowers. There was a park near us, which was nice, but the street was always busy and noisy.

Most of my friends on the street had siblings, or they were expecting some. I was an only child and always asked my parents why I couldn't have a brother or a sister. I thought it would be more fun and told them that it was too quiet in our home. I never got an answer. In later years, when I was about eight years old, my mother became pregnant, and they finally told me the reason for the long wait: "We were afraid to have another child because of all your illnesses for the first five years of your life. Now that we see that you are doing so well,

we are ready. We didn't want to tell you this before, as we did not want you to feel guilty. Therefore, we never answered you when you said you hoped to have a sibling."

One day, when I was around five years old, I went to visit my aunt. I could see that she was pregnant. When I asked, my aunt and uncle confirmed that they were expecting a child. I was thrilled. I always looked at Rachel with such admiration and couldn't wait for the day to come. I spent a lot of time with her. She would pick me up and we would take walks. I also liked her cooking, so sometimes I would eat at her house. But the most fascinating place for me to go with her was the library/bookstore.

I don't think there were too many libraries in those years. In order to service the reading public, there were stores that carried many books in Hebrew and many other languages. There was one such store on Dizengoff Street. The store was filled with books, from floor to ceiling, in many categories. The customers would bring the books that they found to the librarian, who was the storeowner. He then registered all their information on a personalized card, which he kept in a box on his desk. A daily fee was collected for every book that was taken out.

Rachel would usually take out four to five books at a time, and I would help her carry them. She was an avid reader. The owner, who was always very pleasant, would sometimes tell her with a smile: "Rachel, I don't have any new books yet. I know you read most of them already. Come in next week, as I will have a new shipment."

His library was very popular and well thought of. He was always ready to direct his customers to the right books and was also able to tell them about their content. He was known to get new published books at all times, so his collections grew immensely. At times, I would also go with my mother who also liked to read, but not as much as Rachel. Instead, she spent a lot of time sewing and knitting.

The day came when Ely was born. I was so happy and nagged my parents to take me to the hospital to see the baby. It was a small, private hospital in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv. It was standing on its own on top of a hill, surrounded by tall trees and beautiful flowers. It looked like a castle to me.

We walked into a rounded lobby with a circular staircase. At a reception table, a nurse directed us to Rachel's room. She was in bed, looking tired but happy. We all kissed her, and I pulled on my mother's skirt to let her know that I wanted to go see the baby. My father took me immediately, while my mother stayed with her sister. Standing outside the nursery, watching all the babies in their bassinets, I couldn't talk. I never saw so many babies in one place. Through the glass window, my father told the nurse, "We are here to see baby Reiss."

She walked through the bassinets, picked up a baby and carried him in her arms to the window. She held him up so we could see his face and said, "This is baby Reiss."

I remember smiling and giggling, as I had to hold back my tears. Before I knew it, she took the baby back to his bassinet. I was very disappointed because I thought that I would be able to look at him until he opened his eyes. More people came to the window asking to see babies, and my father explained that I would see him more when he will be home. I wanted to go to the hospital every day, but it did not work out.

In those years, women who gave birth would stay in the hospital from eight to ten days. They were not allowed to get off the bed for at least three days after giving birth. By the seventh day, my parents told me that they will take me to the hospital the next day for a special ceremony and a party. They told me that it is called a brit milah (circumcision ceremony), but did not explain what it was all about.

We all got dressed in our best outfits and went to the hospital in the morning. When we got there, we were directed to go down a flight of steps to a party room. I was very excited and realized how important a party it was when I saw many people coming and wishing my uncle and each other "Mazal Tov."

I was roaming around waiting to see the baby. At some point, my parents told me that I had to leave the room and wait on top of a staircase until they will come for me. I was very upset and ran upstairs waiting and sat on the last step, next to the lobby. All I remember is hearing loud cries and curses from women who were giving birth. I couldn't stand it, so I lowered my head, shut my eyes and covered my ears. After a while, I wanted to hear what was going on downstairs. When I took my hands off my ears, I heard a baby crying, so I covered them again. I was hoping that my parents would come to fetch me soon.



*My cousin Avram on his Bar Mitzva day.*

It felt like an eternity. Suddenly, I felt my father's hand tapping me on my shoulder. Relieved, I immediately stood up, held his hand and skipped down the stairs. There was a lot of laughter and loud talk, and everyone was drinking red wine. Food was brought out, and it seemed to me that everyone was very hungry, pushing to get to the table.

All I was interested in was seeing the baby that, at that point, my parents told me was given the name Eliahu, Ely for short. I asked my parents, "Where are Ely and my aunt Rachel?"

"They are resting now and you will see them when they will be home," my mother answered. I was very disappointed and couldn't wait to get out of there. My parents wanted to stay longer, and they gave me permission to go and wait for them in the garden.

Once my aunt and the baby came home, I went to visit a lot, as my mother was helping to take care of Ely. When we started taking him out in the carriage to the park, I made believe that he was my brother.

When Ely was a month old, being that he was a first-born son, my aunt and uncle held a pidyon haben (redeeming of the son) ceremony in their home. The ceremony is held on the thirty-first day of the month, as it is believed that if the boy survived this period, the chances are that he would grow up healthy. Basically, the tradition is that when the parents are Israelites, the father has to pay five shekels or silver dollars to the priest to relieve a first-born son from Temple service.

The room that they lived in was emptied of all furniture and a long table covered with a white tablecloth was set up. All the women brought different dishes that they prepared at their homes and many bottles of wine. Most of the people were the same friends that I had seen many times at my aunt and uncle's home, at their wedding and at Ely's Brit. The only other child who was there was a boy my age, the son of the people who rented my aunt and uncle the room in their apartment. It was not unusual to rent out a room in order to lower monthly expenses.

When a gentleman, whose last name, was Cohen arrived, he sat at the head of the table. My aunt and uncle brought Eli in and laid him down on a large silver tray in front of the Cohen. He was dressed in white and many colored necklaces were put on him. My uncle gave the Cohen money, and with the singing of "Mazal Tov," the baby was redeemed. After the ceremony, Eli was taken to the landlord's room for the rest of the evening. They had a very good relationship with their landlord and they became friends for life. I, too, was friends with the son for many years.

At one point, when Eli was weaned from breast-feeding and was fed from a bottle, my aunt went to a pension (a hotel that catered only to women after birth). Its purpose was to give the new mothers a chance to gain strength and have some relaxation. The government paid all the expenses.

A crib was brought to our apartment. Then my aunt followed with the baby and all the diapers and clothes that were needed. Ely was going to stay with us while his mother was away. I was very excited and couldn't stay still for a moment. I watched my mother bathing, changing and feeding him. All I wanted to do was stand by the crib and watch him. I was not interested in going out at all when I came home from kindergarten. My biggest thrill was when we wheeled him outside, as my mother always let me push the carriage. I was so happy. I told my mother that most people will think that he was my brother, and I loved that. She would just look at me and smile.

My uncle came every evening after work. He would hold Ely in his arms while my mother prepared supper. Once the baby was put to sleep, we all had supper together. Twice in the ten days that he stayed with us, we took Ely to visit his mother. Whenever we came, I remember seeing her sitting outside on a chair reading a book. I thought she looked wonderful. She got very excited at seeing us all, and my mother gave her Ely to hold. Because we went in the afternoon in the middle of the week, my uncle did not accompany us. We would all sit together and have ice cream and a cold drink.

I was sad when Ely was taken back home. A few weeks after he went home, I started to go by myself for visits and take walks with my aunt who allowed me to push the carriage.

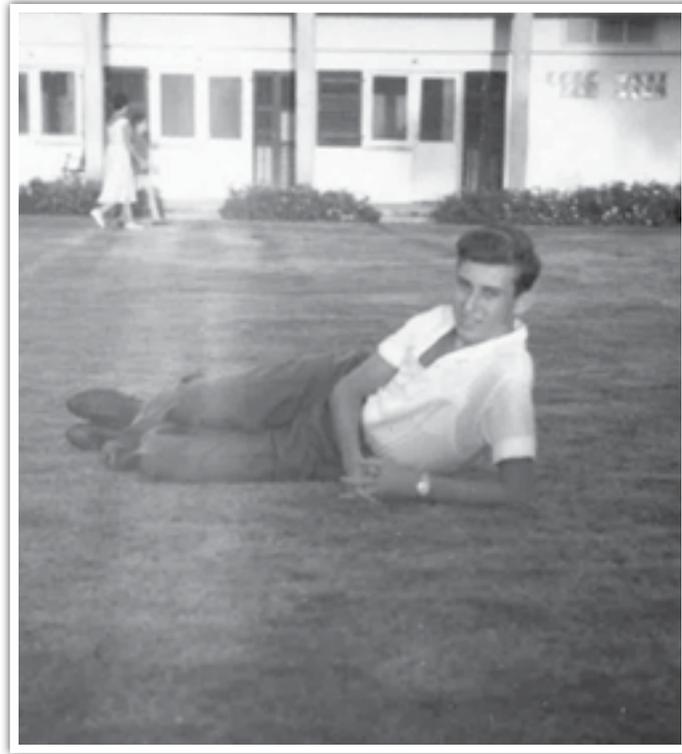
When Ely got a little older, I would pick him up and take him by myself for walks. I would also have my mother buy tickets, for myself and Ely, to children's theatre that I enjoyed as much as he did. I felt very grown up and was sure that everyone would think he was my brother. After my cousins Avraham (Abe) and Billa were born, my aunt was always happy when I would come and pick Ely up. At times, I would also take Avraham and, later on, Billa.

I was very active in the scouts and thought it would be good for Ely to join too. He couldn't be in the same troop that I was at because it was not close to his neighborhood. It was not an easy task to convince him to join. He said that he did not like the activities. Some of his school friends belonged and asked him to join, but he refused them too.

I wanted to make sure that if he accompanied his friends to a meeting he would look right. They wore uniforms that consisted of khaki shorts in the summer and long khaki pants in the winter, for the boys. The girls wore skirts or shorts in the summer, depending on their leader's preference. The shorts they were told to buy were long and touched the knee. The boys and girls in the youth organizations were not happy with the length. They would fold their shorts many folds, until they looked very short. The boys folded them so much that their pockets' lining would hang down outside their shorts. I spent time with Ely at our home teaching him how to handle those folds, although he was very annoyed with me.

I think he ended up going to a meeting or two, maybe just to satisfy me, and then he quit. I never brought up the subject again, and never criticized his shorts' length.

We went to each other's home quite a lot. Many times, when conflicts between Israel and the Arabs got heated up, we would go and stay together at each other's home. One of the conflicts erupted just before the British Mandate ended. The British and Arabs fought many battles against the Jews. Because of this situation, the Jews organized their own large groups of fighters. There were two main organizations. One was the Haganah, also known as the Palmach, which was headed by David Ben-Gurion, head of the Labor party. The other group was the Irgun, which merged with some other right-wing organizations. They were very militant and fought the British. Menachem Begin headed the Irgun. Begin and Ben-Gurion were archenemies.



*My cousin Eli.*

In May of 1948, the Irgun, realizing that Israel was short of arms, sent the boat Altalena from Europe to the north of Tel Aviv. The boat had a lot of rifles, machine guns, bullets and bombs, bought with the Irgun's own money. In addition, there were approximately nine hundred young Holocaust survivors aboard, ready to join the army.

As the boat approached, the Palmach commander demanded that they surrender all the ammunition that they had. The Irgun was prepared to cede some of the weapons and to keep the rest. The Palmach commander disagreed and would not let the boat dock or unload the people or any ammunition.

A year later, the remnants of the Altalena were towed out to sea and sunk. I always thought that it should not have been removed, but kept as a memorial to this terrible time. But the Labor government, headed by Ben-Gurion, tried to get rid of this memory against the protests of the Likud party, which was headed by Menachem Begin.

My mother used to make a cake that I was not too fond of. Whenever I asked her why she baked it, she would answer, "I promised Elinka (Ely)." This was a Polish way of speaking, adding a 'KA' to the end of a name, as in Billinka for Billa, or adding 'SHI,' as in Miriamshi for Miriam. The Yiddish way was to finish the name with a 'LE,' as in Itzchakale, for Itzchak, Chaimale for Chaim and Avrahamale for Avraham, etc.

Each sister had her specialty foods that we liked and that they used to make for us whenever they knew that we were coming to visit. My cousin Billa recalled, "I used to walk with my brothers to visit doda (aunt) Karola and dod (uncle) Zigmund at Shderot Chen. I remember she used to cook a wonderful cholent that I loved eating. Afterwards, Chaim and I would play together. One game involved making a cave out of sheets and blankets in the master bedroom." Billa was the closest in age to my youngest brother Chaim.

My brother Isaac says: "I remember I was very close to my cousin Abe and we hung out together a lot." They were close in age and both were middle children, so maybe they both felt somewhat neglected. They both had their Bar Mitzvah parties at our apartment, for their friends only, against their parents' wishes. They did not want the big, beautiful party that Ely had. Instead, they wanted their parents to use the money saved to buy them bicycles.

My parents and my aunt and uncle, had a completely different set of friends. They never went out together socially; only for many family gatherings.

When my aunt and uncle spent time with their friends, they mostly played cards. They were a nice group of people, who I knew well, as I was a frequent visitor to my cousins' home. They were different than my parents' friends. Many of them were actively involved in the fight against the British, so they had a lot in common. I liked them. They were feisty and very opinionated. Whenever I came to my aunt and uncle's and any of their friends were there, they were always very warm and friendly to me. They all knew me since I was very little. Some I liked more than others, and I spent more time talking to them.

My parents' friends also played cards, but the most they played was maybe twice a month. They took turns hosting and the evening always included big suppers and cold drinks. No hard liqueur or wine was served. The games usually lasted until midnight and sometimes longer. In the summers, when it was hot, tables were set up on the terrace, which was slightly cooler. I enjoyed seeing the many card games going on on so many terraces in the neighborhood and beyond. When they weren't playing cards, my parents' friends went dancing a lot in the different cafes, nightclubs and to big charity balls, for which the women needed to wear long gowns. The movies, theatre and concerts were also a big part of their life. I liked my parents' friends and their zest for life.

It was an interesting relationship between my parents and my aunt and uncle. My mother and my uncle had a hot and cold relationship. At certain times, they disagreed with each other and would argue. I remember my mother saying to my uncle once, "You throw me out of one door, I will come into your home in another door."

They always made up after a very short time. They basically started to talk to each other, without any apologies, as if the argument never happened.

My father and uncle, on the other hand, were very close and shared a lot. My uncle was a builder and he had two partners. They built apartment houses and sold the apartments as condominiums. They were doing well until around 1949-1950, following the Independence War, when the real estate market fell and no apartments could be sold. The partners had to put money in the business in order to keep it afloat. My uncle asked my father for a loan, as he did not have the money to invest in the business. My father loaned him the money and they made a deal. Instead of paying the money back, he gave him two apartments, which were equivalent in value to the loan. My father hoped to make money on the deal. Once the real estate market recovered, my father sold one apartment immediately but it took him a long time to sell the second one. The end result was that he did not make a profit, but he felt good that he could help out.

My father's relationship with my aunt Rachel was very special. They liked each other very much, more than the two sisters did. He liked to buy Rachel gifts once in a while. Once, I was in Haifa with my father and my aunt. My mother did not join us, as she stayed home with my brother Isaac, who was a baby at the time. In Haifa, we passed by a boutique on a main street. There was a colorful striped sweater in the window. We all admired the sweater. My father said, "Wait here. I am going into the store. I want to check something."

My aunt and I waited outside, and ten minutes later, my father came out with a brown paper package in his hand. He gave it to Rachel and said, "This is for you." She looked at him surprised. She couldn't wait and see what was in the package. She tore the paper off immediately and saw the striped sweater.

They hugged and kissed right there. It was hard for me to understand, but I knew that my father liked to surprise my mother and me many times too. From there, we went to visit some of Rachel relatives whom I met for the first time. She showed everyone her gift and put it on at the first opportunity.

As young kids, we never felt conflicted in our feelings towards each other. We got along very well. We were very close and went back and forth to each other's homes all the time, not needing any invitations. After I left the country, the two families often spent the holidays together in various hotels and they all had a great time.

We always had a special love between us. I don't remember any of us ever fighting with our cousins. Growing up together in Israel and sharing all that was going on around us, politically and socially, created memories for a lifetime.



*Avram's wife, Avram (Yehuda and Bruria's son), Yehuda Choina, my mother's first cousin*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **The Choina Family in Rishon LeZion**

The Choina family who lived in Rishon LeZion were cousins from my mother's mother's side of the family. Rishon LeZion was one of the first communities established in Palestine in the early nineteen century. It was mostly settled by Polish and Russian Jews who fled from their countries because of pogroms.

Yakov and Yehudah were brothers and cousins of my mother. Yakov was the older one. We had a very close relationship with them and spent a lot of time together. They both were very athletic and participated in the first Maccabiah (the Jewish Olympics) in 1935. Their youngest sister, Yocheved, who came to Palestine with them, was also very athletic and was a gym teacher in a public school for many years. Another sister, Bronia, who was older, stayed behind in Poland. She came to Israel in 1948, after the Holocaust.

Yakov was married to Regina and they had two daughters. Penina, who was about two years older than me, was my friend. I did not have much to do with her sister, who was two years younger than me. I liked Penina very much. She was a lot of fun. She loved coming to Tel Aviv and staying with us. We would walk all over the city and laugh a lot. My mother did not like her. My mother thought she had a fresh mouth. She also thought that because she was older, she taught me about sex. Whenever I wanted to invite her to stay with us, I had to argue with my mother. My father always sided with me on this subject.

Penina often invited me to come and stay with them in their lovely house, which had a beautiful garden. Penina's mother Regina, was a pretty woman, but I thought she was cold. When I finally agreed to come for a week in the summer, I only stayed for two days. Regina hardly spoke to me, except at mealtimes. It made me feel very uncomfortable. I told Penina that I felt sick and had to go back home. I could not tell her the truth, but I knew she understood. I never stayed with them again, and was never invited to come back, which I was happy about.

I loved Yakov, Penina's father. He was a quiet man but very warm. He was smart and had a wonderful smile. When I stayed with them, and Regina was not around, he would sit with me, asking me many questions, hugging me and giving me kisses.

His brother Yehudah, was also a quiet man and just as warm. He was very handsome, tall and very thin. He was much better looking than his brother Yakov. Although he was quiet, I loved sitting with him



*Carl, Yehuda, unknown woman.*



*Bruria, Yehuda's wife, Jacob Choina, my mother's first cousin, Yochevet, Jacob's sister, Penina, Jacob's daughter*



*Penina, Edna Gorelik (Yehuda and Bruria's daughter), Uri Gorelik (Edna's husband)*

on the living room couch, holding his hand and talking to him. He always had time to sit with me.

Yehudah was married to Bruria who was full of life and was the life of the party. She was always on the go and had a lot of energy. They had two children, Edna and Avraham, who everyone called Avrahamale. I did not have much to do with them, as they were younger than I was, but I did talk to Edna occasionally, as she was a pretty, sweet child and very talkative. My father loved her ever since she was a little girl, and she loved him too, even later in life. Her brother had nothing to do with me, and it felt weird, but I never said anything.

Bruria and Yehudah lived in a rented apartment all their life. It had two bedrooms, and their children Edna and Avraham shared a room. When I came to stay with them, for two weeks, almost every summer, I slept on a cot on an enclosed terrace. I didn't mind, as I loved staying with them. It was a very warm and nurturing home. Bruria spent hours in the kitchen cooking and baking. There were always cookies and candies around. The rest of the family used to come for dinner, especially on Friday nights. Many times I would help Bruria in the kitchen - washing, peeling and cutting vegetables. She was a wonderful housekeeper and the apartment was always spotless. At times, I went shopping with her in the market and in the different specialty stores that she frequented. I felt very close to her and felt good helping her to carry all her packages home.

Once in a rare while, we went to the beach with Bruria. Rishon LeZion has a very beautiful beach and it's not as crowded as the one in Tel Aviv. I especially liked going to the beach with Yehudah. He was a good swimmer and always went into the water with me to help me improve my swimming. At one of these outings, I realized that a ring, which I received as a birthday gift from my parents, was lost in the water. I was very upset and started to cry. Yehudah and I went back home. While crying, I told Bruria what happened.

"So, why are you crying"? She asked.

“I am afraid to tell my parents, as they would be angry with me,” I answered.

“Do not worry. If you want, I will call them and tell them.” Still crying, I nodded my head to let her make the call.

Yehudah, Jacob and three other partners, owned a very large lumber factory. It existed from 1950 until 1964. They supplied lumber for buildings and also had large machines to smooth out some of the rough lumber. All their employees were Histadrut (Israel’s trade union) members, and my father always needled him about it. Even though residential phones were very rare in those days, Yehudah had a phone at home, so that he’d be able to keep in touch with the factory. Their black phone was sitting on a small table in the foyer, on top of a white dolly.

Bruria went to the phone and called my parents at the icebox factory. My mother answered the phone. Bruria told her what happened, and in a very low voice, which I could not hear, told her something in Polish. She then gave me the phone. I took the phone still crying. I heard my mother saying: “Miriamshi, don’t worry about the ring. We are not angry with you. It can happen. Just know, not to wear any jewelry when you go swimming.” I still follow that advice today.

Yocheved, Yakov and Yehudah’s sister was married to Paul, who was much older than her and was very likable. They had two children, a boy and a girl. They lived in a nice house with a very nice garden.

We were very close with all the three families, and we saw each other almost every Saturday. Before we had a car, we used to take a sherut (taxi) from Tel Aviv in the late afternoon and stay for supper, alternating between Bruria and Yehudah’s home and Yochevet and Paul’s home. Many times, Yehudah would drive us back home. At times, if it was not too late in the evening, we would take a taxi back home. Once we had a car, we went even more often to see them.

They also liked coming to visit us on Saturdays, in the late afternoon. My mother liked to prepare coffee and cake, and they also stayed for supper. I liked it very much when they came to us and was happy to help my mother to prepare sandwiches for supper. Regina and Yakov would also join the others when they came to visit us, even though we hardly ever went to their home.

These relationships continued for many years and we always kept in touch and kept each other informed on what was going with us.



*My Uncle Shalom and I on the way home with wet bathing suits in hand while on vacation from the Jewish Brigade.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER NINE

### My Uncle Shalom

My father and his younger brother Shalom were born in Geduv, a small village outside the city of Lebob, in Galitzia. My uncle was born in 1914. I know that my father was older than his brother. His Israeli papers showed that he was born in 1910, but that is probably not the correct year. He actually changed the real birth date on his birth certificate to make himself older. I watched him doing it, and, when I questioned him, he told me that it would help him avoid being inducted into the Israeli army. He was ready with this altered birth certificate when there was a citizen count for which everyone had to stay home.

I was even more astonished when my parents' friend Meir, taught himself how to make both his hands shake constantly in order to avoid the army. Afterwards, Meir found it difficult to stop the shaking, and it took him a very long scary time to get back to normal. Their schemes worked in their favor. I was angry about it, as I knew how every person was needed to help in the war to protect our new independence. I thought they were wrong to take this direction, but never expressed my opinion.

I was recently told by my brother Chaim about something similar that my father did when he still lived in Poland. When he had to register in the Polish Army, he drank a lot of vinegar before he went to the authorities. By doing so, he made his blood pressure go so very high that he was not accepted to the army.

Both my father and his brother were unhappy living at home. They had two sisters and a mother who was a sweet, quiet woman. Their red-haired father, however, loved to drink and was not very nice to his wife and children. Shalom ran away from home twice, but was found and brought back home. He succeeded the third time and arrived in Romania. He was put in jail because he had no papers. After a while, he was let go, learned the language and got a job as a metal worker, the same as his father. Both, Shalom and my father were very good at working with their hands.

In Romania, my uncle joined Betar, a right wing youth organization, training young Jewish people to fight and getting them ready to settle in Palestine. After two years in hachshara (training), Betar paid the group's travel expenses to Palestine. When they arrived, the young people were directed by Betar to settle in different parts of the country. My uncle's group went to Rosh Pina in the north of the country. They worked to build roads and houses and were engaged in many other jobs, anything that helped to develop the country.

Shalom stayed in Rosh Pina for a while and then moved to Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv, he fixed bikes and helped to build different items made with sheet metal.

While the Second World War was raging in Europe, the British, who occupied Palestine, started



*My Uncle Shalom & I at the beach in Tel-Aviv.*

recruiting young men to join their army and fight in Europe. At first, the recruits were part of the British general army. After a while, the British were asked by the Jewish leadership to create a special unit for Jewish soldiers only. The British agreed and they called the unit the “Jewish Brigade.” It was subsequently sent to Europe to fight the Nazis. They fought with the British army in Italy, Libya and Egypt. The fight in Egypt was very crucial and important. Hitler and his forces were on the Egyptian border, ready to invade and take over the entire Middle East. It was important to stop them and they were stopped, after a bitter fight. At the end of the war, the Jewish Brigade was dispatched to the concentration camps to help the survivors with food, clothing and resettling. The British trained the soldiers in different occupations. Shalom was part of the engineering corp. He served in the army for seven years.

My uncle Shalom and I were very close. He used to come to our home whenever he had free days. He was a bachelor and he gave me a lot of attention, lots of hugs and kisses, which I loved. As a British soldier, he had privileges to buy a lot of items in their canteens for very little money. The canteens carried many items that at the time were not available in the local stores or were very expensive.

Some of my most favorite items were canned, sweet fruits. I remember vividly the first time he came with cans of peaches. He put the cans on the table, and I loved the pictures on the outside labels.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Try it and see if you like it,” he answered. He then opened a can and my mother gave him a bowl. I put one slice, with its juice in the plate and tasted it. I loved it. I loved the softness of the fruit and the very sweet juice. My uncle looked at me with a smile on his face and said: “Nu? Do like it?”

“I love it. I never ate anything like it. Can you bring it every time you come?” I asked. “For you, I will,” he answered.

The next time he came, he had canned pears, then he brought canned pineapples, apricots, and mixed fruits. I loved them all. Besides the fruits, he would bring chocolates with nuts from Switzerland and anything

else that was special. Whenever he came, he would give me the package, and I loved opening it. He always tried to include something different, as a surprise. We never knew when he would show up, and to me it was a holiday when he did. Most of the times, it was on a Friday afternoon or on Shabbat. He slept on the base, but stayed with us the rest of the time. My father and his brother had a very warm, nice relationship. My mother liked him too and always made sure that we had enough food when he came, which was never a problem for my mother. It was fascinating to sit and listen to his stories.

My uncle Shalom, was a handsome man, warm and loving. He had light hair, green eyes, an athletic built and a wonderful smile. To me, he always seemed very happy, and I loved him. I liked seeing him in his uniform. He wore khaki shorts, knee-length, high wool socks and brown, highly polished brown-laced shoes. On one side of his shirt's sleeve there was an embroidered Jewish Star. He wore a khaki hard cap. I loved wearing that cap, but was only able to do so when home or when taking a picture with him because, when in uniform, the soldiers had to keep their hats on at all times. If caught without the hat, they would be court-martialed and punished.

My favorite time was when we went for walks to the beach. He knew that it was my favorite place. We mostly went in the mornings, just the two of us, after breakfast or sometimes in the late afternoon after we all woke up from the siesta and had cake and coffee. We would walk down Allenby Street, me holding his arm, wishing that some friends that I know would see us. I was so proud of him and loved to stop and introduce him.

In cooler weather, we just walked the length of the Tayelet (the Tel Aviv Promenade) along the ocean and sat for a long time on benches talking while holding each other. Shalom was always interested in everything I did, and I loved telling him. At times, we stayed to watch the sunset and only then walked back home for supper. On the way home, we used to stop and look at the store windows, and I used to tell him what I liked. We never sat in a café, as it was not important for me. We always ate at home, as I had a feeling that he lived on the allowance he received from the army. Whenever my father offered to pay him for everything he bought for us from the canteen, he refused to take the money.

In the summers, I loved going with him to the beach, to sit on the sand near the sea. We never rented a chair. He had a large beach towel, which he bought in the canteen, and we sat on it. We always sat as close as we could get to the lifeguard's station. My mother packed sandwiches and fruit for us, which always tasted so good.

At times, we took turns going to the water, as we couldn't leave our possessions alone. Unfortunately, sometimes, when no one watched over their stuff, it was stolen. Because of this problem, people who sat nearby would be asked to watch the items. It was a custom and most of the time people were ready to do it, as at some point, everyone needed that favor.

Once we got someone to watch our things, we would hold hands and run into the water together. I did not know how to swim. I always envied the kids who took swimming lessons with the lifeguard. I was curious to see how much the lifeguards would charge. When I got my answer, after asking them, I knew that I would not ask my parents to enroll me.

My uncle knew how to swim and I asked him to teach me. His method was very different from the lifeguard's instructions. One time, we ran into the water towards the deeper part. When we got there, suddenly, without warning, my uncle pushed my body and head under water. I could not breathe, but he would not let me lift my head out the water. Whenever I tried, he pushed my head back in. I heard him yelling, "Swim, swim, and I will let you come out". I was so scared and desperately wanted to get out that I suddenly felt myself moving my arms and floating to the top.

While I was coughing, my uncle was laughing and said, "You see Miriamshi," his favorite name to call me, "you can swim now and forever. Now, I will now show you the correct way of moving your arms and legs, just like the lifeguards do."

"I want to try again and see if I can float again." I tried and was so happy to see that I could do it again. I was determined that he would not push me under water again without letting me surface. I did not like having the water going through my nose and coughing. I never told him about my fear. He taught me how to swim on my stomach and float on my back. I was so happy that I was no longer jealous of the kids who were taking



*My Uncle Shalom in Poland.*

lessons with the lifeguards.

One day, my uncle told me that he met a girl and that they are going to get married. He assured me that we would always continue to have a good time together. It made me very happy to hear it from him, and at this point I was happy to hear about his upcoming marriage. I never imagined that my relationship with him would change. I was young and naïve and trusted him completely.

I went with my parents to their wedding, where I met his wife-to-be for the first time. Miriam was a redhead. She was shorter than my uncle. She was slim and wore a short, white dress and high-heeled white sandals and a short veil. She looked lovely, but I did not want to admit to it. The wedding was in the backyard of her sister Chemda's small wooden house, which was about three blocks from our apartment. Long tables covered with white tablecloths were set up in the yard. The wedding ceremony was outside too. After the ceremony, food prepared by Miriam's family was served, and an accordion player played music for singing and dancing. I was not very happy and couldn't wait to go home.

Some time passed when finally my uncle stopped at our home. He invited me to come and spend Shabbat with him and his wife. I was very excited and agreed. I was happy to have a chance to be with both of them and to get to know Miriam better. I went to their apartment, in the North of Tel Aviv, late Friday afternoon. They had a small one-bedroom apartment, and I was to sleep on the couch in the very small living room, which was separated from their bedroom by a glass double-door covered with a white curtain.

In the foyer, they had a small table that stood against the wall, outside a small working kitchen. We had

our Friday night supper and all the other meals that Miriam prepared at this table. I was surprised that she did not light the Shabbat candles, and that we did not have sweet wine for a blessing. When we finished eating, I offered to help with the dishes, but she told me it was not necessary. During supper, my uncle asked me many questions, but Miriam didn't say much. On Shabbat morning, my uncle and I went for a walk. Our conversations were less than before and they were strained. When we came back to their apartment, a nice lunch was ready. The food was very tasty, and I remarked about it. This time, while my uncle went to their bedroom, I helped Miriam with the dishes. Once the kitchen was cleaned, I was all ready to go for a nap on the sofa, while they retire to their bedroom. At this point, Miriam asked me to stay in the foyer and close the door to the living room while they go for a nap. I was shocked, but did not say anything.

Just before Miriam went to join my uncle, she said to me,

“Miriam, you are growing up, and it is time for you stop calling your uncle ‘Uncle Shalom.’ At times, I heard you say ‘Uncle Shulem,’ the Yiddish way, instead of Shalom, the Hebrew pronunciation. It is time for you to just call him Shalom.”

My parents had always pronounced his name in Yiddish, the same way that his parents and sisters addressed him. I was very surprised to hear what she said and did not react. I sat by the table in the foyer for over an hour and felt very uncomfortable. I thought of leaving while they slept, but decided to wait for them to get up. I realized that it was my uncle's idea to invite me for Shabbat, and that Miriam was not much in favor of it. Once they were up, it was after four o'clock. We all had coffee and cake. When we finished, I told them I had to go home. There was no resistance, and I was relieved. I thanked them, and when my uncle wanted to take me home, I refused him. I said that I was old enough to walk home by myself, and I did.

My parents were surprised to see me home early. When they asked if I had a nice time, all I said was, “Yes, but I will not go there again.” It took a few days until I told my parents what happened. I knew that my wonderful relationship with my uncle ended and I accepted it. My mother, who sensed my feelings, explained to me that my uncle started a new stage in his life with Miriam, and that she is the one he should spent his time with, and not with me.

We did not see them much. The only time I went with my parents to visit them was after my cousin Zev was born. They lived in a nice apartment that was in an old Arabic house, right off Herzl Street. I had a wonderful time holding Zev and playing with him. Miriam and Shalom seemed very happy. Shalom, who was very good with his hands and knew how to read architects' plans, worked and it looked like he made a nice living.

One day, my father came home and told my mother that Shalom wants to buy a farm and become a farmer and be independent. My father added that his brother asked him to give him money. A fight broke up between my parents. My mother was against it, wondering what did Miriam and Shalom know about farming. My father told her that he was going to give his brother the money, because he felt he had to help him. Once Shalom and Miriam moved, I went one time with my parents and my brother Isaac to visit them at their farm. The house they lived in was a small white house, and behind it there was a garden where they grew vegetables. I thought the larger areas were barren. I wondered how they were doing, but did not ask. They struggled to make it work by themselves, but had to leave the farm after a few short years. My parents, Miriam and Shalom, did not see each other much. I did remember my parents going to their second son Udi's brit milah (circumcision ceremony). I did not go. I did know that my Uncle Shalom started his own shop in Jaffa, making and installing commercial air conditioners.

The last time I saw him was on a visit to Israel, after many years of us not seeing or speaking to each other. We went to see him with his son Udi, who supported him. When my uncle Shalom who was sitting in a wheel chair saw me, his first word, with a smile on his face, was: “Miriamshi.” We hugged and kissed each other, and, for a fleeting moment, my old feeling of loving him came back.



*Shavuot with my friend at school.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER TEN

### Celebrating Shabbat and the Holidays

As you will see, for me, Shabbat and the holidays are more about traditions than about religion. Each holiday has a special meaning to me. It probably is because this was the way I was raised. My parents always made sure that each holiday was celebrated with a lot of attention to details. Also, learning a lot about the holidays in a secular school made the feeling for the tradition even stronger. As I grew older, some of the religious feeling was acquired. The change came after I got married and started going to services, something I never did when I was growing up.

### Shabbat

Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, followed the six days in which the world was first created. The seventh day was designated the day of rest, according to the Torah.

Shabbat, is the most holy time of the year; it surpasses Yom Kippur. It is the only day that is mentioned in the Ten Commandments. All work is supposed to stop; as are all thoughts connected to work. It is a time for prayer and a time to spend with the family. The beginning of Shabbat starts with the lighting of the Shabbat candles, 10 minutes before sundown on Friday. The women of the family do the blessing over the candles. Shabbat ends with the Havdalah (Separation) service on Saturday night, once the first three stars are in the sky.

I felt the meaning of Shabbat at its fullest when I lived in Israel. Early on Friday afternoons, store after store would start to shut down. People would hurry home, many carrying flowers and other packages. Fewer cars and buses would be seen out on the roads.

In preparation for a day of rest, I would go to buy all my favorite magazines and newspapers. I would also go to a store which sold only nuts, dried fruits and spices. My favorite nuts were sunflower seeds that were opened in the mouth and the shells were spat out. I would go home, lie on my bed, munch on the black and white seeds and read the papers. I liked the sound the shells made when I was spitting them. My mother hated me doing it, so in order to placate her, I kept a bowl for the shells right next to me.

One of my favorite magazines was Ha'Olam Ha'Ze (This World), a political magazine with a format similar to Newsweek. I liked its layout. I also liked reading the opinion pieces of Uri Avinari, who was the

publisher and the chief editor of the magazine at that time. Mostly, I agreed with him, as he was a right-winger.

Another magazine that I favored was La'Isha (For the Woman). It was the first magazine devoted to women's issues. The editor and all the writers were women. I found its portrayal of women, the gossip and advice fascinating. It was a very successful magazine, and I tried to read most of it before my mother got her hands on it, so I read that one first. I also felt that I had a stake in it, as our next-door neighbor, the Impresario Markevitch, was very involved with and helpful to the staff. He was the one who organized their beauty pageants and convinced actresses to talk about their private lives to the magazine.

On Fridays, my father would come home from work in the early afternoon, and we would eat a big lunch. My mother cooked and baked as much as for a holiday. Once we finished and helped her with the dishes, we all settled in for a long afternoon nap. By then, it was very quiet in the streets, and it felt like the entire city was napping. Afterwards, we'd mostly stay home and have an early light supper, preceded by my mother lighting the candles and my father blessing the wine and the challah. The meal always included gefilte fish, salad and cake. My father loved eating the head of the fish. It could never be thrown away or given to any of us. Friday night was a very important time to spend together with family.

Before my father had a car, we spent Shabbat mornings going to the beach. Lunch on Shabbat, was always a cholent. That was a stew whose ingredients included a dark meat called flanken, stuffed derma and many kinds of beans, potatoes and barley. It was cooked slowly from late Friday afternoon, through the night, until lunch the next day. My mother made it all year round. Although it was very greasy, we loved it. Afterwards, it was difficult to wash the dishes and the large stew pot, especially when there was only cold water. It was a job I shared with my brother Isaac.

Following that heavy lunch, we'd all nap for at least two hours. Then, my mother would set the table for coffee and cake. It was usually served between four and five in the afternoon. At times, we had our cousins and their parents come over to join us, or we would go to them. Often, we would also have my mother's cousins from Rishon LeZion, a small city south of Tel Aviv, come to us. Sometimes, we went to visit them, taking a taxi, the only public transportation allowed, in those years, on Shabbat.

Once my father bought his car, a small, green four-door Fiat, we began to travel outside of the city on Shabbat. In later years, when the first big hotel was built on the beach in Herzliya, we would get all dressed up and go there every Saturday morning. I especially loved it in the winter, on sunny days. As I got older, I went with my friends to the beach in the summer and accompanied my parents to the hotel in the winter.

My parents never went to synagogue on Shabbat, but we always felt that it was a special day at home. My mother made sure of it. It was also special for us because my father never went to work on Shabbat, even when he was very busy and had a lot to do. He was a lot of fun to have around.

Years later, when I had my regular job in the Army, and later in the Foreign Office, it was wonderful to come home on Friday after-noon. I looked forward to smelling all the wonderful foods that I knew my mother would prepare. She always made sure to include my favorites. I would shower, we would all sit down to our midday dinner together, and then everyone slept until suppertime.

Observing some of the traditions of Shabbat that we grew up with was important to me, although I made some adjustments. I tried to keep some of the traditions when our kids were growing up, and am still doing so now, although they now have their own families and their own ideas and lives.

For me, covering the table with a white tablecloth, blessing the candles (most times not on the prescribed time) and blessing the wine and the challah, makes a difference between the daily routines of the week and Shabbat. I don't like to do any shopping for food or anything else on Shabbat. We always also eat somehow differently from the rest of the week, including a challah and a piece of cake with our main meal and sometimes a piece of herring on Shabbat morning.

## **Rosh Hashana**

Usually, when Rosh Hashana came around, it was still hot in Israel. You could feel the approach of the

holiday at home, in the streets, in the markets and in the food and clothing stores.

As my father was the only wage earner in the family, I could tell from my parents' conversations that he would have to shell out a lot of money for the holiday. Usually, at the beginning of each week, he would give my mother an allowance. In those days, no one paid by check, and there were no credit cards. He would give her cash only. This used to be a real funny exchange for me to watch. My father would hand my mother the cash, and she used to count it again, after he counted the money right in front of her. Then, she would recount it. At times, she would say to him, "Zigmund, you didn't give me enough. The amount is short."

"You don't know how to count," he would answer and take the money from her. He would then, with a smirk on his face, start counting again and was quickly able to add the missing money, which she would recount again. The two of them would laugh hysterically every time.

My mother used to tell us that because this holiday is the beginning of a new year, we couldn't wear old clothes. We needed to welcome the New Year fresh. She would also buy something new for herself and for my father. The shopping for new clothes and new shoes for every one, especially for my brothers and me, came before the start of food shopping.

Because she was not the only mother thinking this way, all the stores, especially the ones that carried children's clothing, were mobbed. On the main commercial street, Allenby Street, there was one of the biggest and most popular children's shoe stores, named Pil (Elephant) Shoes. It was a very large store built in the round, with large windows on the outside that were filled with shoes labeled with their prices. The seats in the store were arranged in semi-circles, so every customer could see and be seen by all.

Upon entering the store, people had to write down their names and were called when a salesman was free. My mother had a sales-man that she favored, and he liked her too. After writing down our name, she would look for him and show him where we were sitting. I don't remember ever having any other salesman help us.

He was a slight man with curly black hair and glasses. He wore dark pants and a white shirt. He was very patient, pleasant and always had a smile on his face. Once our turn came, I would go with him outside and show him the shoes that I liked in the windows. Most kids would have their mothers go with them, but I insisted on going by myself. He would always bring an additional style, if he thought that it would be a better fit. I liked him very much. He made me feel very special, so that sometimes, when I passed the store by myself, I would go in just to say hello to him, if he wasn't busy.

Once the shoes were settled on, the salesman would bring them to the cashier and go on to the next customer. With each purchase, we would get a balloon with the store name printed on it and a lollipop. Because of these giveaways, most kids wanted to go to this shoe store only, and some of the smaller stores presented no competition to it.

I always had a new dress that my mom would sew for me, and I also got new underwear and new ribbons for my hair. When my brothers were growing up, she would take them shopping for everything, as she couldn't sew boys' clothing.

It was also very important to buy something new for the home too. It was my father who would usually go shopping for a new accessory. He was also responsible for buying wine for all the holidays. He would go to the small antique shops, which also carried new gift items, and surprise us. I liked to stand on the balcony and wait for him to come home. When I saw him walking down the street, I would run down the stairs to greet him. He had the wine in one arm, usually a few bottles, and the gift, wrapped in newspaper, in the other. Being very excited, I would grab the package from him, run to the living room and open it. I loved everything he bought, as he had very good taste.

My mother was very busy preparing too. She would go to the market to pick her fruits and vegetables, which were then delivered. She always went to the same store in the market. The owner's name was Habibi. He was an Iranian Jew, very well mannered and polite. The store was in a big square space and was very clean. In the front, there was a colorful display of fresh fruits and vegetables. Deeper into the store, Habibi displayed the colorless vegetables, like onions and potatoes. I felt that the place looked like a painting. He used to put away certain items aside for my mother so she would have the freshest items. He was very successful because of his

delivery service and the very fresh produce that he carried. He didn't charge for delivery, but his higher prices covered his expenses.

This store was my favorite. As I grew up, my mother would give me a list and send me shopping by myself. The owner knew exactly what she would buy, but he always let me take out my list and tell him. He would accompany me, let me pick up what I needed and, if it wasn't a good piece, he would tell me why and what to look for.

After a while, when he realized that I knew what to do, he would leave me alone with my list. I felt so grown up. I would also pay him. If at times I didn't have enough money, he would tell me not to worry. He trusted my mother, and he could also collect the money upon delivery. He would always ask me to pick out a fruit or vegetable that was not on the list, as a gift for me. For many years, when I would just walk through the market, I would stop to say hello to Mr. Habibi. We always hugged, and I had to tell him what I was doing. Even now, whenever we are in Israel and walking through the market, my head turns automatically towards the street where his store used to be.

Most of the market consisted of stalls, lined up on each side of the street. Individuals owned them, and one had to carry the produce home, as there was no delivery. The stalls were also very colorful, and they competed with each other price wise. The merchants who had their stalls closer to the main street charged higher prices for their wares than the ones who were further away. The merchants would try to lure customers by yelling about the freshness of their fruits and vegetables and also about their prices. It made for a lot of noise, but it also created the atmosphere of a Middle Eastern bazaar. I always thought it was a lot of fun, as I loved the excitement and even the smells.

Behind the stalls, there were sidewalks and stores. Some of the stores carried many kinds of nuts. Others carried different candies and chocolates. Still others sold table linens, kitchen items, towels, soaps, shoes, underwear and other clothes at a cheaper price than the stores on the main streets. Alongside of them, there were some vegetable stores, fish stores and butchers. It was a mishmash of merchandise and people.

Aside from all the stores and stalls, there was a whole separate area, a few steps higher than the street. This area was under a roof to protect it from the sun. It was designated mainly for fish, chicken and meat. The place was subdivided and occupied by different owners. The fish would be on top of a table lined with a lot of ice to keep them chilled. There were sardines, mackerel, mullets and many other Mediterranean fish. This too, like the fruits and vegetables, looked very colorful. Next to each stall there was a big tub filled with cold water. In the water, live fish were swimming. The tub was mostly filled with carp, which was the most popular fish to cook for the Friday night meal and for Shabbat.

Shopping for fish was a lot of fun. My mother would point with her finger at the particular carp that she liked. The fish man would take his net, as she was pointing, and fish it out. If she did not like the size of the fish, he would put it back, and together they would look for another one. We would usually go to the market on Thursday afternoons after school. She would get two fish for Shabbat, or four if for the holidays. The store owner would then put the fish in a container, and we would carry them home to put in the bathtub. Sometimes, when she shopped for the holidays, she would go about three days early, so the fish were relegated to swim in our bathtub for two to three days. She did it because she never liked to wait until the last minute.

Having the fish in the tub was a lot of fun for me and, later on, for my brothers. I would go to the bathroom and lock the door. I did that in order to try to catch the fish. I would kneel on my knees and bend over the tub. I was mostly able to touch them, but I don't think I ever caught one, or I would remember. At times, I had to catch myself from falling into the tub. I would stay there until I heard a knock on the door. At that point, I would get up, dry my hands and walk out without saying anything. I didn't want anyone to know what I was doing. It was a lot of fun, seeing the fish swimming in the water. For some reason, it made me feel very happy, to the point where I remember laughing out loud.

Many years later, in a conversation with my brothers, Isaac and Chaim, over lunch, I learned that they used to do the same thing. Chaim even told us that he would take off his shoes and step into the tub, trying to catch the fish.

On Thursday mornings, or one day before a holiday, my mother would drain the bathtub and, one by one, take out the thrashing fish and put them in the kitchen sink. She would then take a special utensil and with one strong movement hit on top of the fish's head to kill it. She cleaned the fish, cut it up and washed away the blood from the sink. Then she would take out a steel grinding machine and turn the handle to make it work. Once finished, she had to take the machine apart, wash all the parts and reassemble it. After watching her do this once, I never wanted to see it again, as I found it very upsetting. These days, all this is done in the fish store, and when you bring it home, it is ready to be cooked.

One of the traditions associated with Rosh Hashanah is tashlich (casting or throwing away). It is performed on the first day of Rosh Hashanah (the second, if it falls on Shabbat). It requires that people gather by a body of running water - an ocean, a lake or a river. Pieces of challah are placed in the pockets of men and boys, which are then emptied out into the water. It symbolizes the getting rid of the sins of the old year and starting the new year with a clean slate. It is accompanied by prayer. As a child, I did not like this tradition, as it did not make sense to me. Therefore, I never joined any of my friends who went to the beach to observe it. Although they did not believe in it, either, they thought it was a funny sight.

There was a lot of time-consuming preparation involved with cooking for Shabbat and for the holidays. To get everything done, my mother would wake up at six in the morning, and we could smell fish and chicken soup being cooked when we woke up. I used to like it, as those smells represented Shabbat and the holidays to me.

For Rosh Hashanah, there were always a few special items that were placed on the table. Pomegranate represented the new fruits of the year. Honey was accompanied by apple slices that were dunked in it, in order to guarantee a sweet year. And there was also sweet kiddush wine. All these were placed on a white tablecloth, which was new every year. There was also challah, which was round for the High Holidays, not braided as it was for Shabbat. The roundness symbolized the hope that the coming year would be complete and not broken by any tragedy. Some of the challahs also had raisins in them to symbolize the hope for a sweet year.

We also ate tzimmes, which are carrots cooked with a lot of sugar and cinnamon. My mother would do a lot of baking and made sure that we always had a honey cake. In addition, we would have many different candies and chocolates, all of these food items were very sweet, as they echoed the wish for sweetness in the new year.

Another holiday ritual was shopping for flowers. On our street, there was a very nice flower store that carried, in addition to the same flowers that the street merchants had, some very special and exotic flowers that were flown in from Europe. It was a very small store, and one had to climb a full flight of steps to get in. On the street level, they would display some plants and, on every few steps, some flowers in vases. A very strong floral scent traveled all the way to the street.

The store was privately owned, and at holiday time the whole family would be there to help. You could buy the flowers and take them home, but they also had a delivery service. I always went with my mother to buy the flowers at this store. I was fascinated by the beautiful flowers and felt happy and proud to be carrying them home, all wrapped up in cellophane paper. Because this store was so busy, especially before the holidays, at times, my mother would purchase her flowers a few days before. It also happened that sometimes we wanted certain flowers that had to be ordered. In that case, they would deliver the flowers to us. This would make me unhappy, as it took away the pleasure of pride I had in carrying them. Usually, we'd only buy flowers at this store for the holidays. At other times, when I would pass the store by myself, I would go inside just to see what kind of flowers they had. They were very nice people and would let me look around. I knew not to come on a Thursday or Friday, as those were their busiest days. My father used to go there whenever he bought flowers for my mother on special occasions.

When the time came to set the table for the holidays, I always helped my mother. I remember her teaching me where to put everything, and what was needed to make the table look very festive. We had special dishes that were used for Shabbat dinners and holidays. To me, setting the table always felt very creative and signaled that the beginning of the holiday was near. It was necessary for me to make sure that the water and wine glasses were in place and to use the special holiday silverware, as well.

My parents purchased their first set of pretty dishes at the same time that our apartment on Shenkin Street was decorated. Most of the women in the area bought their housewares at a store located on the first floor of a big apartment building. The owner was an orthodox man with a long white beard who always wore a black suit. He had his business in the front, with an entrance a few steps off the sidewalk. He lived with his family in the back of the store.

He was a very smart businessman. He carried everything for the home: dishes, silverware, pots, towels, sheets, drapes, etc. He was very successful, as he was one of the first people who allowed you to buy his wares on an installment plan. Also, whenever we would meet him in the street, he would stop to tell us what new merchandise he just received that might interest my mother. I always loved going with her to help her pick out what she needed. At times, when I visited friends' homes, I would see the same dishes or table-cloths that we had.

On Rosh Hashana, the evening meal was festive, and we felt it even more so because we had to change into our new clothes. My mother would light the candles, and my father would bless the wine, the challah and the fruit, as he wished us a sweet and healthy New Year.

In the morning, our breakfast consisted of challah, honey cake and coffee. After we ate, my mother and father would get dressed and go to the synagogue, which was a block away from our home, on a different street. The entrance had a wide staircase leading into a main hall. On the left of the lobby, there were a few doors, opening into the main area where services were held. That's where the bima was located; the stage where the Rabbi and the Cantor prayed with the ark containing the torah behind them. The seats in front of the bima were for men only. The women had to climb a staircase to the balcony. Young children, up to the age of 12 or 13, were allowed to stay or visit with either parent.

The building had many, very large windows, spanning from the first floor to the roof. This was the only part that I liked about the place. The windows were in the front and in the back of the building. The back windows faced the neighborhood park, Ginat Shenkin (Shenkin Garden).

This park, Ginat Shenkin, was very important for both the young and the old in the area. It had three entrances, one facing the main street and two on each side of the park, coming in from side streets. The park had many big trees, which gave a lot of shade. It also had small areas of flowers and a sandbox for children to play in. Through-out, there were many benches that at certain times were completely occupied. Mothers would come with baby carriages and their toddlers to the park. Older people would come to sit and chat with friends and observe the children. It was a very vibrant place, except between the hours of one to four in the afternoon, when most people stayed home to eat and take their daily nap.

Most of the kids in the area would congregate in this park. We would usually go there in the afternoon to talk and play games. When we were young, we were allowed to stay until sundown. When we grew older, we were able to stay later. As children, we played games such as hide and seek, catch and jump rope. As we grew older, the evening games changed somewhat. We still played hide and seek, but now we added kissing once someone was caught or discovered. Also, some couples would sit on the back benches necking. Of course, none of us told our parents about any of it, as we knew that they would not let us go to the park in the late evening if they found out.

There was no grass anyplace in the park. It was mostly dirt, except for the area around the big sand box, and that was cement. It was here that many of us learned how to roller skate. Once we felt confident, we would roller skate in the streets outside the park. Going around the block, we had two level surfaces. One was the main street, the other one was the street in front of the synagogue. In between these two, the side streets were going up and down a hill. Because we were able to skate on the sidewalk, we had no problems with our parents permitting it. They wouldn't have allowed us to skate in the streets, as they were very busy with many cars, buses and taxis.

Because of the proximity of the park to the synagogue, we were able to convince our parents that we could hear the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn) from the outside. None of us had any intentions of going inside. Hardly any of my friends' parents went to pray, so none of them were forced to go either.

As Rosh Hashanah was the only holiday celebrated for two days in Israel, it was a good time to get

together with family. On the first day, we would have lunch at home after my parents came from synagogue. We would then all go lie down for a long nap. The streets were very quiet, and you would hardly see anyone walking or riding in a car until about 4:30 p.m. Upon waking up, we would go to our Aunt Rachel and Uncle Motek's for coffee and cake and sometimes stay for supper. My parents would drive there, and I would walk. My parents never questioned me about it, but they were very surprised that I would do that. I'd be walking down a main street to my aunt and uncle's home when my family would drive by and spot me. My father would stop the car and ask me to join them, but I always refused. I could never understand why I chose not to travel by car. For some reason, it made me feel happy and connected to the meaning of the holiday. I kept these traditions for many years.

On the second day of the holiday, my aunt and uncle and cousins would come to us, in late afternoon, for coffee and tea. My mother always made sure to bake the cakes that my cousins liked, in addition to the ones that we liked. These gatherings made the holiday very special for us because we always had great fun, as we liked spending time with each other.

Through the years, I always found that this holiday lifts the spirit, and I love the greeting of "shanah tova (good year)," which really means, I wish for you a happy and healthy New Year.

## Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur was always tough for me to take and still is. I never liked what it represented; or the meaning behind it. And I didn't care for the fasting either. The sayings "Ishana tova tikatevu (May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year)" and "gemar chatima tova (May your fate be sealed for good in the Book of Life)" always did and still do make me very uneasy. The prayer "Unettaneh Tokef (Let us speak of the awesomeness)," which is considered the most important prayer of the day, describes how God and his angels have every human being pass in front of them while his or her fate is decided. It also details the many ways that death can happen. It was scary when I was a young child, learning in school about it and running away with my imagination. It is a tough subject, and, as one gets older, the thoughts evoked by it are deeper and the different descriptions in the prayer become much more meaningful.

Kol Nidrei (literally, All Vows), the prayer in which people ask for forgiveness, which is recited on the evening of Yom Kippur, is considered very important. It sets the tone and reminds us of the purpose of the holiday. Everyone rushes to the services to make sure that none of it is missed.

The preparations for Yom Kippur were the same as for any other holiday, but the atmosphere and the mood were different. There was a certain tension and apprehension in the air. About two hours before the start of the holiday, fewer and fewer cars were on the road. At sundown, when the holiday started, there was no movement on the roads at all. There were no cars or bicycles during the day of Yom Kippur either, and I was always fascinated to see how life returned to the city quickly afterwards. This contrast happened only on Yom Kippur.

My mother told me about the custom of kaparot (atonement), which is practiced by the orthodox before Yom Kippur. Just hearing about it used to make me sick. A person would wave a live chicken, three times over his head. The orthodox believed that by doing so, all illness, pain, guilt and sin would be transferred to the other object (i.e., the chicken). After the ceremony, the chicken would be killed and eaten or given to the poor. Following the tradition meant that the person and the family were assured a pleasant and happy life. My mother asked if I would like to see kaparot done, as she knew where to go to see it, but I was never ready to go. She told me that when she grew up in Poland, most of the men would do it. To me, it just added another reason for not loving this holiday. After hearing about it for the first time, I asked her not to talk about it anymore.

Eating a big meal before the fast is believed to make fasting easier. My mother always prepared gefilte fish as an appetizer. A soup was made with a special cut of beef, and the noodles were replaced by kreplach. Kreplach are triangular-shaped dumplings filled with chopped meat, chopped onions and seasoning. The idea of

re-placing the chicken in the soup with beef was that the latter was heavier and would keep hunger away longer. The side dishes were invariably potatoes, tzimmes and salad. The dessert was always cooked fruit along with some cake. It was also important to have large, red grapes that have a high sugar content. At the end of the meal, we would drink black coffee to keep away the thirst. I never understood where all these explanations came from, except that this was what my mother and her family used to do.

After the meal, we would all help my mother to clean up, so our parents could go for Kol Nidrei. No matter how early we would start to eat, there was always a last minute rush.

When I was about six or seven years old, my mother asked me to come with her to Kol Nidrei. We walked up the steps of the synagogue to the main lobby where I saw many memorial lights on a very long table. My mother and all the other women each lit a candle for their respective family. All the women covered their heads with dark kerchiefs and made a blessing while crying. I felt scared and held my mother's hand tightly. After she was done, we went one flight up to the women's balcony. I sat on her lap, and when she had to stand up, she put me in front of her. Most of the women were dressed in black or other dark dresses with black shawls. When Kol Nidrei started, everyone in the balcony prayed and cried at the same time.

I looked at my mother and said, "I am going home, I don't want to stay here. I am afraid."

She looked at me and gave me a little push as a signal that it was all right. I left and ran home. I was so relieved and happy that I didn't have to stay. When I came home, I went to the terrace and sat there and waited for my parents to come home.

When my parents came back, my father asked, "What happened to you, Miriam?"

"I hate it. It feels like a funeral with everyone shaking and crying and all these candles at the entrance. It is very scary for me. I will never again go inside a synagogue on Yom Kippur," I answered. I never did, until I got married.

During the day, all the neighborhood kids would stay in the park, outside the synagogue. We would be there for most of the day, except for an afternoon break. No one brought any food to the park, so we had to go home to eat. Most of my friends' parents did not observe the holiday, as we did. Most of the parents, if they fasted, didn't go to pray. As it would start to get dark, most of us kids would look at the sky, waiting for three stars to come out, signaling the end of the holiday.

From the age of eight, I was responsible to prepare the table for 'breaking the fast.' I would leave the park, allowing for enough time to set the table and then to go back to the park to hear the shofar.

I was always very happy when this part came and the holiday was ending. I also liked the food that was served. We would start with herring, smoked fish, green and black olives, tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, peppers and onions, which I would cut up and arrange on a platter. All was accompanied with challah, rye bread and black bread.

In addition to not eating, fasting also meant not having anything to drink for more than 24 hours. The salty herring and the other salty fish made the body crave liquids, and one would drink a lot shortly after the fast ended. To quench our thirst, we would drink coffee that was prepared in advance and was ready to be brewed, as well as seltzer.

When setting out the food for breaking the fast, I also had to cut the babka and marble cake that my mother baked. She used a lot of vanilla sugar that gave them a lot of flavor and a very wonderful smell. When I started fasting at the age of 12 and felt hungry at the end of the day, I would smell the cakes, and that would sustain me longer. I also had to put on the table halvah (a sweet candy-like confection made of ground sesame seeds and honey), chocolates and nuts, in addition to fresh fruits.

After hearing the blowing of the shofar in the park, my friends and I would sing the "Hatikva" and then go home. At home, I would keep the main door open. I loved seeing my parents walk in with big smiles. They were very happy, and there were a lot of hugs and kisses. At that point, I was also very happy and relieved. My father always started the meal with a small glass of brandy. He used to tell us that it was good for the stomach. Later on, as an adult, I would do the same, but had to stop, as I didn't think it agreed with me.

For many years, my mother wanted us to eat a full dinner, with gefilte fish, soup and meat, after the

'breaking of the fast' meal of her-ring, vegetables, bread and cake. We always fought her, and finally she gave up. She told us that when she grew up, this is what they used to do. We couldn't understand how they could do it, as so much was eaten before.

When Yom Kippur ended, we all felt relieved and looked for-ward to the next holiday, Sukkot.

## Sukkot

Sukkot begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur. It is a happy holiday and people greet each other saying "Chag sameach (Happy holiday)." The tradition of building a sukka (booth or hut) is done to commemorate the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after they left Egypt on their way to the Holy Land. For shelter, they hastily constructed flimsy booths. The roof and walls were covered densely with branches, bushes, straw, whatever could be found easily, for protection against the hot sun. Very narrow openings were left in the roof in order to be able to see the stars at night and have some light.

As the holiday approached many sukka (booths) were erected on many buildings' terraces. Mostly orthodox families observed this tradition. They ate all their meals in the sukka and some even slept in them.

Our cousin Ely built a sukka in their apartment building's back-yard. The roof of the sukka was covered with palm branches, and white sheets were used for the walls. A light bulb was attached for light, and a large table with chairs was left in the sukka for the entire holiday. We decorated the inside with many colored paper cutouts. Neighbors were invited to use the sukka too.

I could not wait to go and eat there. We all had vacation from school for the seven days of the holiday. I only remember going to eat in the sukka in the evenings for a light supper. During the week, my brother Isaac and I went without my parents. We all helped my aunt to carry the dishes and food from their apartment, which was one flight up. The only time that I recall that my parents came too was on a Shabbat afternoon for lunch. My aunt Rachel carried a large pot of hot cholent, wrapped in a navy and white checked towel. You could see the strain in her face, as the pot was very heavy. All of us cousins helped to carry the dishes, drinks, fruits and excellent cakes and cookies that my aunt baked. She was a very good cook and baker. After lingering for about two hours of eating, we left for our afternoon nap. As a family, we only celebrated this tradition of the holiday.

Another aspect of the holiday, which was mostly observed by the orthodox, is arba'a minim (four species), which refers to the four kinds of Jews, differing in their levels of observance. The holiday of Sukkot is meant to unify these four kinds of Jews. Symbolically, the four kinds are represented by a fruit and three tree branches: the etrog (citron), the lulav (palm), the hadas (myrtle) and the arava (willow). The blessing over the four kinds is recited every day of Sukkot, except on Shabbat.

The last day of the holiday is Simchat Torah. This is a holiday that celebrates the conclusion of the reading of the entire Five Books of Moses and the start of the rereading of the Torah. Adults walk around the synagogue holding all the Torahs and there is a lot of singing and dancing. Children also take part in the services together with the adults.

As children, we got paper flags covered with pictures of Jewish themes. On top of each flag, there was an apple with a candle that was lit up. We had to be very careful carrying the flags. When services were over, tables laden with fruits, desserts, wines and cold drinks were set up. It was only on this holiday that my friends and I and many other kids from the neighborhood went to the synagogue for a celebration. It was a lot of fun.

## Pesach

Pesach (Passover) had a very special meaning in our home. My mother who came from an orthodox home felt strongly about keeping the same customs and traditions that were followed in her home in Poland. She was the only one of her living sisters who kept a kosher home. She followed the kashrut rules pretty closely. She

bought her fish and vegetables early before the holiday, but she always waited until all the 'Kosher for Passover' shelf food was in the stores. She would place her order at the grocery store about two weeks in advance, and it was delivered to us about two to three days before the holiday.

She had a lot of work to do before the delivery, and I was her main helper until my brother Isaac was older. Later, when we could afford to hire help, she had an ozeret (cleaning lady) who took on the role. The most important task was taking care of the kitchen; disposing of the food that was not kosher for Passover.

Another thing she had to do was change dishes. I remember one Pesach going with her to buy special porcelain dishes for meat and glass dishes for dairy, as well as a beautiful new tablecloth and kitchen towels. At the end of the holiday, the dishes were stored on top of the cabinet until the following year. Come Pesach, my father would take them down and replace them with our everyday dishes.

Wine and water glasses were placed in a bathtub filled with water for 48 hours. When they were taken out, we had to shower quickly because for the next three days the live carp filled the tub, at which time my mother was ready to cook them to make gefilte fish. Mean-while, we could only sponge ourselves, as we only had one bathroom in the apartment. When finally we could shower, as close to the holiday as was possible, my father would say laughing, "Now you are koshered for Pesach too." He basically went along with my mother, but did not believe in any of these traditions.

There was a completely different procedure when it came to the pots and pans and silverware. It was too expensive to replace everything. About two weeks before the holidays, an Arab with a horse and carriage would come around shouting in Hebrew: "Pots to clean." My mother and some of the other women in our building used his service, mostly for frying pans that needed heavy duty scrubbing to make them look like new. They always argued with the Arab about the price, but always came to an agreement. Mostly, the frying pans would be returned within two days. He collected them all, and when they were done, he came back yelling again. There were no written records of the names of the owners. The same women always picked up their pots and frying pans and paid him at this point.

Once, my mother received her frying pans back, the rules of kashrut for Pesach stated that they had to be immersed in boiling water to be koshered together with the pots and the silverware. That created a once-a-year, special opportunity for a business. In different neighborhoods, a single person would take care of the task on the sidewalk. It was understood that it would be a religious person who could be trusted. A bunch of large pieces of wood were set on fire. A large metal bucket of water was suspended on top of the fire. It was important that the water be constantly boiling. The pots or pans, about five at a time, were immersed in the water for about five minutes and then immersed into another big bucket of cold water.

The same procedure was done with the silverware, which he put into a special large metal container with holes in it. He would mumble quietly after each time that he took the stuff out of the water. That supposedly was a special prayer, although I didn't believe it was. I also didn't think that he was orthodox. When all was done, he would charge me accordingly. I was amazed at how he remembered the exact number of items he dunked. It was a hard job, as he had to take care of everything by himself, and it was very hot because of the fire and the constant boiling water. He wore long pants and a long-sleeved white top and sweated profusely. I couldn't look at him, as it disgusted me.

I hated this chore because I was the one who had to go back and forth with the pots dangling from my hands and making noise, hit-ting against each other, for two blocks, until all was done. The problem was that I was terrified that a friend would see me, and then I would be the butt of jokes of the class. I basically was the only one in our class whose parents followed the Passover rules. I figured that if I go between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, when most people ate their main meal followed by a siesta, none of my friends would be out. I would practically run, looking all around me and making sure that I wasn't seen, and I was prepared to hide, if necessary. Luckily, I was never seen.

At any other time of the day, there was always a line of people waiting with their pots and pans, as he could only take care of only one person at a time. Many times, when I walked back from school with my friends, they would laugh at the people, and I would just turn away from them so my secret would not be revealed.

When my brother Isaac was about seven years old, and I was already in high school, I refused to do this job, and he was recruited. "I remember taking the pots and pans to the synagogue across the street from our building and koshering them for the holiday," he recalled.

About four days before the holiday, when the kitchen was clean, and all bread and legumes had been thrown out, my mother started to bake. She baked a lot to make sure that there was enough to last through the holiday. She started very early in the morning and baked all day. The Passover vacation from school started a week before the holiday and ended at the end of it. It is still the case today. Mostly, during that time, I would stay home and help in the kitchen. My most favorite job was helping with the baking. I liked to mix the batter and lick the bowls, cleaning them with my fingers before washing them. I loved the combination of folded egg whites, sugar, matzo meal, ground walnuts and fresh lemon zest. It was very smooth, soft and smelled delightful. At times, when I tried to lick some of it before mother put it in the cake pan, she would smile and hit my hand lightly and tell me to stop.

My father's job was to buy the wines. We only used red, sweet Concord wine all through the Seder ceremony and also to make a special layered matzo cake. In addition to the wine, he always bought Slivovitz, which is a brandy made from plums that is 100% proof. It is very strong, burns the insides and is easy to get drunk on from one or two shots. He always bought more than was needed, and my mother made fun of him for it. When I saw him or heard his whistle, I would run downstairs to help him, as he was loaded down with many bottles. I loved watching his glowing face, as he got such pleasure from doing this task.

At a young age, my mother thought me how to set the table and make it festive and beautiful. On top of a white tablecloth, I set the special Passover dishes, the polished silverware and shiny wine glasses. Every year, everything felt like new, as these dishes were only used once a year. Our home was filled with spring flowers and the food smelled divine. There was a very special feeling of celebration in the air.

My father assembled the Seder plate after my mother prepared the components. It was a big job by itself. A day in advance, she had to cut the maror (bitter herb), which was a horseradish root, in small strips. Its smell was so sharp that tears ran down her face, worse than when cutting and chopping onions. At the same time, she also made grated horseradish using a hand-held grater. She liked to get this job out of the way first, so she could enjoy the other preparations. When done, she always wiped her face with her apron and a kitchen towel and sighed a sigh of relief.

Next came the roasting of an egg, used to symbolize mourning and sadness in memory of the destruction of the Temple. That was followed by the roasting of the shank bone, in memory of the lamb sacrifices in the Temple during Passover in ancient times. It filled the house with an unpleasant smell. She opened all the doors and windows to create cross ventilation, so as to get rid of the terrible burning smell.

Once all this was done, she went to make our favorite dish - the charoset. It is a sweet mixture made of ground apples, chopped walnuts and red wine. Its appearance resembles mortar somewhat, to remind us of the mortar that Jewish slaves used to build the pyramids. I used to stand next to my mother, helping her to mix all the ingredients. Once it was finished, I would stick my fingers in the bowl and put some charoset in my mouth. With laughter in her voice, she would try to chase me away, but to no avail. It became a game we played. She would warn me that there will not be enough for the Seder, but, of course, I knew that she always made a lot of extra.

When the Seder plate, candles and flowers were placed on the table, it became majestic to me and very real. My brothers and I would change into our new shoes and outfits, as that was an important part of the tradition. I, then, stood on the terrace watching out for our guests' arrival and seeing other families hurrying to their Seders. We always had guests for the Seder. At times, it was our aunt, uncle, and cousins, at other times friends and sometimes neighbors that we were very close to. We had more guests around the table, when we moved to our larger apartment in Shderot Chen.

Once everyone was present, we sat down at the table. My father handed the Haggadah to everyone and we started. We were always very hungry, but knew that it would take a while before we could eat. He never



*'My cousin Eli and I on Shavuot'*

skipped anything, but he read it so fast that all we could do was just listen. We only were involved with the four questions and the singing of the songs. “Dayenu (It would have been sufficient)” was a very favorite hymn, which we sang with a lot of energy.

For us kids, the best part of the Haggadah involved reciting the plagues that were brought upon the Egyptians. We would dip our pinky in the red wine and try to aim drops of it at each other. When my mother saw us doing it, she warned us and directed us toward the middle of the table. She never had a problem with having the white tablecloth filled with red wine stains.

One of our favorite foods was served before the dinner. It was hard boiled eggs dunked in salt water, followed by boiled new potatoes dipped in the same salt water. I have learned that mostly Jewish families who came from Poland and Russia observed this tradition.

During the Seder, my father insisted that we drink wine and not grape juice, but in smaller amounts than the adults. Often, some of us kids would fall asleep at the table or become drunk and silly. I re-member one Seder in Shderot Chen when the guests were our neighbors, the Weintraubs. Their son Tzvika and I were very good friends. We kept drinking a lot of wine through the first part of the Seder and the meal. By the time we finished eating, we were both very drunk and just giggling and laughing. Being teenagers, we were sure that we could handle all that sweet red wine. When our parents urged us to stop drinking, we answered that it was against the tradition. At that point, we left the table and dragged ourselves to sit on the terrace. As the Seder continued after the meal, we remained outside on the terrace. When our favorite songs were sung, we both sang them very loud, reserving our loudest singing for “Echad Mi Yodea (Who knows one?).” Our parents did not ask us to come in and join them.

Because the weather in the spring in Israel is warm, all doors and windows in most homes are left wide open and the singing is heard outside. As our loud voices hit the street, they just blended in with all the other voices heard through open doors and windows. It almost felt like a competition among the different households, but it also felt like we were all one people. We both felt lousy the next morning, which was a good lesson for us. We always remembered that night, as many times we talked about it.

As for the meal itself, the gefilte fish were served first and with it we had more than just a taste of the matzo, which always tasted the best that night and on the first day of the holiday. The fish was followed by matzo ball chicken soup. We loved the matzo balls because the only time my mother made them was on Pesach. We also never had matzo at any other time of the year, so those foods remained special and represented the holiday to us.

Another food that we ate only during Pesach was matzo brei (fried matzo). It was served for breakfast, following the Seder. In Israel, only one Seder is observed. The next morning, my father would wake up while everyone was still sleeping and make matzo brei. He loved doing it. He'd take a few matzos and soak them in a bowl of water for a few minutes to soften them. Then, he'd break them up into very small pieces and dry them in a towel to get the water out of them. Next, he'd take a couple of eggs, beat them and add them to the matzos with some oil and salt. All was poured into a large frying greased with hot oil. It was fried on a very small flame for a long time and, when finished, it looked like a thick, crusty cake topped with a lot of sugar.

He knew that we would wake up in time because of the wonderful smell, and that we would be very hungry. By the time we woke up, the coffee was ready and the table was set. He would place the matzo brei on the table, insisting that we eat it hot with sugar or jam on top accompanied by coffee. He watched us as we ate. His face shone at seeing how much we loved the taste of it. It was a special treat for us, especially for my mother who didn't have to lift a finger.

Leftovers were kept on the counter to be eaten at room temperature. I kept going to back and forth many times for small pieces and it was always finished within the same day.

It was also customary to eat a lot of nuts during Pesach, mostly walnuts and filbert nuts. It was my mother's job to crack them, which was difficult. She sat on a chair with a towel on her lap and took care of it. Once cracked, she gave them to us to eat. She told us that they did the same thing when she grew up in Poland.

During that week, usually in the afternoons, after waking up from a nap and having cake, we'd play a

game with walnuts and filbert nuts in their hard shells. I don't remember what it was, but we usually sat on the floor to do it, and as we got bored, my father came up with new ideas. The winner was the one accumulating the most nuts. Once the game was over, we each got a nutcracker, and it kept us busy for a while. It was a lot of fun.

We did not eat any bread until the end of the seventh day of Passover. All businesses and restaurants that carried foods that were forbidden to be eaten on Pesach were closed for the entire holiday. By the last day, none of us could stand the matzos anymore. We all craved falafel, which we ate almost every day the rest of the year. It was one of the busiest evenings for all the falafel stores. The owners would pick up pita bread from the Arab bakeries at the end of the day and were ready for the big crowd. Long lines started to form about two hours before they opened. My father, who wanted us to be happy, was always one of the first people on line. We all joined him about a half an hour before the opening. The others on line were disappointed to see it, but no one objected, as most people did the same. It meant that the two-hour line became three or four hours. Everyone waited patiently, as we all knew that three stars had to appear in the night sky before the store opened. This falafel tasted better than it did at any other time. We usually went to Ginat Shenkin to eat, as the street was very congested, and we could not eat it while walking, which was our usual custom.

We kept the falafel tradition for many years. It almost became part of the holiday itself. It was a great ending to the holiday. The only thing I did not like about it was that my mother insisted on putting away the Pesach dishes that same evening. I guess she figured that as long as she had all of us at home, we had no excuse to avoid helping her. Nevertheless, I always felt that Pesach was a very happy and beautiful holiday at a beautiful time of the year.

## **Shavuot**

The holiday of Shavuot follows Pesach by seven weeks. It basically started as an agricultural holiday and was also known as chag ha'bikurim (holiday of the harvest). It signaled the gathering of the first fruits and vegetables of the season. In biblical times, when the Temple was erected in Jerusalem, all farmers would bring their gatherings and give them to the kohanim (temple priests), who distributed them to the poor.

This holiday also celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people in the desert, on their journey from Egypt to the Holy Land.

It was one of my favorite holiday celebrations while I attended elementary school. We all had to wear white, have flower wreaths on our head and bring fruits and vegetables in a basket to school. We were encouraged to invite our siblings and other young family members, such as cousins. The invitees also had to follow all the customs that the students had to follow. I always had my cousin Ely accompany me.

When we arrived at the schoolyard, we formed lines, divided by grade. When the time came, we followed each other in an orderly fashion to the open gym. It was transformed to look like a temple and was manned by members of the upper class (eighth grade), dressed in long white robes. With holiday music playing, and us singing holiday songs, we each handed in our baskets. They were then placed on the stage while we went back to our original places to watch a short dramatic skit.

It was my mother who made this holiday so very exciting for me. I remember one year when she bought white organdy fabric and sewed me a beautiful dress with a skirt made of two-inch ruffles. It was so much work, but she enjoyed doing it, and I could not wait to wear it. Once the dress was finished, we went shopping for white tulle to make a veil. The day before the holiday, she purchased fresh flowers. We sat together in the evening and

made a wreath. It all had to be ready to wear to school in the morning. We also bought a lot of flowers for the different rooms in the apartment.

That evening, my mother prepared a traditional Shavuot dairy dinner that included cheese blintzes and a cheesecake. It was a very special celebration and very festive.

## **Chanukah**

The holidays Chanukah and Purim were also favorites of mine since early childhood. Not surprisingly, it seems that the holidays that I liked the most were always the happy and fun holidays.

Chanukah was celebrated mostly with family. We spent some of the holiday evenings with our cousins at our home and some at their home. As we all were taught the same songs, even though we went to different neighborhood schools, we felt a strong unity. Every evening, our parents lit the chanukiah (Chanukah menorah) and we sang the “Maoz Zur.” Once we went through every song we knew, we sat down to eat. Both my mother and my aunt baked the sufganiot (donuts). I always liked the ones made by my aunt better because she filled them with jam and sprinkled powdered sugar on top. My mother baked them plain and only topped with powdered sugar. She claimed it was too big of a job to fill them. I thought she basically did not know how to do it. My aunt, when asked, would not tell us the secret of inserting the jam.

Every night, as Chanukah gifts, we only received money, in coins. We never knew the amount we would get, so we had to count it every night. We also played dreidel every night, using the money that we received from our parents. When my father saw that one of us was losing too fast, he made that person his partner.

As I grew older, I continued spending the early evening at home with my family, but afterwards my friends and I would go from one party to another in Tel Aviv. Cold weather or rain would not stop us from running around. At times, we also went to charity balls that usually had a few hundred people in attendance. My parents and their friends went to many of them, both during the holiday and throughout the rest of the year.

## **Purim**

Purim was a fun holiday, especially during my childhood years. It was the most festive holiday of the year. In honor of the holiday, there are many celebrations, festivals and carnivals all over the country. Children would get dressed up in the costume of their choice. All costumes were made at home, and we tried not to discuss with our friends what we were going to wear. The only items that could be bought in the stores were: masks, crowns, noisemakers and everything made out of paper. The costumes represented many different countries and traditions of European countries, like Russian, Hungarian and gypsy outfits. Costumes representing the Far East, both Chinese and Japanese, were also very well liked. Different biblical characters, especially Queen Ester, King Ahasuerus, Haman and Mordechai, who were part of the Purim



*Miriam in Purim as a gypsy.*



*Purim: dressed in Chinese clothing.*



*Purim with my brother, Isaac.*



*Purim with my cousin Eli.*

## Tu B'Shevat

story, were easy to put together. The Middle East was represented with costumes from Morocco, Yemen and the Arab countries. What I liked best was to dress up as a Chinese girl or a Gypsy. What also made it very exciting was that we were allowed to apply makeup.

Every year, I had a different costume. I loved the enthusiasm and detail planning that my mother put into it. She always had me participate in the planning and that made the holiday even more special. It was fun to see all the kids walking in the streets all dressed up, as it was very colorful.

The day before Purim, we had to wear our costumes to school. Lessons were canceled and we had a holiday celebration. After congregating in the yard, all the classes went to the auditorium to watch a play connected to the holiday. The drama group worked for a long time rehearsing, painting the scenery and making their own costumes. It was always a play that we all participated in, using our noisemakers. The detailed story of the Megillah was taught in the classrooms in advance of the holiday.

We also had to observe the tradition of mishloach manot (literally, “the sending of portions”), whereby gifts of food and drink are sent to family, friends and neighbors. The idea is to make sure that everyone has food with which to celebrate the holiday.

In the evening before the holiday, my mother always prepared a special supper that ended with hamentashen, traditional triangular cookies that she baked that were filled with poppy seeds. I always asked her to let me know when she was preparing it all for baking, so I could help her mix the poppy seeds with sugar and raisins and nibble on it. She always tried to stop me, telling me that the poppy seeds will make me very sleepy and cause me to miss some of the celebrations. I used to laugh at that and wouldn't stop, until she'd laughingly hit my hands.

On the day of Purim, all I remember is being out all day walking around with my friends, checking out all the other costumes. By early evening many people could be seen in the streets masquerading and on their way to parties, many of them charity balls.

The ad-lo-yada (literally, “until he didn't know”) was a Purim parade that started in 1912, in the early days of Tel Aviv. The parade consisted of floats with large funny puppets, bands, dancers and many kids in costumes. This tradition was halted for a few years, but is now back. It was moved from Tel Aviv to the city of Holon, a suburb of Tel-Aviv.

When I was grown up and serving in the army, we would put on our Purim costumes in the evening after work. We would go to different parties all over the city, having fun, until very late at night. Purim is still being celebrated today to its maximum.

Tu B'Shevat is celebrated in the middle of the month of Shevat, around the middle of February. It is also known as Rosh Hashana La'Ilanot (literally, New Year of the Trees). By this time, most of the seasonal rain is over and an annual cycle of tree growth begins. The shkedia (almond trees) start to bloom, which signals the beginning of spring. I always loved seeing this, as I always preferred spring and summer, over winter. Once the pink and white flowers were in full bloom, it was a very beautiful sight that always made me smile.

This time of the year also brought about the blooming of wild flowers in the fields. When the flowers bloomed, especially the red kalaniyot (poppies), my father drove us out of town to see them. Consequently, it became one of my favorite flowers. He also drove us out of the city to see the fruit orchards. Sometimes, there was a single tree that had been planted in front of a building in the city, but those were rare.

Tu B'Shevat is considered a semi-holiday during which schools and businesses remain open. It was celebrated by eating various fruits, especially those grown in Israel. On Tu B'Shevat, when we came back from school, my mother always had a large plate with dates, figs, apricots, almonds and carob waiting for us on the table. I always loved these fruits and my favorite was the carob. It is the fruit of a Mediterranean tree of the legume family. The tree grows very high and gives a lot of shade. It bears long, leathery black hard pods. The pods contain hard seeds that are very sweet. I loved biting on the pod, which was also sweet but had a special taste and a mild smell, which I could never describe. My mother was always worried that I would break a tooth.

She kept this tradition all through the years. As I grew older and never remembered when the holiday was upon us, I was always very happy and surprised to see the plate with the fruits waiting for me.

Another way that the holiday was celebrated was by having school children go out into the fields and plant trees. It was only at the elementary school level. When we arrived at the field, each of us received a very small, young tree. The teacher demonstrated how to plant it and we did, following her instructions. It was fun and felt very good.

One year, I decided to memorize the spot where I planted my tree. It was in an empty field by the Yarkon River, outside of Tel-Aviv. The tree I planted was the third tree to the right from the end of the field and the third down from the end. I stood there repeating the count to myself many times, until I was sure that I would never forget, which I didn't. When I came home, I sketched the location on a piece of paper, knowing that doing so would help me to remember. I was correct in this assumption, as I still remember it today. Many years later, on one of my trips, I went looking for it. I found the area and saw what a beautiful grown park it had become. I went to the corner, counted, and found what I hoped was my tree, all grown. I had to laugh, as I got very excited, believing that it was the one.



*High school freshman years friends, on the beach in Tel Aviv.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### High School

Gymnasium Herzliya was the high school I attended. The word gymnasium is Latin for high school and is still being used all over the world. Although it was known as a high school, it also had classes from first through eighth grades. It was a private school and very expensive. It was the first Hebrew high school established in Palestine, in 1909. The school is located in the south of Tel Aviv, overlooking Herzl Street, the first main business street of the city. It was built in the Gothic style around a big courtyard, with the buildings creating a u-shape. All doorways inside and outside were arched and the school was three stories high.

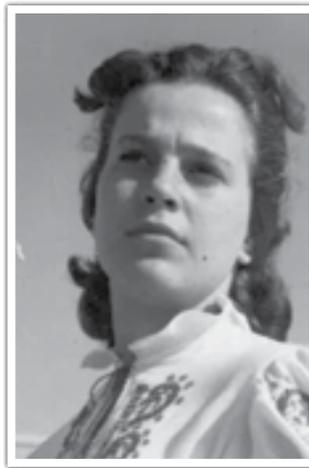
Neither my parents nor I imagined that I would not be able to graduate with all my friends from public school and then attend a high school of my choice, as was the norm. The public (elementary) school was just a few blocks away from our home on Shenkin Street. All my friends lived in the immediate neighborhood of the elementary school. Gymnasium Herzliya, however, was further away. For the first and second year, when we lived on Shenkin street, I was within a fifteen minute walk to school. Once we moved to Shderot Chen, it took at least forty minutes to walk there. I was able to take a bus back and forth, but I loved it best when my father gave me a ride in the morning.

On Fridays, I chose to walk to school, always by myself, as no one else was interested in taking such a long walk. I didn't mind being alone, so I never tried to talk anyone into joining me. I enjoyed it, as I loved looking at stores' windows en route. I mainly stopped at every fabric store, looking at the beautiful fabric displays in the windows. In my mind, I would imagine the different outfits that could be made from the fabrics. I also stopped at different shoe stores and accessory stores. Every week, I switched and walked on opposite sidewalks to make sure that I didn't miss anything. When I realized that the displays were not changed that often, I went home by way of different streets. I liked the solitude and being on my own time. I told my parents about my habit so they would not worry when I came back from school a little late.

Sometimes, I walked through the Carmel market, as I liked watching the merchants shutting down their businesses before Shabbat. It was like theatre, watching the harried shoppers arguing in loud voices with merchants to let them have the best, last-minute bargains. The customers usually won, as the merchant had to shut down. Whenever I took this route, I stopped at a store to buy my favorite nuts for Shabbat. Because I enjoyed my Friday walk and it made me so happy, it was the only day of the week when the long distance from home to school did not matter.



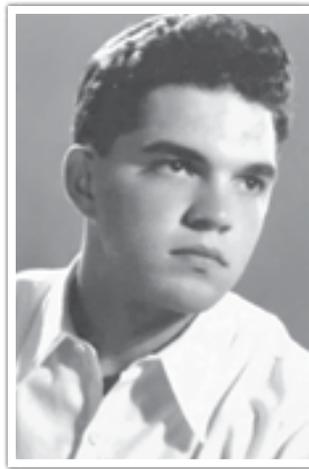
*Alicia Singer with whom  
I studied high school regions*



*Edna, the violinist who went to  
classic music lectures with.*



*Aliza Katz*



*Matti. My best male friend from  
grade one through the army.*



*My best friend Nelli.*



*Myself.*



*At the tennis club.*

The first day of school at Gymnasium Herzliya was nerve-wracking and frightening. I did not know what to expect. I felt like a stranger, knowing that all the kids had been together in that class since first grade. I walked into the classroom together with the homeroom teacher, who introduced me to everyone. Each desk in the classroom had two individual seats and two separate inkwells. The girl the teacher directed me to sit next to greeted me with a smile and introduced herself, “Shalom, my name is Ilana.”

At the end of the class we started to talk. She explained some of the class procedures to me. Afterwards, walking out of the classroom, Ilana introduced me to some of the other girls and we walked out of the building together. I asked her where she lived and for her last name, which was Gershonoviz. She asked me where I lived and when I mentioned Shenkin Street, she laughed and said, “My father’s business is on the same street. He is a tailor and he is on the second floor of a building. This is only his place of business. We live five streets away, on Ben Yehudah Street.”

“I know your father,” I said. “My mother has her suits and coats made by him. He does beautiful work. I always go with my mother for her fittings, and he is so nice. He always greets us with a smile and offers me candies.”

She couldn’t believe it and, because we walked home in the same direction, we asked each other many questions. The next day in school, Ilana told me that her father got very excited when she told him about me and asked her to invite me to their home. Two days later, I went for supper to Ilana’s home, and that solidified our friendship. She had a group of friends in class that knew each other since kindergarten. Ilana introduced me to them, and I was accepted immediately. It made me feel good, as this had been my biggest worry, how I would make new friends.

None of my new friends belonged to a youth organization and it was hard for me to understand why not. I never asked them for their reasons. I was not ready to give up the scouts and all my other activities that involved my friends from public school. I thought that it was important to stay in contact. It took a bit of maneuvering, but it worked. Most of the time, the activities of the two groups were at different times and of a different nature. I kind of enjoyed it, having two sets of friends.

My new friends liked to have parties at someone’s home, walk on the beach on Shabbat mornings or go for ice cream. We were mostly girls in our group and one boy. He was very handsome, or rather beautiful, a talented pianist and a very good student. We loved listening when he played the piano, which filled a void for

him, as the other boys were not interested in it. He was also more mature than the other boys who were very childish and we didn't want to have anything to do with them after school hours.

At one point, at the end of my freshmen year, I told my parents that I wanted to quit school. One of my friends in the school, who also was in the scouts with me, had a very tough time in school. Shula was very beautiful and nice, but not too bright. She came from a poor family, and my other friends did not want anything to do with her. Both her parents were much older than mine, and each worked at a few very menial jobs in order to support the family. As the school had to show their support for underprivileged children, part of her tuition was waived. She failed almost every subject, although she tried hard to keep up.

One day, while we were walking together from school, she said, "Miriam, I am not coming back to school next year. It is very difficult for me and it is hard for my parents to pay their part. They wanted me in a private school, hoping that it would be better for me."

"Your parents don't mind? What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I am going to work in a store and make money. We already told the principal."

When I came home, I said to my mother, "I don't want to go back to school."

She looked at me with a shocked expression and calmly but in an angry voice said, "Where did you suddenly get this idea?"

I told her I didn't hate school, but I also didn't love it. I thought it would be much nicer and fun not to go to school.

"Forget it. If this is what you want to do, the only thing you can do is wash floors and toilets in people's homes for the rest of your life, starting tomorrow. We will not buy you anything, from food to clothes, and will never pay for anything. You will have to take care of all your expenses from the money that you earn. You'd better think about it, and hopefully you will change your mind before your father comes home from work. I will tell him all about it, but I need to know what you decide right now."

I couldn't believe what I heard, but immediately said, "Okay. Forget it. Please don't tell Abba."

She didn't say anything, but I thought she would tell him. I am not sure that she did because the subject never came up. I never told any of my friends about it. I realized how stupid I was to even consider it. I told Shula about my conversation with my mother. Our friendship ceased immediately. She got married when she was seventeen to a young man from a very wealthy family. They were in the ceramic business. Since most of the tiles used in Israel at the time were imported from Italy, Shula and her husband moved to Italy, where they ran the family business and raised a family.

It was the winter of 1950 when Tel Aviv had the only snowstorm in its history. That winter, my mother went to Frankfurt, Germany, to spend time with her brothers Max and Joe and her sister Hanka, all Holocaust survivors. My parents hired a woman named Frieda to help my father who stayed behind to take care of my brother Isaac and me. Her duties were to clean, do laundry and prepare all our meals. She came early in the morning and left after dinner. My mother was scheduled to be away for one month, but stayed for three months. She had a wonderful time with her siblings; skiing, going to balls and doing other fun activities.

On the way back home, she stopped in Paris for five days, all by herself. She went touring day and night and had a wonderful time. At one point, when she ordered breakfast from room service, she was sent portions for two. When she called the desk to tell them of the mistake, they said, "We were sure that a pretty woman like you had someone in her room for the night and was not alone." She was surprised to hear their explanation and their impression was corrected. At that time, women did not travel by themselves or in the company of other women.

Meanwhile, at home, my brother and I were tired of Frieda and couldn't stand her. She was a terrible cook. She probably knew it, as she served us pickles at every meal to make the food more palatable.

My father missed my mother very much. She sent us pictures from Frankfurt, which showed us what a great time she was having. One day, my father came home from work with a large package under his arm. With a big smile on his face, he unwrapped it and showed us a painting of my mother in a beautiful frame. He took a picture of my mother and her sister and removed the sister's image from the photo. Then, he had my mother's



*The only snowstorm in Tel Aviv, in Sderot Chen where we lived.*



*Snowball fight in high school. Students brought the snow to the classroom, and school was later cancelled.*

image enlarged, painted with oil paints and framed. Having my mother's enlarged image showed off her beauty and the painting looked so real. My father leaned the painted photo against the wall on top of the credenza, across the sofa in the salon. In the evenings, he did not go out with their friends too much. He preferred to sit on the sofa with a drink and look at my mother's image.

One night, when my father came back from a movie, he woke me up and said, "Miriam, touch what is in my hand, it is snow."

I thought it was a joke he was playing and angrily said, "There is no snow in Tel Aviv. You are joking. Leave me alone. I want to sleep."

"Get up and look out the window," he insisted.

I got out of bed, went to the window and opened the drapes. I couldn't believe my eyes. The trees across the street, the sidewalk and the road were all white and covered with snow. It was very exciting and, for some reason, I started to laugh and could not stop. I did not want to get back to bed and he let me stay up for a while and watch the snow. After a while, my father insisted that I go back to sleep, as I had to get up early in the morning to go to school. He assured me that the snow would not melt by the time I woke up in the morning. Once my father left my room, it took me a long time to fall asleep because I kept getting out of bed to look out the window. It looked so beautiful and it was unbelievable to see.

When I woke up in the morning, I went to the window and saw that a little of the snow on the roads melted, but not on the sidewalks and the trees. There was about two to three inches on the ground. Being as the winters in Israel are mild, we did not have clothes suited for snow. I dressed in many layers under my coat. I wore two pairs of pants and two pairs of socks. I covered my head in a kafiyah, a large Arab head covering made out of pure cotton that was very warm. My father drove me to school and allowed me to bring his camera.

All the students congregated outside in the courtyard, and it was decided not to hold classes that day. It felt like a holiday to us. We all ran into classes with snow in our hands, spreading it on the chairs, the desks and the floors. We figured that if we all do it, we would not be punished. We were happy when we heard that classes were canceled. For a long while, we stayed within the school grounds, our legs sinking in the snow. We were all so excited and kept laughing in disbelief at the sight. Most students had a camera, and many pictures were taken. Once we were done with that, we started throwing snowballs at each other and building a snowman. We felt very cold, but ignored it.

When we got bored, a small group of us decided to go and throw snowballs at pedestrians and cars. We found a yard facing a busy street and hid behind a stone fence. We rolled the snow in our frozen hands and waited for our prey. We threw snowballs at people walking by and at cars without any interference for almost two hours. Some people who were hit laughed, whereas others were angry. At one point, apparently, a driver stopped by the police station at the end of the block and complained about us. We were so busy throwing snowballs that we were surprised to suddenly see the cops. With a hidden smile and some scolding they chased us away.

Only when we were leaving did we realize how frozen our hands and feet were. As my father's factory was only a block away, two of my friends and I walked slowly and in pain to his factory. When he saw us, he realized how frozen our feet were and said with a very serious face, "Did you have enough fun today? Are you walking home now?"

All three of us looked at him, and with tears in my eyes I said, "Abba, can you please drive us home? We are frozen and our feet hurt so much."

He kept looking at us and said, "But I am very busy. Why can't you walk home? It is not that far." I could not believe what I was hearing, as I knew he had a good heart. My friends and I looked at each other and didn't know what to say. A minute later, he burst out laughing and yelled, "What are you waiting for? You should be in my car already."

We left with him. He dropped off my friends who lived nearby, and then the two of us went home. It was treacherous to go up the steps to our apartment and, if I wouldn't have been ashamed, I would have screamed and cried with every step. My mother was still in Germany visiting her brothers and sister and the only snow they had that winter was on the mountains, where they went skiing.

My father had me take off my shoes and socks, which was painful too. I took off my wet clothes and changed into dry clothes while sitting on a chair, as it was too painful to stand. My father filled a pail with what I thought was hot water and I couldn't wait to put my feet in it. He put the pail in front of me and, when I didn't see any steam rising from the water, I said, "It doesn't look like hot water to me."

"Your feet are so frozen, you can hardly move your toes," he said. "So I need to start with cold water first. They will start defrosting in the cold water and the blood will start circulating again. Only then, we will put your feet in warm water and raise the temperature of the water slowly." At that point, I did not believe that he knew what he was doing, but I didn't question him. I must say it worked, and I told him that he was a magician.

That snowy day in Tel Aviv was probably the only time it would happen in the history of the city, so I'm glad we took full advantage of that special day and turned it into an adventure.

I did not care for all the teachers and subjects that we had to take. In the first year at the new school, my behavior was perfect, as I was on a one-year probation. I was very quiet in class and participated regularly by raising my hand and not calling out answers, as I was used to doing. My reports were detailed and full of information, and my homework was always done on time. I immediately asked my parents to get me a math tutor for my weakest subject. At the end of the year, my parents were called to the principal's office. They were told that I was a good student and that I will be accepted to the high school. I was very relieved and very happy.

After this first year, I was sometimes disruptive in school; yelling out my answers, talking too much to my friends who sat nearby and sometimes passing notes around. It mostly happened in classes where I was bored. When my mother was called to school to hear complaints about my unruly behavior, she asked the teacher to call me out of class, so I could be present at the meeting. "I am not the student," she always said. "You should speak to Miriam while I am here and find out why she is disruptive."

Many times I told them my reasoning, that I was bored, frustrated or didn't get along with the teacher. I would always promise to change. It was a difficult time for me, as I was afraid that they would fail me, but that never happened.

In the freshman and sophomore years, all classes had the same curriculum. It all changed at the junior and senior years. There were three divisions that students were able to join: humanities, science and agriculture. I joined the humanities division. The main subjects were: Bible, Talmud, Jewish history and world history. There was also literature, which included the world classics in writing and poetry. We naturally also covered Hebrew literature and poetry. Classical music was also a big part of the curriculum. These were my favorite subjects until the end of high school. Math and English were taught every year in high school.

We also had to complete one term of physics, chemistry, anatomy and nature, and two years, each, of geography and French. I had a hard time in math, English and French, so my parents engaged tutors for these subjects.

I put a lot of time and effort into subjects that I liked. When possible, my father used to buy me books for research, so I didn't have to go to the library that often. Rarely did I start to do my school work before 11:00 p.m. This way, I had time after school to play tennis and do everything that I felt like doing, including taking a short nap. The late start also helped me concentrate better, as nothing was left to distract me. Only darkness and quiet surrounded me. I loved doing research and writing reports. I always volunteered for extra work, especially in history and geography, and my efforts showed in my good grades.

Geography was my most favorite subject. My father bought me a world atlas, which enabled me to draw the most beautiful maps, using colored pencils. They accompanied my reports about the countries' cultures, economies and politics. While doing the reports, I imagined traveling to the different countries. The most fascinating countries to me were in the Far East. I liked their exotic cultures and customs. India, to me, was the most interesting one.

We had the same geography teacher for two years. I was his favorite student, as he knew that he could depend on my information, and he loved my presentations. I received the highest mark possible in the subject every year. My neighbor Nitza, who lived on the same floor as us, was younger than I was. We both attended the same high school. In her junior year, she had the same geography teacher as I did. I offered her my notebook,



*Senior year in high school with our home teacher leaning on the wall. Third desk from front, Matti & I sharing the desk.*

and she was thrilled to take it because it saved her all that work. At times, the teacher collected everyone's notebooks to take home and inspect them. That happened in Nitzza's class one day. The next day, the teacher called her to his desk, handed her the notebook and said, "This is not your notebook. This belongs to Miriam Wachsberger. She was a student in my class a few years ago. I recognized it immediately, as I never had such a beautiful notebook in all the years that I am teaching. Please return the notebook to her."

Nitzza was very embarrassed and the teacher gave her an "F." At some point, I went to the school and apologized to him. He appreciated my coming by and accepted my apology and said, "I hope you will not do it again and that you will have the opportunity to travel a lot in your lifetime."

My other favorite subject was the Bible. I was fascinated with some of the stories and the different interpretations. The only difficult part for me was learning to recite large portions by heart. We were expected to be able to recite almost half of the Bible and the prayer book. It was about half of our Regents exam at the end of senior year. The only way for me to study it was to walk around the living room and keep repeating each sentence a few times. I tried hard, but found out that when I had to recite in class, I didn't always remember everything. I was often frustrated listening to the other students who had an easy time with it. What saved me in this class and got me a good grade was my constant participation and good essays.

The Bible Regents was the toughest test of them all. We were all afraid that we might fail and were looking for a way to make sure that it didn't happen. We knew that our Bible teacher, who was also our homeroom teacher, would have the test papers in his briefcase for distribution to the entire class. Many times, he left his briefcase in the teacher's lounge, thinking that he wouldn't need it. At times, when he forgot something, he would send one of his favorite students to fetch it. That student would take out what was needed and bring it to class and leave the briefcase behind. All the other teachers were used to seeing it done that way and always by the same students.

We decided that we should steal a copy of the test booklet before the administration of the test, and that the deed should be done by two of his favorite students. It was done in no time. A few copies were made and



*Senior class in high school.*

distributed among the study groups. We decided to be careful and adjust our answers close to our grades, so as not to raise any suspicions. We did tell the failing students that they could improve their answers but only to achieve a passing mark.

We couldn't believe how difficult the test was. We thought that most of us would have failed. The original copy was returned to the teacher's briefcase the same day. It took almost a week to get our marked papers back. The rule was that the teacher who corrected the test would be from another school, so there would be no favoritism involved. The same rule applied for the written tests in literature and in the Talmud.

When the papers came back and only one student failed, the teacher looked at us with suspicion while reading our marks out loud, one by one. He said to us, "This was a very difficult test and I was sure that most of you would score less than your regular grades and more than one student would fail." We agreed with him and he never found out the truth.

I also liked literature classes. We had to do a lot of reading and I had a problem keeping up, as I was always a slow reader. I needed the help of synopsis books to help me keep up with the class. As always, I participated in the discussions and wrote good essays, which usually solved my problem.

The literature Regents was an oral test. I studied with two friends, who read all the books. Because we were good friends, I told them about my difficulty. They were better students than I was, but didn't participate as much as I did. When the teacher called on them, they spoke in a low voice that did not show much confidence. While studying together, I always encouraged them to speak louder. They improved at home, but could not do the same in class.

For the oral test, two students went into a room to be tested by three teachers who were unknown to us. I went with one of the two friends who had studied with me. After reviewing the questions for five minutes, my friend Aliza was the first one to be tested. I did not see her questions, but I was sure that she would do very well,

as she knew the material. I became worried about her when I heard her answering questions in a very low voice.

I was called in to be tested next. When I saw the questions, I was in shock. I read both the books and the synopses that the first three questions were based on. But the rest of the questions were based on two books that I hadn't read at all. I just knew what they were about. Once I was seated in front of the teachers, I read the first question in a very loud voice. I continued in the same tone, mostly giving an introduction to the book. I was stopped after a few sentences and asked to continue to the next question. I used the same technique with the second and third questions. Again, I was stopped after a few sentences. I was getting ready to answer the fourth question, when they thanked me and asked me to leave. Not knowing what that meant and feeling nervous, I said, looking straight at them, "Don't you want to hear more?"

"No. You really know the material very well, we had enough."

I thanked them and walked quickly out of the room, not believing what just happened. This was the only subject where I got the highest mark possible.

My friends did well, but not as well as I did. Even my teacher couldn't believe how well I did. It was most exciting, and it taught me how important it is to show self-confidence and hide fear of failure.

Talmud, which is the study of discussions, debates, and arguments pertaining to the Torah and Jewish law, was the other verbal test that was given with an open book. I knew my material, but the teachers who tested me kept throwing argumentative questions at me. It was tough, but I passed with a "B-."

For French, English and math, I needed the help of tutors. I could have used tutors in chemistry and physics also, but I thought it would be too much money for my parents to spend. Luckily, I managed to pass chemistry. Sometimes, I wrote cheat notes with formulas on them. Most of my friends had the same problem. We decided that if we glued notes to the hems of our skirts, we could turn the skirts down when the teachers approached us. Our chemistry teacher was a young man, and he caught on to what we were doing immediately. So, we were unable to cheat. But, as most of us passed the test without using the cheat notes, we thought that he just ignored some mistakes in order to pass us. He couldn't afford to have so many failures in his class.

The physics teacher, who was very tough and strict, asked me one day to stay after class. Although I couldn't grasp this subject, I tried to participate whenever I thought I had the correct answer to his questions. My answers were mostly wrong, and I didn't do well on his tests. It was frightening. I couldn't figure out what was going to happen.

"Miriam, I see how hard you work in my class and participate, but you don't get it. I like your efforts and I decided to give you a passing mark. It is not a subject you will ever use, and I don't think you should repeat the course," he said.

I was in complete shock. My eyes filled with tears, and if I thought it appropriate, I would have hugged and kissed him. Instead, I extended my hand to shake his hand and said, "Thank you."

He extended a hand to me to shake mine and with a big smile said, "You will do well in life without physics." I walked out of that classroom not believing my good fortune and never told anyone about it.

In math, I failed the Regents, and thought that I would have to take it again. My teacher, however, said that I shouldn't. She held the same opinion as my physics teacher did. When I told her that I was afraid that I would not be accepted at the university because of it, she assured me not to worry about it.

Learning English and having to pass the Regents exam, which included spelling, grammar, Shakespeare and poetry was a big, scary problem. In those years, most students did not want to learn English. One reason was that we all hated the British Mandate. The second reason was that we knew that many books were translated from English and other languages into Hebrew, so what was the use of struggling, especially when the English alphabet was completely different from the Hebrew one?

Consequently, even though we started learning English in third grade, we didn't know too much by the time we started high school. As students, once we did not like a subject and felt that the teacher was weak and wouldn't be able to control us, we gave that teacher a hard time. It also did not help them when their understanding of Hebrew was very minimal. We could feel their relief when a lesson ended. We got a big kick,

when passing them in the corridor, out of cursing them in Arabic, to which they would nod their heads smiling and saying, "You too."

As a result, English teachers rarely lasted more than one or two years. In four years of high school, we had three different teachers. The first two were Americans. In our junior year, a young female American teacher was appointed to teach our class. She was pretty, soft spoken and could never take control of the class. One day, a student in class put fire to a piece of used film and threw it at her. It fell in front of her, and luckily she wasn't hurt. She screamed and ran out of the room crying hysterically. Not one of us knew that he was going to do it, and we were shocked ourselves. So we just sat there and kept very quiet.

Within minutes, the principal stormed furiously into class demanding to know who had done it. No one answered. Seeing that he wasn't getting anywhere, he said, "You are dismissed from school until you tell me who did it. Every one of you must bring a note tomorrow morning from your parents, attesting to the fact that they are aware of the situation.

"This is the worse case of misbehavior that I ever had to face in my entire career."

It was not easy for any of us to explain to our parents what happened, but we all had our notes the next morning. The principal came in to collect them and asked for the disruptive student's name. We would not give it, so he sent us home again. Every morning, the principal came in and got the same result, and we were sent home again. Although our parents wrote in their notes that they were aware of the situation, none of them could persuade us to give up the name. We were all very united in our decision.

After five days, the principal had to change tactics. He asked us to get together a committee of five students to discuss the situation with him and find a solution. We picked the best students and, before they went to see him, we all met to discuss our demands. We wanted to make sure that the guilty student would not be expelled from school and would be able to graduate with the rest of us. We did agree that he should be out on suspension for two weeks, as we understood that he deserved some punishment. This episode happened in the second term of our junior year, and we lost a lot of study time for the material that would be covered by the Regents exams given at the end of the senior year. Though, honestly, with the teachers that we had up to that point, we did not learn too much English. We were too disruptive, and they could not control us enough. The principal had no choice and agreed with the committee, and classes resumed with a substitute teacher.

When we started the senior year, we discovered that our English teacher would be Dr. Levin. He was known to be the toughest teacher in the school for many years. We were very nervous before the first class, and so the class was very quiet. When he first came in, he didn't say much, he just handed us a test, so he could gauge how much we knew. It was very tough.

The next morning, he told us, "Most of the students in the class, except for a few individuals, did not learn anything and would fail the Regents exam if they were not prepared to work hard for the balance of the time." When we heard that, we all got very nervous. We kept very quiet in his class, which was given every day. We were afraid of him, as we knew that he would not let us get away with any disruption. He gave us a lot of work, but everyone made sure that it was done on time.

To our surprise, he turned out to be a wonderful teacher and English became our favorite subject. He was very dramatic and expressive. His voice, when reading to us, went up and down according to the text. When he asked us questions, he would walk all around the classroom, flagging his arms with excitement or disappointment. He never mocked a student for a wrong answer, but pushed the student to think and come up with the right one. He was especially fabulous when we had to learn Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. When he read to us, it felt like being in the theatre. When he made us read, he had us repeat passages until we sounded like actors. One day, he came to class with tickets for everyone to go with him to see Julius Caesar at the movies. We were so surprised, but delighted. And seeing the movie did help us a lot to understand the play.

We loved him, and none of us failed the English Regents exam. We all thanked him and told him that whatever English we knew, we learned in that one year. When my mother saw him at a teacher conference, she told him how much we all loved him, and he had a hard time believing it.



*Classmates from high school .*



*With high school friends at an Air Show.*

In our senior year, we were somewhat restless and some students would sometimes skip a class, especially, when it was one that they didn't like. In that year, 1954, the first movie house opened, a few blocks away from school, on Allenby Street, and it showed movies non-stop, day and night. The first movie to be shown there was an Italian movie called *The Bitter Rice*, starring the Italian actress Silvana Mangano. It was a romantic, sexy movie.

One day, about twenty of us decided to go to the movie after lunch and not come back to school. As we were allowed to go out for lunch, we did not have to worry about how we would do it. We bought the tickets without any problem, as no questions were asked, and came into an empty movie house. We were all very excited and couldn't wait for the movie to start. We knew that it was the kind of movie that our parents would not let us see. The story dealt with women in Northern Italy who came each year to work in the rice fields, wading up to their waist in water. One of them falls in love with a petty thief, played by Vittorio Gassman, who hopes to steal the rice crop. When she finds out that he was using her, she murders him and then turns the gun on herself.

The review in the newspaper described the main star as follows: "The voluptuous Mangano in thigh-revealing shorts and torn nylons, her ample breasts thrust forward, her seductive head held high, standing in a rice paddy, is the film's most memorable image and the one that the audiences will take with them."

The curtain went up and all of us became so quiet, as we never were before as a group. We got engrossed in the movie from the first moment on. Then, about a half an hour into the movie, it was paused. We thought something was wrong with the film, and so we sat and waited patiently. The lights came on and we were wondering what happened. Usually, when a movie stopped and there was something wrong, the lights never came on before the movie resumed. From the side of the big screen, two people came on stage, and one of them was our principal.

We looked at each other not believing who was standing in front of us. We were in shock, not being able to figure out how he found out where we were. As a group, we decided to keep our plans a secret, and we didn't include anyone who we were sure would not agree to join us.

"You really thought that we would not find out where you all went," he chuckled in an angry voice, "Two teachers came to my office telling me that too many of you were missing at the same time after lunch. They were used to one or two of you not coming back, but not so many all at once. Therefore, we figured that you are all somewhere together. We did not think that you went to the beach, and it had to be somewhere unusual. We all agreed that it could only be this movie house. It seems that we were correct.

"At this point, you must all leave, go home and come back to school tomorrow with a note from your parents, stating that they know about this. The note must include the exact time you came home from school. I want to make sure that you are going straight home. You will not get your money back for your tickets, which was the understanding I have with the theater manager." We got up and left cursing quietly. We were not worried about punishment, but about facing our parents. That was worse than anything else.

When I got home so early, both my parents were there, as it was still siesta time. They asked if I came home early because I was sick. I told them what we did. Both my parents were astonished. My mother started to yell at me and my father tried to calm her down. He said: "Don't you think this was stupid? I thought you were smart, but I guess I was wrong."

"But, so many of us went, including some of the best students," I protested.

"If they all decided to jump off the roof, would you do it too?"

"Of course not," I answered.

"But you did," he said angrily.

"You are right," I answered quietly. In the same breath, with my stomach in knots, I added, "I need a note from you to acknowledge that you know about this episode and exactly at what time I came home."

My father was very quiet and didn't answer. He waited a few minutes while I became frightened, not knowing what was happening. Then he turned to my mother, "Do you think we should give her the note?"

My mother went along with him and said, "Not sure."

"What do you mean you are not sure?" I yelled. "The principal will not let me return to school without a

note. He made it very clear. What am I going to do? I need to graduate.” Both my parents kept quiet, so I started to cry.

My father said, “Miriam, crying will not help you this time. You should have thought of the consequences. Do not think that you and your friends are smarter than the adults.” Hearing him talk like this, I became more hysterical, as he was always more lenient than my mother.

They kept me in suspense somewhat longer, and finally my father said, “This is the last note we are writing a note for you until graduation. You must make sure that your behavior will be perfect and, next time, think before you jump.”

I thank them, hugged and kissed them, but did not get the regular response from either one of them, and I did not like it. I knew that they were very upset with me, and I needed to watch my step in the future, which I did. I had a very good, warm and loving relationship with my parents, which I did not want to spoil.

A very important teacher, whom we all had mixed feelings about, was our music teacher, Hadassah Sherman. She was a very sweet person, but very strict, determined and in complete control of the class. For four years, she concentrated mostly on classical music. We had to research every composer’s life before we listened to his music. Hadassah would have us listen in class to the music and, most of the times, she tried to make us understand the format by playing parts on the piano. She also used to play a few notes on the piano and then ask us to identify the music. She gave us a test every time we listened to a certain composer’s music. At the end of the year, we had a test to cover all we learned throughout the year.

At the time, not too many families had a record player or a library consisting of many records. Luckily, I had a friend that did. I, and a few others who were his friends, would go to his home and listen, again and again, to what we knew we would be tested on. For the last test, at the end of the senior year, when we didn’t have any more classes, just final tests and Regents exams, we were in that friend’s home, for three or four days, just listening to classical music, from morning to night. The test took three hours and was not easy, but we were prepared.

Hadassah, the music teacher, was also responsible for the school choir. There were many competitions among the high school choirs all over the country. In Tel Aviv, the most important competition took place during Hanukah. Being in the choir, meant staying after school once or twice a week for rehearsals. Many of us tried to get out of it. Every year, each one of us was tested to see who could carry a tune. Hadassah would play a note on the piano, and we had to repeat that note. At one time, when I was tested, I purposely repeated the notes wrong, hoping not to be chosen. She looked at me with a smile and said, “You can’t fool me Miriam. I know you can carry a tune. When we learn new songs and I walk around the class, I listen and know exactly who can or can’t carry a tune.” I couldn’t believe my ears.

At this point, I knew I could not fool her, so I didn’t even try after that.

I belonged to the choir for four years. After a while, I learned to enjoy it. I mostly liked it when we competed against other high schools. One competition took place in the first and only concert hall in Tel Aviv – Ohel Shem (God’s Tent). It was there that the Israeli Philharmonic started and performed for many years, until a new, larger concert hall was built in the north of the city.

All the participants had to abide by a dress code; khaki pants for boys, navy skirts for girls and white shirts for all. All choirs sang the same piece, which was Handel’s Hallelujah, translated into Hebrew.

The last week before the concert, we met for at least two hours every day. In our senior year, we were determined to win, as we did not do too well the years before. For us seniors, it was the last time we would participate in this competition, and this was our last chance to reach first place. Hadassah, pushed us hard and we took it seriously.

When the day arrived, we were very excited and nervous at the same time. When our turn came, we went on the stage and took our places. Haddasah raised her baton and with a big smile said, “I know we will do well. You worked hard and you are ready. Stand straight, heads up and be proud.” With her baton, she signaled the professional orchestra, who accompanied all the choirs, to start. After the short musical intermission, she signaled us, and we started singing. We felt that we were very good and, at the end, walking off the stage, we were

convinced that we had won. We were very excited and couldn't wait to hear the judges' decision.

All the groups huddled behind the stage, waiting very quietly. It took about fifteen minutes, and then we were all called to the stage to hear the results. Teachers stood with their students waiting. It was nerve-wracking. The organizer of the competition showed up. He first congratulated everyone on their hard work and the beautiful singing. He then announced the three winners. We came in second. We were very disappointed because we worked the hardest ever and were sure that we that we would be the winners. Hadassah told us how proud she was of us and hugged and thanked each one of us. It was because of her method of teaching and insistence that all of her former students became lovers of classical music and music in general.

There was a change in classes once we chose the department we were interested in. Most boys went for math and science, whereas most girls went for the humanities. Very few went in for agriculture. The students in the agriculture department spent between two or three days a week, at Mikveh Israel, an agricultural institution that was associated with our high school. It had the first and only agriculture classes in the country. Lessons there involved basically working the fields and understanding all about the value of fruits and vegetables and how to cultivate them from beginning to end. Lessons also covered packing and shipping. Taking care of farm animals and learning everything about their health and sickness was another important part of the curriculum.

Our humanities section consisted of 45 students, who were placed in different classes. Only five were boys. At this point, many new friendships were formed among people who found themselves in the same class. Nelly, one of the girls in the humanities section, was not assigned to my class. However, one day, we happened to walk home together, as we lived about seven blocks away from each other off Shenkin Street. This kept happening and, after a few walks, we found out that we shared many of the same ideas and thoughts. As time went on, although we did not sit next to each other in class, we hung out together in between classes and outside of school. I still stayed friendly with Ilana and the other girls, but it was not the same. They all found new relationships too, so it did not create any problems.

One of the best parties that we had in a classmate's home, was given by Natan Mugarbi, a third generation Israeli. The Mugarbi family was a large Sephardic family that came from one of the Arab countries. The family was one of the oldest and richest families in the country. Natan's father and his uncles built one of the first movie houses in Palestine. It was the Mugarbi movie house, which was located on Allenby Street, between Ben Yehudah and Bialik Streets, about three blocks away from the ocean. That movie house was in a large building with many wide steps leading to the main entrance, which had heavy, carved doors. In the same building, on the Bialik Street side, going down a few steps, was the first theatre space that was built in Tel Aviv. For many years it was the home of the opera, ballet and theatre companies, until separate venues were built for them in different parts of the city. In the front of the movie house, there was a large open area with a tall clock in the center. For many years, it was an important meeting place for many people of all ages. It was also the site of many political gatherings and demonstrations.

The second movie house that the family built was the Allenby Cinema on Allenby Street, a block away from Shuk Ha'Carmel. It was a smaller movie house and not as elaborate. Shortly thereafter, additional movie houses were built by some other family members.

Natan was somewhat choosy about whom he invited to his parties. I was happy that I was one of the people. The apartment was very large, and was located in a building that the family owned on the last block of Allenby Street. The building spanned the entire city block and faced the ocean. There was a large terrace running from one side of the building to the other. On it, there were small sofas, small tables, chairs and a large table. Whenever there was a party, the large table was used for a buffet, and it was always laden with a large selection of different foods.

There was also a record player with a wide selection of old and new popular records, including music from different countries. Some of it was for listening and some for dancing. Natan's parties created some jealousy in the class. I admit that I enjoyed having people envy me. Both my best friends Nelly and Ronnie were always invited too.

In the middle of my junior year, things changed. At one point, while Nelly and I were strolling the

corridor, purposely near the senior classes, two guys stopped us. They asked for our names and had some other questions. After we answered, they invited us to a party on a Friday night and we accepted immediately. We gave them the address where we each lived, so that they could pick us up, which was the norm. The bell rang and we ran to class giggling with excitement.

It was the first party that Nelly and I attended with an older group of students. This group consisted of all seniors, while both of us were the only juniors. Groups such as these were called salons, from the word salon (parlor). It meant that they were the opposite from the kids who belonged to youth groups. They were interested in different subjects and wore the latest fashions. At parties, they only danced ballroom dances like the tango, the rumba, the cha cha, etc. Folk music and folk dances were avoided. Records, at that time, were very expensive and were usually bought by the wealthy from one of two records stores in Tel Aviv, or on trips abroad.

The dress code at these parties was elegant skirts or dresses, high-heeled or suede-wedged shoes and silk stockings. I had none of this kind of clothing, as for years I belonged to the scouts.

My mother was very excited about the party to which Nelly and I were invited. She was thrilled that I was going to change my attire and become more involved socially with this new group of people. She hated the simple clothes that I wore to the scouts up to my junior year. She hoped that I would be willing to wear more updated, fine outfits, which was more to her taste. Because there was not enough time to sew an outfit, we went shopping for a ready-made one. We bought a navy pencil skirt, a white organdy blouse and black suede shoes with a small heel. We had a big fight about the stockings. I just couldn't see myself wearing silk stockings.

"I will only wear short white socks with my shoes," I said. "I can't wear silk stockings."

My mother looked at me in amazement and couldn't believe her ears. "It will look terrible and you would be laughed at. I know Nelly is wearing silk stockings, as she told me so," she said.

"I can't do it. She is used to it, as she was never in a youth group and wore them whenever she went out with her parents. They are too fancy for my taste," I answered back very upset.

We argued some more. She bought a pair and, as she was paying for them, I said in anger, "Ima, you are wasting your money. I will not wear them."

One of the boys was going to pick me up on Friday night, around 8:00 p.m. I got dressed and loved the way I looked in my tight skirt and white blouse. My mother was in the room with me and she put the silk stockings on my bed. I went to the closet and took out the short white socks. I put them on with my new shoes and looked in the mirror. I didn't love it. For a minute I looked at the silk stockings. My mother was still hoping that I would change my mind. She smiled and looked back and forth at the stockings and at me, but I stayed with my white socks.

When my date and I met Nelly and her date, before we went into the building, I saw Nelly looking at my legs. She had a mocking smile on her face, but didn't say a word. The girl who hosted the party was named Nitza. When she opened the door, she was not happy to see us. She recognized both of us, and knew that we were from the junior class. The guys never told her whom they were bringing with them. She looked us over to see how we were dressed. When she looked at me and saw the white socks, she had the same mocking smile I had seen earlier on Nelly's face.

As we came into the room where the party was going on, I realized that I was the only girl wearing white socks. I felt uncomfortable during the entire party and this was the end of my wearing white socks. I did tell my mother all about it and that it will never happen again. After this episode, I always wore beautiful outfits and high heels with silk stockings.

The hostess was so upset that we were at her party that she told the boys never to bring us again to a party at her home. Our dates had a big fight with her. They told her that she couldn't tell them whom to bring when she invites them to a party. They also told her not to invite them ever again.

Nitza came from a very wealthy old family. There were a lot of parties at her home, but Nelly and I never attended any after that night. She was a snob and whenever we passed each other in school, she quickly turned her head and we never spoke to each other.



*Graduation ceremony from high school.*

Our final tests ended and we started to get ready for the graduation ceremony and parties. We were all very excited and making plans. The graduation ceremony was held in the afternoon in the school's courtyard. Chairs were set up in rows facing the principal's office. We all sat in the front rows and all family members and friends sat in back of us. No tickets were needed, as whoever wanted to come was welcome.

All the teachers sat facing us. There were two principals, each one seated on one side of the podium. One was an acting principal who was retiring, and we were part of his last graduation ceremony. Dr. Bugrachov, was an elderly man who became a Knesset (parliament) member when he retired. He had a mild nature and we all loved him. Whenever he saw any of us, he would greet us with a smile.

The second one, Dr. Ben-Yehudah, who was taking over the job of principal, was tough. He was in the position of assistant principle for two years. He always roamed the corridors and entered classes without letting the teachers know in advance. We could always see the surprised expression on the teacher's face. He would stay for a short time and then walk out of the classroom without saying a word. We often also saw him standing by the window watching us when we were in the courtyard at recess.

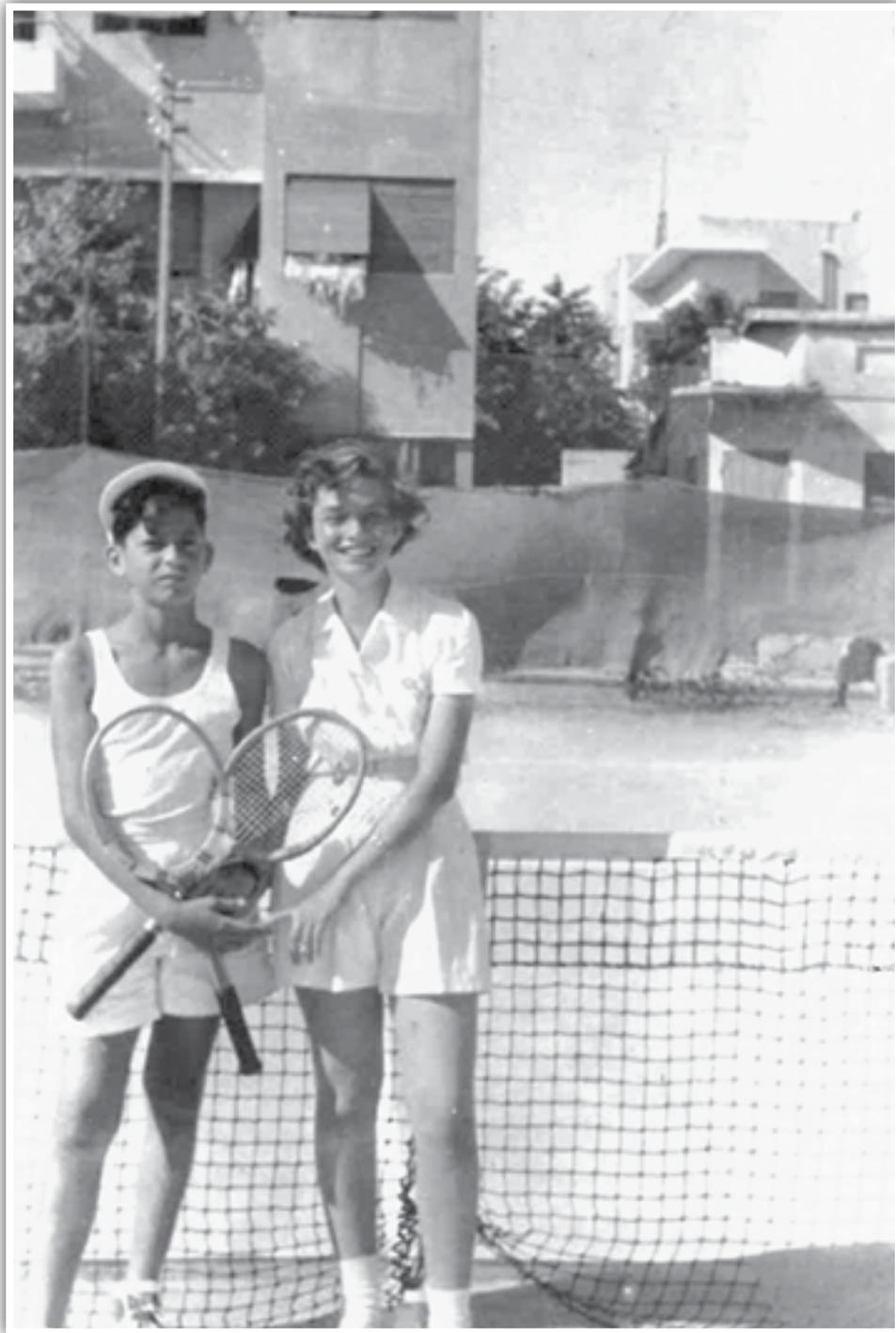
At one point, one of the girls was summoned to his office. We waited anxiously to find out what happened. She was an American girl whose parents came on Aliyah to Israel. At the end of the day, she told us what happened. In the fifties, it was a custom for American girls to wear a bracelet on their ankle. The principal saw through the window that she was wearing such a bracelet. He told her that it is not the custom in Israel, and she should not wear it anymore to school. She was very surprised and so were we. There were many other incidents like that, and we were all very scared of him. Because we were graduating, we were relieved that we would be out of school when he took over as principal.

I heard that the year he started his job as principal, he insisted on uniforms at school. The student body was told in the beginning of the year that the uniforms would be worn at graduation too. He told them that he did not like how the female students were dressed the year before. It was too dressy and suited for a ball, but not for graduation. He was right, as we all wore beautiful dresses that looked almost like ballgowns.

The graduation ceremony started with Dr. Ben-Yehudah's short speech, at the end of which he introduced the outgoing principal, Dr. Bugrachov. We heard a few words from him, telling us how much he enjoyed his job and how he was sure that he will miss it. He was in this job since the school was established. We then were called, one by one, to come up to the podium, shake hands with Dr. Bugrachov and receive a diploma and a small Bible. My friends and I had to hold our tears back, as we all loved him.

On the same day, we had a party, at night, at the home of one of the students in our class. Naomi, was a very sweet, quiet girl; a very good student, but not very popular. We were all surprised when she volunteered her home. She lived in a very beautiful, big villa in Ramat Gan. There was a big swimming pool and a large garden, and it was all on a very large piece of land. The flowers in the garden were in many varieties and very colorful. There was also a small dance floor surrounded by tall, old trees. Colorful balloons and colorful lights were hung all over. A large buffet and round tables were set up by the pool. The buffet included a lot of salads, different kinds of cold cuts, fruits and cakes.

The music was piped in from the house, starting with popular Israeli music and changing into ballroom dancing music after the meal. The kids who still belonged to different youth organizations only participated in dancing to folk music. Only the kids who went to private parties enjoyed the ballroom music and danced to it. It was an unbelievable party. The next day, we immediately collected money and sent a big bouquet of flowers with a thank you note, signed by all of fifty of us, to Naomi and her parents. It was a great, unexpected celebration to end high school. A week later, we all went into the army.



*With Chaim, my tennis partner and friend playing with wooden tennis rackets*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Playing Tennis

It is June 8, 2007 and I am home watching the French Open on television. When the tennis tournaments are on TV, it is the only time that I allow myself to spend a morning or an afternoon sitting in front of the television. At times, I would give up doing other things, just so I would not miss these broadcasts. For years, Carl and I would wake up at 6:00 a.m. in order not to miss the games. Nowadays, that's no longer necessary, as all the finals are adjusted to the right hours for prime time.

I was about 12 or 13 years old when one day my mother said to me, "How about learning how to play tennis?"

I remember being in shock at hearing this, as I didn't know anyone who played tennis. All I could think of was how my friends would make fun of me when they will see me walking in a tennis outfit, carrying a tennis racket.

"I think you would like it very much," my mother continued. "It is a very nice sport, and it will be good for you to know as you get older."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I don't understand how it will be good for me."

"It is a sport where you meet the right people," she said. "You will belong to a club and meet a successful group that will eventually help you to have a very nice life. It is an aristocratic sport. It is better than dancing ballet, which you loved so much and don't do anymore. It is not that I don't want you to dance. It is Abba who is against the dance lessons. He wants you to have a better future and a good life. Being a ballerina is not easy, and he wants to protect you. I do agree with him on that." I just walked away in silence.

The Maccabee Tennis club was not far, about a ten-minute walk away from home. I passed by the club a few times to observe the courts and the action from the outside. I didn't see anyone my age at any time, but I liked what I saw. I liked the movements of the strokes that used every part of the body. In some ways, it was like dancing, but faster. Sometimes, I would see two women play against each other. They were probably in their early thirties, but looked very old to me. I liked the idea of all the players dressed in white outfits. I didn't tell anyone of my observations. I used to go at different times to watch people play, to see what people did when they had to wait for a court and how they began a game. I liked the area it was in. It was adjacent to the gym and basketball courts of Maccabee.

There were three clay courts, two flights down from the street level. One court, court #1, was along



*Trying to serve the tennis ball which I always had difficulty with.*

Bezalel Street. All the better players played on this court, and all major games and tournaments took place on that court also. Along the court, there were about ten rows of cement stadium seating. The courts were enclosed with a high wire fence. Most of the fence was covered on the inside with brown burlap for privacy. At the entrance to the club, the fence was covered with very dense high bushes with pink flowers. There were a few spots here and there where it was possible to peek through.

Every member had a key to the club's entrance. To the right of the entrance, there was a bench in a shaded area filled with flowers. Next to it, there was a small building that contained dressing rooms for men and women. There were no showers, and players had to go home in sweaty uniforms.

The courts were taken care of by the superintendent, Mr. Baum. He took care of the courts by pushing a large cement roller to smooth out the ground. He then watered the courts with a hose and, once they were dry, he re-marked the white lines. He was always wearing khaki shorts and a sleeveless tee shirt and was heavily sweating from heat and hard work. He worked on the courts between 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. when the sun was very strong and hardly anyone played. In addition to taking care of the courts, Mr. Baum was responsible for collecting dues and checking tickets when there were tennis tournaments. After watching the club for a while, I started to think that it might be a sport that I would enjoy. I didn't tell my parents that I staked out the club.

My friend Ilana lived right next door to the club. I made sure to stop by her house whenever I stopped by the club, so I was covered. I didn't tell Ilana about the tennis possibility, either. Most of the times, someone was home, so it was easy to stop by. Her mother was very beautiful and very friendly. Ilana's sister, Dahlia, whom I liked a lot, was about three years older and was my leader at the scouts.

Two weeks after my mother told me about the tennis, I told her, "Let's go to the tennis club and find out more about it." She was thrilled and, that same afternoon, we went to the club. When we got there, we had to knock on the door for a while until someone came to open it for us. We were greeted by Mr. Baum, the club's superintendent. He had all the information for us about dues, which were very high, and about regulations. He asked us if we would like to meet with the tennis pro for information about lessons. When we told him we did, he asked us to follow him. We came to the last court, in the back of the club, and Mr. Baum waited with us until the pro, Mr. Davidman, was finished with a lesson he was giving. I never knew the pro's first name, as it was customary to call older people by their second name to show respect.

Sitting on the bench and observing the lesson got me very excited and I couldn't wait to get started. The pro, Mr. Davidman, was a handsome man, quite tall, slim and very tan. I noticed that he was patient and gentle when correcting the students' mistakes. I liked that in him, as I didn't feel he would be frightening. Also, seeing him move with so much strength and grace reminded me of dancing.

When the lesson ended, he came over with his student and introduced himself. He was completely drenched with sweat. He toweled himself, and then asked me many questions. He wanted to know why I wanted to play, and did I realize that it takes time to learn and lots of practice? At that point, being very excited, I answered positively to every question. He asked my age, and I told him that I was 12. He said that's good, as he felt that children shouldn't start playing earlier than age 12, when they start to be more developed and strong. My Mother kept quiet throughout this interview, which was good.

When I asked him what time in the afternoon I would have my lesson, he told me it would be at 2:30. It was the heat of the day, but this was his only opening. The older members took lessons starting at 4:00 p.m. when it cooled off a little. I was a little bit in shock, but didn't say a word. He also told me that a 25-minute lesson, especially in the beginning, is very long. The lessons were given in 30-minute increments, as, after 25 minutes, the pro needed 5 minutes to rest and get ready for his next lesson.

The fee was very high, and I never thought that my parents would go for it. I do not remember what it was, but I remember thinking that one has to earn a lot of money to be able to join this club.

We were told that everyone playing must wear a white outfit, and that Mr. Davidman would buy my tennis racket and balls, which were very expensive. We went home, and when my father came home from work at night, I told him how excited I was to learn to play tennis. My parents didn't discuss the financials in front of me.

The next morning, my mother told me that we are going to register at the club and start lessons. I decided not to tell any of my friends until it was all set up and I got started. In the late afternoon, my mother and I went back to the tennis club. My mother paid the superintendent, Mr. Baum, for one year of membership. He gave us a receipt and the key to the club. He told us that I was the youngest person in the club and that, at that point, there were no other kids registered. He did hope that, with time, more kids would start to play. He then asked us to follow him, and he introduced my mother and me to the members who were at the courts. They all wanted to know how old I was, as I was tall for my age. Everyone was very warm and seemed excited to meet me. Quickly, I became everyone's adopted child. At that point, I realized what a special thing my parents were doing for me.

Very quickly I came to understand that Mr. Baum was a very important person, and I observed that he was treated nicely by everyone. I thought it was very important for me and him to become friends. After forgetting to bring my key, twice in a row, and being personable and apologetic, he decided to help me out.

At one corner of the court, there was a kiosk where we could buy snacks, cold drinks and ice cream. The door that the owner of the kiosk used to enter was also a way to come into the club, but only under certain circumstances. Mr. Baum (I never knew his first name) introduced me to the kiosk owner, and told him that I was a member of the club and that he should let me in whenever I forgot my key and at any other time.

Later on, Mr. Baum also instructed him to let me in at tournament time without purchasing a ticket, even though other members had to pay. This is why: at one point, when he wanted a raise in salary, and was arguing about it with the club committee, I was the only one he told that he would quit, if he didn't get the raise. I was hoping that it would not happen, and was relieved and happy when he told me that he was staying, and I think

he appreciated knowing how I felt. Mr. Baum was married, but never had children. So, I guess he liked that I cared about what happened to him and maybe he also liked looking out for me.

Once I registered, my mother and I immediately made arrangements for 2 lessons a week, for the next 3 weeks. Then, we stayed for a while to watch the players, and it was getting more exciting by the minute.

Most members of the club were born in Germany and immigrated to Palestine in the 1930's, as they were afraid that Hitler, who started to organize his party, was out to destroy the Jews. In order to save their families, they left good jobs and rich, cultural and generally happy lives. They were intelligent, highly educated professionals from various fields. Some had successful businesses in Germany that they had to sell for a low price. They moved to a country that was the complete opposite from the country they left. They had to start life again under difficult circumstances. Although the club members mastered Hebrew and spoke it with an accent, they spoke German among themselves.

There were only two women players in the club and they were good friends. They were both very tall and thin and excellent tennis players. I rarely spoke with them. Both were married, and one of them had two children. Their husbands were longtime friends. The childless woman was somewhat prettier than her friend. She was married to Jake Pichman, who was a handsome man and a successful architect. He was also knowledgeable in the arts. Jake and his wife had a best friend who was single. He wasn't as good-looking and friendly as Jake. His name was Mr. Figer. They were best of friends in High School and at the Technion, where they studied architecture. The rumor was that Mr. Figer proposed marriage to Jake's wife, who refused him and married Jake instead. It seemed to everyone that Jake was not as much with his wife as his friend was. They always came and went to the tennis club together and Jake would come later. There were many rumors about them and they were a topic of conversation. After I had been in the club for about two years, Jake became my friend and teacher.

Before I went for my first lesson, I had to make sure that I had a white tennis outfit. My mother and I went to the fabric store to buy the fabric, so my mother could sew the outfit. In about one day, she made me a very beautiful, short, semi-pleated tennis skirt and a white blouse.

My tennis racket frame was made of wood and the strings were made of horse's hair. Mr. Davidman also got me a separate frame to put the racket in, so it would not bend from the humidity. The outer frame was made from two pieces of wood connected with four screws, in the four corners of the frame. Once the tennis racket was inserted into it, I had to tighten the screws so the frame around the racket itself couldn't move. He also got me the tennis balls. There were three balls to a box and they were imported from England. Every time he opened a new box, he'd say, "Now we are going to smell English air," followed by a chuckle. All the years that I had lessons with him, he'd repeat the same line, and I always laughed.

In the beginning, I thought that the lessons were boring, but I didn't say anything. He read my mind and told me that within three lessons I will have to start moving and will enjoy the lessons better. He was correct. I picked up on my forehand pretty fast and, in no time, my stroke became strong and long, hitting the lines. I was exhausted at the end of each lesson and had to drink a lot of water. He told me to watch others play and to hit balls against a wall, as doing so will improve my strokes.

After a while, Mr. Davidman started to teach me the backhand. I had a lot of trouble with it and was very frustrated. My backhand was never as strong and good as my forehand. He was smart, as he ended the last ten minutes of a lesson by hitting to my forehand only. I liked playing the net and hated to serve. I didn't practice too much playing against the wall, as it bored me, but I liked to watch the good players do so.

Once I felt comfortable and saw an empty court, I gathered my nerve and asked others if they would hit with me for a short while. It worked for me, and slowly I improved. The other players knew that I would play better if they mostly aimed for my forehand, so that's what they did, and it was more fun for me that they did that.

I also was good at the net, but I didn't like running. Playing singles was my favorite, but at times I joined some doubles games. The real truth was that I just liked to volley and not worry about points and winning. I found out that my game changed completely when I played a game and had to watch my strokes. My opponent would figure out quickly that I didn't like to run and tried to hit short balls and hit to my backhand, which wasn't

too good.

As time passed, three more women joined the club, and a women's tournament was organized at the same time that the men competed. One year, a few girls from other clubs in the country came to compete. It was a lot of fun. I was in the dressing room getting ready to play the quarter finals. Tova, my opponent, was older than me. She was studying to become a gym teacher and was very athletic and an excellent competitor.

We were both getting dressed before our game, when she said, "I hope I don't have to play Bracha, the champion of the last few tournaments in the semi-finals."

With anger, I said, "You didn't play me yet, how can you talk about your next match?"

"Well, all I have to do is make you run, and the match will be over quickly, and I will be the winner."

"We'll see," I answered, fuming.

Tova walked out of the dressing room with a smirk on her face. At that point, I remember thinking that I must prove her wrong. I never liked her in the first place, but she surely insulted me to no end.

For each match there was a referee, so there would be no questions or quarrels. We had to win in two sets. I knew my odds were pretty bad, but decided to give it my best shot. Although I always liked to play for fun only, this situation was different.

While we practiced for about ten minutes, Tova's smirk never left her face. The first set started. I don't remember the set point by point, as I didn't pay much attention to it. I put all my concentration and efforts into getting every ball. I won the first set and suddenly, by the second set, other players came to our court and stood around watching. No one thought I could give her a hard time. Somebody who watched the first set told the others, and it became a show. Seeing everyone standing around gave me more confidence and I got very excited. I knew that most of the people were my friends and liked me more than her. I kept playing and won the second set. The applause was great, and everyone had big smiles on their faces. I shook Tova's hand, and she quickly disappeared into the dressing room. I stayed around a little longer enjoying the victory with my friends.

When I came back to the dressing room, Tova was still there. She said, "What happened to you today? You ran like the devil and returned every ball. Even your backhand was good. I can't believe it!"

With a smirk on my face, I said, "You have a big mouth and you are stupid. By talking about the person that you were going to play in the semi-finals, you did yourself in. You got me so angry listening to you. I was so insulted that I decided that I must do all that is in my power to make you lose, and I did. I don't think that I will win the championship, but today was my championship. I also learned that if I put my mind to do something, I can. I don't like you and many people feel the same way. You are a big snob!" Tova didn't say anything. After that match, she stayed in the club for a while, but we never spoke to each other again. She must have quit soon after, as I no longer saw her there, but it didn't really matter to me.

Of course I lost at the finals, which was the only time I got that far. I went back to my old habits and played for enjoyment only. I did improve with time, and we started to visit other clubs in Israel, mainly in Netanya and Haifa. It was a lot of fun playing in different clubs and meeting many nice people. We would usually stay in their homes and have a great time.

It wasn't just the game itself that I enjoyed. The club became a wonderful place for me to go. I knew everybody and they all saw me grow from a young girl to a young woman. I learned how to get along with people of all ages. I also knew how to keep my distance from some who didn't care for me, but still be friendly. It was a place I could go to any time and just hang out; observing all the different people, their mannerisms and their style of playing.

It was a lot of fun when we hosted international tournaments. Players mostly came from South Africa and Europe. When we had the Maccabiah games, we also had players from the United States.

The Maccabiah games took place every 4 years. They were the Olympics for the Jewish people and it was a very exciting time. The only way to be a part of it was to get tickets for the different events, listen to the radio or read about it in the newspapers. Members who could speak some English and were friendly were assigned to the players to make them feel comfortable. I was on the committee of our club. Although my English wasn't too good, it didn't really matter.



*Playing a tournament at a tennis club in Netanya.*

The players lived in a special village that was built for them in Tel Aviv. We used to go visit them and sometimes we'd accompany them on walks or to coffeehouses. I was always the youngest of the group.

The friendliest, best looking and best players were the ones from South Africa. They all came from very wealthy homes and were warm and polite. The South African players would come for tennis tournaments about two or three times a year. Their participation elevated the tournaments to a higher standard. We would usually have the tournaments during Passover in the spring and during Sukkot in the fall. Because schools were closed for the holidays, it made it easier for me to spend days at the club. I would go early in the morning, come home for a few hours if there were no games, and come back in the afternoon and stay until sundown.

As I mentioned, I never had to buy a ticket for any tournaments. My friends always saved me a space next to them. Because they were much older than me, they were very involved in organizing the games. Therefore, they had special seats that were shared with the board members, the tennis pro and myself. Their small sitting area was at the bottom of the stairs that club members used when entering. It was basically a slab of cement without any back to lean on. After a while, it was difficult to sit, but I never complained. Every spectator could see us, and I knew some were trying to figure out who I was because I was the only female sitting there. Besides feeling important, I also enjoyed listening to my teacher's remarks about the players and their game.

I was surprised that I was never questioned about a ticket. All spectators, including club members, had to enter through a special door designated for tournaments. Upon entering the court, I would greet the other club members who had to buy tickets, but didn't get involved in any lengthy conversations with them because I didn't want to have to answer too many questions. The ticket holders would sit on cement slabs that were the stadium seating. There was room for about 200 to 300 spectators. Therefore, it was very important to sell tickets for every seat. The tickets were always sold out in advance of the games.

The important and interesting games were played on court #1. All other games, single and doubles, were

played on the other two courts. The public couldn't observe those games because there were no seats at those other courts, except for one small bench for the players to rest on or to keep their equipment.

My teacher's son Lazar was a very good player. He was tall, strong and good looking, but not too smart or too friendly. He was quiet and a snob. I thought he seemed to be a snob only because he was not very smart. He trained a lot with his father, and I could see how difficult it was, at times, for my teacher not to correct him when he was playing, especially when he made mistakes. The only time my teacher would say anything to him was when he would curse and throw his racket. My teacher spent a lot of time with all his students teaching them how to behave on the court and how to speak to an opponent with respect.

My teacher was most upset at his son when we had guest players from other countries at our club. He'd tell him, "You need to calm down and behave. You are giving our club and Israel a bad reputation." Lazar would just walk away huffing and puffing.

In spite of his behavior, Lazar won many championships, playing singles. Years later, he came to New York to play at the U.S. Tennis Open in Forest Hills and got as far as the quarter finals before being eliminated. It was a big achievement for him because most of the players were of a higher caliber than most of the players from Israel.

Spending all these years at the club, I learned a lot about the different tournaments that took place all over the world. My teacher, Mr. Davidman, always made sure that we had all the detailed news about the games. He had a special short-wave radio and also a Morse code machine from where he would get his information. When the games in Wimbledon, the French Open, the U.S. open or the Davis Cup in Australia were on, he would write the results on paper, come to the club and tell us all about the games. He also had his favorite players, and he made sure that we all knew the players' names and their rankings. Because of all this information, we got very involved and knowledgeable about the games.

When there were international tournaments, I made sure that I was at the club every day, from morning to night. It was not always easy to achieve. One spring, I came home in the evening and found my mother sick in bed. Immediately she told me that I wouldn't be able to go to the club the next day because I had to take care of the household and my brothers. I walked out of her bedroom very upset. However, I thought that if I could take care of everything that needed to be done early in the morning, I'd be able to go to the club afterwards.

The next morning, I was the first one up, figuring that I would make breakfast and clean and then send my brothers out to play with their friends. I also counted on my father helping me with breakfast and the dishes before he went to work. He used to rise very early and exercise every morning for a half an hour before going to work. But, it was getting late and my father wasn't up and I couldn't figure out what was happening. I was getting very nervous that I would miss a very important match that was going to be played that morning.

Suddenly, I heard my parents' bedroom door open. I looked at my watch with great relief. My father came out and said, "Miriam, I am sick. I can hardly stand. You will have to take care of breakfast by yourself. I need you to bring breakfast to our bedroom. Also, make sure that Isaac and Chaim stay in our bedroom with us. They also have a very high fever, and I don't want them walking around."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I was upset, but decided to get to work immediately. I asked everyone what they wanted for breakfast and filled their requests. When they were finished eating, I quickly washed the dishes and put them away. I dusted the furniture, washed the floors and got dressed to go. I went to my parents' bedroom and said, "I've done everything; cleaned the kitchen and washed the floors. I am going to the club to watch this very important match. On the way back, before lunch, I will stop at the store to buy fresh bread and anything else that we need." Neither my mother nor my father reacted.

I turned around to leave when I heard my mother's voice, "No. You are not going anywhere. You have to stay home with us because you are the only one who is healthy."

With anger and tears I said, "Yes I am going. There is no reason for me to stay home. I've done everything necessary, and I will be home for lunch. Then, I will go back to the club at 4:00 p.m. After lunch, I will prepare supper so I can serve it to you when I return at 7:00 p.m."

My mother got very upset. "I forbid you to go. You are very selfish. You see how sick we all are, and you

still want to go.”

“Tell me why is it so important for me to stay home although I have taken care of everything already?” I raised my voice, crying.

“You need to be home in case we need something,” she said.

At this point, my father said, “She can go. We are not dying yet and we can help ourselves if we need something. Go. Just be back in time for lunch.”

“Toda raba (thank you) Abba,” I said with a big relief and a smile. I was so thankful to him that I wanted to hug and kiss him, but I knew better.

It was late, and I walked so fast to the courts that when I came to the club, I was out of breath. The match had just started. Mr. Baum, standing at the door, waved me in murmuring, “You are late!”

I heard the same from my friend who had a hard time saving me a seat next to him. Because I didn’t have a ticket, it was important that I be in my seat before the matches started. Only later in the match, I told my friend why I was late. It was one of the most exciting matches of the tournament.

On the way home, I went shopping and, when I came home, I checked on everyone. It didn’t seem that things were too bad, but I must say, everyone was in bed. I only hoped that I would not get sick while the matches were on. I made lunch and brought it to everyone. Then, I cleaned up and prepared platters for supper, as I wasn’t expecting to be home until about 7:00 p.m. I had no argument in the afternoon, but my mother wouldn’t speak to me. By the third day, everyone was well and I had my freedom back, being able to come and go at any time.

The other time that I had a major problem was at one of the Maccabiah games. It was around the High Holidays and there was a big group of tennis players from different countries. The dilemma was what to do with the players on the night that Yom Kippur ended. There were no games that day, and there was no place to go because all businesses and restaurants were closed. We all felt bad for the players. We decided that a party at someone’s home would be a nice change and a nice gesture. I volunteered to have the party at our home, once my parents approved, which they did.

The party was scheduled to start at 10:00 p.m. All the guest tennis players were men, so I invited some of my girlfriends and some older girls that I knew and that were friendly and sociable. I told them not to worry about their English. As long as they smiled, laughed and danced, everything would work out. I explained that my English was as bad as theirs. Somehow, we all understood each other and had a good time. I found it to be fun when, at times, we were made fun of, when we made mistakes or used the wrong words. It made us all laugh, especially when they tried to learn some Hebrew words. The funniest guys were the South African ones. They sounded like they had a hot potato in their mouth when they spoke.

The day before Yom Kippur I went shopping for fruits, all kind of snacks, soft drinks and some brandy. My parents were not too thrilled about serving brandy because I was still in high school. I explained that all of the players were in their twenties and thirties, so we had to be able to serve brandy. We decided not to display the liquor, but only to take it out if there were any requests. One of my friends brought her record player and records, as we didn’t have one. We set it all up before the holiday, and everything was ready.

Yom Kippur is the holiest holiday of them all. On the afternoon before the start of the holiday, all stores and restaurants shut down early. Slowly the cars disappear from the streets and highways. Israelis do not drive on Yom Kippur. Nowadays, many kids and young people take out their bikes and ride all over. Some ride from one town to another, as no one is on the roads.

In the morning, my parents went to the synagogue. I stayed home with my brothers until their friends came to get them to go out to play. After they left, I still stayed home because I was fasting. Suddenly, the door opened and my father came in running and yelling, “I need my car keys to take Isaac to the emergency room. He is waiting downstairs for me. He played with his friends in the backyard. There was dried-up cement in the big sink, and when he opened the faucet to drink water, the cement blew into his eyes and now he can’t see.” I wanted to go with him and so did my mother but he wouldn’t let us. He told us that he would keep us informed by calling our neighbor’s phone.

My brother Isaac gave me the following information about what happened: My father rushed him to the Magen David Adom emergency room where they flushed out his eyes. He could see very little, and therefore, he was moved by ambulance to the Hadassah hospital, which was only three blocks away. In the hospital, they treated him and he could see a little better, and so he was sent home. He was told to keep his eyes shut. My parents put him in their bed and shut all the blinds to keep the room dark.

After settling Isaac down, my father said, "There is an eye specialist that he needs to see. He lives in Rehoboth, about a half an hour from Tel Aviv. He agreed to come and check Isaac, if I would pick him up and bring him back to his house afterwards. No one is on the roads today, so it will take me no time to get the doctor and take him back."

I remember looking at him, surprised that he was going to travel on Yom Kippur. I didn't say anything, but my father turned to me and said, "Pikuach nefesh mechasel Shabbat (Saving a life or having a dire emergency cancels all restrictions of Shabbat or any holiday)." I just smiled, appreciating that he knew my thoughts. I was relieved and nodded my head in understanding.

So my father left and came back with the doctor in a very short time. After checking Isaac, the doctor said, "He will be fine. He needs to keep his eyes shut for three days, and you need to keep the room dark. You will have to get eye drops for him." My father paid the doctor and drove him back home. He took a newspaper with him that listed the pharmacies on duty that holiday. He came home with the drops, and we all were relieved to hear that my brother would heal completely.

When my father came back, I asked my parents to come to the living room and said, "I feel that I should cancel tonight's party. I am not in the mood and it will be too noisy, and Isaac would not be able to rest. I will go over to the Maccabiah village and explain the reason. Surely everyone will understand."

Both, my mother and father said in unison, "No way. There is no reason to cancel. As a matter of fact, there is reason to celebrate that Isaac will be fine. We were all very lucky."

Looking at them with dismay, I didn't say anything. I was surprised to hear their immediate and strong reaction to my suggestion. The party was called for 10:00 p.m. and everyone showed up on time. It was a very lively party. There was dancing and laughing and noshing on the goodies that we put out. We set out the liquor too, but no one touched it. When I personally offered the drinks, our guests told me that they have to play the next day and therefore couldn't drink. The energy was very high because on Yom Kippur, there was not much for people to do during the day. I didn't tell any of the guests about my brother, but apparently one of my friends did. Isaac later told me that some guys came into the bedroom.

He was not allowed to open his eyes, but he heard them asking him in English: "How are you? Are you feeling better?"

"Yes" he answered and he wanted to cry. He was very touched by their gesture.

The party ended after midnight, and everyone left in a great mood. I felt very happy and proud. I thanked my parents for insisting that the party should go on. Three days later, my brother fully recovered. The next day, when I went to the club, the buzz got out that it was the best party of their stay.

Being a member in the tennis club, gave me experiences that none of my friends from school had. It also gave me the opportunity to be friends with people of all ages and to learn how to handle myself in different situations. I always thanked my parents for introducing me to tennis and for readily paying the high dues of the club.

During my high school years, there weren't yet too many girls my age playing tennis. The younger players who joined the club were mostly guys with whom I became friends with for years.

I also met Maryann, who was 24, born and raised in Chicago and worked at the American Embassy. We became good friends. She didn't know any Hebrew and my English wasn't terrific, but we liked each other and spent time together. Maryann had a car, and we would go to the beach in Herzliya. When I was studying for my Regents, during my last year in high school, she would pick me up at 2:00 p.m. and we would go to the beach. My mother was very upset with me, but Maryann assured her that we wouldn't talk and I would study, which I did.



*Watching a tennis tournament with a friend without paying entrance fee.*

Wherever we drove, she would try to teach me American songs. The song “All day, all night, Maryann” was our favorite, and whenever I hear it, I always think of her. She also insisted that I go to embassy parties, but I only went twice because I thought the Americans were drinking too much and I didn’t feel comfortable. I explained that to her, and she understood. She always told me how grateful she was to have met me, as it was difficult for her to make friends with any other Israelis.

When her duty at the embassy ended, we wrote each other a few times. But, after a while, we lost touch. She always told me that I would love the life in America.

Another good friend that I had was Yakov, the husband of the older of the two women in the club. Yakov had a lot of interest in and knowledge of art. He was ready to teach me about art, and I was willing to learn. After school, we would meet at the only art museum that Israel had at that time, which was in Tel Aviv. He taught me to appreciate modern and Chinese art and to know how to study and understand art. Whenever there was a new exhibit at the museum, he would tell me, and we would go. Often, We’d go twice or three times to the same exhibit.

I always remember the first time that I went with him to a modern art exhibit and being almost in shock, looking at the large canvases with bright colors and different shapes and not seeing or understanding the beauty of it. I asked, “What is this? I probably could do it too. How can you compare it to the old masters and the impressionists and call it art?”

He said, “Please stop comparing. Lets walk around, and when you see a painting that you like, because of its colors or shapes, then stop and we will talk about it.”

We walked slowly and I stopped.

Jacob asked, “Why did you stop? What appeals to you in this painting?”

“I like some of the colors.”

“Why? How do you feel about the colors and what is your reaction? Do you feel happy, do you feel angry, do you feel relaxed?”

I was surprised by his questions. I looked at him and tried to answer. Suddenly, I realized that the colors do have an effect on me. He then would ask me the same thing about the shapes, and I found answers for those questions too. I then proceeded to read the title for the painting, and many times it was “untitled.” I was puzzled by that and he knew immediately that I was.

He said, “If a painting is creating a reaction, any reaction, then it is a good painting for you. It does not mean that it will be good for anyone else, as people have different tastes. It is easier to appreciate paintings done by the impressionists or the old masters than the modern paintings, which is a new movement in art. It will take years until it will become more popular.”

After our first visit, he felt that we should go back a few weeks later and see if my original reaction would be the same. We went to see the exhibit again and I had different reactions. He asked me to express my feelings verbally, and I suddenly understood what he explained at our first trip to the exhibit. He truly opened my eyes to modern art. Whenever I see modern paintings, I always think of Yakov and am thankful for his patience and teachings.

I was so impressed by modern art that I asked my mother to go with me to the museum. I never asked her to accompany me to any modern art exhibit before. She told me that it was nice but she still liked the European art much better.

The next most exciting art that I enjoyed looking at were the Chinese exhibits. I felt such happiness and calm when seeing them. What was surprising to me was that I could explain what I felt. I liked everything about Chinese art, whether it was paintings, sculptures, ceramics, or fine china. To me, it was a completely new culture and a new way of expressing art, which always stayed with me.

I never disclosed any of my museum trips to my friends. Likewise, I asked my parents never to tell them when they came looking for me that I was in the tennis club.

I played tennis almost daily, preferring to play singles to doubles. At times, I had no choice because the wait for a court to play singles was very long. When I played doubles, I always stayed in the back because my strokes were very long, strong and on the lines, especially my forehand. My partners rarely objected.

One gentleman that I liked to play doubles with was an elderly man whose name was Dr. Froid. He was an obstetrician/gynecologist who owned the first and only private hospital in the country, in the early thirties and mid- forties. He couldn't run much and was very happy to cover the net. We were a very good team. He would only play in the late afternoon, and he made sure to tell me when he would be at the club. I always tried my best to be there, so I could be his partner.

One day, I made arrangements with my mother to pick me up from the club early in the evening. That day, I played doubles with my partner, Dr. Froid. My mother showed up earlier than agreed and watched our game. When we finished, she came over to us.

She greeted my partner and the other players. My partner said to my mother, “You look so familiar to me. Where would I know you from?”

My mother smiled at him and said, “Dr. Froid, you were my doctor when I gave birth to Miriam, at your hospital.”

He turned to me and said with a big grin, “Miriam, did you know this?”

Smiling, I answered, “I sure did.”

“Why didn't you say something all this time?”

“I didn't think it was that important and I didn't want you to get too excited.”

He turned around, hugged and kissed me and mumbled, “I can't believe it. How many doctors can say that they played tennis with a person that they helped bring into the world?”

After this discovery, he kissed and hugged me every time we played. At times, I thought he tried to play harder than before, but I couldn't figure out why. Maybe he didn't want to show his age. At the time, he was in his mid- or late sixties, the oldest member of the club.

Belonging to the tennis club exposed me to so many wonderful experiences that my friends did not have. One Saturday afternoon, Gabi, who was a great player, about four years older than me, invited me to his home. Many other club members, myself included, didn't like Gabi. He was a snob and spoke in a snooty manner to others. I was surprised when he invited me, but decided not to miss the opportunity. When I arrived at 1:00 p.m., I met a few friends of his and his girlfriend, whom I did not know. I was the only one invited from our club. We were told not to eat lunch at home, and a wonderful buffet was awaiting us. Once we finished eating, we listened to a recording of Harry Belafonte. His music was very new to us, but we loved it and kept listening to the record for a few hours. We also danced a lot, as we could not sit still, loving the new beat and sound.

Another great experience was talking with a young man who was an officer in the Air force. He was very handsome, and I had a terrific crush on him. At times, we would hit balls together and became friendly. He was a journalist and a caricaturist who wrote for the Air Force newspaper. He explained to me in detail what journalism was all about. It interested me, as I liked writing. As a civilian, he became one of the most famous and sought after political caricaturists in Israel. I thought about going into journalism because it was not a profession where one sits in an office every day. Because of him, I entered a few writing competitions in different subjects. I never won more than recognition, sometimes accompanied by a thank you note appreciating my participation in the competition. In a short time, I realized that I wasn't a good enough writer to become a journalist.

My good friend Doka, who was my age, was a very good tennis player, but never won a championship, although he tried very hard. I was the only one he trusted to listen to him express his frustrations and we shared a lot of feelings. He came from a very wealthy family. He was good looking and very polite. His family owned the first and only delicatessen in Tel Aviv. They were also the first ones to make hot dogs, pastrami and corn beef, all served the same way the delis serve them in New York.

He had a girlfriend since the start of high school, and he married her after his army service was concluded. After he finished training camp, I was able to get him a job in our office. It took some convincing of my bosses, but they were very happy with him all through his service. His family and girlfriend appreciated it, and I was always invited to spend time with them, which I always enjoyed.

Another friend was Raffi. He was a married man with two children. Raffi was a funny guy and could be annoying, at times. He was short, ugly, with red hair and a messy appearance. He was not a bad player but always made a lot of noise when he messed up a point or when he gained a point. He would yell, "Yap, Yap," skipping around before being ready for the next game. Although he could be annoying, he was also very well liked by most people. He always had good jokes and made us laugh. Raffi brought lightness to the club. He was successful on his own merit and lived very nicely with his family. Whenever I was at the courts at the same time as him, he would drive me home. He would come up to our apartment, and we would sit with my mother on the terrace and drink beer.

He always asked me: "Does your mother have cold beer? It is so good in your house because it is always very cold. I don't know what your mother does, but I can't get such cold beer anywhere else."

When Raffi visited when my father was home, it was a lot of fun with all the jokes flying around. In the beginning, when he started taking me home, I knew there were rumors about us. When I realized what was going on, I asked him, "Does your wife know that you take me home almost everyday?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Good. I want to meet her. Let her come to the club, as that will make me very happy."

He looked at me a little puzzled. I explained that it was important for me to show the members who are busy talking about us that everything is on the level. The next day, without telling me, his wife came to the club with his two kids. She was a very beautiful woman, and that surprised me. She had shoulder-length, black, curly hair and very dark eyes. She was tall and slim and dressed very well. I was happy to see that their daughter looked exactly like her mother and the boy like his father. It was difficult for me to understand this match. Raffi introduced me to his wife and kids.

I remember her saying, "I am so happy to meet you Miriam. Raffi told me about the cold beer he gets in your home. He claims that it is the best beer because it is always so cold. You know him. He is a little nuts." I

laughed. Many times after that first meeting, I was invited to their home and my parents invited Raffi's wife and kids too. The rumors about us stopped immediately.

There were also two bachelors in their late forties in the club. They were good players and always found time to hit balls with me. In tournaments, they were the ones who would hold a seat for me in the best spot on the court. They were nosy, and liked hearing from me about school and my social activities. They were the ones who told me about the rumors circulating about my friendship with Raffi.

They also defended me when I started to wear a colorful plaid shirt when I played. It created a bit of an upsetting situation. The club rule was very strict about wearing whites only, and there I was trying to change it.

I was called in front of the board and the head of the club asked me, "Miriam, you know that our members can only wear whites?"

"Yes I know. I don't understand why it is such a big deal. I needed some new white shirts to replace the white shirts that were worn out. Being able to wear this shirt will save me from buying a replacement. If I see anyone else starting to wear colored shirts, I will not wear it anymore."

The board members had a brief discussion, then the head of the board looked at me and said, "Beseder" (okay). I couldn't believe that the board members were not more insistent. No other member ever wore a colorful shirt but me!

Some of the other interesting experiences that I had involved watching a group of men and women playing bridge after their games. They always invited me to watch them and offered to teach me the game. They thought that playing bridge would be a great asset for me as I grew older. I watched them a few times and knew that it was not for me, as my concentration span was too short for the game. I told them that I was not interested, and they thought I was making a mistake by refusing them. In order to get them off my back, I told them that my schoolwork is very demanding and I don't have the time.

Besides not being interested in bridge, I also resented the idea that most of the time they spoke German, although they knew Hebrew very well. In the beginning, when I sat with them to see if I would like the game, they would catch themselves and switch to Hebrew. Most of the time, I understood what they were saying because of my knowledge of Yiddish, which is very similar to German. I also understood a lot of the German because of the tenants in our apartment who had spoken it. I never told them that I understood what they were talking about because at times it was to my advantage.

The other thing that used to fascinate me was the idea that they wouldn't even try to eat any of the Middle Eastern foods like humus, tehina, falafel or pita bread. Many times when I was hungry, I went to Shuk Bezalel to get falafel. When I would ask them if I could bring them anything, they would smile, thank me and take out the food that they brought from home. After a while, I stopped asking. It was difficult for me to understand their dislike of all these foods, and I also resented them for speaking German. I remember talking to my parents about it.

"When people move from the country where they were born, their life changes. Eating food from home and speaking their mother tongue makes their adjustment easier," my father explained.

"They are not the only group who sticks to their food and language. The same is true for Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Polish and all the others who came from Europe. Most of them keep using all they brought with them from the old country. Because behavior, beliefs, food, culture, language and work attitudes in the Middle East are so different, keeping some of the traditions from home helps newcomers to adjust.

"It is difficult for you to understand it because you were born here and Hebrew is your first language and the food and the culture here are the only ways you know."

After this discussion with my father I looked differently at people speaking languages other than Hebrew, but I still resented it.

One of the funniest episodes happened one day in the dressing room. One of the older tennis players was a woman with long, bleached-yellow blond hair. She was very slim but had a good figure with good strong muscular legs and arms. She was very tanned and dark from the sun and her face had a lot of wrinkles. She was a very strong player and very fast on her feet and was, therefore, a threat to the other two older women players.

She was always very serious, and I didn't talk to her too often.

One day, we were the only ones in the dressing room after playing. She showered first, and then I took my shower. I was drying myself and was taking out my clothes from the locker. As I started to dress and was putting on my bra, I suddenly heard, "Miriam, don't wear a bra. It is not healthy or good for you. You are young and a bra will only ruin your beautiful breasts."

"What?" I asked turning around to her in absolute amazement. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

I was even more surprised when she stood in front of me in the nude saying, "Look at me. See how nice and erect my breasts are." I didn't answer, as I was in shock. "If you will not wear a bra, your breasts will look as beautiful as mine. Wearing a bra just stops them from being erect and healthy on their own."

I just smiled because I thought her breasts were real ugly and hanging low. I didn't say anything to her. I got dressed as fast as I could and ran out of the dressing room. I remember walking home so fast, hoping that my mother was home, so I could tell her about it. My mother couldn't believe what I was telling her, but we both started to laugh hysterically. She explained to me that there are all kinds of people around with different ideas and that I should just forget about it and not pay attention to this woman.

After this conversation, I spoke to her even less than before and always made sure that I would not be in the dressing room at the same time as her. Up to that time, I always hoped that she would hit balls with me, but not anymore. It happened that after that conversation she asked me to hit balls with her, but I gave her some excuse and refused.

Once I joined the army, I hardly had any time to go to the club to play. I tried to have a doubles game on Saturdays at 7:00 a.m., as it was the only day that I didn't have to go to the office. I enjoyed going this early to the club because no one was in the streets, and it felt like the city belonged to me. It took me about 15 minutes to walk for one hour's play. At times, it was difficult for me to wake up that early, as I would only have about three to four hours of sleep on a Friday night. The minute I saw the courts, I woke up and was happy that I decided to play.

At one point, the treasurer of the club told me that my club dues were up for payment. I could not see asking my parents to pay my dues. I didn't have the money myself, and I was playing less and less.

I told the treasurer, "Sorry, I don't have the money and I can't ask my parents to pay for me, anymore."

He looked at me and said, "I am sorry but you will have to leave the club."

I got very upset and said to him, "Please bring it up to the committee. Tell them what I said. Also tell them that it is a shame for the club to throw me out after all the years of my never missing paying my dues. If I would be working and not paying, it would be understandable. I am not working, but serving in the army, and, in order to respect the service, they should let me keep playing. I cannot ask my parents for money anymore. I am also not playing as much, only sometimes on Saturdays at 7:00 a.m. If necessary, I will be very happy to meet with the committee and explain it to them myself."

At that time, there were many more kids, boys and girls, joining, and there were people on this committee who didn't know me.

He looked at me for a minute and said, "I'll speak to them and let you know."

This was on a Saturday morning after my game. I told him that I would be back at the end of the week before I made an appointment for a game, and that I hoped to have his answer then. I showed up as promised and, when I saw the treasurer, he told me that the committee saw my reasoning, and I could keep playing.

He added, "They did it for you, but it doesn't mean that this is a new policy for us, and please don't talk about it."

"Fine," I answered and thought to myself that it is always important to speak out and try.

When I came home and told my parents about that episode, they looked at me. My father smiled and said: "You have chutzpa."

I was able to keep my key to the club and come at any time. My time was so limited that I practically stopped going and was even unable to go to watch tournaments. It was the end of many wonderful years in a place that was my second home, where I enjoyed playing, making friends and learning about people.



*Saturday mornings on the beach in Herzliya.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Friends and Social Life in School and Beyond

I had a wide range of friends while in high school, and afterwards, with whom I socialized. Some were more intimate than others. My best and closest female friends were Esther and Nellie, who were as different from each other as night and day. The only thing they had in common was that both were only children. I loved them both, and I spent time with each of them, but separately.

I have a special purpose in describing my social life here in detail. I am not writing about it in order to show off my popularity. It was a different time, and behavior and attitudes were different. It was the fifties, and it was before feminism and the sexual revolution. It was before everything started to change in the sixties. Women of my generation were expected to get married at the latest by age twenty-three, and to have children shortly thereafter. Past that age, unmarried young women were considered old maids. When I told my parents that I didn't plan on getting married until age twenty-six or seven, my parents were very upset with me, especially my mother.

Most women stayed away from sexual activities until they got married. They were virgins. We were divided into good girls and bad girls. Men who respected a woman whom they went out with were considered to be gentlemen. Feelings of love or admiration were expressed only as far as hugs, kisses and some necking. Many times, we were not invited to certain parties. It was explained to us that they were sex orgies and, therefore, not for us. We never knew who the invited women to these parties were. The guys were very discreet about it, and we never asked. Because of this understanding, it was easy to have dates, without any pressure. The three of us, Esther, Nellie and myself, were considered "good girls."

Esther and I met at a small hotel in Nahariya. It was a summer resort in the northern part of the country, just north of Haifa. We were both there with our mothers. We both attended high school and were about to go into our senior year. Esther came from an orthodox home and was an only child. She went to an orthodox, girls' public high school called Talpiyot. She was a very good student and serious about her studies and was able to converse in English and French. I, on the other hand, came from a secular, political home, where Shabbat and holidays were observed in traditional ways. I have two brothers; Isaac, who is eight years younger than me, and Chaim, who is sixteen years younger. I attended a secular, private school, Gymnasium Herzliya, which was the first high school in Palestine. I was a mediocre student, as I was always very engaged in different organized and social activities.



*With my friend Nellie.*

Although our backgrounds and upbringings were very different, we became close friends and shared a lot. That first morning at the hotel, after breakfast, my mother spotted Esther and her mother sitting by the pool. My mother and I went over and asked if we could join them. After a short introduction, both mothers started to converse. Esther and I took immediately to each other and moved away from our mothers. We were both curious to know why we were vacationing with our mothers at the hotel.

I told Esther that I was there after having a big fight with my father that created a lot of tension at home. The fight was about Uri, a nice Yemenite young man, a journalist and six years my senior, who I was dating at the time. My neighbor Tzipora and her fiancé Yakov introduced us. My father was very unhappy that I was dating a Yemenite. He was opposed to me dating anyone from a Sephardic or Yemenite background.

At that time, there was a very big divide between Ashkenazi Jews from Europe and Sephardic Jews from Middle Eastern countries, in social circles and in the government. My father claimed that the backgrounds, traditions and upbringings were very different and could cause problems in any relationship in the long run. He also claimed that my friend was waiting for me to get older, and then he would want to marry me.

When I stopped seeing Uri, my father was delighted. One day at lunch, I told my parents that I had a date with Uri. My father got red in the face, banged on the table with clinched fists, stopped eating and stormed out of the kitchen. I was afraid that he would get a heart attack. Crying, I immediately ran to the candy store, as we did not have a phone, to cancel my date. I came up with some kind of an excuse.

My friend was upset and said, “I don’t believe your excuse. It is your father who is stopping you, as he does not like me because I am a Yemenite.” I was surprised that he figured out the reason and I was very embarrassed. I wanted to deny it, but I was speechless, unable to reply.

I came back home, letting my parents know that I canceled my date, but I would not speak to my father. The next day, my mother informed me that we would both go away for a few days on vacation, and my father will stay behind with my brothers.

Esther and her mother's reason for being there differed from mine. They had a retail store and both needed a vacation. Their store was located in an old apartment building, a third floor walk-up, off Allenby Street, the main commercial street in Tel Aviv. Esther's father and mother ran the business, and Esther helped out after school. Once she graduated from high school, she would be working alongside with them full time.

From a young age, Esther was a charming and wonderful salesperson. The store was a very busy, successful business and the first one in Tel Aviv that sold women's fashions on credit. Their reputation grew through word of mouth and attracted customers who did not have a lot of money and were only able to buy on credit. After leaving a deposit, the customers were able to take home what they bought immediately. The balance was paid monthly without interest charges. The store also employed two seamstresses for alterations at an extra charge.

In order to supervise all these activities, one family member had to be there at all times. Esther's father was very orthodox and not keen on going away for vacation. It was easier for him to stay home and take care of the store, attend prayers twice a day and study.

My mother and I ended up staying at the hotel from Sunday to Thursday and then went home for Shabbat. While we were there, every day after breakfast we went to the beach or sat by the pool. As meals were included in the hotel price, we had our own table and ate all our meals together. After lunch, we went for a long siesta and met Esther and her mother again in the afternoon.

Every afternoon, between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., dance music was played at different cafes along the main street of the town. Light fares, like ice cream, cold drinks and cakes were available. Liquor was only sold between 9:00 p.m. and midnight. Groups of young single women and single young men sat at separate tables that surrounded the dance floor. Couples or families occupied some of the tables with their children, but only in the afternoons. The single men were about six to eight years older than us. Once the orchestra started to play, the guys would approach girls whom they found attractive and ask them to dance, or to join them at their tables.

It was a very new experience for Esther and her mother, as they did not frequent cafes before. We were both about seventeen years old, but I had been going dancing to cafes and parties since I was sixteen years old. I explained to Esther and her mother how it worked and told them to relax.

When the music started, and two guys came over to ask us to dance, I immediately got up. I saw my friend looking at her mother, who nodded with approval. She was a lovely, smart woman and did not want Esther to feel bad. I always loved her. She saw it all, was diplomatic, charming and always welcoming with a smile.

When the musicians took a break, we were asked to join the guys' table. We went over to our mothers and told them about the invite and, with their permission, joined the young men at their table. Those few days created a very strong bond between us. When we came back to Tel Aviv, we stayed in touch. We shared everything, and I introduced her to the life of the young secular society. She never joined me on Friday nights, or before Shabbat was over. I understood and never pushed her.

The people we met at the café in Nahariya were a very nice, down-to-earth group of guys, in their mid-twenties. Most of the girls were younger than the guys, but we were the youngest ones. For me, it was the beginning of a new social life without any of my high school friends. Most of the guys in this group had only a high school education, but held responsible jobs in the private sector as drivers, store managers and clerks. I went to a few of their parties, but, after a while, my social life took another turn, and I stopped seeing this group.

I had two very good friends, Alex and Natan, who were in their mid-twenties and were stewards at the newly created El Al, the airline of Israel. I can't recall how and where I met them. The three of us became good friends and very close. They were at least six or eight years older than I me. At times, they called me "schoolgirl," and, at other times, "Dennis the Menace." They said that when I smiled, I reminded them of him. I asked them not to call me by this nickname in front of any of my friends.

Natan and Alex were the first ones to shorten my name to Miri. I was known as Miri only within my social set. Many times they surprised me and waited for me outside the main gate of school. I would excuse myself from my friends and go with them, and hear all about the countries they flew to. They insisted on holding

my schoolbag, which I thought was funny. Often, they brought me delicious chocolates from different parts of the world. One day, I told them that I loved cherries, which were very difficult to find. It was my father who introduced me to cherries, which he bought in an expensive specialty store. Soon afterwards, they surprised me with a big box of large, red, sweet and juicy fresh cherries, which they bought in Greece.

Natan and Alex also introduced me to small cafes and nightclubs, where we would go dancing. The three of us also went to small bars to listen to music. At the time, there was no law about a minimum drinking age. As I looked older than a schoolgirl, I never had a problem ordering. My favorite drinks were screwdriver and gin and tonic because they were cold and refreshing.

I was very open with my parents and always told them where I was going with Natan and Alex. They had no objections, as they knew that it was an innocent friendship. Many times, I would come home and find both guys sitting with my parents or brother, waiting for me.

One evening, they came after supper and asked me to join them. They planned to listen to a wonderful pianist at a small bar near the sea, on Ha'Yarkon Street. We entered a very small dark bar that was not very crowded. By an upright black piano, there was the pianist playing wonderful tunes. That evening, Natan and Alex wanted to sit by the bar, as the atmosphere called for it, but I refused. I explained that I promised my mother that I would never sit at a bar, as, according to her, only prostitutes did that. I was not going to take a chance that someone who knew my parents and me might come in, and eventually tell my parents that they saw me and where I was sitting. I knew that it would have ended our friendship, which was too dear to me. We sat down by a table, and the waiter came for our orders.

"Scotch on the rocks," I said.

"Miri, are you sure?" they both asked in astonishment.

"Yes," I insisted.

They placed their orders and, before the waiter left, they asked me again if I was sure. I remember giving them a dirty look. Seeing that, they waved the waiter to go. When he came back with our drinks and we clinked our glasses, they watched me. I thought it was a terrible drink, and that it tasted like medicine. They both kept watching me, but I would not give them any indication of how I felt about it.

They smiled and asked, "Where did you learn to order this drink?"

"I saw Humphrey Bogart ordering it in a movie, and I liked the sound of it."

They started to laugh and said, "You don't have to finish it, you can order something else."

"But I like it," I answered with a straight face. They then explained to me that it was considered a man's drink. I never ordered it again.

We stayed there late, as the music and the pianist were fantastic. He played music from all over the world with a lot of feeling and great technique. Afterwards, Alex and I went out of the bar, while Natan stayed behind to pay the bill. Outside, Alex looked at me and said, "Don't tell Natan that I told you, but we both went to a gym today for the first time. We stayed there for almost two hours. I am aching all over."

Halfway through our walk back, Alex left us, as he was near his home. As soon as he left, Natan looked at me conspiratorially and said, "Don't tell Alex what I will tell you now. This afternoon we went to a gym and stayed for two hours. I am aching all over. But I don't want him to know that I told you." I just smiled and didn't say anything.

Natan and Alex invited Esther and me to a party. We waited until after Shabbat, and picked Esther up on the way out of the city to Givatayim, a small town east of Tel Aviv. The party was given at a very elaborate villa, owned by the Saks family, an old, prominent and one of the wealthiest families in Israel. They owned the first and biggest fabric store on Nachlat Benjamin Street in Tel Aviv. It was called "Meshi Saks," which translates to Saks' Silks. Very quickly, many smaller fabric stores opened on the same street.

Meshi Saks was a corner store with large display windows facing two streets. Their window displays were very beautiful and were changed often. Because they had large windows, they were able to use mannequins and to drape fabrics on the mannequins, which made them look as if they were wearing dresses. They were the first company to import European fabrics; silks, taffetas, brocades, linens, silk, and cotton, prints, solids, wools and



*Ziporah and I at her engagement.*

woven fabrics in all price categories. They also carried some fabrics that were made in Palestine and some from the Arab countries, mainly Egyptian cottons, as those were considered superior. The demand for fabrics was strong, as most men and women's clothing was custom-made at home or by tailors and dressmakers. There were very few stores that sold ready-made clothes, which were very expensive and, therefore, out of reach for most people.

To go to Alex and Natan's party, I wore a woolen black pencil skirt, a sky-blue woolen long-sleeved blouse, custom-made black patent high-heeled sandals and silk stockings. I had short hair parted on the side and wore only light lipstick. I felt very good, elegant and grown up. I knew I looked older than a high school student, which I liked.

Esther wore a light grey wool suit and high heels. She looked matronly, but I didn't say anything. Years later, reminiscing about the party, she confessed that her mother insisted that she wear this suit, as it was made from "a very good expensive fabric."

The large villa where the party was taking place was very impressive. The entire front of the house was white marble with a flight of wide marble steps leading up to the main entrance. The double doors were heavily carved in dark wood. Many outside, bright lights illuminated the villa and the beautiful garden and trees. It was very unlike most private villas at the time.

Walking in, we found ourselves in a center hall with a large dining room on the left and a living room on the right. Through an open door, we could see a large kitchen attached to a den. A circular staircase led to the second floor. The furniture, large area rugs and window treatments were rich-looking and impressive. Beautiful paintings, sculptures and antiquities were everywhere. It was very overwhelming.

Almost everybody was already there, since we were somewhat late. Everyone was dressed in beautiful outfits. Most of the men wore slacks and white shirts and some wore suits. The women wore the latest fashions. The music was blasting, a mixture of American, Italian and Greek music. The party was in full swing. Some people were having drinks, mostly screwdrivers, gin and tonics, beer and wine. Others chatted and laughed, and some danced.

In a large dining room, chairs were set up all around the walls. A large dining table was set up as a buffet. It was filled with wonderful Middle Eastern dishes, different salads, fruits and cookies. In the corner of the room, there was a small table set up as the bar. Esther told me that she was surprised to see me walking around with a drink in my hand, as she did not drink. After a while, people got tired of standing. They filled large plates with food and sat down to eat with soft music playing in the background. A little while later, the dance music started again. Esther told me that she suddenly realized that she was the only one who stayed seated, as she was not invited to dance.

At that point, the host, who was short and chubby, introduced his very handsome friend, Abe Natan, who did magic tricks. He was not a professional magician, but a pilot at El Al. He spoke mostly English and a broken Hebrew. His performance was amazing. He explained that he was born in India where he grew up and learned magic. He wanted to become a magician, but his parents objected. He then learned to fly and received a pilot's license. When Israel became independent and fought the War of Independence, in 1948, he left India and volunteered for the Israeli Air Force. His family, which was still living in India, was very Zionist and followed all the news about Israel. They were not surprised when Abe decided to leave home at the beginning of the war and join the fighting. As it was, he had no future in India. When his air force service ended, he joined El Al.

At the end of his magic show, Natan and Alex introduced me to him. When he asked me where I served in the Army, he was surprised to hear that I was still in high school. He laughed and called me "Schoolgirl!" From that time on, Nathan and Alex called me the same thing until I graduated from high school and joined the army.

When I was in the army, Abe and I went out on a few dates, but we basically just stayed friends for a long time. Many times, Nellie, my best friend from high school, and I were invited to parties at his house but not to all of them, as he felt that some were too wild for us. He was divorced and had a little daughter. A few times, I went with him to visit his ex-wife and daughter. Abe and his ex-wife were on good terms, and she was always very

nice and friendly to me. The three of us, Abe, his ex-wife and I used to talk and laugh together, especially when he constantly repeated certain sentences, such as, "Is everybody happy?" It was difficult for me to understand why they were divorced, but I never asked. At the time, there were not too many divorced couples, and it always became sensational gossip when we heard about one.

After this party, whenever I asked Esther to join me, she turned me down. She realized that this crowd was not for her. I thought she had some pressure at home and accepted her wishes without asking for reasons. We kept seeing each other a lot, and we shared everything. I always was very comfortable visiting her home. Her mother always welcomed me with much warmth and many times participated in our conversations. Her father would acknowledge me with a smile, but he and I never carried on any conversations. I understood that too and never held it against him.

The last year of high school went quickly. Both Esther and I were very busy with projects and tests, but we kept in constant touch. When the time came to enlist in the army, Esther was exempt with all the other orthodox girls. All they had to do was swear in court that they followed all the religious laws and observed the Shabbat and holidays accordingly.

While I was in basic training, for six weeks, with only one Shabbat off, I received a very happy letter from Esther. She wrote that a matchmaker introduced her to a very handsome, nice and successful young man. He was a diamond dealer whose name was Yosef Ostfeld. He came from a very good and wealthy family. He was a gentleman, always dressed in beautiful suits and ties and drove a beautiful car. In those years, most young men didn't own their own car, unless they were successful professionals, businessmen or came from money. Esther said that she and Yosef were spending a lot of time together and were falling in love.

Esther also disclosed to me that, on Shabbat, Yosef insisted on a drive out of Tel Aviv, as it was the only day of the week that he didn't work. He never told his parents that he drove on Shabbat, as he also came from an orthodox family, and they expected him to follow the rules. It was difficult for her, but she was not ready to lose him. She would go out of her home, telling her parents that she was going with friends, but really met Yosef in a designated place. She asked me not to tell anyone, which I didn't. She also told me that she was shocked to see him smoking on Shabbat.

In response, I wrote her a very nasty letter about my feelings. Her letter made me happy and angry at the same time. Happy that Esther had met a nice young man and was in love for the first time; but angry that Esther, an Orthodox girl, could claim exemption from service by swearing in court that she was observant, even though she was breaking the Shabbat rules. Whereas I, being secular, had to serve in the army.

Through all the years that we kept in touch, she always told me that she would not forget this letter. I wrote that it wasn't fair that I had to be in the army, sweating it out, being stuck in camp, especially on Shabbat, while she was having a great time.

When I finished basic training, we met and I apologized, as I did not want to lose her as my friend, and luckily she understood. She introduced me to Yosef, whose nickname was Yoshi, and I liked him right away. How could I not? Immediately, he was included in whatever I shared with Esther. After a very short time, they got married at the Ramat Aviv hotel.

It was one of the top new luxury hotels outside of the city. The hotel had one story of rooms spread across beautiful gardens. It was one of a kind and had a great reputation. It also had a wonderful nightclub with music and outdoor dancing. It was very popular and busy on Friday nights, since it was excluded from Shabbat rules that had to be observed in Tel Aviv. It was frequently the destination of my group of friends.

There were about two or three hundred guests in attendance. No expense was spared. Esther and Yosef were a very beautiful couple. Esther was glowing in her ruffled white wedding gown. The chupah (wedding canopy/ceremony) was outdoors and the dinner reception indoors. They went on a three-month long honeymoon all over Europe, which not too many young couples could afford, at that time. On their return, they moved into a beautiful apartment, not far from our home. I was very happy for them and went to visit them often.



*Ziporah and Jacob at their wedding. On my left is Uri, a young man I dated at the time.  
My father was against it because he was from a Yemenite family.*

I will never forget the first time when I was invited there for dinner. I came early, before Yosef came home. Esther and I sat on the terrace and I updated her on my comings and goings. She suddenly stood up and said, "Miriam, please come to the kitchen with me. It is the first time that I am cooking beans with tomatoes. It is cooking for hours on a small fire, but I am not sure if they are done. Please taste it and let me know." She filled a large spoon with beans and gave it to me. She looked at me with worried eyes.

"They are good," I said. "We ate a lot of this dish in the army and this tastes great." A big smile of relief covered her face, and we both laughed hysterically.

"This cooking business is very difficult but I will get used to it," she said.

When Yosef came home, we set the table on the terrace and waited anxiously to hear his reaction to the dish. We were happy to hear that he liked it. Esther and I looked at each other and never told him of her concern.

Yosef was determined to fix me up with friends that he thought I would like. I did become friends with his partner and best friend Arye. Yosef was upset with me that I only regarded Arye as a friend and nothing more serious. He would nag me constantly, until I finally made him stop.

Once, I almost wanted to kill Yosef. It was the time he introduced me to his brother, Israel, who I never saw or met before. I liked Yosef's parents very much. At times, I stopped by on the way home from school. I always felt very welcome. His mother, a very intelligent, beautiful, sophisticated lady, who Yosef resembled, engaged me in interesting conversations. His father was a quiet man and hardly engaged in our conversations at all. He was very attentive, and many times I heard him chuckle and saw him smile. When I left, he always walked me to the door and hugged and kissed me lightly on my cheek. He was a sweet, warm man.

So, I agreed to have a blind date with Yosef's brother. I thought Yosef and his brother would look somewhat alike and have a similar personality. I was shocked when I opened the door when he came to pick me up. He was very tall and slim, had red hair, wore heavy glasses and looked ancient to me. I knew he was a pharmacist and quite intelligent. We went out, and it was a disaster. He was very serious, hardly spoke and I couldn't wait to get back home.

The next day, I went to see Esther and Yosef. As I walked into the apartment, I looked at Yosef and with an angry voice said, "What were you thinking, fixing me up with your brother? You must have known that it would never work out. It was terrible. I could hardly get a word out of him."

"You are right. I knew you would not be happy with me. I had to get my father off my back. He nagged me constantly and asked me to fix you up with Israel," he answered.

Years later, after I got married in New York to Carl, the four of us stayed friends. Eventually, Yosef and Esther emigrated to Canada and settled in Toronto. We visited and stayed at their home and had a fabulous time. They took us all over Toronto. We laughed a lot and shared memories and discussed everything that was happening in our lives.

When they came to New York, the good times we had together continued. One night, we had friends over for dinner who understood Yiddish. We all stayed together until two in the morning, laughing at Yosef's Yiddish jokes. They came one after the other and didn't stop. I also loved when Yosef answered the phone at their home with a joke. It was amazing to me, as I knew that he was a very successful businessman, and for that one needs to be smart and serious.

Yosef and Esther had two sons. One was born in Israel and one in Canada. The entire family was engaged in many businesses in Toronto.

Unfortunately, Yosef became sick and passed away in his sixties. A few years later, Esther's youngest son passed away unexpectedly.

We went to each other's children's weddings and always felt as part of the family. We shared many experiences, some good and some sad, and were always very open and direct with each other. Our children and grandchildren, who often heard me talk about Esther, had the opportunity to meet her one year in Las Vegas, which gave both Esther and me great pleasure.

About three years ago I flew for the day to Toronto to visit Esther. Her male friend, who lived with her, told me on the way from the airport about her health problems and that she was now in a wheelchair.

It hit me hard when I entered her beautiful apartment and saw her in the chair being attended to by an aide who washed her legs and combed her hair. I walked out of the room and waited in the living room. It took a few moments until she entered. We hugged and kissed smiling at each other with tears in our eyes.

Esther said, "Look what happened to me. Miriam, would you believe it?" I don't remember what I said. I was upset, but tried not to show it.

"Let's have lunch, you must be hungry," she said.

We held hands while her friend wheeled her to the dining room. It was one of the largest rooms in the penthouse. The city of Toronto could be seen from every window.

The apartment was furnished with very beautiful furniture, antiques, paintings and accessories from places in the world that she and Yosef had visited. The dining room table was covered with an embroidered linen tablecloth and linen napkins. It was set with her best china, silverware, crystal water glasses and a very beautiful flower arrangement. There was so much food; from every possible Israeli salad and humus to Jewish food like different herrings and lox. There were also all kind of breads and, on a buffet next to the table, all kinds of cakes and fruits.

I couldn't believe it, and with a smile I said, "This is a banquet, not just a lunch. I hope you don't expect me to eat all of this?"

With her old laughter she answered, "Yes. This is a big and special celebration for me. I wanted to make sure you have everything you like."

We spent about an hour eating, chatting and laughing. Many times, I had to stop her from pushing more food on me. I didn't see her wheelchair anymore. She came back to life with her laughter, giggles and talk. I only saw my friend as she was when we were younger. When we finished lunch, her male friend excused himself and went for a nap.

This was when the real fun begun. I wheeled her to the living room and we brought up all the memories we shared from our youth. She never tired of talking about the parties I took her to, about the angry letter I sent her from training camp and about my social life as a single young woman. I was so amazed that she was able to remember so much more than I did.

She suddenly excused herself while I got up to look at the view. She came back with her arms full of accessories and said, "I want you to take all this home with you as my gift. You can't even imagine what this visit means to me."

I looked at her with amazement and answered, "It means a lot for me too, but I can't take it all. I have no room in my carry-on. I also have many gifts that you gave me when you came to visit Carl and me in New York." We argued jokingly about it until we settled the matter.

She then said, "Take me to my closets. I want to give you some of my clothes. I have so many scarves and hats and you look good in hats."

I burst out laughing and opened every closet. She wanted me to take so much. We laughed and giggled and I had to try on every scarf and every hat. We finally settled for one large brimmed, navy and green silk hat and two scarves. I had to wear the hat on the plane, and it is still in my closet. It was a very special and great afternoon for both of us. We felt like the two young girls we were when we first met at that hotel in Nahariya.

It was late in the afternoon and time for me to leave. It was difficult for both of us. It was the only time that afternoon that we hid our true thoughts and feelings. We hugged and kissed and with tears and phony smiles we said, "Litraot bekarov (See you again soon)."

She called her friend, who came out of his room, and he went with me to meet a private car that would take me to the hotel, where Edna was waiting for me. On the way down, he told me that she was so excited when I told her that I would visit, that she didn't stop talking about it. He thanked me for keeping my promise, as he could see how wonderful it was for her.

"I liked it too and am happy that I came," I told him.

The driver who drove me to the hotel told me what a wonderful person she was. She was his most

beloved customer.

A few months after my visit, she got worse and had to be moved to a nursing home. She became bed-ridden and they had to build a special unit to which she was moved. We spoke every few weeks, and she poured out her heart to me. She shared a lot with me about everything and everyone. She told me, "Miriam, you are the only one I can tell all, as I know that it will stay with you."

During the last year of her life, she told me a few times that she hoped her suffering would end. It was hard to swallow, but all I said was, "I understand."

On her 75th birthday I sent her a collage of pictures that included a beautiful portrait of her and Yosef, pictures of the four of us in Toronto and one of her wearing the hat that she had given me. I also attached a long letter detailing the many memories that we shared.

In the last few months of her life, I called a few times, but she wouldn't talk to me. Her aide, who was now with her around the clock, tried to encourage her, but it didn't help. Many times, I thought of visiting again, but I could not get myself to do it. I wanted my last memory of her to remain the one from the last visit and not be worse. When her son called to let me know that she passed away, I felt sad, but also happy that her suffering was over. I will never forget her and all that we shared for so many years.

Nellie and I met in high school during our junior year when classes were divided into the different divisions. We were in the same class and were friendly to each other, as classmates only. When we lived on Shenkin street, she lived close by.

She was not a member of any youth organization, as I was. Once I left the scouts, I was more open to new friendships in class. We started talking more to each other, and a few times we walked home together and found out that we had a lot in common. On one of our walks home, she stopped at our home and I introduced her to my mother and my brother Isaac. She couldn't stay too long, as she was expected home at a certain time and did not want her parents to worry. I accompanied her some of the way, and she told me that she was somewhat envious that I was not an only child. I told her that she was welcome to our home at any time. She asked me to come and meet her parents and have lunch with them, and I accepted.

I went to her home and was greeted warmly by her mother, who was a very beautiful woman. Nellie looked very much like her, just taller. Her mother was average height, slim, with beautiful legs, blond hair and big brown eyes. She wore a beautiful dress and high heels and had on a lot of makeup. To me, it looked like she was ready to go out, not to serve lunch. I extended my hand to her and with a smile told her my name.

Nellie's mother led me and Nellie into a beautifully furnished living room with very dark furnishings, impressive paintings and heavy drapes, which covered the windows and made the room very dark. While we were waiting for Nellie's father to come home, I was answering her mom's general questions about my family. She had a somewhat formal manner, which made me slightly uncomfortable.

A short time later, Nellie's father walked in. He was a big builder in Tel Aviv, very successful and very rich. According to Nellie, her father had many connections with important and influential people, both in the private sector and in government. He was a very tall, handsome man with broad shoulders, dark hair and brown eyes. When he approached us, I got up, remembering my mother telling me to always get up for an older person, as a sign of respect. I extended my hand to him and told him my name. He answered with a very artificial, tight smile, which I did not like. I looked at his eyes and they were not smiling. All I could think about was that I could not stand him. I knew I didn't give him a chance to prove me wrong and hoped that this feeling would change. He excused himself to go wash his hands. When he came back, we all went into a dining room.

It was a very formal room with a large dining table and heavy, old-looking dark wooden chairs. The mood around the table was as heavy as the furniture. A maid, dressed in a uniform, served us a wonderful lunch while Nellie's father asked me more questions. He was mostly interested in my father's occupation. I felt proud to tell him about his icebox factory and the patent from the British government. Besides answering his very detailed questions, I remember being very quiet. I couldn't wait for lunch to end and to get out of there. It seemed that happiness and laughter were missing at my friend's house. It was too somber for me. When lunch was over, I thanked Nellie's parents and left with Nellie accompanying me downstairs. When we got outside, I didn't say

much to Nellie, but invited her for lunch at my house the next day.

When I came home, and my parents asked me about the visit, I described it in details. I ended my description saying, "I will never go to their home again. I feel sorry for Nellie. I can't stand her father, who is a snob. I feel better about her mother. It is not a happy family, and I am so lucky."

Throughout our friendship, I tried to avoid Nellie's father as much as possible. When I saw him, I would just greet him and walk away. The only time I would get somewhat more involved was on the beach. I loved to play madkot (beach racket ball). He was a very good player and I was too. Whenever he saw me, he'd ask me to play against him. I could not refuse him, as Nellie was next to me and I didn't want to stir up ill feelings. To be honest, I did like to play against him, as it was challenging to me. While we played, the only words exchanged between us were those absolutely necessary for the game. At the end of a game, we just thanked each other and went in opposite directions. It was a mutual dislike towards each other, but we never talked about it.

Nellie never asked me what impressions I had of her parents after I left her home. She could tell that I was very uncomfortable. I was never invited again and that made me feel very happy and relieved.

A short time later, I invited Nellie to our home for supper, figuring that in the evening my father would be home, and I wanted her to meet the whole family. Our favorite place to have supper was on the terrace. The meal was very informal and mostly consisted of salad, hard-boiled eggs, sardines, different kind of breads and rolls and, for dessert, home-baked cake and some fruit.

Before we left for a walk, my mother said to her, "Nellie, come back at any time. You don't have to wait for an invitation. You and Miriam are best friends, so our home is always open to you." She thanked my mother, hugged both my parents and left with me in tow.

Outside she said to me, "I love your family and I envy you. You have a happy family and it is fun being with them." After that, she was a very frequent visitor to our home.

When we were about sixteen years old, Nellie and her parents moved to an upcoming area in the north of Tel Aviv. They moved to a three-bedroom apartment in a building built by her father, at #4 Dubnov Street. I went to see her in the new apartment one day when her parents were not home. It was very rich, elaborate and beautiful and designed by the most well-known architect in the country. There were dark wood, built-in closets in every room, and all the windows were covered with heavy drapes. Beautiful paintings and antiques were everywhere. Nellie's room was bright and colorful and very beautiful, all done in pinks and purples. She was most excited that her father was able to obtain a phone for their home. At the time, Israel had very limited phone lines. Most phones were distributed to the army, government offices, doctors, lawyers and some businesses. Very few phones were allocated to private residences.

When I was 16 years old, we needed a larger apartment as my brother Chaim was born and I couldn't keep sleeping in the kitchen much longer. My father wanted to buy a villa in Ramat Gan, which was a suburb of Tel Aviv. He claimed that we would have a lot of room without neighbors looking in, and it would be quiet. He took all of us to see a villa which was newly built. It was spacious and beautiful. It was located on top of a hill in a cool spot. There was cross ventilation, and it was surrounded by trees. The location was important, as, in those years, no private residences had air-conditioning to cool the homes on hot summer days and nights.

My father was very excited and tried to convince us what a great life we could have living there. My mother, on the other hand, tried to tell him that she would be stuck at home, as it was far away from everything and she did not drive. We also only had one car that my father used every day. The atmosphere became very tense and no one spoke. As we walked out of the villa, my father suddenly saw, on one side of the house, a walkthrough that went all the way down to a street at the bottom of the hill. There was no one with us who could explain its purpose. Because we were there on a Saturday, the builder had given my father the key to the house. On Sunday, the builder told him that what he saw was a public passageway. That same day, my father went to the municipality to find out if that could be changed and he got a negative answer. To our delight, he stopped looking in the suburbs.



*Herzliya Beach.*

My parents started looking for a new place in Tel Aviv. Most of the time, they went together, but, sometimes, my father went alone. One day, he came home very excited, saying that he found exactly the neighborhood where we should live. My mother had to leave whatever she was doing and go with him, as the builder was waiting for them. They both came back home delighted with the floor plans of the apartment. That evening, we all went to see the location of the building. As the building was at mid-construction, we were not able to see the apartment. Every week, and sometimes more than once a week, we would go back to check on the progress of the building. When it was completed, we were finally able to move in.

The building was at # 46 Shderot Chen, an impressive address that had the cachet of a Park Avenue address in Manhattan. I was very unhappy about the location, as it was not in the center of the city and far from high school. I cried that I would be isolated and no one would come to see me.

My father wanted to live there, as it was a wide boulevard, with trees and benches separating one side of the street from the other. It was a very quiet street because no buses were allowed. Shderot Chen was a complete opposite to the busy and noisy Shenkin Street where we now lived. Also, the new apartment was a corner apartment which created cross ventilation. He also appreciated the relative privacy it afforded. His favorite new saying became, "In this apartment, no one can look in at our apartment and see me running around in my gatkes (underwear)."

It was a four-story building, built on pillars, which was a building style and movement that started in the fifties. There were two apartments on the ground floor. The next three floors had three apartments to a floor. The fourth and top floor was a single penthouse apartment. The highest residential buildings in Tel Aviv were four stories high. None of the old or newly-built buildings had elevators. Electrical power in the country was low and very expensive and, therefore, use of elevators was avoided. As power became more available, higher residential buildings and skyscrapers were built, and these had elevators. Through the years, many of the older buildings had small elevators installed at a very high cost.

Our building was a condominium. Residents owned their apartments. The neighbors met to discuss how much money should be spent for a gardener, a cleaning crew and repairs when needed. They all had the desire to keep the building and garden beautiful and everything on the outside of the building unified. All the awnings above the terraces were the same style and color, which was a bright deep blue with a white trim. In order to save on electricity, which was very expensive, the building hallway lights were not on at all times. Light switches were installed in the middle of each floor. Because we were only one flight up, we could make it to the apartment without having to press the light switch again. Our neighbors who lived on the higher floors, had to press the light on every floor. My father installed a light switch for the ground floor and the first floor corridors inside our apartment, for convenience.

He also installed a switch for the bell inside the apartment. He wanted to be able to control the outside doorbell. The only time we used it was for afternoon naps. He decided to install the inside doorbell switch because of an incident that occurred at our former apartment. One very hot summer afternoon, the entrance door to the apartment was wide open. Although all windows and inside doors were open too, it was still very hot. An open door at the opposite of all the other openings helped to create cross ventilation. Most entrance doors in the building were left open on hot days. We were all napping, around 2:00 p.m., when the doorbell rang. We saw my father run to the door. There was a gentleman at the door, and we heard my father asking in a very angry voice, "Who are you?"

"I am Mr. Shultz from Frankfurt. I am a friend of your wife's sister, Hanka. She asked me to come, give you regards and this package," he answered.

"Don't you know that it is siesta time here and no one comes to visit between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.? You will have to come back another time," my father said in anger. The gentleman walked away without saying goodbye, probably in shock and insulted.

My parents had a big fight over my father's rude behavior towards a visitor who came to fulfill my mother's sister's request. My mother was very upset and embarrassed. She found out what hotel Mr. Shultz was staying at, and went to see him to apologize. This is why my mother loved the idea of having a bell that could be

shut off whenever needed.

My mother loved the inside light switch too when she realized that being able to shut off the corridor light from inside the apartment meant that she was able to control me. When she heard me coming back from a date and walking towards the entrance, she waited for a while. If I lingered and did not come upstairs within minutes, she figured that we were in the dark too long. She would then switch on the light and spoil what might have been a romantic moment. It angered me every time, even though, at times, it made me happy too. My mother and I had many arguments about it. I finally had to involve my father, and she stopped.

All of us loved this apartment and the neighborhood, surprisingly myself included. It was decorated well, with the help of the same interior designer who helped my parents with our former apartment. My mother was the happiest.

As it was more than double the size of our former apartment, she needed help to maintain it. For a while, she had household help every day, though, after a while, it became twice a week. The most difficult job was the family wash. No residential washing machines or dryers were available in those days. Sheets, towels and tablecloths were given out to a commercial laundry. All other items had to be washed by hand and hung to dry on the roof. A large, round metal washtub and a ridged washboard on which the clothes were moved up and down against had to be carried up and down, as they were stored in the apartment. Because the tub was large, it was very heavy, and so it would have been very hard to bring the water from the apartment. Luckily, because this was a new building, hot and cold water was installed on the roof.

In order that not too many neighbors do their laundry on the same day, a list was kept on the roof door where family names were listed by designated wash day. This was done mainly to prevent arguments.

Once the laundry was dried, it had to be taken down and ironed. To avoid running up and down to the roof, all back balconies, facing the backyard, had clotheslines installed.

When we moved into the new apartment, my mother washed some diapers. They were needed for my brother Chaim who was still a baby. The diapers were hung on the balcony clothesline to dry overnight. One day, when we got up in the morning, we realized that whatever was hanging outside on the balcony was stolen.

In those years, it was not unusual for thieves to come into a home, at night, while everyone was sleeping. It mostly happened when the weather was hot and all the doors and windows off the balconies were left wide open to get some air. It was difficult to control it. The thieves were successful in many instances. At times, the dwellers of an apartment woke up while the thieves were inside, and loud yells of "Thieves, thieves" were heard, which chased them out quickly. I used to wake up sweating when I heard those screams. In our apartment, the clothesline was installed right outside of my converted bedroom. After the wash was stolen, I told my father that I was frightened that the thieves might come back.

He said, "Don't worry Miriam, I will take care of the problem."

I was very upset but left immediately to go to school. When I came back from school, my father had gates installed all along my bedroom. I didn't love the idea, as it felt like a prison, but I was relieved. I was surprised at how quickly my father took care of the problem. "Thank you Abba," I said and gave him a big hug.

The apartment was very comfortable and I felt rich living there. When you walked into the apartment, the kitchen was on the right. All kitchens in the buildings had a terrace. Ours was eliminated in order to be able to fit a large table and chairs for our daily meals. That also left room for a large refrigerator to accommodate my mother's constant supply of fresh and cooked food, cold sodas, water and black and white beer.

On the opposite side of the entrance, the balance of the terrace was closed up to create an 8 by 12-foot room for me. My two brothers shared a large bedroom behind my tiny space. Their window, which was supposed to face the outside terrace, now faced my room instead. So privacy was limited. All I had in my room was a small closet, my twin-sized bed, an old dining room table that I used as my desk and built-in drawers on one side of the bed. Those drawers, which had a reading lamp on top, served as my night table because the other side of the bed was against the wall. I faced the back of the building, looking at all the other kitchens in the surrounding buildings. I did have shutters that I mostly used only during the night. When I did my homework at night, I had to shut the ceiling light and use a desk light, in order not to wake up my brothers. I had many heated discussions

with my mother about not being orderly in my tiny closet, and about leaving some of my clothes on my one and only chair. Her favorite saying to me was, “I wonder how orderly you would be in your own home when you get married.”

At that point, I always walked away growling. I finally arranged to have some of my clothes in my brothers’ closet, but not my underwear. They had a large freestanding closet that was used in our former apartment. Most of the old furniture that could be used were only used in the back sleeping quarters. The only new piece of furniture was an upright piano. I was still taking piano lessons when we moved in, but, after a short while, stopped and never touched the piano again.

I had taken piano lessons for about three years. The first two years I had a lovely teacher, on Shenkin Street, who was pleasant and nice. She not only gave lessons, she also charged by the hour for students to practice at her home, using her piano, as most students did not have pianos at home. At the end of every year, she arranged a concert at her home, where each of us played a piece of music and was presented with a bouquet of flowers afterwards. She then had a photographer take a group picture of all of us holding the flowers. We all liked her very much, but she got sick and had to give up teaching.

My mother immediately signed me up with another teacher. She was very strict, never smiled and got upset when I made a mistake. I didn’t care for her or her selections of music. My parents bought a very expensive upright piano, which they put in my brothers’ room. My mother thought that I would enjoy playing more if I didn’t have to go and practice in the teacher’s home. At the year’s end concert, I made a few mistakes playing my piece, which never happened to me with the former teacher. After the concert, the teacher told me that I had no talent and that I embarrassed her. I didn’t care and told my parents on the way home that I was done playing.

Of course my mother was not satisfied with my decision. One day, she came home and said, “I found another teacher for you. He was recommended highly by a friend and I just met with him. He is an older, soft-spoken Viennese man and he would like to meet you before we make a decision. I made an appointment for tomorrow late afternoon.” I couldn’t believe my ears but decided not to argue. I figured I would defiantly turn him down.

The next afternoon we went to see him. It was a fifteen-minute walk from our apartment. He lived on the first floor of an apartment house. An elderly man with a big, warm smile opened the door and welcomed us. We followed him to a room where an upright piano stood on one side against a solid wall. Instead of having a piano bench for two, which most teachers had and shared with the students, there were two separate piano stools. Across from the piano, there was a wall with many windows looking out on a garden with many big old trees that gave a lot of shade. Consequently, the room was dark, but very cool in spite of the outside summer heat. A large sofa was under the window flanked by two small upholstered chairs and a glass cocktail table. There were many accessories around the room and there was fruit, candy and cold soda on the table.

“Miriam. How many piano teachers did you study with?” he asked.

“I had two teachers. The first teacher I liked. She was a nice woman with a lot of patience. Her choice of music was good and fun. Unfortunately, she became sick and stopped teaching. All of the students were very sad, as she was very much liked. The second teacher didn’t think I had any talent and said that I should stop coming, and I was very happy to hear that,” I said.

“Why were you happy?” he asked.

“I did not like the music she had us play. My first teacher had us play classical pieces that had a lot of melody, whereas, with the second one, the pieces felt more like exercises. It was boring.”

“What would you like to play?” he asked.

“I would like to play light classical music, like waltzes and other nice, happy, melodious pieces. Ballet, ballroom dancing and folk dance music from other countries would interest me too. Also, popular Israeli music and popular music from different countries can be added.”

He looked at me and with a big smile asked, “Miriam, would you trust me to buy the notes for you? If there will be something you don’t like, I will not press you to play it.”

I was very happy and relieved to hear him say that. With a smile I said, “Yes I would.”



*Friends at a party.*

So we set up a one-month schedule of lessons. I loved his lessons and practiced at home, more than I ever did before. Unfortunately, he became ill after six months and stopped teaching. I was very sad, as I looked forward to his lessons. So, that was the end of my piano music education. Once in a while, I would sit down at the piano and play some of my favorites, but this stopped after a while too.

We only had one bathroom and it had a bathtub, a separate shower and a sink with running hot water. The running hot water was a great luxury, compared to our old apartment. The toilet was separate, in another room, outside of the bath room.

Entering the apartment, you saw a short hallway that opened up into a large foyer that was covered with hand-painted, light green square wooden panels. The panels were separated by round wooden buttons, set on each corner of the square. The paint was a light yellowish-green that was light in the middle and gradually became darker, with the darkest green on the buttons. The only corner in this area had two built-in benches and a glass cocktail table in front of them. Having this seating corner created a welcoming atmosphere and warmth.

This area led into the living room. The entrance was very wide with sliding doors that opened and closed. When closed, they slid into a double wall and were not visible. My mother requested those doors for privacy. She told my father, “The doors will be closed most of the time, so the children will spend more time in their rooms and the salon/living room will remain clean and neat.”

“No way!” I protested. “This place is not a museum and all the rooms will be used by everyone whenever they feel like it.” And so it was. I hardly ever remember those doors being closed.

There were four lights high in the ceiling in front of the doors. My father and I liked to put on a show dancing the tango. The tango is a sexy dance and the most popular dance in South America. My parents, who loved to dance, went out a dancing often to various cafes and nightclubs.

The tango became my favorite dance too. Because my father was somewhat of an actor, I loved dancing with him. We’d both get dressed for the occasion and put on a show. I would put on a tight dress, high heels and tie a kerchief around my neck. My father wore a white, short-sleeved shirt, open almost to

his waist, and a red small kerchief tied around his neck. I was a street girl and he was the pimp. We hid behind the closed doors with only the ceiling lights on, creating our stage.

My mother and brothers would sit on the couch and wait for our performance to start. When we were ready, I opened the doors and started dancing. Within seconds, my father joined me. We tried to use every complicated step that we could handle. We learned most of the steps from movies and dance performances that we attended. My father used to make all kind of faces while we were dancing, and I had to try hard not to laugh.

At times, when I was home alone in the evenings, I would draw the curtains, so I couldn't be seen from the street, and then I would dance. I liked to imagine dancing with Gene Kelly or Fred Astaire, whom I adored. Since I was very young and a good dancer, many times, at weddings or Bar Mitzvah parties, I would dance by myself in the middle of the dance floor, loving the attention and applause. My other favorite dances were Russian dances that were lively and full of energy.

We spent a lot of time in the living room. It was a large, long room divided into two sections. To the right of the entrance, there was a dark, solid green fabric sofa, two chairs upholstered in the same fabric and a glass-topped cocktail table resting on a black lacquer open base. These pieces were brought from our old apartment, as they still looked new. The wall on the right of the door had an artificial, electric fireplace. I don't remember it being used too much. It was part of a low unit with a marble top.

Across from the fireplace, there was a new large wing chair, covered in a blue and green cut-velvet fabric. This was my father's chair. He was not a big man and he looked smaller in this chair, but he loved it. We never sat on it except when he was not home or when he asked one of us to sit on his lap.

The other part of the room was the dining room. It had a large table with ten high-backed chairs. At the end of the room, there was a long, beautiful dark wood buffet. It stretched from wall to wall. On one side of it, there was a window, which, when open, brought nice fresh air to this part of the room. My mother's Rosenthal dishes that she bought in Germany, her crystal water and wine glasses and the silverware, all for twenty-four people, were stored in that buffet.

On another wall, there was a mirrored showcase that was built-in. The back and sides of the showcase were lined with twenty-four vertical strips, three inches wide. A light was installed on top of the mirrored strips. All the beautiful figurines and other small decorative items that were displayed on the glass shelves looked doubled and tripled. I loved standing in front of the showcase and seeing my face in every strip. It was a very nice touch, especially when the light over the dining room table was off and it was dark.

My parent loved to entertain. We always had company - family, neighbors or my parents' friends. My mother loved to cook and bake and use her beautiful dishes. I liked helping her and many times stayed around to mix with the guests. We always had guests on Shabbat, on holidays and sometimes during the week too. At times, friends showed up without any notice. They were always welcome, as my mother always had enough food and goodies at home to welcome them.

On the left of the entrance to the living room, there was a small wall with a built-in cabinet that was the same as the unit with the fireplace. In it, behind sliding wooden doors, was our radio. I loved to lay on the floor, in front of it, and listen to my favorite programs. It was the only radio at home, and we had to learn how to share it. We often all gathered together to listen to the radio when the news was broadcast, which was three times a day.

My parents' bedroom had a beautiful light-wood, built-in cabinet along an entire wall, which served as their closet. Across was their bed. On one side of the bed, there was a night table with a light. On the other side, my mother had a beautiful vanity with a three-way mirror and a bench. On top of the vanity, there was a large silver tray. On it, there was a heavy, carved silver set that included a comb, a hairbrush, a cloth brush and a hand-held mirror. Her favorite Chanel perfume in a crystal holder was also displayed. I spent a lot of time sitting at that vanity when no one was home, making believe that it was my bedroom. The room had two windows and a door to the terrace, which made it the coolest room in the summer.



*With friends at a party.*

On very hot days, I insisted on washing all the floors in the apartment on the days that our Yemenite cleaning girl was not there. I liked the cool feeling of swooshing in water with bare feet. My mother used to laugh at me, as the floors were not dirty and she didn't think the work was necessary. She once tried to stop me, but I got angry with her so she let me be.

We had a very large terrace facing the street in front of the apartment. We used it a lot, all year round, when the weather was nice. It had a beach chair that was mostly used by my mother. It was her favorite place to read the newspaper or a book when she was finished with her household chores. There was also a large table and chairs where we liked to eat as a family.

On summer evenings, most people were out on their terraces, as the apartments were not air-conditioned and it was very hot inside. At times, on very hot nights, I would sleep directly on the floor of the terrace to keep cool.

My brother Isaac and I always insisted on eating supper in summer on the terrace. Because the terrace was a distance away from the kitchen, my mother did not always agree. So, we made a deal with her. As supper was a very light meal, mostly consisting of vegetables, eggs, sardines, cheeses and sour cream, Isaac and I promised to prepare it. Every evening, we would make different food platters, carry them out and back to the kitchen and wash the dishes. We loved figuring out what to serve and how to present it nicely on each individual plate. We always waited for my father to come home, and we all ate together. My mother, of course, loved this compromise, and would smile whenever she saw us coming with the platters.

All the neighbors in the building were very friendly with each other and it felt like a big extended family. That was unusual, as in many buildings there were big fights among the residents. One neighboring family was the Werners. Mr. Werner was very respected in the real estate business. He used his apartment as his office and therefore was entitled to have a phone. He gave me his number and permission to give it out. I very rarely did, and when I did, I gave special instructions as to when someone could call.

The Werners had two daughters, one year and three years younger than me. We were very close with them, and some years my parents invited them for the Passover Seder together with another family from another floor.

That other family was the Weintraubs. They lived on the fourth floor. Their apartment had the same layout as ours, but looked completely different. The décor was very heavy. It had many dark wood built-ins. All upholstered pieces were covered in dark velvets. The windows were framed in brocade fabric. There were many antiques and very fine paintings.

My parents and they had a very close relationship, especially my father and Mr. Weintraub. They loved sitting together for long periods of time and complaining about the laws and organizations of the dominant Labor government.

Mr. Weintraub, owned a very successful, large steel manufacturing plant. All his workers were members of the Labor union. He had a lot of problems and fights with the union, and he found my father's ear receptive to fill with his frustrations.

Mr. Weintraub was a very handsome man, with big blue eyes and a lot of grey hair. He was soft-spoken, down-to-earth and warm. I loved him and enjoyed just sitting next to him and talking to him. He was always very interested in what I was up to, which flattered me.

His wife was a very attractive woman, but kind of snobbish and a know-it-all. She was very opinionated, loud and loved to brag. She liked having fun, and my parents appreciated her for it.

Many times, the Weintraubs were invited with their children, Tzipora and Tzvika, for Shabbat dinners and Seders at our home, and vice versa. I was very friendly with both of their children. Tzipora, was three years older than me. Her brother Tzvika was one year older. Tzipora had a good figure and was very thin. She had a nice face, beautiful long hair, big blue eyes like her father and a beautiful smile, which she never spared. She was cross-eyed but I guess that nothing could be done about it. She was friendly, warm and outgoing, so being cross-eyed was not much of an issue for her. She quit high school in her junior year and went to work. She had a boyfriend who was about six years older than her. His name was Jacob. He was an engineer, very good looking and warm. They got married when she was eighteen, as that allowed her to avoid being in the army.

When I was a junior in high school, she invited me to join their group of friends who were mostly Jacob's age. I dated one of their friends, but, most of the times, we spent time together as a group, going to dances, to parties and to the beach.

Before her marriage, she had to go to the rabbinate, which gave out marriage licenses. Every bride had to go to a mikvah before her wedding. The mikvah is a natural body of water, like a pool, a river, a pond, a lake or an ocean. By immersing completely after cutting nails and toenails, the bride purifies herself for the groom. Once the mikvah ritual of immersing completely in the water three times is fulfilled, a note to that effect is given to the bride by the woman who supervises the immersion. This ritual is still being enforced today.

Once Tzipora was done with the immersion, she took the note to a rabbi who would be interviewing her. The interviewing rabbi was supposed to sign off on the note before an appointment could be set up with another rabbi to officiate at the ceremony. When Tzipora came back from the interview, I saw her and she said to me, "I have to tell you the nerve of the rabbi who interviewed me. After verifying general information and receiving the note I had from the mikvah, he suddenly asked, 'Are you a virgin?' I was flabbergasted and ready to hit him. For a moment, I did not know how to react. I couldn't let him get away with this very personal question. I looked straight into his eyes, lifted my skirt and said, 'Would you like to check?' He got all red in the face and immediately gave me the note I needed. I wanted to laugh at his reaction, but I didn't want to take a chance that I would not get my approval note. I immediately went looking for the department that will assign a rabbi to the

wedding ceremony. I got my appointment, and on the bus, on the way home, I was laughing and crying at the same time.”

“You know you took a tremendous risk,” I said looking at her in disbelief.

“I realized it later on the bus,” she said.” I was so angry and insulted that my answer to the rabbi just came out, as a reaction, without any thought.”

We were all invited to Tzipora and Jacob’s wedding, which took place in a small synagogue in Tel Aviv. There were not too many guests at the wedding, only family and close friends. It was not at all elaborate, which her parents were very upset about, as they wished to give them a big fancy wedding. Instead, Tzipora and Jacob asked them to give them money to buy an apartment. They were told that they could have both, but they were absolutely against that. Tzipora told me privately that Jacob didn’t come from a big wealthy family and did not have many friends. She did not want his family to be embarrassed or feel bad. I thought it was very considerate of her, but this is who she was and I admired her for it.

Towards the end of high school, I stopped going out with this group as many couples were getting married. At that point, I would only see Tzipora and Jacob when I came to visit her parents. I did however remain good friends for many years with her brother Tzvika. He also left high school in his junior year and went to work for his father. He had his own group of friends and I had mine, but we were close friends and exchanged confidences, as we trusted each other. After his army service, he went back to work in his father’s factory. He was not always happy, and I was his listening ear. We were in touch on and off. He was married to a famous singer for a short time. Tzvika never shared with me why they divorced. After I moved to the United States and came to Israel for a visit, we spent a long evening at a Jaffa café reminiscing about the years when we were close. He once visited us in New York, but, after that visit, we lost touch.

When I was in high school I used to babysit for our next-door neighbors. Mr. and Mrs. Gatenu were a French couple who had one little girl. They only spoke French at home and many times helped me with my French homework. They liked to go out a lot, so I babysat for their daughter Gila at least twice a week and made nice money. Once I read Gila a story, she would immediately fall asleep and I had the evening free to do my homework. The parents very rarely came home before midnight. They always left me a wonderful platter with fresh fruits, chocolate, and home-baked cookies or cake. Once I became a high school senior, I didn’t babysit as much because I wanted to go out. I stopped altogether when I started my army service.

The Tal family had the penthouse apartment. It was large and included a large outdoor space. They used to have many parties, and many times we heard couples running down the steps fighting and women crying. It seemed, from what we heard, that the parties were pretty wild. They had two boys, Hannan and Arnon. The older one was close in age to my brother Isaac and they became friends. The younger one was the same age as my brother Chaim.

Mrs. Tal invited me many times to attend their parties. Her main reason was that she wanted me to meet her younger brother. I always refused. Finally, I couldn’t stand her nagging and agreed to attend one party. I met her younger brother Yeoshua, who was an architect, and had a good job. We both couldn’t stand the party and we left after one hour. I had a few dates with him, as he was a terrific dancer and he liked to go dancing in the best hotels. I was also introduced to his group of friends, successful young men in different professions, and spent some time in their company.

One night, we went dancing at the Ramat Aviv hotel, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. When we were ready to go home, we found that his car would not start. Yeoshua insisted on walking to a bus station in order to go back to the city. When I suggested and offered to pay for a taxi, he got upset and yelled until he was red in the face. At that point, I was afraid he would get a heart attack. So, I walked with him, in my high heels, in the sand, as there were no sidewalks in this area. After that, I had no interest in seeing him again.

I also had two or three dates with a young judge who lived with his parents on the first floor in our building. Whenever he saw me, he would stop to talk and ask me for a date. I finally relented, as I couldn’t stand his nagging and my mother’s pressure to accept the date. “Go out with him,” she’d say. “Give him a chance. He is a judge at such a young age and has a great future.” I would give her a dirty look and walk away.

One of the dates we had was special. It was Purim, so there were many large masquerade balls all over the city. He suggested that we go to one, and I accepted. It was one of the most popular balls, and the tickets were very expensive. I knew my parents were going to the same ball with their friends, and I did not want to tell them where I was going. I thought I'd surprise them.

I decided to dress up as a man, wearing a tuxedo and a cylindrical top hat. I rented the tuxedo and accessories. I borrowed the hat and a gentleman's cane from a friend who had them from his British grandparents. I was very happy with my outfit, and added a small black mask that I decided to wear for most of the evening. My date, who was very tall and heavy, rented a toreador costume and looked ridiculous.

The ball was held in a large ballroom, and there were about 500 people in attendance. Round tables, which sat 12 people, surrounded a large round dance floor. All the tables sported beautiful flowers and colorful balloons and many colorful party favors. Some people were dressed in costumes and others in formal evening clothes: men in dark suits and women in ball gowns. The room looked very festive. A twelve-piece band, accompanied by male and female singers, was at the back of the ballroom playing music. Colorful hanging streamers, strewn across the room, created a very festive atmosphere. At the entrance, we were handed cards with our table number. The people at our table were all couples who did not know each other and were not part of a group. All at the table were interested in meeting everyone else, so it worked out well.

After a while, I excused myself, telling my date that I was going to take a walk to see if I could find my parents. I walked around and finally spotted their table. I went to the opposite side to see if they would recognize me. No one paid any attention to me when I stopped by their table. So, in a loud voice I said, "Hey, ma nishmah (what is going on)?"

It surely got their attention, and my father yelled, "Miriam! It is you." Of course, all their friends started yelling too and were then laughing hysterically. I stayed for a few minutes. I told my parents where I sat, and they said they'd stop by after they located the photographer. I went back to my date and told him all about it.

In between dinner courses, the orchestra played wonderful dancing music. My date was not much of a dancer, and I was getting restless. I excused myself and told him that I wanted to invite women to dance with me and see if they would accept. With my mask on, I went over to a table, tapped a woman on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, can I invite you for a dance?"

She said, "Yes." While we were dancing and exchanging a few words here and there, she said, "You are a great dancer. Are you a young boy or a girl dressed as a boy?"

I didn't answer...just smiled. Afterwards, I went to a few other tables inviting women to dance and was never turned down. Every one of my women partners asked the same question and I would...just smile. Finally, happy and satisfied, I went back to my table, telling my date about my experience.

"I was watching you," he said. "You kept doing it, and no one refused you." I think he was very happy that he didn't have to dance and that I had a great time.

At that point, my father approached our table with a photographer and grabbed both of us to take pictures. This was my last date with the judge, as he must have realized that, being in high school, I was too young and not serious enough about him. He was very wise, and when we saw each other afterwards, we just exchanged greetings.

Nellie loved coming to us. She spent many hours at our home, mostly in the evenings when we had no plans. Her parents went out every night and she didn't like to stay home alone that much. At times, I thought that she liked our home better than hers. I never mentioned it to her, for fear that it would make her uncomfortable and she wouldn't come as much. My parents and brothers accepted her warmly. She even felt comfortable opening my closet and counting how many new outfits I had. She'd say, "You have more clothes than I do."

And I would answer, "What difference does it make?" I knew that she threw this question at me because her parents were very wealthy and, yet, she had to fight for every new outfit. I sometimes thought that her mother looked at Nellie who was a spitting image of her, but taller and younger, as her competition.

We were very close and honest with each other. We were inseparable and were always invited to parties together. We had an agreement that if one of us liked a man and told the other, the other one would stay away

from this person.

Nellie was very talkative and loved to gossip. She would gather a lot of information and forward it to me. She did not have any hobbies or special interests. Unlike me. I had many interests, which kept me very busy. I also needed to have my own time to be alone. At times, I would turn down a party invitation, as it became too much for me. She never turned down an invitation and was angry when I did. She always met new people at the different parties. When she was invited to join a new group, she would always introduce me, and I became part of that group. For a while, we moved from one group to another until we finally found one that we liked and that we stayed with.

It was a group of about twenty people, more males than females. The number changed all the time, as all dates were welcome to join. Nellie had long relationships with some of the guys she went out with, while mine were very short-lived, in comparison. I was kind of naive, not realizing that a person that I was going out with for a while might have serious intentions. I just thought of it as having fun with a good friend. I was always in shock when I found out how wrong I was, and immediately cut off the connection.

That sort of thing happened with Yossi, a friend that I went out with for a longer period of time than any other. One early Saturday afternoon, he insisted that I go for a ride with him, so he could show me a lot that he owned. When we got there, he said he was going to build a house for us to live in on the site. I was so shocked to hear that, that I asked him to take me home immediately, and I did not want to see him anymore. I really thought he was just a very good friend. One reason I thought so was because, while we were dating, he used to introduce me to other guys, implying that I might date them. Only once did I agree to do it.

Yossi, and his brother were the owners of a big successful business and were active in an organization for business owners. At one of the luncheons that Yossi attended, the speaker was from the Foreign Office. That speaker was Dr. Dov Shmorack, who had a Ph.D. in international relations and a very high and important position in the Foreign Office. When the luncheon ended, Yossi went over to talk to the speaker. He introduced himself and told him that he would like to fix him up with me. He told him that I was interested in working for the Foreign Office, and that maybe he could tell me more about the work. He then called me at my office in the army, and I agreed to go out on the date.

The idea of applying to the Foreign Office came from Israel, a guy I met at a party, who asked me out on a date. It was during the last half-year of my army service. I had already applied to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was determined to find a job, in order to support myself while attending school.

On my first date with Israel, he asked me what my plans were for the future. I told him I'd be attending Hebrew University, and that afterwards I'd like to have a job that would get me out of the country and enable me to travel.

Originally I wanted to become an El Al stewardess, but my father would not hear of it. He told me that they are basically glorified waitresses. No matter how much I tried to reason with him, he would not change his mind. I also asked two of my good friends, Natan and Alex, to speak with him. This didn't help either. In the 1950's, becoming an El Al stewardess was a big deal, as it was very difficult to get this job. The few young women who got the position were highly respected and became part of a privileged group.

"Did you ever think about the Foreign Office?" asked Israel. "I have been working there for a few years now, and I don't think you will have a problem getting in. You are suited, and I will help you. Your current position in the army is a big plus. You should know that it takes at least five years to be sent outside the country for two years to work at any of the Israeli embassies or consulates. It is worth the wait. My five years are almost over, and if I pass some tests, I will be sent to the embassy in Rome. You must, however be able to type in both Hebrew and in English."

I thought it was a great idea and was ready to work hard towards it. I also knew that my parents would not object to this idea. I had a few more dates with him, and he introduced me to his best friend who would also be assigned to Rome.

The tests Israel and his friend had to pass were about Roman history and the culture of Italy: its customs, music, and art and the Italian language. There was a lot of studying and the tests were tough. When the tests

ended, all the candidates for the job were invited to a luncheon. No one realized that this was part of the test. Their table manners and their social behavior was carefully observed. Quite a few people lost their chance to get the job in the embassy because of failing this part, one of them being Israel's best friend. It was explained to them that the correct social behavior was more important than knowledge, as they would be representing the State of Israel.

After five months of training, my friend left for his two-year stint in Rome. Before he left, he gave me the embassy's address in Rome, in case I needed his help.

The guys in our social group of friends were mostly about eight years older than Nellie and me. We were almost always the youngest ones among the girls. Many of the guys were educated outside of the country, and some were graduates of Israeli universities. Some of them were from families that were in the country for many generations and were involved in their family businesses. On the whole, this group of guys were established in their professions, were successful, had cars, money and loved fun. Some of them were ready to settle down and get married. I thought that many of them were snobs because of their position in life.

A couple of them came from Petach Tikva and Rishon LeZion, where they owned multiple numbers of orange groves. Much of the land was acquired from Arab owners in the 18th century at a very low price. As time went by, orange groves were scattered all over the country, as it became a profitable business, and many individuals bought available land and planted new groves. It took about three years to see the first fruit in a newly planted orange grove. Oranges were sent all over the world, the bulk of it to European countries, and it was the number one export item for many years. Other guys in the group came from old families engaged in various businesses involving diamonds, export/import and fabrics.

One of the guys that Nellie dated for a long time was a very famous athlete who won many medals in the Maccabiah games. He was a champion at throwing a heavy metal ball. He was the son of one of the oldest families in Israel, and the only one that dealt in leather. They were very wealthy and built a large villa on Shderot Chen, two blocks from our apartment building. Because of the family wealth, he was able to spend a lot of time on athletics. He trained in a gym that was built for him in their home. This was unheard of at the time.

Nellie and I were invited to a party at his home. The two of them hit it off and ended up dating for a very long time. Her parents never found out about their relationship. Although he was very wealthy, and Nellie's parents would have loved that, they would have been very upset had they known that he was divorced.

At the time, I was dating too and Nellie and I made my parents a proposition: my date would pick her up at her home and come to us and her date will wait for her at our home. All four of us would go out together and then would either stay together or separate for the rest of the evening. My parents looked at each other, and my father waited for my mother to express her opinion. It took a few minutes while they were quietly exchanging looks.

At last, my mother said earnestly, "Okay. It will be fine, although we shouldn't do it. But we love you Nellie and understand your dilemma. Nellie, we want you to be happy." It all worked very well for about a year until they broke up.

For both of us, it was a wonderful social life with this group of people.

One of our favorite pastimes in the summer was to go dancing on Friday nights. No café or nightclub was allowed to be open in Tel Aviv on Friday night because of the Shabbat, so we had to drive out of the city. Often, we went to the Ramat Aviv hotel, in Ramat Gan, because it had a great live band and they played dancing music outdoors.

Most of the times, we brought bathing suits with us, which were left in the cars while we went dancing. At 12:00 midnight, when the music stopped, we'd go to the beach, which was about a fifteen-minute drive from the hotel. As no one was there that late, the guys were able to drive the cars right on the beach, park on the sand and put on their lights. We all went behind the bushes to put on our bathing suits.

The ocean was very inviting. When the moon was out, the water shimmered with silvery sparkles. The waves were small and sounded like music when they broke close to the shore, white and fluffy as whipped cream on top of a cake. The air was chilly, but the water was very warm from the hot sun of the day. We would all run

into the ocean, play, laugh and sing like little children. There was a certain magical feeling to it and, for me, it was one of the best things about summer.

We'd stay in the water for a long time, as it was warm. When we came out, we were shivering because of the change in temperature. We'd immediately run back behind the bushes to dry up and put on our dry clothes. Then, we'd sit on the sand, talking and singing, while some couples walked away for a while. It usually took about two hours before we headed back to the city.

At that point, we were all very hungry. We'd drive to Shchunat Hatikva, a poor neighborhood at the south of the city, where Rebecca's was located. It was a small stand on the sidewalk that was open all night and was very popular and busy. Their specialty was a thin, grilled steak in a pita. We frequented the place very often, and many times there were long lines even late at night. There was no place to sit, so we ate leaning on the cars. Rebecca's stand was so successful that eventually she went indoors to a large space with tables and chairs. Our group ceased to go there, as the atmosphere was lost. She kept doing well because now she was able to stay open on cold rainy nights, as well as during the day.

In the fall and winter, instead of Rebecca's, we went to the Espresso Café. It was the first café that imported an espresso machine from Italy. The machine was very expensive, and that was reflected in the café's prices. The café was open all night and, in spite of high prices, there were always people waiting on line to get in.

Many people wanted to experience all the new places, foods and other items that came to the country from abroad. If they had the means, they did it all. My father was one of them. He introduced us immediately to popcorn, soft ice cream, Seven Up soda, which was called Tempo, and everything else that was new.

In the fall, we'd have cocktail parties that started at 5:00 p.m. At most of these parties, we listened to new music recordings that were bought abroad by people who went there on business or on vacation. At these parties, we'd just talk among ourselves and there was no dancing, unlike at parties that started later in the evening.

In the summer, I would go to play tennis at 6:00 a.m. and be back by 9:00 a.m. At 10:00 in the morning, I would be picked up to go to the beach in Herzliya, just outside of Tel Aviv. Because everyone in the group had a car, we went many times to beautiful, isolated beaches for picnics. Often we'd find a favorite spot that we kept going back to all throughout the summer.

I would put on my bathing suit at home. On top of it, I wore a short, terrycloth jacket. The jacket had a print pattern of large colored polka dots. There was a matching cap made from the same fabric by my mother. I carried a white bag that contained a large towel for sunbathing and I wore high-heeled wooden open sandals. We all spread our towels on the sand, laid down or sat up and gossiped. I never stayed too long on the towel, as I preferred to play madkot or to be in the water. On Saturdays, when the ocean was quiet, with waves breaking near the shore, a small group of us would jump through the waves and swim out to quiet waters. We floated on our backs, going up and down on the quiet waves before they broke. After a while, we would create a small circle, tread water, and gossip again. We would stay in this position for at least an hour, if not more. We all wanted to look very dark and this was a way to achieve it quickly.

I always felt that the people I ran around with were snobs. They had to know who dated whom. They liked to criticize anyone who dated someone who was not at their level. Many times, I was criticized for having a date with a professional army officer or someone of a similar social level. At times, my date and I would go on a Friday night outside the city to a nightclub or a bar that I was sure no one from my group would go to, so I would not have to listen to their opinions.

I was always surprised when, the next day, on the beach, someone would say, "Miri, someone saw you last night outside the city on a date with a good looking man who was a lieutenant in the navy. Not for you." I was flabbergasted and disgusted with remarks like this. I never answered, as I was not ready to get into an argument.

I had one of my biggest fights with Nellie at a party that we were both invited to. It was at the apartment of a very successful journalist, who came from a known and respected old, wealthy family. Nellie and I were introduced to him. I thought he was nice, and I told Nellie so. Before I knew it, he asked me to dance with him. I was very excited and happy. While we danced, he asked me many questions about my position in the army, my plans for the future, etc. At one point he asked, "What does your father do?" I thought this was out of place.

“He is a shoemaker,” I answered with a straight face.

“Oh. And where do you live?”

“Shederot Chen,” I answered in a cynical voice, looking directly at him and smiling.

The dance ended. I thanked him and walked away. Within five minutes, Nellie appeared next to me. “Miri, we need to talk.” So we went out to the balcony. “When you were asked what your father did for a living, did you say that he was a shoemaker? If that’s true, you are nuts.”

“Nellie, I knew exactly why he asked. He is exactly like everyone else we know. He is a snob. Was he interested in my father or in me?”

“He came over to tell me about your conversation. He was wondering how your family could afford an apartment on Shderot Chen if your father was a shoemaker.”

“You see,” I said, “I was correct in my assumption. I don’t like it, and I will not have anything to do with him. I was surprised because he is a journalist and should know better. It is degrading. He is just another snob.” At this point, Nellie walked away from me, nodding her head from side to side in anger.

The next day, she showed up, after lunch, in her parents’ big American car, and we went for a drive. She was able to afford the very expensive driving lessons and to get a license. The only time she had the car was when her parents took their afternoon nap on Shabbat. We had our best conversations in that car. We mostly did it when the weather started to get cooler and the beach season ended.

On this ride, I told her that I didn’t appreciate our friends’ intervention in everything we do. I made it clear to her that I will not say anything, as I love the life we have, but that I didn’t so much love the people. I also told her that I would date anyone I felt right about, no matter what his social status was, as long as he was a nice person. I told her that this conversation was to stay between us, but she had to know my true feelings.

“Miri, you cannot just go out with anybody, what would people say?” she said, giving me an angry look. I didn’t answer her. Of course, she was the one who was asked, at times, where I was and who I was with. When others in our group criticized me, she resented it, as we were very good friends, even though most of the times she thought I was wrong.

Most Friday nights when we went out, we never knew at whose party we would wind up and who would be there. If one person was invited, it was not unusual to bring a group of people who were unknown to the host or hostess. Numerous parties had a mixed crowd and this was where we met new people and enlarged our circle of acquaintances. Some turned into dates and some were just people to say hello to. The State of Israel, in the late nineteen forties and early fifties, only had a population of around five hundred thousand people. And even though it was growing quickly, it still felt as if we knew almost everyone in Tel Aviv who belonged to certain social circles.

In the summer, because of the heat, many parties were held on rooftops. When they were inside apartments, the heat was unbearable. It was somewhat helpful that all apartments had balconies to get a small relief from the heat indoors, as air-conditioning was, at that time, only available in office buildings, not in residential ones. All conversations took place on the balconies and all the dancing indoors, where the record player was set up.

Traditionally, Friday night was a time for families to gather together, have dinner and spend time with each other, talking about the week that passed, which always also involved political discussions. Those get-togethers mostly took place between six and eight in the evening and so parties never started before 10:00 p.m. Therefore, all that was served at parties was cookies, cake, nuts, fruits and many different cold drinks, set up buffet style. Chairs were set up in a circle on the roof for a chance to sit when weary. The only alcoholic drinks were screwdriver, made of orange or grapefruit juice with vodka, and gin and tonic. At winter parties, cognac was added, as it was the popular hard liquor in those years.

Eighteen was considered a very big birthday in Israel. I don’t remember having any other birthday parties through the years, except the one in kindergarten. At times, I forgot my birthday, but my mother did not. When I was a schoolgirl, on the day of my birthday, at 7:00 a.m., before I left for school, the doorbell would ring. My mother would call my name and order me to open the door. I was not very happy, as I was trying to get ready for

school, but I had no choice.

Once I opened the door, I'd see the delivery man with flowers, mostly tulips, my favorite. Then, I'd realize that it was my birthday. My parents and brother Isaac would come over with hugs and kisses. For some reason, I forgot my birthday from year to year. For many years, we did not know my parents' birthdays, as, at the time, in Israel, no one made a big deal out of celebrating birthdays.

On my eighteenth birthday, however, my parents insisted that I should have a big party for my friends at home to celebrate the occasion. I thought that would be very nice, but I was worried that it would get overcrowded. I made a list of the people that I would like to invite and had to double it to allow for everyone on the list to bring one guest. I decided to hand out written invitations, which was unheard of. In them, I gave the information about the party and then added: "You can only bring one guest. Any more will be turned away at the door. Sorry, but the apartment can only hold a certain number of people."

I gave the invitations to friends to distribute for me to people that they saw frequently. The party was called for 10:00 p.m. I didn't expect RSVP's and did not bother to ask for any. It was not the custom in Israel to RSVP, not even to weddings or to any other large gatherings. We figured that the most we would have would be eighty people, which would make it pretty crowded.

My mother and father were very excited. My mother was in charge of food, and she baked all the cookies and cakes. My father took it upon himself to get chairs and drinks and to rent a record player, as we didn't own one. I asked friends to bring their records. My father was also responsible for emptying the living room of furniture and setting up chairs on the balcony. A buffet would be set up in the foyer, leaving enough room for dancing and standing around to converse. It was difficult for me to stay home and help my parents, as I was in the army and could only take off on Friday, the day of the party.

My control system worked pretty well. I was the only one to open the door, and if a name was not on my list, I would turn the person away. Some couldn't believe that I would actually do it, but I had no choice. We had close to 80 people, and it was very crowded, but fun. My brothers weren't there, as my parents shipped them out for the night to friends' homes. They came back around 2:00 a.m. when some of the partygoers started to leave. The only glitch we had was when suddenly the record player stopped working. I was very upset, but, luckily, one of my friends fixed it quickly.

I thought it all worked out well, and the word around town was that it was a great party. I was slightly disappointed that my boss, Dov Eshkol, couldn't come. He always went back home on Shabbat to his family in Kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shachar in the upper Galilee. He never stayed in the city, unless it was necessary for security reasons. He sent a beautiful bouquet of flowers with a note, which I was very flattered to read. His bouquet was the first one to arrive, followed by many other bouquets from my friends. There were so many that we had to distribute them in every room of the apartment. As people started to arrive, I thanked them for their flowers because we did not have the custom of sending out thank you cards.

That Saturday, I stayed home to help my parents put everything back where it belonged. Nellie came over to help, and reported that the word was that it was a very successful party. Most people knew each other, and that made a difference. No one felt left out. Everyone in this crowd felt comfortable with each other. I was happy and so were my parents who worked so hard to make it a success. I could see their faces glowing

Nellie's 18th birthday was coming up a few weeks after mine.

"Are you going to have a party at home?" my mother asked her.

"No. My parents said it was too much work and that they will take me out for dinner," she answered with teary eyes. I was not surprised.

"The day after your birthday come here and we will celebrate with you," my mother said. Nellie went over to my mother and father and hugged them.

When the day came, we sent a large bouquet of flowers to her home. My mother and I also decided to buy her a gift. I don't remember what it was. My mother made a great supper and baked a strawberry cake that Nellie loved. She was very surprised when we gave her the gift and thanked us all with tears running down her face. After the meal, we both took a long walk. She gave me a detailed rundown of what people said about the

party and other gossip that she collected.

We walked towards her home, and just before she went upstairs she said, “You have the best family, and I feel like a daughter when I come. Miri, you are so lucky.”

She didn't say much more, but I did understand her. Walking back home, I had to digest everything I heard from Nellie. I was very content, happy and proud of my family.



*First day in the army with friends since public school.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Basic Training for the Army: 1954-1956

Since the birth of the State of Israel, all 18-year-old girls and boys are recruited to the army, no matter how much education they've had. The only ones who could be released from service were ultra-orthodox men who are full-time yeshiva students, religious women, married women and women with children. The single religious women had to go to court and swear that they were orthodox. Most of the young women were happy to be called up. In the beginning, women served for two years. That was later changed to 21 months. Men have always been called for three years. Most women in the army are engaged in secretarial jobs, as instructors, radio operators, drivers and other support jobs for the different units all over the country, but not in combat. Some of the jobs are boring and frustrating. It is probably a waste of time for some. But there is no choice, as those jobs need to be done.

The first stop of army service is training camp. The duration of the training camp is six weeks for females and three months for males. The idea behind basic training is to prepare all recruits physically, mentally and emotionally for the duration of the service. The purpose is to teach them the basic tools that they would need to fulfill the different tasks assigned to them in the army. This time of intensive training should prepare them to succeed as soldiers and, later on, in civilian life. For me, the two years of army service proved to be invaluable. I had many very different experiences at work, professionally and privately. Later on, in private life and in business, I often drew on these experiences.

My army service began on a hot August day, a week after the administration of the Regents exams in high school, when we were told to report for active duty. Our group was considered to be made up of the crème of the recruits. It consisted of high school graduates from the cities and kids who grew up in the kibbutzim, where they also received a high school education.

For many years, only elementary school education was mandatory and government-supported. There were very few free public high schools, and those were available only to the brightest, most talented and best students. All others had to attend the private high schools, which charged high tuitions. Most private high schools were located in the cities. Because of this, most young people's education ended after eighth grade. Since then, things have changed. For many years now, most high schools in the country are public and free.

For the kibbutz kids, however, things were different at the time. There was one high school in each region of the country to which they were transported by buses back and forth. These high schools were all tuition-free.

The first kibbutz was established in the beginning of the 19th century. A kibbutz is a community whose members rotate their jobs. Everyone takes turns working in the fields, the farm, the kitchen, the laundry and all other areas that have to do with running the kibbutz. The payment for their work is free housing, education, clothing and food. All members receive the same small equal amount of cash as pocket money for personal items. In order to release parents from the daily care of their children, all children live together in children's houses, supervised by trained adults. They do not live with their parents, but visit with them at the end of each workday and on Shabbat.

Children who grow up on a kibbutz are exposed to an environment and an upbringing that are very different from that of children who grow up in cities, villages or towns. Consequently, they develop different attitudes and mindsets.

The army was very happy to get this group of kids from the kibbutzim, as they were smart, hard working, unspoiled and independent. This group was looked upon as potential leaders. Many of them became pilots and high-ranked officers. When they retired, many became famous in Israeli political life.

We already had some indication as to what to expect in basic training from our experiences in the Gadna. The Gadna was an after-school pre-army program in high school. It taught us to adjust physically and mentally to special exercises and to take orders from trained leaders. Twice a week, after school, we stayed for two hours of training. For the first 45 minutes, we marched and learned how to execute different maneuvers in unison. The marching was followed by practical instructions of living and surviving outdoors.

Twice a year, we went on camping trips using the tools that we learned. These camping trips were more difficult than the ones we experienced with the scouts. They were more adapted to army life.

We mainly camped in Herzliya, a suburb of Tel Aviv, about 25 minutes by car. There, we walked through the dunes in full gear, never knowing what war games our leaders would spring on us. We were all dressed in khaki shorts, short-sleeved khaki shirts, high-laced walking shoes and khaki hats. We all carried our own water canteens. It was burning hot, walking up and down the dunes, under the hot sun. Although the heat and exercise made us very thirsty, we could only drink one sip of water at a time, when allowed by our leaders. They were of the opinion that this discipline would toughen us up. It was in complete opposite to today's thinking that water, in general, is very important.

Usually, by the time we arrived at the camp grounds, in late afternoon, we'd be exhausted from being in the sun most of the day. But we couldn't rest until we erected tents and set up the kitchen. We worked hard and fast in teams. We were all equal and cared for each other. We prepared our meals, and ate together. At the end of each day, when activities ended, we all relaxed together and no one was excluded. We were very happy at the end of the week when we went back home by bus. These two years of Gadna sort of prepared us somewhat for the army.

The other experience that gave us a taste of what to expect was when, at age 16, we had to register for the Army. Once registered, we were not allowed to go on trips outside Israel. (At the present time, that is no longer the rule.) Registration also meant that we had to undergo physical exams. The physical tests were intimidating, as we did not know what to expect. When we first arrived, we were taken to a building where we had to fill out forms. Once finished, we were directed to a large room and lined up only in our underwear. We were marched from one room to another to be examined by different doctors, without being allowed to speak. It was the first time that we were stripped in public, so many girls together. Our facial expressions showed how uncomfortable we were. We were relieved when we were all done and received the grade of our health and knew that we passed the exam and would be able to serve.

When the day arrived to start the army service, my parents drove me to a meeting point in Jaffa to board one of the buses that would take us to the training camp. We were told to leave civilian clothes at home, except for whatever clothes and underwear we were wearing, and to only bring toiletries, writing papers, envelopes and stamps. We hugged, kissed and said goodbye to our families and quickly got on the buses, keeping our emotions and tears in check. Although we were ready and proud to start our service, we probably were not emotionally ready to leave the comfort, love and freedom of home. The separation was unexpectedly tough for all of us, but

we all kept quiet and just waved goodbye to our families through the open windows.

Once the buses moved, we started singing to hide our emotions. We all knew the same songs from the different youth movements that we belonged to. We sang all the way to basic training camp. Although the trip there did not take more than a half an hour, getting off the bus started a new stage in our young lives.

The training camp we went to was the largest one of all the camps that the British built during their mandate. It had all the training and living facilities needed for basic training. Every soldier, before being assigned to his or her permanent unit, spent basic training in this camp. Male and female camps were separated and far from each other. The entrance gate was very big and impressive. It was opened by the guards only after a thorough check of entrance papers. The road leading in was very wide to enable every vehicle, two or three at a time, when necessary, to move freely. The road was flanked on each side by a one-story building that contained offices and lecture halls. Each area was fenced in according to its use. We were all very quiet, not uttering a word while taking in the sights.

After a short ride, the buses went through another gate inside the camp. As we came off the buses, our names were called and we were divided into groups of fifty girls. Our commanding officer and her two assistants met us. We lined up in doubles and, after a short introduction, we marched to our assigned barracks. The commanding officer, a second lieutenant, was very attractive. Her dark brown hair was pulled back in a high ponytail, so it wouldn't touch the collar of her shirt. She had dark brown eyes, a nice face and a good figure. Her uniform was pressed well, and she looked very neat and put together. Her assistants, both second lieutenants, looked very put together too. Their appearances and facial expressions were stern, without a smile, and we knew that they meant business. We looked for some warmth, but we immediately understood that we would not get it.

When they were done with the introductions, the lieutenant left and her assistants took us on a tour of the facilities. There were ten-foot long barracks distanced from each other along the same side of the road. Each barracks was one long space with no partitions for any privacy. There were two long rows of twenty-five cots facing each other, separated by three feet. A five-foot opening between the two rows created a passage from one side of the barracks to the other side where the doors were. There were many windows on each side to let the air in. Each cot had a rolled up thin mattress, a thin, charcoal-grey, rough wool blanket, a thin pillow, one white sheet and a white pillowcase. There was one open shelf over each cot and an open-shelved night table on one side of each cot for clothes.

Between the barracks and along the roads, there were very large eucalyptus trees that gave a lot of shade. We came to appreciate the shade they created every day. The trees were there because of Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel. He had the idea to plant trees along all roads and army facilities in the country to make it difficult for the enemy to spot them in case of war.

Behind the barracks, there were showers with no doors or curtains for privacy and only cold running water. The sinks across from the showers were tiny and made out of metal with a small mirror hanging over each one. It was a depressing sight and sarcastically we whispered under our breath, "Hmm, at least the mirrors are beautiful!"

To the left of the showers were the kitchen and the dining hall. By then, it was time to eat, and a long buffet was set up with large trays for hot and cold dishes, salads and fruit. The food was handed out by kitchen personnel. It was basically slopped down into each individual's mess kit, a round, aluminum closed container, divided into four compartments, which lined up on top of each other when the container was closed. When opened up, it became a large divided plate. Besides the mess kit, we were also given our own individual utensils and water canteen, which we would use in the camp and in all outings.

The dining tables were long and paired up with long benches. Although there were many windows, the heat was unbearable, which made the food smell terrible and nauseating. After a while, I learned that the most tolerable meal of the day was breakfast, as it was served when it was still cool outside. Many times, the only hot food we could tolerate were baked beans, which I ate almost every day with some salad. When we finished eating, we washed our greasy, smelly dishes in cold water, using large, rough bars of soap. Later, in the field, we'd learn to use sand as a soap substitute.



*First day in the army, in uniform except our own shoes.*

Next we were marched across the road to the right side of the main gate. The first two barracks were storage warehouses for ammunition. We looked into one, and the place was spotless and divided into different shelved compartments, clearly marked for different weapons. Past the ammunition warehouses were the bathrooms, which were across the road from our barracks. These bathrooms were for the use of all ten barracks, and there were not too many of them. They were wooden huts with an opening at the top of the door to circulate the air. The toilet itself was a very deep hole with a seat made of a round cement circle with about a three-inch lip to sit on and no cover. There was no water to flush and the waste was picked up every evening by a special group of assigned male soldiers. Because of the summer heat, the stench was unbearable, and we had to cover our noses in order to be able to breathe. We were in absolute shock at seeing this.

About ten feet in front of the toilets, there were large basins for washing our clothes, in cold water, using the same rough soap bars that we'd used to wash our dishes. Clothes were hung to dry on laundry lines behind our barracks. They dried quickly because of the constant heat.

These were our living conditions for six weeks. Surprisingly, we all adjusted quickly, as there was no other choice.

When the tour ended, we had ten minutes to choose our cots for the duration of the training. To do so, we all had to make some quick decisions. We immediately split into two groups. All the kibbutz girls occupied the back of the barracks, and all the city girls were in the front. It was done very quickly and without any conversation. This split was very natural, as the two groups came from very different backgrounds and upbringing. We then decided who would be to the immediate right and left of us. When the whistle blew, we were all set and each one of us quickly stood at attention in front of her chosen cot.

At this point, the commanding officer entered the barracks and ordered us to stand at ease. "We welcome

you to your new home,” she said smiling, something we hadn’t see too often, so far.

“I would like to give you some pointers which you need to follow at all times. This place needs to be kept very tidy and very clean. You will learn how to make your beds in a certain way. Your clothes should be neatly folded up on your individual shelves. I will not tolerate any speck of dust or any disorder. My assistants will inspect the barracks every morning and I will do it on Fridays. At times, I will come in for an inspection unexpectedly, while you are in the field training. I also cannot stand dirty windows. The time allocated for making your bed and cleaning the barracks is thirty minutes after breakfast.”

She continued, “The most important points regarding keeping everything neat and clean are the following: First point: A good army, strong, powerful and successful is one that is very organized and disciplined.

“Second point: You are all one team and are responsible for each other. Therefore, if one bed is not made well, or one shelf is messy, or we find a speck of dust, you will all pay the consequences.

“You will now leave your personal belongings and go get army uniforms which you will start wearing immediately.”

We walked outside and marched to a large warehouse to exchange our civilian cloths for army uniforms. This experience brought up many new feelings and emotions. We realized that, from this moment on, we would lose our individuality and become one uniformed group.

As we arrived at the warehouse, we were lined up in a single line. First, we were asked for our size and, if we were not sure, the female soldiers behind the counter sized us up and handed us the uniforms which they thought would fit. The first items they gave us were the outer khaki uniforms for summer and winter. Next, they handed out underwear, which was white, heavy cotton and very unfeminine. We also received our toiletries, including toothbrush and toothpaste and soap, but no shampoo. We put all of our “beautiful” new clothes in a big khaki bag, which would later be used as a laundry bag.

By that time, it was already late afternoon and we were told that our shoes would be distributed in the morning. We marched back to our barracks and were told to wear our uniforms to dinner and to the evening activities. We were given about an hour to shower and change. We were told to walk to the dining room on our own and to remember to bring our dishes and utensils.

When we were finally alone, there was a very eerie quiet in the barracks. We all had to digest the afternoon, which brought us to the reality of what was in store for us. There was no time to discuss anything. We gathered our soap and towel and ran to the showers. There were ten showers to be shared by fifty women. We quickly realized that we each had very few short minutes to shower and wash our hair. We took off our clothes and, in groups of five, lined up by each shower. One by one, we showered, avoiding looking at each other in order to have some privacy. We all were back in the barracks within fifteen minutes. Luckily we mastered the showers quickly because, in the six weeks of training, there was never more time for cold showers. Being it was the month of August, the hottest month of the summer, cold showers were always welcome. If allowed, we probably would have taken many showers every day and for longer periods of times, but this was a luxury that wasn’t available to us.

Once we were back in the barracks, we put on our uniforms. The civilian clothes were put in a special bag, on the bottom shelf. Within this hour, we also had to make our beds and make sure that everything was neat and in order. The only items that we were still wearing from home were our shoes. I had on my favorite red sandals and looked at them very lovingly. I knew that the next time that I will be able to wear them would be at home on leave. In the six weeks of training, we were only given one weekend to go home.

Before we knew it, the hour was over and we all hurried out to the dining room. As we approached the building, the smell of the food killed our appetite. Walking in, we were greeted by buffet-style tables loaded with food. The different courses were lined up next to each other. We were not given any choices and had to take whatever was offered. All the courses were piled up into our mess kits and the only available drink was water.

After loading up on the food, we sat down at the long tables, looked at the food, made faces and then yelled: “Beteavon!” (Hearty appetite) chuckling. We had about a half an hour to spend on our meal. We were out of the dining hall within ten minutes, with a lot of leftovers to be thrown out. We then proceeded to wash

our dishes in soap and cold water. As we had an extra twenty minutes to spend before the evening activities, we walked back to the barracks.

On those walks, we would usually be with our closest friends. It was the first opportunity in the day to exchange our thoughts and feelings. After the initial shock of that first day, we decided that we'd better get off the complaint bandwagon. So we said to each other: "It will all be beseder (okay). Remember how we couldn't wait to get out of high school and join the army. We are here now and have to adjust quickly."

At the assigned time, we lined up outside the barracks, waiting for our instructors. When the officers approached, we all stood at attention until we were ordered to stand at ease. This rule was applied outside the barracks and inside, whenever staff would approach us. Our instructors showed up exactly on time. They explained that all the new arrivals would be together at the stadium for an orientation session and entertainment.

We marched to a large open stadium, and sat on cement seats. The sun was setting, and a light wind started to blow and bring relief from the heat. The open space and beauty of the hour relaxed us and improved our mood. A photographer walked around taking our pictures. I think it was done purposely to show us how we looked wearing our last item of civilian clothes, our shoes. As darkness fell, marching music was heard over the loudspeakers. With it, the commander of the women's training camp walked out on stage. She was a tall woman, wearing a khaki uniform, brown shoes and a brown hat. The three leaves on her shoulder's lapel were shining. She was the highest ranking female officer in the army, an aluf mishne (colonel). Although, she looked very neat and strict, there was a certain softness in her facial expression. She was an attractive woman and had a wonderful smile when she walked on stage. Behind her, standing on the stage, were all the personnel and instructors of the women's training camp. The only men that were seen on our premises were the kitchen cooks, garbage and toilet waste collectors, and drivers.

When the music stopped, the commander stepped forward, saying, "Good evening soldiers and welcome. Today is the first day of your two year service in the Israeli Defense Forces.

"You will be trained physically and mentally, getting ready for army life in whatever unit you will eventually be assigned to. This training, and many other experiences you will encounter in your service, will help you later in civilian life. Training camp is the first step.

"Look around you, seeing everyone in uniform marks the beginning of the transformation from being civilians to becoming soldiers. The only parts left from your civilian life are your shoes. As of tomorrow morning this will change too.

"You will become one, one team in which each soldier is responsible for every other and for their entire team.

"Each one of you will get dog tags, with your individual number but not your name, to be worn at all times, day and night. This system enables the army to keep correct records and to be able to identify soldiers faster, when necessary. This is also for your individual safety, in case you fall into enemy hands. If you are ever asked for your name, you only have to repeat your rank and number. Therefore, you must memorize your number immediately. During training, you will only be addressed by your number, unless the instructors feel differently. It is left up to their discretion.

"Tomorrow, you will also receive your Belgian rifle and your submachine gun, which is called the "Sten." The rifle will stay with you at all times, and the machine gun will be stored away when not in use. You will be responsible for keeping them clean. I promise you that, by the end of training, you will know how to use them both.

"What is most important for all of you to remember is that at all times you will have to know where your rifle is, even when you are asleep. Think of it as your best friend!

"As of tomorrow morning, and thereafter, you will be awakened at 5:30 a.m. to go for an organized run, followed by breakfast. Bed making and cleaning of the barracks and changing for the activities of the day will end by 8:00 a.m. Training and different activities will go on until 12:00 noon. You will be notified about the activities the evening before. There will be one hour for lunch, and then it's back to training from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. After that, you'll have one free hour to shower, do laundry and anything else you find necessary to take

care of. Dinner at 6:00 p.m. will be followed by evening activities. Lights will be out at 10:00 p.m.

“You will also have kitchen duty, and clean showers and toilets in rotation to get acquainted with all facets of army life.

“Shabbat and holidays are the only times free of training. You will stay in camp and report to meals at the regular times. In between, you are free to do as you please. You will have only one Shabbat at home, in the middle of the six weeks.

“In conclusion, I would like you to know that you should consider me as your “ima” (mother). There will be difficult times of physical and emotional adjustment, and my door is always open to discuss any problem and help you out.”

At this point, we all looked at each other and with a cynical smile, a faint chuckle and a low murmur under our breath, “Ya, sure. Like our mother!”

We were then ordered to stand up at attention, as the commander left the stage. Immediately after, one of the best music bands showed up on stage and started playing the most popular music of the time. We did not have a minute to talk, as we were immediately drawn in to join the group singing and clap hands. It went on for an hour, during which our mood changed from apprehension and fear to pride and happiness at being in the army. By the time the band finished playing, we all felt that we could make it. Thinking back on that evening, it was an amazing exercise of transforming a few hundred young women from a depressed state to a happy one.

We marched back to the barracks with our instructors. Upon arriving, we were met by our commanding officer. She ordered us to stand next to our cots. In her hand she held our dog tags. One by one, we were called by our name and had to approach our officer. She put the dog tags, which were attached to a long ribbon, on our necks and said with a smile, “Kol tuv” (all the best). When everyone had received their dog tags, the officer and her assistants left. They came back at 10:00 p.m. to shut the lights and wish us a good night. My number was 356146. I had to repeat it so many times during my service that I never forgot it.

There were many activities planned out for each day. After being awakened by loud marching music, at 5:30 a.m., we'd put on our tee shirts, shorts and high-laced shoes quickly. Then, we'd rush outside and line up in front of our instructors. It was still dark outside and chilly because of the morning dew. We ran for about two miles, singing loudly all the way. When we finished the run, we did stretching exercises and sit-ups. This daily routine woke us up and got us ready to face the day.

When morning exercises were finished, we had a very busy hour. In this time period, we had to eat our breakfast, shower, dress, make beds and clean the barracks. Cleaning the gun was added to the hour after a few lessons, as it was a complicated job that required instruction. We had to take the gun apart, clean it, oil it and put it back together. Because we had to have our gun with us at all times, and because it got exposed to the elements when we trained outside, it got dusty and very dirty. Our instructors showed a lot of patience demonstrating how to clean the guns. When necessary, they were ready to spend time with individuals who needed more attention. It was most important that all of us know how to handle it. Eventually, their efforts paid off and it became second nature to us to disassemble and reassemble the guns. What surprised us most was that the cleaning of the gun took longer than putting it together. We knew how important it was to do it right, so we learned to leave enough time for this task. The gun was the most important object that we were responsible for. Guns were inspected every day by our instructors. If one gun out of the fifty was not perfectly clean, we were all punished. The punishment entailed putting sand into the guns and cleaning them again, in our free time.

The other most important rule was to have our guns in our possession at all times, day and night. We decided that the safest place for the guns at night was under our mattresses. We believed that no one could take the guns out, while we slept, without waking us up.

On the second morning of training, before morning exercises, we reached for our guns. To our surprise, we discovered that all the guns in the barracks were missing. We got panicky, not understanding how that could have happened. When our officer and instructors walked in, looking very serious, we did not know what to expect. We were surprised to see our commanding officer there too, as we didn't expect to see her in the morning.

She was quiet for a few minutes and then said, “Boker tov (good morning) soldiers. Is all well here and are you ready for the day?”

“No,” we yelled.

“What is the problem?”

“We can’t find our guns! we answered hysterically. “They were under our mattresses.”

“This isn’t good enough,” she said with a big smirk. “Last night, while you were asleep, we came and pulled the guns out from under you. You were so tired and slept so well that no one woke up while we did it.” Listening to her explanation, we didn’t know what to expect as punishment.

“This was a lesson to all of you. The only way to make sure it does not happen again is to sleep holding the gun under your arm. This way you will be assured that the minute anyone will try to steal it from you, you will wake up.”

The guns were returned to us and we had to put sand in them and clean them before daily activities started. This punishment was repeated countless times, whenever we messed up on any requirements, sometimes without even realizing that we were doing anything wrong. For example, when some practically invisible dust was found on a shelf, a window or under our beds, or if a bed was not made up according to regulations, we were punished with cleaning guns. We understood that this constantly repeated punishment had a few purposes behind it. It built up tremendous pressure to work as a team and to be responsible for one another. We also became very efficient at cleaning and assembling the guns quickly.

The next step was to learn how to use our ammunition. We left camp immediately after breakfast with sandwiches and fruit in our backpacks and water in our canteens. After a twenty-minute bus ride, we arrived at the field which was used as the shooting range. It was a flat, large open space surrounded by dunes. The targets were placed many yards away from where we were lined up. We got out of the bus, staying together for some instructions.

The order of shooting was according to the alphabet. I was pretty much in the beginning of the group, as my last name in Hebrew, starts with the sixth letter of the alphabet. I wished that it had been at the end. We were told that if we went through the exercises quickly, without a hitch, we would head back to camp in the early afternoon and have the rest of the day free. When our names were called, one by one, we laid on the floor, on our stomachs, in direct line of each target. The Belgian gun was placed between the shoulder blades. It was very important to find the right spot to rest the gun’s wooden handle, otherwise it would hurt a lot while shooting.

We had to see the target through a narrow opening at the end of the gun. For the life of me, I could not understand or see the opening when we received the instruction at the training camp before leaving for the shooting range. I had asked twice for an extra explanation, which I received, but it didn’t help. I didn’t want to tell anyone about my problem, and I didn’t want to ask for any more help. I figured that I would wait and see what happened in the field. When we finally had the targets in front of us, I did very poorly. They explained it to me again, and I told them that I understood, but I didn’t. They probably figured that I just didn’t have a sharp eye, which was a relief. The funny thing is that about fifteen years later, when I went to an amusement park and tried to shoot down some water bottles, for a price, it suddenly clicked in my head and I understood what to do. Conversely, using my machine gun from the hip was for some reason very easy for me, and I always hit the middle of the target. I guess that kept the instructors off my back.

All went very well until close to the end when a problem aroused with one of the girls. When her turn came to shoot, she didn’t move. When the instructor urged her on, she started to cry, saying she could not shoot. At first, the urging was very soft, but when that didn’t help, the tone changed, and she was told that she must do it.

To our shock, we were now told that unless every one of us completes her turn, we would not leave the field. “It is now up to you soldiers to convince your friend to use her gun,” said our instructor.

At this point, our friend was hysterically yelling and crying, “I will not shoot. You cannot make me do it.”

They told us to break for lunch. She was so upset that she could not eat. We tried to find out the reason for her refusal to shoot, but she wouldn’t tell us. Then, lunch was finished. Under the midday hot sun, we were

trying to get her to comply, but we were not getting any place. The instructors stayed away and didn't interfere. They decided to skip her, and have everyone else finish the task. They made sure again that she understood that unless she shoots, we will not be able to return to camp. Every few minutes, one of us would try to calm her down and find out her reason for not being able to shoot. We all tried different methods of convincing her, like laughter, anger, insults and guilt. Nothing worked. By 2:00 p.m., when the last soldier took the last shot, we all looked in her direction, but she did not move. We sat around waiting, hoping that she will change her mind soon.

Late in the afternoon, around 4:00 p.m., she suddenly stood up and said, "I was a very young girl when I came to Israel. I am a Holocaust survivor. I remember the noise of shotguns and not seeing some members of my family afterwards." We were all very quiet, including our instructors. She then picked up her gun, laid down on the floor and shot. Then, she picked up her machine gun and shot. "Oh, that was not bad at all," she said, crying and laughing at the same time.

One can only imagine how we felt. On the bus, going back to camp, no one said a word. Later, we discussed among ourselves the experience we had that day. We were not angry with her. One of us was picked to let her know that we were not angry with her, as we were unaware of her circumstances growing up. She was relieved and, with tears in her eyes, thanked us for our understanding. It was all forgotten and never brought up again. We understood what she went through and felt very lucky.

There were many different types of physical activities every day. Some were more difficult than others. No one could get away with any excuse. It didn't matter how difficult you found the exercises, you still had to go through them. We came to a fast realization that we were not in as good a shape as we thought we were. I was always very active; playing tennis and racket ball, swimming and walking. I was astonished to realize that all these activities were not enough to prepare me for army training. My and everyone else's muscles were always aching, but we never dared to complain.

For the many different types of exercises, each barracks was divided into groups of five. Two instructors were waiting for us at each point. That enabled us to walk from one place to another, without waiting for anyone else. The ones who finished earlier had a chance to rest until everyone was done with an exercise.

One of my favorite exercises was crawling on the ground under very low, stretched barbed wire. We had to be very careful and make sure that our bodies remained low, so that our hair and clothing would not be caught in the barbed wire. I felt comfortable doing it. On the other hand, I couldn't handle climbing over a straight high wall. Being under pressure to do it fast did not help. I was also somewhat embarrassed, as I needed an instructor to help me with a little push. When we were ordered to climb the wall with the help of a rope, I had no problem doing it. I also liked climbing a wall made entirely out of ropes. It seems that, as long as I had something to hold on to, and was able to pull myself up gradually, I was fine. There were many other exercises that we did, but I can't recall them. All I remember is that it was very hot and we were sweating to no end. With all this intense activity, the one hour of rest after lunch was very welcome. I always preferred to rest outside under the trees. It was also a good time to do laundry and write letters.

Some other responsibilities that we had were cleaning showers, toilets and the ammunition warehouses. The most disgusting job was cleaning toilets. We had to wash the walls and floors with a special, smelly liquid to sanitize the toilet rooms. Some of the girls vomited and got sick because of the terrible stench. We got smart, and secretly got a little friendly with the guys who took out the waste. We offered them money to do our job. They swore to us that they would keep our secret, because if any one of us was caught, she would have been punished and would have had to spend a few days in an army prison. We never had a problem and never got caught. We thought that there was a possibility that our supervisors knew, but turned their heads, as they felt sorry for us.

Kitchen duty was the one thing we all liked. Whoever was on kitchen duty was awakened at 4:00 a.m. and worked until 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon. After that, the person was free from training for the rest of the day. In the kitchen, we had to help the cooks to peel vegetables and fruits, wash them and then help with whatever else was needed. We also had to wash pots, pans, food trays, utensils, stoves and ovens. Because all of the main preparation of the food was done early in the morning, it was a short shift, but a difficult one. The male kitchen

workers treated us as their slaves.

One time, I was assigned to wash a very big pot that came up almost to my shoulders. It was full of grease and I had to scrub hard to remove it, especially at the bottom of the pot. The supervisor gave me a metal brush and told me to make sure that the pot was spotless. I put a lot of soap on my hard bristle brush, poured some water into the bottom of the pot, and bent down to reach it. I reached the bottom, but then felt my whole body slipping. I tried to lift myself up, but couldn't do it. I started yelling for help, but it took a few minutes until someone came and pulled me out. All the guys were standing around the pot laughing hysterically. I was basically too short to reach the bottom of the pot, and the supervisor was well aware of it. When I told that little episode to some of my friends, I found out that the same thing happened to them, but they were too embarrassed to talk about it. On my next kitchen duty, I was able to get out of it, as they always gave this particular pot scrubbing job to the shorter girls, and it was their joke on us.

To accept orders without arguments, to follow those orders to the tee, to not express our opinions if we were not asked, those were some of the behaviors that we had to adjust to. It was not easy, but we learned quickly, as no one wanted to rock the boat. One of the toughest habits we had to acquire was saluting the officers, whenever we saw them indoors or outdoors. It meant expressing our respect for higher authority.

At the first week of training we were shown how to salute. The correct way involved a straight posture, eye-to-eye contact and the right arm bent and touching the face over the eyebrow. Of course, the whole idea of saluting did not sit very well with us. We decided that we could outsmart our officers. Once we spotted an officer from a distance, walking in our direction, we changed our route or hid behind a tree, bushes or a wall.

One day, a few of my friends and I were walking. We spotted our head officer coming from afar towards us. It was too late to change our route, so we jumped behind some bushes and laid low. Once she passed us, we waited a while and then got up from our hiding place, all smiles. Before evening activities, she came to the barracks. We were ordered to stand by our cots, and she called out me and my friends' names and ordered us to step forward. We could not figure out the reason, but found out instantly. She told us that she saw us hiding behind the bushes in order to avoid a salute. We were warned that if the behavior was repeated, we would be punished severely. At that point, we realized that we couldn't get away with anything. After this episode, saluting became almost second nature to us.

Another activity that took up a lot of time was taking tests. They were administered in the morning or in the afternoon. They covered: general knowledge, math, current events and psychological questions and exercises. We liked taking these tests, as they gave us a reprieve from physical activity.

The tests were given in an assigned building. There were two supervisors who gave out the tests, made sure that we worked on our own and clocked every part according to a set timetable. When we asked a question about a test, the only answer we ever received was: "Figure it out yourself."

Some parts of the tests frustrated me, especially the ones that had to do with mathematics. As these tests would determine our future job for the next two years, we were under pressure to do well.

Evening activities included lectures on various subjects, concerts and movies. Being very tired most of the time, we always hoped to get a free night, but that seldom occurred. We were usually in the barracks by 9:30 p.m. At 10:00 p.m., one of our instructors would come to shut the lights and wish us good night. Once the instructor left, we all waited for a few minutes, before sounds of whispers and the rustle of papers were heard in the barracks. At this point, we opened packages of food that we received from home. Packages contained cookies, dry cakes, nuts, candies, chocolate and other foods that did not require refrigeration. Reading materials, such as books, newspapers and magazines were also sent to us from home. Every night, we shared our booty with our immediate friends to our left and right.

We noticed that the kibbutz girls hardly ever received any packages. We felt bad for them, even though they laughed at us, claiming that we were spoiled city brats. Letters and packages were the only contact we had with our families, and they made us happy.

The third Shabbat of the six weeks was the only Shabbat we were allowed to go home. On that Friday, we were released around noontime, and were expected to be back by 7:00 a.m., on Sunday morning. It was a

hardship for the girls who lived far from camp, in different parts of the country. They usually came back late Saturday night, no later than 12:00 midnight, in order to be on time in the morning. I was very fortunate to live in Tel Aviv, only a half an hour away from camp. My father, who owned a car, drove me back at 6:00 a.m., so I was able to take full advantage of the weekend.

Staying in camp over the weekend was depressing. We were free to do whatever we wanted, as it was a day of rest. The only things we had to observe were mealtimes and making our beds. We were confined to our area and were not able to go anywhere. We mostly stayed outside all day, in the shade, under the big eucalyptus trees. We read books, newspapers and magazines, falling asleep in between. We reread letters that we just glanced over when we received them during the week, and we responded to them. It was the only time in the week that we were able to take our time to do anything.

Another pleasure that we had on the weekends at camp was being able to shower at a slow pace without being rushed or surrounded by others. We also took advantage of this free time to wash our garments. To our amazement, we learned quickly to appreciate little things like that.

On one of the weekends, while I was sitting outside, reading and writing, I suddenly heard a whistle. That whistle was our family's whistle. I thought I was dreaming. I looked up and saw our car, a small green Fiat, and my father and mother standing behind the wire fence. I couldn't believe my eyes, as no civilians were allowed in camp, unless they worked for the army or had a special permit. I ran to them and they handed me a package over the fence. I started to cry from happiness at seeing them.

"How were you able to get into camp without a permit?" I asked.

My father laughed and said, "Leave it to Ima. She smiled and complimented the guard and he let us in. We promised him that we would be back quickly because we knew that you were outside. We brought you some of the goodies that you like and also wanted to see your face."

I laughed and cried at the same time and threw kisses in the air, and then they left. My friends and I were speechless. Luckily, none of our supervisors were around, or I would probably be in deep trouble, and so would be the guard at the entrance. That night, we had a special treat after lights were out.

The six weeks of training went by quickly with memories of good days and bad days. It was difficult, but we all learned that we could adjust to many situations if we had no choice, and we learned how to make the best of it in any circumstance.

At the end of training camp, there was a swearing-in ceremony. All family members were invited for the ceremony that took place in the evening after sundown. We worked very hard rehearsing our march into the stadium. It took hours of marching, turning and saluting the right way. We had to make sure that our bodies were erect with our heads up. We had to move our arms forward and back at waist height and make sure that we followed each other in a perfectly straight line. Each group of 50 soldiers was lined up 5 across, so we had to make sure that we were straight up front and across without moving our heads. We were able to use our eyes only. When we got it right, we were told to feel pride in completing our training and at being sworn in to be loyal to the country and the army.

The day of the ceremony we had many hours to prepare. We had to make sure that our uniforms were spotless and very well ironed. There was only one iron in the barracks, so we had to see to it that every one had a chance to use it. We also had to make sure that our ugly, oxford brown shoes were clean and very shiny, like a mirror. After six weeks of shining shoes every day, we had a lot of experience. We would put a lot of brown paste on, wipe it off, then spit and shine them with a clean rag by rubbing hard back and forth. Most of the time, it made us laugh, watching ourselves spitting. One day, it became the joke of the day, as many of us did it at the same time. At one point, we all tried to coordinate our spitting. We laughed our heads off and tried to figure out why it all came about. The answer to our own question was that it was the combination of the happiness of getting out of training camp and the nervous anticipation of where we will go next for the balance of our two years of army service.

As darkness started to fall, we all got dressed and started to gather outside to get in line for the ceremony. We could see all the guests — grandparents, parents, siblings and close friends walking towards the stadium and

our excitement mounted. When the time came for the ceremony to begin, we could see the lights shutting off. It was very dark and very quiet. The only thing visible were the stars shining in the sky. For us, that was the signal to get ready and start marching for our entrance to the stadium. One could sense how we all straightened up and our hearts and faces filled with pride. At this point, torches all around the stadium were lit. The flames gave the area a majestic light in shades of orange and red. We didn't expect this, as it was kept a secret and a surprise. At the same time that the lights went on, the march music started. I think that the drama of the moment kept everyone in the crowd very quiet.

When we arrived at our assigned spaces, we stopped marching. We were put at ease and, two minutes later, were ordered into attention, and the guests were asked to stand up. A soldier from the band stepped forward and started to play. Then, a group of soldiers, one from each unit, marched towards the flagpole. To the sound of the bugle, the flag was raised. At that point, the band played the introduction to the national anthem, Hatikva, and everyone joined in singing in very loud voices. The sound of the singing echoed in the air, as the surroundings were very still.

When the singing was finished, the head of camp announced, "Soldiers! You are now going to be sworn to obey, to be loyal and to be ready to serve in the army and protect your country." Then, she read us a prayer and we all repeated it in unison. My eyes filled with tears and it was very difficult not to cry. I heard quiet sniffing from our group and, from the corner of my eye, I realized that I was not the only one who was struggling with her emotions.

This ceremony held a lot of deep meanings for all of us. The State of Israel was only in its sixth year. Our age group also lived through the hard times and struggles that preceded our becoming independent. Everyone in the whole country was in a mood of excitement to have our freedom and our own country. Although we complained about having to serve for two years, we were actually very proud and wouldn't have wanted to be deferred.

After the ceremony was over and we were dismissed, we mingled with our family and friends. There were a lot of hugs and kisses. We all spent about a half an hour together, and then all the guests had to leave the camp. We walked slowly back to our barracks. Our officer came in and congratulated us on completing the training and told us the program for the next day. First thing after breakfast, we were to pack up our belongings. We had to strip our beds and fold the blankets and put everything back in the same order that we found it when we came in on the first day. Then, we would all go outside, form a line and we get our orders about where we would be stationed.

We were all very uptight, as personally every one had her own idea about where she would like to serve for the next two years. Most of the kibbutz girls wanted to serve in the fighting units. It didn't matter to them if they were far away from home. The city girls, however, were hoping to be assigned to duty not far from home, so they'd be able to go home for Shabbat. I also hoped to be able to stay nearby, although I was also concerned that my assigned job would be interesting enough.

At the appointed time, our commanding officer met us outside. One by one, she called our names. We came forward and she announced the unit we were assigned to and gave us the papers with our orders. We were scattered all over the country in different units. Some of my friends and I were assigned to a six-week clerical course. The course was to be given in the same camp where we were trained, but in a different location. We had mixed feelings about the assignment, as we still didn't know our final destination. We were dismissed and were then bused back to Tel Aviv, where everyone was able to find transportation to get home.

It was a wonderful, happy weekend at home, especially appreciated after being confined to camp for a few weeks. It was a great feeling knowing that the training was behind me. I hoped that I would be able to come home for Shabbat every weekend while at the course and hopefully for the balance of my service.

We had to be back at camp on Sunday before 8:00 a.m., bringing all of our belongings. My father drove and dropped me off at the entrance to the training camp. We all met at a big hall and waited for our new commanders. We looked rested and relaxed, feeling that, at this point, we were in a good place. We each took our place at the single desks that were set up as if in a classroom. At exactly 8:00 a.m., a staff sergeant walked in and

commanded us to stand at attention. He let us know that at the beginning of each class we should stand up to welcome the instructor.

The staff sergeant was tall and very muscular. He had dark black eyes, black hair and a big black mustache. He had a very serious expression on his face, devoid of any smile. His name was Yair. His appearance and the tone of his voice instilled fear in all of us. He said, "Welcome to the clerical course. I am your staff sergeant, and you are my responsibility for the duration of the course. If you should have any problem or a need to talk, I am your person. If the matter would need to go further than myself, I will be the only one that will listen to you and make the necessary arrangements, if I see fit." I thought to myself that he really thinks he is a God and very superior to everyone else. All of us avoided looking at each other, while he spoke, but I knew that we all felt the same about him, and I found out later that I was correct. We all hated him from the first moment.

A high-ranking officer came into the hall next. He was introduced to us as the person in charge of career and educational courses. He ordered us to sit. He was tall and thin with blond hair and looked more like a British soldier than an Israeli. "I welcome you to the clerical course, which will prepare you for your work wherever you will be assigned," he said. "You were chosen for this course on the basis of the tests you took at training camp. In the coming weeks, you will learn about the laws and regulations of the Army. You will also acquire knowledge of all the different forms that are needed for different reports and of the procedures for reporting activities.

"In addition, you will learn about the different divisions of the army, so that wherever you will be assigned, you would be familiar with that particular division. Besides the above, you will also be trained in how to speak in public and how to prepare oral reports and presentations.

"Whatever you learn in this course will prepare you for a good career in the army and later on in civilian life. I know you will take this course seriously, and I wish you all the best." We were then ordered to stand at attention, and he walked out of the room.

When we sat down again, we went over our daily schedule of classes. Wake-up call was scheduled for 6:30 a.m., followed by morning exercises. Then, breakfast from 7:45 to 8:15 and 15 minutes to make our beds and clean the barracks. Morning classes would start at 8:30 and go on until 12:30, at which time we'd have one hour for lunch. Afternoon classes would be from 1:30 until 5:00 p.m. Most evenings were free for homework, study and preparation for tests. All classes would start on Sunday morning and end Friday at noon. Our time off would last from Friday noontime until midnight on Saturday. Soldiers who lived about an hour or less from camp were happy. The soldiers who lived all the way up north had a very long trip for a short stay. One evening a week was set aside for a movie or a concert, at which attendance was mandatory.

Tel Aviv was about a half an hour away from camp. Most of the times, my father would pick me up on Friday. When I went out on Saturday night, my friends all had cars, so I always had a ride back to camp. Usually, I changed from civilian clothes to my army uniform in the bathroom, at whatever place we were in last. I put my clothes in a small bag and took it with me to camp. When I couldn't get a ride back with my friends, my father would drive me.

One time, I got to the entrance gate a little late and knew that I might be in trouble. The guards at the gate, especially on a Saturday night, were very strict. They were upset that they had to stay in camp on Shabbat. I arrived at the gate about three minutes late. I walked right past the guard without stopping, holding a paper in my hand. I recall him yelling for me to stop, looking at his watch very angrily. I knew I was in for an argument about the time. I took a deep breath and felt relieved that I was inside the camp. I figured that once I was inside, I could argue with him from a better position.

He looked at me with a very stern face and said, "Soldier, you are three minutes late. I know you purposely passed me instead of handing me your papers, which is against regulations. I will not let you get away with it."

I always had my watch running ten minutes fast, as I didn't want to be late. When I realized that I would be late, I changed the time on my watch back to three minutes earlier than the correct time. This way, I knew that an argument over two to three minutes would give me a chance convince the guard that he was wrong.

"Look at my watch," I said. "Compared to yours, I am on time, as my watch is three minutes earlier than

yours. My watch is set according to the radio.” I added with a wide smile, “I know I am correct and you seem to be a very nice guy who will not make a big deal over it.” I continued smiling, while my heart was pounding. “I promise I will never be late again and another chance will be much appreciated.” He looked at me and finally let me go. I thanked him and, after this experience, I was always on time.

Every morning following breakfast, we gathered all we needed for classes and lined up for uniform inspection by the staff sergeant, Yair. Our uniforms had to be spotless and pressed, shoes shined, hair in place above our collars and hats worn at a perfect angle. When he arrived, we were ordered to stand at attention, erect, heads up and eyes directly in front. While he was inspecting us, we had to look straight into his eyes. The problem was that he never talked, but only yelled. When he critiqued any of us, he always had a smirk on his face. He was very cynical and insulting. We were scared of him, so it was difficult to look directly at him. After a while, we got used to him and learned not to take anything he said personally.

One time, after he gave me a nasty critique and proceeded past me, I mumbled some curse words under my breath. I was sure he couldn't hear me, but I was wrong. He came back to where I stood and insisted I repeat what I said. I did. He walked away without saying a word, which scared me, as I did not know what to expect. From that day on, I was his punching bag. He always found something wrong with me. When I became aware of the situation, I quickly learned not to say a word to him, unless I was ordered to. There were a few times when, at the end of the day, he walked next to me and tried to start a conversation. In response, I only used two words, “yes” and “no.” I hated his guts and didn't trust him.

One day, he came over to me and said, “I just got a message from the head of the camp to send you to his office after lunch. Do you know the reason, as he wouldn't tell me.”

“No,” I said. I did know exactly why and got very nervous, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of telling him. I also wasn't sure if he was bluffing that he didn't know the reason, or if he was telling the truth. This is what happened: One day, on the way to lunch, walking by myself, I suddenly realized that the head of the camp, a lieutenant colonel, was walking past me. When I saw him, I greeted him by saying “Shalom,” rather than saluting, as was the rule. He stopped, asked for my name and serial number and walked away. I knew it was a mistake, but I had a hard time saluting anyone. I hoped that I would get away with it, although I did not like that he asked for my name.

Immediately after lunch, I went to his office. I made sure that I looked right, as I figured that I was in deep trouble. The door to his office was ajar, and he motioned me to come inside. I should have saluted then, but I didn't, again.

“Give me your name and serial number,” he said.

“Miriam Wachsberger, serial number 356146,” I answered.

“Do you know why I summoned you to my office?”

At this point, I had to make a very quick decision as to how to answer. Should I make believe that I had no idea, or should I tell him that I know? “Yes. I know why. When I saw you, instead of a salute, I greeted you with shalom.”

“You are absolutely correct. By now, you know the rule, so why don't you follow it?” he asked.

At this point, thinking that I might be in for a severe punishment, I decided to be very frank with him, rather than to find an excuse. Standing very straight and serious, I said, “I have a big problem with this rule. Basically, we are all the same people. I respect your position and who you are, but a simple “shalom” is enough. I feel that a salute is very degrading.”

He looked directly at me and was very quiet. I figured that he will order me to be court-marshaled, and eventually I would end up at a military prison for a few days. I was very nervous and scared, but didn't move. I looked directly at him and waited to hear his decision.

After a moment or two that seemed like hours to me, he said, “Soldier, I will let you go this time without any punishment. I think that you have a lot of courage and are very nervy to give me such a frank answer. I understand what you say, but this is the army and rules must be followed. Next time, you will not get away without a stiff punishment.”

I walked back to class not believing my luck. This experience taught me that most of the times when I used the absolute truth, the person listening was so surprised that I got away without punishment.

Our classes were about fifty minutes each, with a ten-minute intermission in between. Most of them were boring. They covered rules and regulations of the different units, correct behavior, punishments, expectations and achievements. We were constantly being tested, and I had no problem with these subjects.

There was also a course that involved understanding and knowing how to use an IBM computer. We were introduced to its special language and symbols. This subject was difficult for me and I didn't do well on the tests. It worried me a lot, as I was afraid that I would fail the course. Therefore, I was determined to get very strong marks in the other subjects, which I did.

Two of those subjects were public speaking and writing. At times, we chose what subject we'd write or speak about. At other times, we were assigned a topic. I always preferred when we were allowed to choose our own topic. In the writing class, the papers were collected, corrected and graded. The grades reflected our ability to write and express ourselves.

In the public speaking class, we were taught to speak loud and clear, to make sure that our tone of voice varied, to use facial expressions and hand gestures and to move around when possible. We were assigned an oral presentation. My topic was "Order and Discipline." This was a paper that I wrote in my senior year in high school and got an "A" on. I thought the subject was very appropriate, and I was correct. Again, I received a very high mark for the content and for my delivery. I was very happy and felt that this class will save me from failing.

It was staff sergeant Yair who gave us back our tests. Most of the time, I was the last one to get a paper back, and usually it was accompanied by a sarcastic remark that I didn't always understand. It always made me feel very anxious and nervous. It was extremely difficult when the tests were returned in our computer course. Knowing that I was not doing well, he always implied that I failed, although, at times, I passed with a very low mark. At some point, he must have figured out that I couldn't stand him, because he loved to say, "Wouldn't it be nice for you to spend another term in this course with me?" The idea of that scared me terribly. My friends concluded that because I was the only one to whom he gave such a hard time, that he actually liked me, but didn't know how to handle it. I thought they were absolutely out of their minds.

When the course ended we had a big party. At the party, we were told that the next morning we would get our assignments for our jobs. The head of the camp told us that we all passed and wished us the best of luck. I was very relieved knowing that I only had one more hurdle. My friends and I hoped to be stationed near home, which would enable us to go home every night, except when we were assigned to guard duty. The only ones who hoped to be assigned to the fighting and armor units were the kibbutz girls. They thought it would be more exciting and valuable and didn't care in which part of the country they were stationed.

We were very happy to be finished with the clerical course and had a great time at the all-girls' party that evening. After the party, we went back to our barracks and packed our belongings.

The next morning, after breakfast, we all lined up for the last time and waited for our staff sergeant. When he arrived for our last inspection, there was no yelling, which amazed us. We remained standing when he said, "I had a wonderful time with this group. You are very smart and knowledgeable, and I know you'll all do well. I hope I wasn't too hard on you, but I could see you maturing in front of my eyes. I wish you good luck wherever you go." He said these words in a softer tone of voice that was unfamiliar to us.

He continued, "When I call your name, step forward, at which time I will announce your destination and give you the necessary papers. We took into consideration your test results and your abilities, and the assignment should represent the best job at which you could excel."

One by one, he called the names. I was very upset, as according to the Hebrew alphabet, I should have been called at the beginning. I was called second to last. By that time, I was sure that I would be stationed somewhere in the far north or far south, a long distance from home.

He called, "Miriam Wachsberger to shalishut roshit (the main manpower unit) in Jaffa." I almost fell to the floor. That base was about 15 minutes from home. I tried to hold back my tears.

Giving me the papers he said smiling, "Happy?"

“Very much and thank you,” I answered.

We all went back to the barracks to get our belongings. Most of us cried or laughed with relief to know where we were destined to go.

Suddenly I heard the staff sergeant’s voice, “Miriam, wait a minute, I need to talk to you.” I couldn’t figure out what he wanted. He asked me to walk with him to the side and said, “I know I gave you a hard time all these weeks. Now that it is over, I’d like to have dinner with you. What do you think?”

I couldn’t believe my ears and all I could think was that my friends were correct all along. I looked at him, and he had a big smile on his face, waiting for my answer. “Thank you, but I need to go home and settle down. I am very tired now and cannot give you an answer,” I said.

“I understand. I know where you are stationed and will get in touch with you there.”

I was delighted that I never heard from him.

My father was waiting for me at the gate and after getting into the car with all my belongings, I started to cry.

“What happened? Where are you stationed?” he asked.

Mixing tears and laughter, I yelled with happiness, “In Jaffa.”

“So, why are you crying?” he asked. I told him how nerve-wracking it was for me to be almost the last one to get my assignment.

When we came home, everyone was excited for me, and my mom, as always, had prepared my favorite dinner.

That night, at a party, our friends celebrated my and my best friend Nellie’s luck at being assigned so close to home. Nellie was going to be in the IBM unit. The Army was the first place where IBM computers were installed. The clerks had to punch in their information, and the machines would spit out cards with holes in them. Nellie was good in math and passed all the tests and was trained for this job. She wasn’t too happy about it, as she had some problems and made a few mistakes. After six month of trying to improve, she was transferred to the office of the army’s newspaper, “Ha’Machne” (The Camp), to be the chief editor’s secretary. She stayed at that job until the end of her service and loved it. It was a fifteen-minute walk from her home.



*Myself.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Servng in the Army

I was thrilled to work in Jaffa. It was very easy to get there by bus. It took about a half an hour. The camp was located in the middle of the city. Jaffa was originally an Arabic city taken over by Israel in the 1948 Independence War. Our offices were in old five-story buildings, surrounded by barbed wire fences. One block away, there were many shops and restaurants, so we didn't feel isolated.

My orders were to show up at eight o'clock, Sunday morning, at the office of the head of the base. I was very excited, and my parents insisted on driving me on that first day. Upon entering the assigned office, I immediately recognized the secretary. Her name was Chaviva, and, once in a while, I'd meet her at parties in Tel Aviv. After a few such meetings, we had become friends. I gave Chaviva my papers, and she asked me to wait while she went into her boss's office. After a minute, she asked me to come in, and she left the room. I immediately saluted, as I wasn't going to start trouble right away.

Her boss asked me to sit down, as he studied my papers. He was a good-looking man, broad shouldered with black hair and bright blue eyes. He had a wonderful warm smile that made me very comfortable. "I heard from my secretary that you know each other. She also mentioned that you are a very nice person."

"Thanks," I said and nodded my head, surprised at his secretary's introduction.

He asked me questions about my parents, my brothers, my father's occupation, where we lived, my hobbies and my likes and dislikes.

"Tennis, swimming, dancing and the theatre are my most favorite pastimes," I answered.

He smiled and said, "There is a job opening which is headed by a very nice, pleasant officer. I know that you will get along very well. I'll have my secretary call him and tell him to expect you. You will hear your job description from him. Good Luck." I got up and thanked him and left.

Arriving at the next office, I was greeted by a secretary. I gave her my papers and followed her to meet the head of the department. At this point, I didn't salute, as my friend, Chaviva, told me that this rule is not observed in Jaffa. I was relieved.

The head of the department was a tall man with reddish hair and a big mustache. He spoke Hebrew with a German accent. He didn't ask me any personal questions, as apparently the head of the base already noted all the answers that I gave to his questions.

He looked up from the papers and said, "There are many components to the job we do here. Some

are more interesting than others. I like to start everyone at the bottom. In time, if I'm satisfied with their performance, I elevate them.

"Your first job will be mostly filing. The staff sergeant who runs the office will give you all the details. From what I heard about you, I know that you will advance fast.

"It's very important that soldiers look presentable, in neat, clean and pressed uniforms, shiny shoes and combed hair. Looking well influences the attitude towards the job." I had heard this statement before, a couple of times, and I came to realize that this was a very important point to remember.

I thanked him and then followed his secretary out the door. She introduced me to the other soldiers sitting at their desks and to the staff sergeant. The place was very quiet and everyone was deep into his or her job. I then followed the staff sergeant to a small office located at the end of the department, away from everyone. It was a small room that had one narrow, tall window, many filing cabinets up to the ceiling and one desk. It looked like a prison cell. I kept quiet, but I was upset. All I kept remembering is the department head saying: "If I am satisfied, I will elevate you to another job."

Every day started at 8:00 a.m. with a fifteen-minute marching drill led by a sergeant. Lunch was one hour and we went out of the camp or ate sandwiches brought from home, as there were no facilities for eating there. We rotated answering the phones at lunchtime. It was my relief from my very boring job. The day ended at 5:00 p.m.

For the short time that my friend Nellie was at IBM, we went out together for lunch. Many days, I had lunch with Chaviva, who was the only soldier in her office. After a while, I befriended some of the other girls and went out for lunch with them too.

One day, while I was having lunch out with Chaviva, I told her how miserable I was at my job. "Do you think you can do something for me and get me out of this office?" I asked.

"I will keep my eyes open," she answered. I knew that she was very happy that Nellie and I extended our friendship to her and invited her to join us at parties.

In order not to die from boredom, I tried to read the correspondence, which gave me some insight into how things ran in the unit that we were responsible for. I made sure that all was filed away immediately, and that I was able to locate requisitioned papers without anyone having to wait. When I didn't have much to do, I went through complete files. I knew that I was doing well, as once in a while, when I passed the head of the department, he would say with a smile, "Doing well."

After I had been at my filing job for four weeks, Chaviva called. "Miriam, you are wanted immediately at my office."

"Do you know what it's about?" I asked, and she answered negatively. I hoped it was for a transfer to another office with more interesting work. Before going down to the head of the camp's office, I made sure that I looked good. I combed my hair, put fresh lipstick on and made sure that my hat, which I hated, sat on my head according to regulation.

When I came in, Chaviva told me about a job opening as the secretary to the second highest officer on the base, Lieutenant Colonel Dov Eshkol. "It is a very interesting job in a very busy office. The only problem is that he has a reputation as a womanizer."

"Don't worry about that. I don't care! I will handle it. I must get out of where I am, or I will go out of my mind," I said. At this point, I realized how very important and helpful contacts and relationships are.

Chaviva opened the door to her boss's office and let me in with a smile. He told me that my present commander was happy with my work and the way that I present myself and behave. He also said that it was my friend, Chaviva, who suggested me for this new position. He mentioned that Dov Eshkol had two secretaries within three months and was very unhappy. He added that he had a feeling that I will fit Dov Eshkol's demands. He also kind of implied about the commander's reputation. I told him not to worry.

Truthfully, I was a little apprehensive, as I knew how important a good reputation is. With a big smile, not showing any of my fears, I walked out of his office and went to the next building. When I came in, I gave my name to a secretary, and she showed me to the office where I would be interviewed. Dov Eshkol, the commander,

was waiting for me. He got up, introduced himself, shook my hand and asked me to sit down. I thought that he would be tall, handsome, muscular and very impressive. I had this image in my head after hearing about him being a womanizer. He was the complete opposite. He was of medium height, very thin, with an elongated face and thin grey hair. He had a wonderful warm smile and spoke softly with a slight German accent. I thought to myself that there is no way his reputation was correct. I relaxed.

“I just let two secretaries go, one after the other, as they were absolutely stupid. I need someone immediately, and you were highly recommended,” he said with a smile. Then he continued, “This is a very busy office. We have officers of different units coming in for meetings. You would need to set up all my appointments, take messages and converse with anyone waiting for me.

“It’s very important that you look neat, with hair combed and lipstick on. As my secretary, you are the first person people see when they come here, and it reflects on me.

“You will be the liaison between me and the different command officers and their assistants, who are stationed all over the country, and between me and the heads of the departments that are located at this base. What is most important is your responsibility to get me all that I need, in a timely manner. If I am satisfied, your responsibilities will grow. From what I heard about you, I know things will work out.

“The highest officer on this base is colonel Shmuel Socher, who is my immediate boss. My closest assistants are four officers, two lieutenants, one captain and one major. The balance of the base consists of support departments to the different arms of the IDF (Israeli Defense Force). They deal with all manpower numbers and supplies, having on record every soldier’s personal information. They provide information to help us configure how many soldiers will be sent to each unit.

“A major who is assisted by lower-ranked officers and a large pool of other soldiers runs each department. The office you came from is operating like all the other departments. Once all the right and detailed information is done, we supply it to the IBM unit to work on the numbers, and we get spreadsheets. Therefore, we must make sure that all the information we supply is accurate.

“You would basically run my office. You will have the office next door. Your desk will always face the entrance, so you will always know what is going on. All correspondence will be typed by the front office, but you will have to make sure that it is done on time.

“One other important thing for you to know now is that every day, at three o’clock, you will have to brew fresh Turkish coffee and serve it to me. It is your place to make it and to make sure that all utensils that are used are always cleaned and put neatly away. The staff sergeant will teach you how to make it. My office and yours must always be very clean, free of dust and look neat. I also like to have a small vase of fresh flowers on the unit across my desk, which will be your responsibility.

“The other important point is that there will be no files on top of my desk when I have appointments. You are to make sure that the file that I need for the meeting will be on top of the other files in the right-hand drawer. Most files are stored at the different departments, and there are soldiers who are assigned to deliver and pick them up at our request. You will never have to do it, just make sure that there are no delays.

“Meetings take place usually between the manpower officer of a unit and us. They mostly come when they do not agree with the number of soldiers that we allocated to their units. They always have reasons for increases. At times, I can help them immediately and, at other times, I need to look into it some more. Sometimes they are happy with the results, and sometimes they’re disappointed. They come a few times a year to see if the numbers can change. I will not take any phone calls at my meetings, unless there is an emergency. Do you think you are ready to take all this on?” He asked.

My heart raced from excitement and happiness. I immediately realized how interesting this job could be. With a big smile I answered, “Of course I am ready, thank you.”

“I will call the head of camp, and you will start tomorrow morning,” he said.

I ran down the steps floating on clouds. I stopped by my friend, Chaviva, to tell her about my interview. She said: “We know. He already called, and my boss already notified your present boss of your immediate departure. He was not very happy, but knew he had no choice.”



*Nelli.*

I went back to my present office, and my boss was waiting for me at the door, motioning me to come into his office. “I was just told that you are leaving us tomorrow to be Dov Eshkol’s secretary. I would not recommend it, as he has the reputation of being a womanizer. Eventually, your reputation will be tarnished. You would also become like a servant, just answering phone calls and making coffee. I am telling you all this because I like you and don’t want to lose you. I was just about to move you to another position, from which you would have a great opportunity to advance in this department.”

I thanked him and said, “I am ready to take a chance on this job.” I felt good and didn’t care about all these warnings. At the end of the day, I said goodbye to all, told everyone that it was nice working with them and that I was sure that our paths would cross again some day.

When I got home, my parents immediately realized that something good happened, as I couldn’t stop smiling. I told them about my new job and they were happy for me.

We were supplied with two sets of summer uniforms and two winter ones. The summer uniforms were made of heavy cotton that wrinkled easily and was difficult to iron. The winter uniforms were made of wool and were a breeze to keep neat, as they never wrinkled. We only wore almost mid-calf skirts, ugly brown oxford shoes and white socks.

Up to this point, my mother had my uniforms washed and ironed for me, which was very nice. Once I got the new position, I ironed them myself for the balance of my service. I tried to put some pleats in the straight, ugly skirts, hoping to make them somewhat nicer. It took me a long time to accomplish, but I didn’t give up. I also made sure that I had a comb, lipstick and a small mirror in my purse at all times. I had a second supply in

my desk's drawer. I was resolved to be successful at my new position.

The next morning, I first met with the staff sergeant, Ronnie. He managed the office and made sure that everything ran smoothly, timely and on a high level. He was stocky and had a round face which was always red. His hair was black and he had big brown eyes. He was always uptight and rarely smiled. His uniform was always in tiptop shape, even though he sweated a lot, especially when he was aggravated, which was most of the time. In order to keep himself so neat, he kept a few extra uniforms in the closet. His immediate assistants were three female soldiers who were typists and two others who helped with filing and all other office jobs. He welcomed me and wished me all the best.

That first day in my new job was very nerve-wracking. It was the first real job I ever held. I wanted to make sure that I did everything right. I dusted, changed the water in the flower vase and waited for my boss. He came in late that day. I thought that he did it on purpose to see if I was following his instructions. When he walked in, I stood up and greeted him. I didn't salute, as the staff sergeant told me that it was not necessary. To explain why he was late, Dov told me that he lives in kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shachar in the Upper Galilee, in the northern part of the country. He said that he always comes in late on Sunday mornings, because the trip takes almost four hours. He also leaves early on Friday mornings.

The wall separating our two offices had a small window through which I could hear him calling me. As there were no hold buttons on the phone, I had to tell him through the window who was calling. At times, when I wasn't sure if he wanted to answer the call, I'd put the phone on the desk and go to his office to get an answer for the person waiting on the phone. Many times, I repeated the caller's name out loud and watched for a signal from my boss. There were so many phone calls on my first day that I was overwhelmed. In the morning, my stomach turned with every call. By the afternoon, I was relaxed and felt more confident.

On the second day, I was mostly in the office by myself. I wrote down phone messages and gave Dov the information when he came in. I made coffee at three in the afternoon, and I was exhausted by the end of the day. I went to lunch with some people who were friendly and welcoming, so it relaxed me.

The only person that I had a problem with was Ronnie, the staff sergeant. Ronnie received the mail, sorted it out and had it delivered to the different officers in our building. I personally picked up my boss's mail. I always smiled and thanked him, but he would just look down at his desk and not answer. Very quickly, after asking others about him, I realized that the less I said to him, the better off I would be. I always felt bad for the typists who shared the office with him.

By the third day, I felt well and in control when, half way through the morning, my boss called me in and asked me to sit down. "There are a few things we need to clear up," he said with a very serious expression. "First, I noticed that you never call me by my name. It almost feels like I don't exist."

I was flustered and said, "I didn't know how to call you; if I should mention your rank, your first name or last name, so I thought not saying anything was the safest way."

"Well, just call me by my first name, Dov. You'll hear many people call me 'bebale' which is my nickname, but this name is not for you to use.

Second, who is the secretary here? Are you my secretary or am I your secretary?"

"I am," I said, not understanding why he'd ask me that.

"I just spoke to two people who were surprised that I didn't return their call. I apologized, but then realized that you didn't give me the messages." When he mentioned their names, I knew that he was correct, and I apologized to him. He stressed how important every call was and that I had to do it right. He also emphasized that I should not be embarrassed to ask someone to repeat an order or a name and whatever else I didn't understand that the caller said. It was very good advice that I always followed.

By the second week, I felt so much better that I actually started to enjoy the job. I realized what a nice person Dov was, and how he was ready to correct me and teach in a very nice manner; delicate and stern, but never insulting. The days went very fast, as it was a very busy office, with many people coming and going. I checked myself twice on everything that I did, whether it was writing down the phone calls, setting up appointments, getting the mail promptly and, of course, serving the Turkish coffee on time.

The whole office had a coffee break at the same time, as it was a long day. We had our own Turkish coffeemaker that allowed me to make coffee for everyone in our office. Dov also insisted that we have a set of our own Turkish coffee cups. After a while, it became second nature to me, and I knew when the time came to serve coffee without looking at my watch.

I enjoyed meeting the people who came to the office. When they had to wait, I liked talking with them and finding out whatever I could about their lives. After a while, when I got better acquainted with everyone, it seemed that some came earlier for a meeting, just so we could talk. Some became good friends, and being that they were older than me, in their late twenties or early thirties, I learned a lot from them.

At the end of every meeting, I would go to Dov's office and accompany the person out the door with a big smile and small talk. It wasn't always easy, especially when their requests were denied and they were very upset and angry on their way out.

The small window on the wall separating our offices was open most of the time while meetings were conducted. In the beginning, I never listened to what was discussed at those meetings. I didn't think it was appropriate. After one of the first meetings, Dov called me in and asked, "Can you tell me some of the demands that I was asked to fulfill? I am not sure that I wrote it all down."

"I don't know," I answered, puzzled and perplexed. "I didn't listen or pay attention because I didn't think I should."

Dov smiled and said, "This window has a purpose. When I have meetings, make yourself look as if you're busy, but, at the same time, listen in on the meetings. This way, you will know what is going on without letting the others know. It will help me and also help you when they call with questions and I am not here, or when I do not want to speak to them." That was when I learned to talk to one person and listen to another at the same time.

On one hand, I was surprised to hear this explanation. On the other hand, I felt very good about it. At that moment, I understood that my job was very involved, that he trusted me and that I wasn't there just to answer phones and make appointments. I also realized that all the talk about doing nothing as Dov's secretary was wrong. In short, I was very happy with my position and decided to let my friend Chaviva know. I called her and asked her to have lunch with me.

When I came to pick her up, she said, "Miriam, before we go, my boss wants to talk to you." I went in to see him, not knowing what it was all about.

"Please sit," he said with a big smile. I relaxed seeing him smile like that. I noticed that my friend stayed in the room too. "This morning, I received a phone call from your boss. He told me how happy he was with you, and thanked me for suggesting you for this position. He had three other secretaries within one month whom he didn't like. He thought they were beautiful, but stupid. When you first came to see me, I also thanked your friend, Chaviva, for recommending you, and I am very pleased."

We walked out of his office gloating and went to lunch. I told my friend that all the rumors about Dov being a ladies' man were false. I also told her that the rest of the girls and the staff sergeant were cold towards me. It bothered me somewhat, but I always stayed pleasant and polite towards them. This attitude never changed. What was most important to me was that my job was secure and interesting. I figured that jealousy and anger was part of it. The load of accurate reports that had to be submitted on time was immense. The staff sergeant and all the typists were very verbal in expressing their resentment towards me. They all felt that I should learn to type and do more of the work in the office. They did the typing for several other sections in the unit, but our office had the most work and had top priority above all the others. When I discussed it with Dov, he was absolutely against it, which made me happy. When I told them about Dov's decision, they got angrier with me. They all knew that they couldn't argue with my boss about his decision.

Only once did I get very upset and snapped at them saying, "We were all tested for different jobs when we started our service. Apparently it was decided that I should not be a typist." They were very quiet, as I never exploded before. I never told my boss about their attitude towards me, because I didn't want to stir up more hard feelings.



*A group trip to the Galil in the north, Israel.*

Making sure that all demands to our office were delivered on time was a very important part of my job. Another difficult aspect of the job was to get very detailed information from the different departments, on time. Certain reports, which I had to supply our office with, were given to me in the morning, to be processed by four o'clock that afternoon. These were usually not a problem. The problem was when the information had to be completed within one or two hours and sometimes immediately. Each department had assigned runners who delivered and picked up files or any other papers.



*Trip to the Galil.*

I was always nice and friendly to these soldiers. They considered me a “prima donna,” as I never came out of my office and had all this done for me.

The first time when I was presented with this job and I asked Dov how to go about accomplishing the task, he said, “Figure it out yourself. I don’t need to tell you. You are smart enough.”

Surprised to hear his answer, I went to my desk, stared at the phone and thought about what I needed to do. I was very uptight. After a little while, once I relaxed, I figured out which department could give me what I need, and how to go about getting it. I picked up the phone and when the secretary answered, with a polite and definite voice, I said, “This is Miriam, Dov Eshkol’s secretary. Can I please speak to the head of the department?”

I was very tense because I wasn’t sure if I was approaching it the right way. I couldn’t ask anyone’s advice because I didn’t want anyone to know my hesitations. When the head of the department picked up the phone, I said, “We need the following information delivered to our office by four o’clock this afternoon.”

When a report involved a lot of work to be done in a short time, they questioned me if I was sure about the time. I always answered positively, with some sharpness in my voice. I also made sure to make the request using the plural “we,” as in “we need it in an hour.” I figured and hoped that when they heard “we,” they would be more likely to follow my instructions and not question the request. After being successful with this technique the first time, I used it repeatedly for two years and was never questioned. Many times, I used this method for my

own benefit, and it always worked. When the head of the department was not there, or not available, I dealt with one of his officers. With time, whenever a head of a department came to see Dov, I conversed with the person in a friendly manner with a certain distance. Some I became very good friends with.

The first time I presented Dov with the necessary work on time, he looked at me and asked, "How did you do it?"

Looking straight at him, I answered, "You didn't tell me how to do it, I will not tell you how I did it." I realized it was a fresh answer, but it was too late to take it back. I became fearful, not knowing what to expect.

"Good job," he said smiling.

This question never came up again. I realized that I was completely on my own. When I needed help, I always turned to the three officers in our office, who were always very friendly, as they benefited from it too. Many times, I helped them out with quick information that Dov appreciated. I learned how to phrase my questions in a way that wouldn't make me look stupid. I also concluded that being polite, friendly, showing confidence and not wavering got me where I needed to be and got my orders and projects done, although sometimes I was scared while I was doing it.

Every day that passed, I realized how fortunate I was to have this position. I was impressed by how nice Dov was, although he was demanding. He never raised his voice and was always very friendly to me, to the people who came to the office and to those he talked to on the phone. Even when he was angry, he never raised his voice or cursed. With a little extra sharpness in his voice, his message was very clear. He loved to laugh and flirt with women callers.

Dov came to Israel from Germany and was one of the founders of the kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shachar. He met his wife Yehudit, a nice and pretty woman, on the kibbutz, and they had a daughter and two sons. During the week, he stayed in a small apartment in Tel Aviv, which was paid for by the army. I thought it was a lonely existence during the week and was happy to hear when he made plans to go out. He had many friends from all parts of life, soldiers and civilians, some of whom he met at parties. He was very likable and people enjoyed spending time with him.

One day, just before I was getting ready to leave, Dov called me to his office. "How are you getting home?" he asked.

"Usually, I take the bus."

"Wait a few minutes, and I will take you home."

I didn't think I should refuse, so I accepted the ride.

On the way home, we talked about certain things that we were working on. I was very relaxed and enjoyed the ride much better than I would have enjoyed waiting for the bus.

When we got close to home, he said, "How about having dinner with me?" I got a knot in my stomach, and all I could think of was what I was told about him. I immediately told him that I had plans that evening.

Then he said, "I understand. Why don't you let me know tomorrow when you are available?"

"Beseder (okay)," I answered quickly and jumped out of the car. My head was pounding and so was my heart. I had to figure out what to do. I walked around the block, and when I calmed down I went home. I was very happy to see that my mother was home. I never told my parents about the warnings I got about Dov being a ladies' man.

I was very close with my mother. At this point, I decided to tell her about Dov's reputation and his invitation to have dinner. She was surprised that I didn't tell her about it before. I explained that I didn't think it was important and didn't want anyone to influence my decision about accepting the job. I also never thought that I would have to face the situation.

"Invite him home to have dinner with all of us," she said with a smile on her face.

I looked at her astonished, thinking it was crazy. "How can I do that? It sounds stupid."

"No," she answered and continued, "Think about it. He might accept."

"Beseder. I will have to think about it. I hope that he will drop the subject and will understand that I'm not interested if I don't say anything," I said. I could hardly sleep that night.

The next morning we were very busy at the office. I was happy about it, hoping that everything we talked about in the car would be forgotten. Dov went out to lunch with some people, and I stayed in, not wanting to talk to anyone. When he came back, he called me into his office.

With much trepidation, I went in hoping that he would give me some work. “So, do you have a free evening when we can go out for dinner?” he asked.

I felt the blood rush to my head and my stomach was churning. I had to think quickly how to phrase my answer. I decided at that moment to go with the truth and explain it to him once and for all.

“Dov, I need to be honest with you and not beat around the bush. When I was offered this job, I was very excited. I thought I was very lucky, and I now know that I am. I love my position and what I do. It is interesting and exciting and you are a nice person to work for and a good mentor. No regrets!”

He was listening very quietly as I continued, “I was warned by some people that you are a ladies’ man and that I will get a bad reputation working for you. I ignored that part because I didn’t think it should influence my decision.” He kept quiet, but was smiling. I kept talking. “I know that I do not have to worry about your intentions, and I appreciate your invitation. The problem is that we might go out to dinner and be seen. The gossip train will start, and it will be interpreted the wrong way. I wouldn’t like us to be in that situation.”

He still kept quiet, and I got more nervous by the minute, but I had to keep talking. “I have an idea. I would like to invite you to our home for dinner. You will meet my family and will be able to come to us any time.” I looked directly at him, relieved and uptight at the same time.

After being quiet for a minute, which seemed like an hour, he said laughing, “Well, I never knew I had such a reputation. I guess I should feel good about it. I know where it comes from. I am always invited for dinner, most often by women friends, and we tend to dine out. It saves me from eating alone, which I hate. From the phone calls and appointments that I make for dinners, I am sure you realize that I have many friends.

“Miriam, I like your honesty. I am sure it wasn’t easy for you to come up with this answer. I understand, and I will be happy to accept your dinner invitation and meet your family.”

With much relief, I said, “How about tomorrow evening?” I figured that I couldn’t postpone the invitation and knew that my mother would be able to handle it. He answered positively, and I was thrilled. I knew at that moment that we will become good friends and will always be honest with one another and I was correct.

When I came home that evening, my parents were waiting for me, wanting to know what happened at the office. I gave them a detailed answer and at the end I said, “I invited him for dinner for tomorrow night.”

“You handled it well and there is no problem with making dinner for tomorrow night,” said my mother. “You had to strike while the iron was still hot.” That was one of her favorite sentences and she repeated it many times through the years.

The next day, Dov and I went home together. My mother set up a beautiful table using her best dishes, silverware and crystal. She prepared a wonderful dinner that we all enjoyed and the conversation was flowing. Afterwards, Dov thanked my parents and kissed my mother.

“Our home is always open to you and I never need a long advance notice or time to prepare. We count you as one of our family. When your wife or kids come to Tel Aviv, we would love to meet them and have them over too,” she said.

“Dinner was great, and I do feel very welcome,” he answered. “You have a very smart daughter, and I am lucky to have her as my secretary.”

The next morning when I walked in, Dov said, “It was very special last night. I felt like one of your family, and I will have my wife come to meet your family too.” He was true to his promise, and she joined us once or twice when she came to the city, which wasn’t too often.

Most of the time, I kept taking the bus home and tried not to spend too much time being seen with him. Our relationship was very good. Every one in the outer office realized it, which was to my advantage. I didn’t have any special privileges and had to stay on guard duty like everyone else. When my turn came to make Turkish coffee, every third or fourth day, for the entire office, I insisted on doing it. When we had to stay over the weekend, although Dov went home, I would stay. Being one of them and not taking advantage of my position

helped me many times throughout my service.

After I was in Jaffa for about five months, I was told that our entire base was moving to a new location outside the city. It was a very difficult and consuming job to pack and move everything. We stayed at work many evenings and a few weekends, but got it all accomplished in time while conducting everyday business.

We were not happy about the relocation, as it took much longer to get to and from the base. The public bus station was now about five blocks away. There were no nearby restaurants and no places to buy food at, so we had to bring lunch from home.

The new base was located in a quiet, strictly residential neighborhood, consisting mostly of new, four-story buildings and private villas, surrounded by grass, flowers and trees. Each department had its own building, and most of the buildings were one story. Our offices were in a two-story building on top of a hill. There were about thirty steps on the outside leading up to our office. The hill was covered with grass and beautiful flowers on each side of the steps. Our office and the officers working with us were on the first floor. The secretarial group, including the typists, were on the second floor. Dov's boss, who was an aluf mishne (colonel), also had an office on the second floor. In addition to his office and his secretary's office, he had a large conference room that could accommodate about 20 people around a very large and beautiful conference table.

Dov's title was the head officer of manpower. Many high-ranking and important officers came to us from the different units to discuss manpower and the number of soldiers to be assigned to their divisions. When some of the top commanders walked up the steps to our office, I called my girl friends in the other offices. In order to see them, they pretended that they had to deliver files and went outside. The most favorite officers were the paratroopers and Itzhak Rabin, who in later years became the prime minister.

Itzhak Rabin was a very handsome man. He was born and raised on a kibbutz and had a slightly rough look about him. He was not very tall, a bit stocky, with curly, mostly disheveled blond hair, blue eyes and a perpetual tan. He was polite, didn't like to talk much and would smile once in a while. He was much more reserved than all the other officers.

The officer who headed the paratroopers' manpower department was a lot of fun to have around. His staff sergeant, who was dark-skinned with very dark brown eyes and a short and chubby body, like a typical sabra, always accompanied him. The officer, himself, was very tall, slim, blue-eyed, blond and very Aryan-looking. I always laughed when I saw both of them hopping up the steps together.

These two were the most charming guys. They were always warm, smiling and very friendly to everyone. They always came with big demands for extra manpower and their requests were always met. At times, they would show up without an appointment, as they were desperate. If we were busy, they were always ready to wait, giving the impression that there was nothing more important than the business at hand. Many times, Dov told me that he did not want to give in to their demands, but it never happened. They just knew how to convince him; being insistent and having all the correct information, reasons and facts. They never raised their voices or were insulting. At every meeting, the officer was the serious one and the staff sergeant, although serious too, always interjected remarks that made Dov laugh and therefore broke the tension. I was always fascinated by their style, which I have learned how to use myself, at times.

At one point, those two guys helped Dov a lot. A law came out that every officer, from lieutenant on up, must go through a two-week paratrooper course and learn how to jump from a plane. At the end of the course, each officer would receive a pin of large wings, evidencing their participation. In order to be accepted to the course, officers had to be a certain height and weight. Dov had the height, but definitely was underweight. He had the two guys talk to the doctors to make sure that he got in. He explained to them that he would shame his two sons if he did not acquire the wings. As always, they were very persuasive, and the doctors allowed him into the course. Dov had no problem passing the course, as he was strong and very agile. His immediate assistants and myself were invited to come to the final ceremony to see the officers jump from the planes and accept their wings.

That morning, we were picked up in Dov's car and driven by a female driver who passed the first women's driver course in the service. I begged Dov to let me take the course, but he would not let me, as it meant that

I would no longer be working for him. It was a half-hour ride to the paratroopers' base, and we were all very excited. Our first stop at the base was in a large space, where open, silk parachutes were checked for holes and folded by female soldiers. Once each parachute was folded, the name of the responsible soldier and the date was written in a designated area. Then, they showed us a training field with different equipment that was used in daily workouts.

We finally went to the viewing field from where we could see the officers jump. All their families were invited, and we met Dov's wife, his two sons and daughter. After a short introduction by the head of the course, we heard the roar of planes from the distance. As the planes got closer, we saw the officers jump, one after the other, from all the planes at the same time. The white parachutes opened immediately and, within minutes, they were on the ground. It was a breathtaking sight and very exciting. Once the men were on the ground, they left the parachutes and got in line, marching to accept their wings. It was very touching to see them all, so proud to be pinned. The ceremony ended with the chief of staff's congratulations and the singing of Hatikvah. Afterwards, we all joined in raising wine glasses and wishing for a peaceful, bright future.

Everyone was hugging and kissing and wishing mazal tov (good luck) to the graduating officers. It was a big accomplishment to go back for such intense training, after not undergoing anything so rigorous since their officer's course, when many of them were quite a few years younger. Dov's face was shining from happiness, and his wife and children were very proud of him. We were proud too, as, at the start, we were not sure that he would be able to complete the course. After that, Dov made sure that the wings were always pinned to his uniform.

About the same time that the men's parachuting course ended, a new ruling came out. For the first time, women would be able to take the course and become paratroopers. Once I heard about it, I thought it would be a great adventure, thinking that I wouldn't mind the tough training. Before approaching my parents for permission, I researched the qualifications. I thought I would have no problem being accepted. There was one reason that kept me from applying. A woman soldier had to sign a release, knowing that she might lose the ability to bear children. The force accompanying the opening of the parachute was so great that it might harm her. I was not ready to take this chance. And although I did not think that I was going to apply, I approached my parents for permission, anyhow. They were very upset with me that I even considered the idea. I knew that they would be against it, but I needed to hear it from them. It made me feel better for not signing up. Not too many women joined, and the ones who did were mostly kibbutz members.

One day, the officer who was the head of the secretarial course that I attended after training camp had an appointment with Dov. I wondered if he would remember me from the face-off we had in his office about saluting. I was somewhat apprehensive. When he arrived for his meeting a little early, I got up from my desk to greet him and shake his hand.

He looked at me, smiled and said, "I remember you. You are the soldier that I summoned to my office because you wouldn't salute me. I thought that you had a lot of nerve to express your opinion, not knowing how I would react. I could have had you court-martialed, but I honestly liked your daring.

It seems that you don't have to worry about it here. I see a handshake is in place, instead. You must be happy."

"Yes, I am," I confirmed with a smile.

I showed him to Dov's office. When the meeting ended, Dov called me in and said, "I was just told about your run-in with the head of the camp in a discussion about the salute. You had a lot of nerve."

"So what did you say to him?" I asked.

"I told him that I was not surprised, and we both laughed about it," was his answer. At this point, I felt very good about myself and very thankful to my boss.

Twice a month, each soldier stayed on the base overnight for guard duty. On the left of the entrance to the base, there was a booth that was always occupied by a guard who checked every person who entered the base. On the right side, there were two tents with cots for the use of the overnight guards. All guards had their supper right after everyone left for the night. In between shifts, guards stayed in the tents, mostly sleeping, as there was not enough light to read. The tents were very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. The guards slept in their clothes, with shoes on the floor, holding their rifles, ready for any emergency.



*A friend and I part of a group chose to host Ben Gurion, Moshe Dayan and other important people on Yom A'Hzmaut-Independent day, before joining special celebrations.*

The shifts were as follows: first shift was 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. and 12:00 midnight to 2 a.m.; second shift was 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 to 4:00 a.m.; third and last shift was 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00 to 6:00 a.m. The worst shift was the last one, as there was no chance to sleep before starting guard duty.

There were no showers on the base and, for some reason, when on guard duty, we felt dirty after sleeping in the tent with our clothes on. I always brought a clean uniform with me, as I knew that Dov would not like to see me in a wrinkled, slept-in uniform. Our superiors never cared if we were tired, and we quickly learned how to deal with it and not complain.

Two sergeants were appointed to split the night duty. One shift was from 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight, and the second was from 12:00 midnight to 7:00 a.m. when the regular guards started their day shift. The sergeant on duty woke us up, about fifteen minutes before the shift started. We patrolled in male and female doubles, along the fence that surrounded the base. We were not allowed to talk or sit down while patrolling. We were not afraid, as the base was in a safe area.

It was the sergeant's duty and responsibility to make sure that all went well, and every so often to check on the guards and make sure that they were following the rules. An additional responsibility of the sergeant's was to make sure that there were no cars parked in areas near the base marked "no parking." In case of a problem, the officer in charge for the night had to be notified.

I was very happy when, after a difficult test of all the army's rules and regulations, I was promoted to sergeant, a rank which carried some privileges. One of them was that sergeants did not have to clean the office windows every Friday. The other one was that sergeants only had to do one guard duty a month.

One time, being the sergeant on duty, on the early shift, I had a very embarrassing and unpleasant situation to deal with. I noticed a car parked around the corner from the gate. It was already dark outside, and I decided to check it out. I took my gun with me and walked over with some trepidation. The lights were off and the doors and windows were shut. I peered through the window and saw a silhouette of two people embracing. I knocked on the window, and the fellow sitting behind the wheel rolled it down. I could hardly talk when I realized that it was someone that I just broke up with after dating for a few months. Next to him was his old girlfriend, whom he later married. She was one of the guards that night and probably sneaked out of camp while I was away from the booth.

I gathered my thoughts and said in the toughest voice that I could, "Get out of the car immediately and go back to camp. You know that you can get a stiff punishment for this." She got out of the car quickly and ran back to camp. I turned around to face my old friend and said, "Don't worry. I will not report her, but only because it is you." He thanked me with a smile, started his car and left.

I immediately went to the tent where I found her, and asked her to come out. "What you did was the worst thing you could have done," I told her. "According to the rules, you were AWOL. You also were in touch with a civilian while you were on duty," I continued. Do you have anything to say?"

"No. I am sorry. I know I shouldn't have done it, and I would not dare to do it again."

With a straight face I said, "I am not going to report you this time, and I already told your boy friend the same. You can go back now." She thanked me, and I walked away feeling very good about it. I never told anyone about this incident and asked her to keep it quiet, which she did.

The officer on duty was in charge of the twenty guards and us sergeants. Most officers stayed in an office near the gate. It was equipped with a cot, a small desk, a large comfortable chair and good lights. Most officers came out once or twice during the first shift to check with the sergeant if all was going well. They did not bother to go and check on the guards, and they slept through the second shift.

There was only one officer who did things differently, and everyone hated to be on guard when he was on duty. His name was Naftali. He was very handsome, tall, with black curly hair and big blue eyes, but with an obnoxious personality. Those who worked under his command had a very tough time. Most soldiers disliked him. No one assigned to guard duty wanted to have him as the supervising officer. He had a lot of energy and couldn't stay still for long. On his watch, all rules had to be followed exactly. He liked to surprise the guards. He would hide behind the bushes and make slight noises, hoping to get the guards' attention. He wanted to see if

they were alert enough to investigate the source of the noise and movement with their guns drawn, and if they properly asked for identification. When there was no quick reaction, he jumped out and scared the guards. Then, he'd yell and punish them with extra guard duties.

There was, however, one event that involved Naftali that gained him a lot of respect. Every one of us had to choose one of the days of the High Holidays to stay in camp for guard duty. I picked Yom Kippur in my first year of service. I figured that as long as I was fasting and staying home most of the day and disliking the holiday, I might as well get rid of this obligation as fast as I could.

There was a wonderful dinner, buffet style, placed on colonel Socher's large conference table on the eve of Yom Kippur. Naftali, the officer in charge, told us that there would be three meals served, on the day of the fast, for all of us to eat and enjoy.

I went over to him and said, "I have been fasting on Yom Kippur since I was 12 years old, so I will fast tomorrow until sundown."

He looked at me with a slightly mocking expression and said, "You must eat because you are to be on guard four times. I am not allowing you to fast." He must have noticed my dissatisfied facial expression, as he immediately added, "If fasting is so important to you, your choice for guard duty should have been Rosh Hashanah."

As he was not the right person to challenge, I walked away. At mealtime, I noticed him watching me. I felt uncomfortable and guilty about eating, but had no choice. I told myself that I was doing it for the good of the country. By lunchtime, I was able to enjoy the food.

The food was very good, as it was definitely not army food. The platters contained everything that all us Israelis like to eat. There was hummus, tehina, baba ghanoush and other Mediterranean specialties. There were all kinds of salads, cold meats, assorted vegetables, sodas and the most wonderful desserts. We later found out that because there was no kitchen in the camp, the officer in charge had an open budget to order what he thought was right. Because Naftali was a perfectionist, we got the best. He also appointed three additional soldiers whose only responsibility was to take care of the food and to make sure that it always looked presentable and clean. It was a full time job, as the guards ate at different times.

On weekends and holidays, we also guarded facilities outside of the base. One of these facilities was a radio station in Bnei Brak, a small town, a mile away from camp, on top of a hill. It is a very orthodox community. The men wear long black coats over black pants and white shirts. On their heads, they wear black hats with payos (side locks) tucked behind their ears. In the summer, because of the heat, they wear their coats on Shabbat and holidays only. The women of Bnei Brak wear long skirts or long-sleeved dresses and stockings, all year round. Married women wear a sheitel (wig) or a kerchief to cover their shaved heads.

They tend to have very large families, as they believe in having a lot of children. There are two reasons for that: The first reason is that in the Bible it is written that God commanded Avraham "to become a big nation." The second reason is to make up for all the Jewish people that perished in the Holocaust. The young children in the community attend orthodox day schools beginning at age three. By age six, they are enrolled in a yeshiva school, where they mostly study the Torah and the Talmud and other religious books. They continue studying in the yeshiva into adulthood. The ultra orthodox mostly do not work and are exempt from the army. (Although the law in Israel has recently changed, and a new policy requiring Haredi Jews to serve in the army is due to take effect in 2020, they are fighting the new law and trying to water it down.) Their exemption from the army was and continues to be a big problem. All secular Israelis are upset about it. I always felt the same and still do. It is not right, as they live in a country that always has to be on the defensive. What is even worse is that they get a lot of money from the government, and they still complain and are not happy.

The more they study, the more their community respects them. Their marriages are arranged by a shadchan (matchmaker), at a very young age. The young couples are fortunate if one of them comes from a wealthy family that can support them. Otherwise, the wife goes to work until she gives birth to their first child.

On Yom Kippur, there are no cars on the roads in Israel, except for emergency cars like ambulances, police cars and fire trucks. These days, all the kids who are not orthodox ride their bikes on the empty roads all



*Miriam*



*My friend Ronni in military police.*

over the country, but not then.

On the morning of Yom Kippur, Naftali drove a truck filled with soldiers through the center of Bnei Brak, every two hours, for the changing of the guards assigned to the radio station. On one of the early morning trips, the soldiers in the truck were confronted by a group of orthodox, young and old people, yelling, cursing and throwing stones at them. The soldiers got very upset, not believing what they were seeing and hearing. Naftali stopped the car, took his gun and went outside. He pointed the gun toward the group. When they saw the officer with a gun, they started to retreat. He yelled, "Stop running away, or I will shoot."

They stopped in their tracks. He approached them, and said in a very angry voice, "Do you think that my soldiers are happy to be on duty on the holiday? Don't you think that they would rather stay home with their families? You are the ones who are able to observe the holidays only because we, who are in the service, guard you and fight to protect you." They kept quiet, and he continued, "This is a very strong warning to you. If I see anyone in the street where we drive yelling insults at the soldiers, I will shoot without any warning. You need to apologize, leave and tell the rest of your congregation what I said." They all mumbled their apologies and walked away. This incident was never repeated on any holiday or on Shabbat. The message was very clear, and they clearly understood the seriousness of the threat.

When Naftali came back to the base, his face was red and he looked very agitated. He wouldn't say what happened, but the soldiers who were with him told everyone about the incident. He became the hero of the base, and we all looked at him differently, with a lot of respect, after that.

In 1955, tension on the Egyptian border escalated, and attacks by infiltrators against Israeli settlements in the south multiplied. Israel decided to retaliate with an operation dubbed "Black Arrow," on February 28. The attack was carried out in the Gaza region. It was Friday morning when my boss was called for an emergency meeting. When he came back from the meeting, he told me that he has to leave on Saturday morning to go to a base in the south, in the Negev, to arrange for manpower in the war zone. Another officer was to take his place while he was away. He did not say anything more, but I could tell that he was very upset because he didn't have the time to go home and bid his family goodbye.

"You should come to our home for dinner tonight," I said immediately. "It will be nicer for you not to be alone this evening. My family will be very happy to have you."

He immediately agreed. As we did not have a phone, I called our neighbor to summon my mother. When she picked up the phone, I told her about our dinner guest and, of course, there was no problem. My mother went out of her way and prepared a very festive dinner, using her best china and silverware. My father and brothers were home too, and it was a very prolonged and pleasant evening. Dov was very relaxed and expressed his feelings about not being able to go home to his family, as he didn't know for how long his transfer would last.

When he left, close to midnight, he said to us, "I have no words to describe how wonderful this evening was, and how much it meant to me. You are like family to me, and I don't feel as bad as I did before. I consider myself very lucky. I hope I will not be away for long. I am inviting myself now for a celebration dinner when I get back to my office." We all hugged, and with tears in our eyes bade him farewell.

Sunday morning, when I came to the base and entered the office, my new commander, Israel Karo, was already at his desk. He was younger than Dov, handsome, tall, with wide shoulders, a dark complexion and a very deep voice. He asked me to gather everyone in his office for a meeting. He introduced himself, and told us that he was assigned to this post only for the time that Dov will be in the south. He was transferred from a completely different unit, and he expected everyone's cooperation. He spoke with a lot of confidence, a very serious expression and no smile. We didn't have a very good feeling about him, and in a very short time we realized that our intuition was correct.

Israel was the complete opposite of Dov. Dov was demanding, but in a nice way. He never raised his voice, but quietly let a person know when he was upset, angry or disappointed. His office was always very neat. He was rarely late for his appointments and always had the correct information ready. He trained me to make sure that all the correct files were where they belonged and to make sure that his appointment files were always on top of all the others in his drawer. After every meeting, I removed the used files from his office and kept them

on my desk, which gave me a chance to read them. It was an orderly way, especially for me, to know everything that was discussed and had to be done. I also kept the little window open between our offices, so I could listen in and take short notes.

All this changed with Israel. The situation became the complete opposite from what I was trained and used to do. Israel was very disorganized. Most of the time, his meetings ran late, and he had problems finding his files. He insisted on taking charge of the necessary files by himself. All I had to do was put them on his desk. His desk was always piled up with papers and files. When he had no more room on his desk, he would put the balance in the drawers. I never got back any of the files that he was done with, unless I had to take action on them. He also insisted that I shut the small window at every meeting. His office was not very clean, either. He smoked a pipe, and he would clean it wherever he happened to be sitting. He also always looked very angry. When he came to the office in the morning, he hardly acknowledged anyone. On leaving, he would only tell me that he was leaving and immediately turn his back and leave. He never asked nicely when he needed something. Nor did he thank anyone for a job well done. His attitude created a very uncomfortable atmosphere.

I knew that I had no choice and decided to be quiet and just do what he asked for without giving him any extra information, unless he specifically asked. I realized that I wasn't the only one who didn't like him, but not much was said about it. We figured that he must be angry for being transferred to this position, without knowing for how long. He came from a much higher post and from a unit considered higher in importance. We also found out that he wasn't too far from being promoted. I wasn't too happy during this period. I kept telling my parents that I should get married and get out of the army, but I was basically joking. I hardly talked to him, and I was very upset by the way he spoke to others and that he often yelled at everyone, including me.

One day, he was so upset that he yelled at me in front of some people who were in his office for a meeting because he couldn't find the file and the papers that he needed for the discussion. I asked his permission to look at his desk drawers and found what he needed at the bottom of one of them. I threw the file on his desk and stormed out of his office. At the end of the day, as I was ready to leave, he came to my office and said, "I'd like to give you a ride home because I would like to talk to you." I didn't want to accept the offer, but decided that it was a bad idea not to, and that I might as well hear what he had to say. For a while, we drove in silence. I was so upset with him that I thought he needed to talk first. Finally, he said, "I am sorry that I yelled at you today in front of everyone. I was very frustrated, and it was an important document that I couldn't find."

"Fine," I answered and then kept quiet.

"I have a feeling that you don't like me. I would like to alter this situation. You hardly speak to me or smile. I watched you with others, and I find you to be very charming and on a very friendly basis with everyone. What is the problem, Miriam?"

I was shocked to hear his statement and question and couldn't believe that he couldn't figure it out. I had to think quickly how to handle my answer to him. Should I be honest, or should I make light of it? It was my only chance to hopefully straighten it all up. At this point, we already were in front of our home. He turned off the car engine and waited for my answer.

I turned to him and said, "You are right. I don't like working for you. It is not because of who you are, but because of how you behave. I think you are smart and you know your job. I can't stand the way you talk to others. I don't like that you yell when you get frustrated, and you never ask people nicely to do a job. When done, you never acknowledge or thank them. I understand that this is the army, but there is a measure of decency towards others that should be kept. Maybe we were spoiled by Dov, but it was a nice atmosphere all around." I stopped talking, suddenly realizing that maybe I was too critical of him. I was getting a little nervous and didn't know what to expect.

He looked directly at me and said quietly, "Keep going. I think you have more to say, and I want to hear it all."

I figured, I might as well do what he wants and said, "I know that you have a different style of running the office, and that I should get used to it, but apparently it doesn't work for either one of us. It seems that you don't trust me. You know that I wouldn't be in this position if I couldn't be trusted, as it is a very high-level security

job. You keep most files and documents on top of your desk or in the drawers for no reason. When you can't find something, you get nasty and yell at me or the other officers in our office. There is a lot of unnecessary tension on top of the regular tension that we have with keeping all projects on time.

"Another thing, your office isn't too clean because of your pipe. By the way, I love the smell of your tobacco, and I kind of like to see a man smoking a pipe. I think it is very flattering and masculine." He didn't say anything at this point, so my fear grew. Smiling to hide my fear, I continued, "I hope I made myself clear, but didn't cross the line. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them."

He kept quiet for a few more minutes, while I tried to figure out what to expect. Then, he turned to me with a smile and said, "Thanks. You see, I am learning already." He continued to smile. "I give you a lot of credit for telling me all this. You have a lot of nerve, saying it without knowing what my reaction will be. I am very happy that it came to a head now, because now I know better what is going on and what I need to do to try to correct it. Miriam, tomorrow we start a new page."

I opened the door to the car and said "Shalom." And just when I was ready to leave, I said to him, "You look so handsome when you smile."

He grabbed my hand and said, "Thanks. Have a nice evening, and I'll see you in the morning."

I took a deep breath, ran up the steps and rang the bell without stopping. When my mother opened the door, I just ran inside and walked around breathing hard. My mother got a little nervous, not knowing what was going on. At that point, my father came home, and I sat them both down to tell them about my conversation with my boss.

"You definitely took a chance. You are fortunate that he took it the right way," my mother said relieved.

"Yes, I know. I realized it halfway through, but I couldn't stop. He is so miserable in the office that I figured, given the opportunity, I might as well try and go all the way," I said. "At least, I got him to smile. It will be interesting to see what will happen tomorrow in the office."

The next morning, he greeted me with a big smile and a big hello. We immediately made some changes, his way, but they were good enough to have everything back in order. He also made an effort to be friendlier and smile a little more. Most of the people were wondering a bit about the change, but I didn't tell anyone about our conversation. Everyone in the office was happier because things were more in order and less frustrating. I gained back a trust that I was missing, and we were friendly to each other.

A few days after the conversation with my boss, my uncle Morty showed up with papers calling him up to the reserves because of the war.

He asked me, "Can you get me out of this?"

"Let me see. I can't promise," I answered and took the papers from him. I looked and found the unit's name and knew that the center command was close to my home, within walking distance, actually.

I decided to go there the next morning because my uncle was supposed to meet his unit the following morning. As I was on friendlier terms with my boss, Israel, I knew that he would give me permission to come a little later to the office. I also knew that we had no meeting that morning. So I called him and told him that I needed to take care of a family matter, and that I will be one or two hours late.

I went to see the commander without an appointment. I was curious to see how far I could get just by mentioning the name of the office I worked for. I hoped I wouldn't have any problem getting into the base, as I had no pass to get in. At the gate, I said to the guard, "Please call Officer X's office and tell the secretary that I am here on behalf of Dov Eshkol on an urgent matter and that I had no time to set up an appointment."

The guard called the office and, within a minute, I was on my way. I took a deep breath gearing myself for the next step. I was nervous, but knew that I must show confidence. I greeted the secretary with a big smile, and she immediately led me into her boss's office. Not knowing him, who he was and what he likes, I decided to salute him.

I immediately took my uncle's orders from my bag. Looking straight at him, I said in a voice full with authority, "Something went wrong with this soldier, and he should be relieved from his orders."

I gave the officer the papers, praying that he wouldn't call my boss. While he was reading the orders,

I stood by his desk as my stomach turned. I knew that I had to have full control of myself and not show any weakness. I held my breath and didn't move. It took the officer a few minutes to check the papers, which seemed like hours to me, and then he finally signed the release.

With a big smile, I thanked him, saluted and walked out quickly. I took the bus to work smiling all the way, unbelieving that it all went so smoothly. I was happy that the ride was quick, because I wasn't sure yet if the officer that signed the release would call my boss and say something.

When I came in, I was greeted with a big smile and the question, "Is everything okay? You are back earlier than you thought."

"All is good," I answered with much relief and went to my office getting myself busy with my work.

Although there was a big change in Israel's behavior and attitude, I couldn't wait for Dov to come back. He was away for two months. Throughout this time, he never left his base in the south and was not able to see his family. When Dov finally came back, Israel invited me for lunch. He told me that he hoped my opinion about him changed. I answered positively, knowing how difficult it was for him to change some of his mannerisms. I followed his army career and he quickly advanced to a very high position.

After he was transferred back to his previous role, I found out that he had a sick child at home with a disease that was difficult to cure. A few years later, after ending his army career, he received a position as the officer of public relations at the Israeli Consulate in New York. I understood that he had great connections, and that they helped him to get the job so that his son would be able to get better and more advanced medical care. I didn't think he would last long at this job due to his personality, and, unfortunately, I was correct. He lasted only six months.

We were all relieved when Dov came back and immediately he asked me how everything was handled in the office. I told him how happy I was to see him back, and had to tell him everything that went on. I didn't spare anything from him, including my conversation with Israel. After I updated him, he called in every one of his immediate officers to debrief him as to where they were with work at that point. Once he was comfortable with all the information, work went back to normal.

Once a year we had an office party in a restaurant. We were able to wear civilian clothes, which made the female soldiers feel feminine and happy. We looked so much better out of uniforms, and that created a happy atmosphere. There was always a lot of food, drinks and great dance music. We liked these parties and never wanted them to end, so they always ran late.

Coming back from one of these parties, Dov's boss, Shmuel, offered four of my friends and myself a lift home. He asked each one of us for our address, so he'd know in what order to drop us off. I was the first one to be dropped off. Seeing that he passed my house and did not stop, I said, "You just passed my house."

"I know," he said, softly. "I'd like to talk to you, so I will drop you off last." I was sitting next to him, at his insistence, when we first got into his car. Now, I got a little nervous, not knowing what it was that he wanted to talk to me about. He dropped off all the other girls and I was alone in the car with him. Then, he turned to me with a smile and said, "Let's go for a drink where we can talk."

I was astonished to hear this and started to think quickly how to refuse his offer. "I am sorry," I said. "It is very late and I am exhausted. We have a very busy day tomorrow, and I would like to go home. Why don't you tell me now what you wanted to talk about?"

"It will be nicer if we go somewhere quiet and nice, not for too long, I promise." I kept insisting that I would not go and asked him to take me home immediately. "Miriam, what are you afraid of?" he asked.

"I don't go out anywhere with married men," I answered with anger. "You have a wife and children at home. You should go out with your wife, not with me."

He got very quiet and took me home. Before I had a chance to thank him, he said, "Let me explain myself and maybe you will learn from this for the future. My wife and I have been married for many years. Our kids are out of the house, and there is only the two of us. When we got married, she was a beautiful, bright and interesting woman. We shared everything and she was very excited as my career expanded. I was promoted in a very short time to my current position.

“She was a wonderful mother and did a great job raising our children. But our relationship changed completely. She stopped taking care of herself and, whenever I wanted to share my experiences with her, she claimed that she was tired. When I wanted her to accompany me to parties, concerts, etc., she refused. I tried for a long while and finally gave up. Now that the kids are out of the house, we are like two strangers living under one roof. I grew and developed, but she stayed behind and wasn’t interested. Therefore, I look to share my time with young women that I like and respect.

“I hope that one day when you get married and have a family, you will remember this evening. I hope that you will not lose interest in your partner, so when the children grow up and leave, you are not strangers and still have a life together.”

I remember tears came to my eyes and I said, “I will definitely keep this in my mind. It is a good lesson to remember.” Then, I thanked him and got out of the car.

The hour was late and I had a hard time falling asleep. In the morning, I had some extra time before leaving the house and had a chance to share what happened with my parents.

“Good lesson. It’s amazing what you are learning in the army. It feels like lessons for life,” both my parents said.

After that evening, whenever I had to deliver papers to his office, I hoped that he wouldn’t be there. When we saw each other, we would ask after each other’s well-being with a smile, and it felt awkward. After a while, this feeling disappeared.

One of the other officers, who used to come to the office often, shared with me his dilemma about adopting a child. He was telling me that he was married for a long time, and that he and his wife couldn’t have children. His wife wanted to adopt a child, but he was against it. He didn’t think he could love a child that wasn’t his. I listened to him surprised, wondering why he was telling me this. I kept quiet and didn’t express any opinion.

One day, he came very early for his meeting and seemed very upset. He usually entered the office with a big hello and a big smile. That day, he came in very quiet and sad. I wasn’t used to see him like this, so I asked, “Chaim, what is the matter with you? Are you sick or did something happen in your family?”

He looked at me and said, “I have a big problem and can’t decide what to do.”

I felt bad for him because I liked him. I said, “If you want to tell me, I will listen, just to make you feel better.”

“I would love to, but I am not sure if it is right. You are very young, and maybe it is not the right thing for me to confide in you,” he said very seriously.

“It’s okay, I can handle it,” I answered with a smile.

“Okay. Remember when I told you that my wife wanted to adopt a child and I was against it? Last night, she gave me an ultimatum. She told me that if I don’t go along with her wish, she will file for divorce. I tried to explain my reservations, but she kept saying that I was wrong, and that I will learn to love the child and that we will be a family. The conversation turned into an argument and, this morning, she left for work very early without even saying goodbye. I don’t want to lose her because I love her very much.” He became very quiet and had tears in his eyes.

It was hard for me to see him so upset, and I knew that I must say something. He looked straight at me without saying a word. I felt that he was waiting for my reaction. So, I said, “Chaim, it seems that you want to stay married and you are very upset about the possibility of a divorce. I think you need to do what she wants. Everyone loves a baby. You will learn to love it too.”

He kept quiet, and then it was time for him to go into the meeting. When the meeting ended, he left in a better mood and thanked me. I never asked him about his decision. The next time he came to the office for a meeting, he seemed more like himself again. All he said to me when he came was, “We are adopting a baby very soon.”

I was very happy for him and told him so.

About two or three months later, when we saw him again, he told Dov and me that they just brought a

baby boy home and that they are very happy. He had pictures with him and told me everything about the baby. About four months after the adoption, he said to me, "I should have listened to my wife a long time ago, when she started to talk about adoption. I am crazy about MY son. I want to thank you for listening to me that day. I had no one to talk to but you. You are a great young woman." He then asked if he could kiss me, and I let him.

When I came home that day I told my parents about it.

"Well, you are learning a lot about life in that office," said my father.

"Maybe a little too much, too early, but it can't harm you," said my mother, smiling and nodding her head in agreement.

Many of the officers who visited us were handsome men. They were in good shape and impressive in their uniforms and officers' hats, which were different from the berets worn by most soldiers. Although they had high ranks, most of them were very friendly. At times, when my boss was on the phone and not ready to start a meeting, I had to carry on a conversation with them. As time passed, and I became more familiar with all of them, I felt more and more comfortable in my position. I became friendly with a few and some of the conversations became personal. At times, too personal for my taste, but I always made sure that I seemed interested.

The ranking officers in our camp were in their thirties or early forties, whereas we, the female soldiers, were as young as seventeen and eighteen years old. Some officers were single and some were married. Quite a few of the married ones tried to get the girls to go out with them and have a good time. There were many affairs going on, on our base, mostly with married officers. It enabled the young women to improve their status in their jobs and gain certain privileges. It wasn't looked on favorably, and there was a lot of gossip circling around.

I could never understand what they were seeing in us. We thought we looked ugly, unappealing and sexless in our khaki uniforms. In the summer, we wore cotton khakis. The skirts were cut in a straight line reaching mid-calf. The shirt was tucked into the skirt and we wore no belts. In order to make the uniform look somewhat feminine, I would iron in some pleats. Therefore, even if my mother ironed the uniforms for me, I would need to iron them again. I also had to make sure that they looked fresh and not wrinkled because my boss looked me over every morning.

The winter uniforms were a little better looking. Same style, but, instead of cotton, they were made out of wool, except for the shirt. We also had to wear a dark khaki tie in the winter. I always had a problem making the correct knot, and my father had to do it for me until I finally learned to do it myself. Our jacket was a short jacket that only reached the waist. It was finished with its own belt and was closed with buttons that were hidden. When it was cold, we had a khaki v-neck sweater to wear under the jacket. We wore laced, dark brown oxford shoes with khaki or white socks. Our hats were berets with a metal insignia of the unit that we belonged to. When outside the office, we had to wear the hat at all times. We also had to make sure that our hair never touched the shirt collar. We were not allowed to wear civilian coats over the uniform. The only time we were allowed to wear civilian clothes, was at office parties off the base.

As time went on, because of the different things I experienced, I realized that I should not be afraid to look out for myself and that I could sometimes do things that were not exactly according to procedures. I learned more and more that I must be very independent because my boss was not going to help me. I also realized that unless I have chutzpah (guts) and take chances, I will not achieve my goals.

One day, my boss called me into his office. "Miriam, I just had a very exciting conversation with the head of the Navy. Israel is getting its first submarine and torpedo boats. There is a special ceremony and party for the occasion, and I was invited. Please put it on the calendar." He was very excited and couldn't stop smiling.

"I want to go too," I said.

"But you were not invited, and there is just a limited number of people who can attend," he answered with a disbelieving expression on his face.

"I never asked for anything before," I said. "But, to me, this is a historic moment, and it will probably be the only time that I will be able to be on a submarine,"

"Well, I don't think I can do anything for you," he answered.

“If I will be able to get an invite, would it be all right with you?” I asked.

“Sure,” he said with a smile, nodding his head.

Avram, the head officer of manpower in the Navy, came to our office very often. He was a short man, slightly chubby, curly-haired, fast walking, always smiling and in good humor. We were very good friends and shared a lot. Many times, I told Avram that I would like to be in the navy because of the beautiful white uniforms. He always said that he would love to have me as his secretary, but didn't think that Dov would let me go.

As soon as I heard from Dov about the celebration, I called Avram. He picked up immediately, thinking that Dov was looking to talk to him. I asked him about his well-being and then said, “Avram, I was just told by Dov about the invitation he received to a party and a ceremony for the first submarine and torpedo boats that the navy acquired. I want to come too and don't say no to me. I've asked Dov if I would be able to go with him if I get an invitation, and he said that it would be fine.”

“I will see what I can do, as there is only room for a very limited number of people,” he said.

“Thanks. I just want you to know that I am not interested in lunch, as it is not my place to be there.”

I didn't say anything to my boss about my request. On the third day, I received a phone call granting me the permission to come, but not for lunch. My name was added to the list of visitors. I asked Avram to tell my boss about it. Through the small window between our offices, I watched my boss pick up the phone, listen and nod his head with a big smile on his face. When the conversation ended, he motioned for me to come in.

“How did you pull this off?” he asked. I just smiled and walked out. I didn't tell anyone in our office that I was going to Haifa until the day before, when we all left for home. I was not going to take a chance that it would create an outcry among other officers who were not invited.

When the day came, my boss picked me up early in the morning to go to Haifa. I made sure that my uniform looked perfect. As I entered the car, I was immediately looked over from head to toe. With a smile, Dov greeted me and handed me an English/Hebrew notebook. He expected me to help him to master the English language as payment for this trip. Not that I liked it, but I knew that this was going to be a very special day and that one long and boring lesson was worth it.

The weather was magnificent. The sky was blue without a cloud to be seen. The sun was shining, but there was a slight chill in the air. I was so happy and excited. The hour and a half ride to the Haifa port felt like a few minutes. When we arrived, we were directed to a room for some coffee and cookies. Everyone who was invited arrived on time. A short time later, the head of the Navy welcomed us. With a lot of excitement, he told us what an important time it was for the Israeli Navy to acquire their first submarine and a few torpedo boats. He explained that this acquisition would make it easier for the Navy to watch and protect the country from an attack on the waterfront. He was also hoping that within a short time the number of submarines and torpedo boats would increase. He then told us to follow him to the submarine.

We walked a short distance in the port when we saw the boat. Everyone was very quiet, but you could see the excitement on their faces. As we arrived at the boat, we lined up. We had to go up on the bridge, one at a time. At the end of the bridge, there were two parallel lines of sailors dressed in white uniforms and standing at attention. As each person came on board, he or she had to stop, and a sailor would whistle using a special instrument. It was a welcome signal and was played for every person who came aboard. I couldn't help but notice how everyone's body lengthened. Head and chin were pulled upward and back and shoulders straightened. You could feel the pride that ran through everyone.

When my turn came, I straightened myself too, feeling very proud and fortunate to have this opportunity. I had to fight back my tears when I heard the whistle welcoming me. This time, I was happy to salute. I felt I was respecting the Navy, the Army and the Country for being able to achieve this.

After all of us were on board, we were taken for a tour that included very detailed information about the operation of the sub. We were also told about the special training that the sailors had to undergo in order to operate the sub correctly and safely. It took almost an hour and a half to two hours to walk through every level of the sub, but it felt like fifteen minutes.

When the tour was over, the officers went to lunch. The rest of us went back on the top deck to have our lunch, which consisted of sandwiches, cold drinks and cookies. While we were eating, we were offered a ride on a torpedo boat. We all accepted with renewed excitement, as it was an unexpected surprise. There were two boats ready for us, each manned by a naval officer.

We walked to where the boats were docked and, one by one, we went aboard. The officer directed us to our seats. Before I knew it, I found myself standing in the front of the boat next to the navigator. There was no seat at that spot, but I didn't care. I was elated, thinking to myself how wonderful it would be to experience the ride from up front. He asked me for my name and said that he hoped that I didn't mind having to stand. I told him that I was thrilled. After everyone took his or her place, the officer started the boat. When the motor started, I turned my head around and we all looked at each other with excitement showing on our faces. We all realized how special it was for us to be part of this celebration. The boat started to move at a slow pace while the officer explained how it operated and what its purpose was. Then, we went out to open sea and the boat picked up speed. They wanted to impress on us the importance of the torpedo when it was called to action, and how speed was a part of it. We were holding on for dear life to whatever we could, as we never before had an experience like it.

By this time, the sun was in the middle of the sky and hitting hard. It felt hot. When the boat reached maximum speed, the wind was blowing hard, and it felt much cooler, rather cold. I held on tightly to a metal bar and loved the feeling of the wind blowing in my hair and face, smelling the salty air and feeling sprinkles of water against my face and body. I felt my hair and uniform getting slightly wet, and I shivered a little, but it was very exhilarating.

After a little while, I was asked if I was ready to help navigate the boat. I was a little scared, but answered positively. I didn't think I should miss the opportunity. The officer asked me to put my hands on the wheel and hold tight. I followed his directions, got closer to him, and, before I knew it, I felt him standing behind me holding my arms and helping me to direct the boat. In my excitement, I didn't think anything of it and was kind of relieved to have help, not being sure that I could handle it myself. I guess I made a mistake not pushing him away and just enjoying my time behind the wheel.

We spent about a half an hour on the water and we were pretty far from shore. On the way back, he slowly reduced the speed. We then realized how noisy it was while we were at high speed. It was nice to slow down, as it gave everyone an opportunity to talk to each other. We all were very excited on our way back home.

Early the next day, my phone in the office was ringing. When the person on the other side introduced himself, for a minute I couldn't think of who he was. It was the officer from the boat. He asked me to have dinner with him, which I refused. I gave him a reason, hoping it was the last I heard from him. He was very persistent and, finally, when I threatened that I will inform his boss, he stopped calling.

One late afternoon after leaving the base, I forgot to put on my hat. Before I knew it, I had an MP (Military Policeman) standing next to me. They were very strict in those days about appearances. It was not only about hats, but also about length of hair, polished shoes and neat uniform. They used to work in pairs, and they would hide and suddenly appear from nowhere.

"You know that I have to give you a citation, and you will be punished for not wearing your hat," he said in a serious voice. I tried to talk him out of it, but he cut me short. I was very unhappy and angry with myself. Usually, the punishment for not wearing a hat was a few additional nights of guard duty. I thought that the only way to get out of it would be to ask my boss to make a phone call for me to the head of the military police.

The next morning, I showed my boss the citation and asked him to help me to erase it. Of course, he was not ready to make the call. I was upset with him, but I wasn't ready to give up. I knew the name of the top officer of the police and decided to call him directly. He was in our office only once, but I was hoping that he would remember me and would help.

I called his office, introduced myself to the secretary, and he picked up the phone, thinking that Dov would soon be on the line.

"I know you expect my boss to get on the line, but I am the one who needs to talk to you," I said. "I was

caught without my hat, and I received a citation. It is the first time that it happened, and it will not happen again.” He kept quiet, so I kept talking. “I will appreciate it very much if you could revoke the citation,” I said.

“Does your boss know about this call?” he asked.

“No he doesn’t. I’ve asked him to help me, and he wouldn’t, so I decided to try on my own. I promise that this is my first and last call to you, and if it happens again, I will be responsible for the consequences.”

For a minute, while I was somewhat shaky, he kept quiet. “Fine. I will do it this time only. I liked your honesty and your daring to get on the phone with me. Please give me the citation number, if you have it on you, and it will be forgotten.” I gave him the citation number and never heard anything about it again.

When I got off the phone, I went to my boss’s office and told him that I took care of the citation. He became curious and asked me how I did it, and I told him exactly. At the end, I added, “You see, I told the truth and didn’t mention your name.” I saw him smile as I left his office. I never told anyone about this.

At around the same time, I had another experience that I had to handle by myself. I took a Friday off in order to meet my father in Tiberius, where he was on vacation. It was about a three-hour ride, so I left on Thursday evening.

I was back in the office on Sunday morning, ready for a very busy day with many appointments lined up. At the end of the day, Dov asked me to add on the calendar a date for a special performance in Sarfend, which was the largest army base with the largest outdoor theatre.

“What kind of a show is it?” I asked.

“Danny Kaye and Chaim Topol appearing together on stage,” he said.

Danny Kaye was a big star of comedy, stage, movies and, later on, his own television show. I never missed any of his movies or shows. Topol was a member of the theatre group Laakat Ha’Nachal (the River Company). All actors in the theater group were amateurs who traveled to the different army units to entertain the troops. It was a very popular theatre group, and many of its actors became very well-known. Topol was one of the most loved ones.

I walked out of Dov’s office very upset. How could it be that Danny Kaye is coming to perform, and I don’t have a ticket? I had to get one, no matter what. As usual, I knew that Dov would not help me get an extra ticket, and that I had to fend for myself. I immediately made a few phone calls in search of the person in control of the tickets. After a while, I found out who he was and called.

“This is the secretary of the head of the Manpower Division, Officer Dov Eshkol. He has one ticket to the Danny Kaye and Chaim Topol performance. It is urgent and very important that I get another ticket,” I said in a very formal and stern tone.

“All the tickets have already been distributed,” the person on the other side answered.

“Yes, I know. I wouldn’t call if it wasn’t important. The seat’s location is not important. A standing ticket will be accepted too.” I kept insisting and would not get off the phone. Finally, I was promised that a ticket would be mailed to our office. I said my thanks and got quickly off the phone.

For two days, I was very anxious. When finally the ticket arrived, I told Dov that I needed a ride. He looked at me surprised and shook his head, knowing well enough not to ask me how I got it.

This was one of the most exciting performances I ever attended. Danny Kaye and Chaim Topol exchanged jokes, sang and danced together. Many times, in the middle of a skit, they broke out laughing and couldn’t stop. At midpoint of clowning around, Danny Kaye stopped for a moment and said, “Chaim, I thought I came here to teach you some tricks of the profession. I have news for you, I can learn from you.”

Although there were many seats, most of them were assigned to officers. The demand was so great that once the news came out, the balance of tickets were given out for the rest to sit on the ground. I sat on the floor, somewhat in the back but was able to see and hear. The loudspeaker system was excellent, and everyone sitting on the floor adjusted his or her position to make sure that everyone seated behind could see. It was an hour and a half of non-stop fun and delight. At the end, they hugged and kissed to thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

I met Dov by the main gate for my ride home. All the way home, we laughed with delight, bringing up

some of the moments of the performance.

When we arrived in front of my home, he said to me, “No wonder you were angry at me when I didn’t try to get you a ticket. This was a special evening. I give you credit for always finding a way to get what you want.”

I was surprised to hear it from him, but was very pleased. “Thank you,” I said. “It is your way of pushing me to do everything on my own that taught me how to go about it.”

Chaim Topol, after his release from the army, became a well-known and admired actor worldwide. One of his biggest and most successful appearances was his role as Tevye in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, first in the film and later on Broadway. His film *Salah Shabati*, about the hardships and tribulations of an immigrant family in Israel, became very popular too.

Many years later, Carl and I went to see him perform on Broadway. I sent a letter addressed to Topol at the theatre, mentioning the date that we would attend the show. In my letter, I described the performance in Israel. I hoped to hear from him and see him back stage. We had no response, and I was somewhat disappointed. When the run ended, I received a note from Topol. He wrote that my letter was just handed to him. He wished that we had come back stage. He had never heard from anyone who attended his performance with Danny Kaye in Israel, which was one of the highlights of his career.

A few months after we moved to our new offices, my boss started taking English classes in the evening. It was highly recommended for high-ranking officers, and was paid for by the army.

Up to that point, I used public transportation to get to and from the base. Once in a while, I would get a ride back home. My boss had his own tender (pick-up truck). There was one seat next to him and 2 benches in the back with room for 6 people.

Not every officer had a car. He had one because of his long commute home. Every morning, at certain meeting spots, he would pick up 7 officers and give them a ride to camp. The highest-ranking officer would take the seat next to my boss.

Right after he started the English course, he called me into his office and said, “I need help with my homework for this course. I will pick you up every morning and take you back to the city at the end of the day. You will sit next to me.” I will get a Hebrew-English dictionary and, on the way to camp, you will tell me words in Hebrew, and I will give you the English translation and vice versa.”

I was amazed to hear about it and said, “How could you do it? You already have 7 people in your car. You would have to tell someone to get off the ride.”

“This is my problem not yours. You are not afraid of gossip at this point, are you?” he said, looking straight at me with a very stern expression.

“Of course not,” I answered quickly, with mixed emotions. I could just see the gossip train rolling with the news. He took care of the matter by arranging another ride for one of the officers. I was correct, as gossip was started by this officer who was very upset. At this point, I didn’t care anymore, and I also didn’t have much choice in the matter. I really didn’t like this job, especially early in the morning. I thought it was boring, but on the other hand it helped me too.

Once, when I asked him if he explained to the officer why he had to get him off the ride, he said, “No. It was not his business to know and I don’t have to explain.” He said this last thing with a smirk on his face.

When Dov retired from the army, the fact that he spoke English opened great opportunities for him, and I felt good to have contributed to his learning. At one point, he was heading the group that was sent to Europe to acquire weapons for the IDF. Another time, he was the liaison in discussions with the Holiday Inn Hotels chain that was interested in opening hotels in Israel. A third time, he became the spokesman for El-Al airlines and came to the States to promote their business, staying at the Plaza Hotel in New York, in a suite that was larger than his home in Israel.

At around the same time, Dov and I also started to go out for lunch together to an outdoor restaurant, which had wonderful Middle-Eastern food. Dov hated to eat by himself. He had a policy of not having lunch with any of the officers in camp or the ones who came to get more manpower than was allocated to them. He only accepted dinner invitations in the city, mostly with his civilian friends or with army friends who had

nothing to do with our department. I never went out with him for dinner, although he loved coming to our house for dinner and did so many times.

Many of his civilian friends were well-to-do and part of the upper echelon of Israeli society. He met them at parties that he was invited to. Because he was very pleasant, warm, friendly and had an important position, he was invited to the nicest places. Not too many officers had such privileges.

One of his best friends was a gentleman who owned the first Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv, Mr. Federman. He was a South African who moved to Israel with his family. He called at least twice a week to make sure that Dov was okay and was not eating alone. They became very close friends, and they had a very comfortable relationship.

One time, Dov went to a party and met someone who knew me. The next morning, in the office, he asked me if I knew the man and could I give him more details about him. Laughingly I told him that he was one of the wealthiest people in the country. He owned most of the gas stations in Israel and was very sophisticated and nice. Dov told me that the man would call the office to make an appointment for dinner and that I should put him through. When he called, we had a short conversation and he made a dinner appointment with my boss.

The morning after they had dinner, Dov called me into his office and said, "I had a wonderful time with your friend. You are right that he is sophisticated and intelligent. How come you didn't tell me that he asked you on a date twice and you refused to go out with him?"

I blushed and answered, "I didn't think it was important for you to know."

"He asked me if I could convince you to accept his invitation," said Dov. "Why not? You yourself described him as a nice man," he continued.

I was getting annoyed and answered, "I have enough nagging from my mother, I don't need you to nag me too. He is not for me. Although he is nice and very wealthy, which my mother is impressed with, I will not go out with him. Basically, physically, I can't stand him. I am very friendly when I see him and would never tell him the truth, as I don't want to insult him. Don't tell him that you spoke to me, so you can go out to dinner with him again." At that point, I realized that I was a bit too fresh when Dov was just trying to do someone a favor, so I apologized.

A few days later, he called to invite Dov for dinner a second time.

The morning after their dinner, Dov told me that he thinks it was their last dinner together because Dov told him that I wouldn't go out with him. I laughed and told him that I was sorry. He was right, as he was not invited to dinner again and we laughed about it. Whenever we met, mostly at the same parties, neither one of us ever talked about it.

One of the most exciting experiences that I had was to host a party at Dov's boss's office. It was on Israel's Independence Day. There was a special celebration in a large stadium not far from the base. It was decided that all dignitaries would come to lunch at the base, in our offices, before going to the stadium. The list was very impressive. It included the Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and his wife and many more cabinet ministers, high officers and their chiefs of staff. One of them was my friend Matt, who I was close friends with since first grade. We lost touch while we were in the service, and I was so happy to see him in such an important position. Four of my friends from the office and myself were chosen to be hostesses. We were very excited about this opportunity. We didn't mind that we had to come in on a holiday while everyone else was off.

We came in early in the morning and helped the caterers to set up. We cut flowers from the garden and arranged them in vases. The excitement in the air and the anticipation were very high.

Exactly at 1:00 p.m., a long line of cars stopped at the bottom of the steps. Dov and his boss welcomed the guests as they came out of the cars and led them to where lunch would be served. Our role was basically to mingle among the guests, small talk and make sure that everyone was comfortable. Lunch was served buffet-style, so we helped them with drinks and also had to clean up when necessary. They only had a one-hour opening before leaving for the stadium to be seated at a special review stand.

The atmosphere was very celebratory. We circulated among the guests and a few times were asked some

questions about our work. At one point, the head of staff for the Prime Minister asked me to get a certain drink for Ben-Gurion and something special to eat. When I brought it, he thanked me with a smile.

Another time, the Prime Minister's wife, Paula, summoned me. She was sitting by a square table that had a flower vase in the middle. "Soldier, please come here for a moment," she said. "Let me teach you something. When you have a square cocktail table, like this one, the flowers should always be at one of the corners, not in the middle. This way, there is more room for putting large platters or anything else that is needed. I hope you don't mind my telling you this, but you are a young woman and it is a good thing to know for the future."

"Thank you very much," I said with a smile and walked away. I was kind of surprised to hear that from her, but whenever I put flowers on a cocktail table, I think back on it.

The hour passed by fast and, exactly at 2:00 p.m., they left for the 10-minute ride to their festivities. We cleaned up while talking about our experiences. We were very excited, and our commanders told us that we did a wonderful job and all enjoyed our company.

The next day, we were constantly asked by friends to tell them about the lunch and the guest list. We felt very fortunate to have been chosen for this job, as it was a very special opportunity to be in the company of all these leaders.

There were many interesting instances and situations that I faced throughout my army service, between my 18th and 20th birthdays. I've learned a lot from these experiences. I wouldn't remember them so vividly, if they hadn't made an impression on me, taught me a lot and influenced many decisions that I made in my life. I've learned a lot about people by observing their body language and facial expressions and by listening to the way they answer questions and reading between the lines. Storing this information and using it when necessary was helpful.

One of these experiences involved the officer who headed the camp where all basic training was done. He was also in charge of issuing the final releases from the service. His name was Nur, and he was very good looking, smart, charming and friendly. He was of medium height and very athletic-looking. He had big blue eyes and a beautiful smile. He exuded confidence in the way he walked and talked.

For one of his appointments with Dov, he showed up much too early. I was surprised and said, "You are about a half an hour ahead of your scheduled appointment."

"I know," he said. "I purposely came early so I could talk to you."

I kept quiet not knowing what he had in mind and not being able to figure it out.

"I would like to have dinner with you after work," he continued.

I was in shock, as I knew that he was married and had two children. For a moment, I held my breath, trying to figure out how to get out of it. "You told me that you were married and had two children. How come you are asking me to go out with you for dinner? Would you tell your wife?" I asked with a serious expression.

"We don't have a good marriage and there is no problem with me asking you," he answered with a smile. I understood that he was not going to tell her.

"How would you feel if you found out that your wife was out with another man and didn't tell you?" I asked.

"It is not a problem," he answered.

"Sorry but I can't do it. I understand that when one is married, one does not go out with others without the approval of one's spouse. That is a betrayal," I said.

His smile vanished, and he said, "Here is the situation. Sometimes a marriage does not work, for many reasons. The only way for my wife and I to be happy is to get a divorce. Our problem is our two children. They are wonderful, happy kids and the four of us do a lot of things together. We do not want to hurt them by getting a divorce, so we came up with a plan. We decided to stay together until they are out of high school and go to the army. Meanwhile, this is what we do: we go out of the house together in the evening. After walking together for a while, we go our separate ways. We always meet at a designated place and time and walk home together. Since we came up with this plan, we don't argue anymore and there is no tension at home.

"You are still very young Miriam and it is probably difficult for you to understand. Sometimes in life,

especially in a marriage, you need to make adjustments.”

I was very quiet and didn't utter a word, thinking to myself how sad that whole thing sounded.

He realized that I was amazed and maybe a little surprised to hear his explanation. “So, now that you know, can we have dinner together?”

“No, we cannot. I will not go out with a married man whatever the circumstances. Thank you for explaining it to me and I understand your position, but it is not for me. I probably will remember this for many years to come and hope that I will not have to experience it. I am sorry that this is the kind of marriage that you have, and whatever works for you is fine with me,” I said with a faint smile. I had to make sure that I didn't antagonize or insult him because he was a frequent visitor to our office. We never had a problem after this conversation and I didn't tell anyone in our office about it. Although, I couldn't wait to come home and tell my mother about this conversation.

She was very quiet while listening to me and, finally, she said, “You were smart to reject his invitation even though he tried to explain his situation. It is the first time I have heard of such a plan. It is sad when a marriage doesn't work out, especially when there are children involved. I always say that only death will separate me from Abba. You have to be able to discuss problems and talk about everything, because you can always find a way to correct problems, if you discuss them. It's not always easy, but it's important to make the effort. That was the first time that my mother talked to me like this, and I was surprised, as we never discussed marriage before.

I remained on friendly terms with this officer who, at the end of my service, was a great help to me, as he assisted me in getting an early release from the army. I wanted to get my release two months before I was due to be released because I felt that I needed time to get myself ready for a job in the Foreign Office. I didn't know how to type fast and knew that I had to learn to do so in both Hebrew and English. I didn't want to take a course because they were very expensive, and I wasn't ready to let my father pay for it. I knew that it would take me some time to teach myself. We had a Hebrew typewriter at home and we were able to rent an English typewriter and to buy two instruction books, all for very little money.

I never took the two weeks vacation that I was entitled to. Checking the rules of discharge, I found that I could get out early by deducting vacation days that were not used. My best friend and some other friends of mine were released after 18 months, rather than after two years, with their boss's approval. Of course my boss wouldn't let me do it, as he claimed that I was very important to him. I wasn't surprised, but I was disappointed, and never told him of my earlier impending release. He was surprised when I asked for his signature two months earlier than my official release date.

“How come you didn't tell me what you were doing?” he asked.

“You never told me to take time off or wondered why I wasn't taking a vacation, so I figured I might as well use those days at the end.”

I explained why I needed the extra time, and he signed my papers.

It was a very hot day when I went for my release. I took my summer and winter uniforms, my hat, shoes and belt and packed them in the bag that I was given at the beginning. My father drove me to the gate and I told him not to wait for me. It was around noontime, and I had a long walk to the office where my friend was waiting for me, as I made an appointment beforehand.

I walked quickly. Although I knew that I had all the right papers with me, I was somewhat nervous that something would go wrong. I knew I also needed the approval of the head of the camp and, suddenly, I was not sure that he would do it for me. It took me about fifteen minutes to get there. I was sweating and breathing a little hard.

I first stopped at the warehouse where I had to return my uniforms. I was only allowed to keep one set, my hat and shoes. All the other uniforms I had to leave. I kept the one I was wearing, but shortly after my release I threw it out, which in later years I regretted.

When I was let in to see my friend, he immediately offered me some cold water. He asked to see my papers. I sat in front of his desk, watching his serious expression. He didn't say anything, just picked up his phone and dialed. I didn't know who he was calling and was getting anxious by the minute.

“Shalom Dov,” he said. I have Miriam here and she just gave me the paper with your release signature. You know that she is short two months of the actual day of release. I just wanted to make sure that it was okay with you,” he said.

I couldn't believe this call, as there was no reason for it. I started to sweat again when I saw him smile, bidding Dov goodbye. “I know that Dov isn't happy that you are leaving. I also know that he tried to talk you into taking an officer course, coming back to his office and staying on as a professional. He was disappointed that you turned it down. I will sign your release now.”

He got up from his desk, came over to my side and said, “May I hug you and give you a kiss because I will miss our friendship and miss seeing you when I come to see Dov.”

I answered in the affirmative. He hugged me, gave me a light kiss, shook my hand and wished me all the best in civilian life.

I smiled, thanked him and walked out. I almost ran to the gate, not believing that I was done with my service. I walked to the bus station, smiling the whole time.

The next day, I went to the office for a small celebration where I got a few books as a present. I thanked everyone and said, “I feel very lucky that I got to spend my two years in this position. It was interesting, exciting and challenging. I felt that I learned a lot and it gave me a solid base for my future in every facet of life. I hope that I would feel the same in later years looking back. You were all part of it in different capacities and I thank you all. Leitraot. (until we meet again).”

Dov drove me home, and we promised each other that we will keep in touch, which we did. I remember running up the stairs to our home and, when my mother opened the door, I yelled, jumping up and down and repeating, “I am finished with the army, and I can't believe it.”

Later that evening, I went out with my friends to celebrate. In the morning, when I woke up and didn't have to put on my uniform, I had a strange feeling of disbelief and some emptiness, which I couldn't understand. It took me a few days to get over it. For a few years, once in a while, I would dream that I was not able to get my early release.

When I accidentally ran into Dov in Tel Aviv and told him about my dreams, he laughed and said, “I should not have let you go early. I only had troubles with my secretaries after you. I should have tried harder to convince you to stay longer, but I knew that it was not fair, so I let you go.”

Looking back at the two years of service, I've realized throughout my life how much these experiences became part of me. I became independent, daring to take chances and confident. I always tried to achieve my goals and, if not always successful, at least I knew that I gave it my best. Some of the personal experiences that I mentioned led me to understand what life is all about and that it does not always work out as planned or as expected.



*Before I left for New York.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### Working in the The Foreign Office

As my two years of service in the army was coming to a close, I had to make decisions about my future. One evening, I sat down with my parents to tell them my plans. By this time, I knew that I was accepted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I told them that I decided to apply for a job at the Foreign Office, which eventually will give me the opportunity to travel out of the country. I also let them know that I would have to apply the minute I got my army release.

In addition to teaching myself to type in Hebrew and English, I knew that I had to meet people with connection to the Foreign Office. The first person I contacted was Israel, the friend who planted the idea in my head. He was now stationed at the Israeli Embassy in Rome. So I wrote him a letter, telling him of my intention and made sure to remind him that it was his suggestion.

I asked him for his assistance in making contacts. Within a very short time, I received an answer. He was happy that I listened to him and thought that I had a good chance to be accepted. He told me that his best friend in the Office was the head of personnel, and that he would talk to him and recommend me very highly. I was thrilled.

I called the Foreign Office and asked for an employment application. I received the forms, filled them out immediately and mailed them right back. The questions covered many aspects of my life that included schooling and social and cultural likes. Knowledge of languages was important and had to be listed. I felt some trepidation doing it. I knew that the more languages I could list, the more impressive my application would be. After thinking for a while, I listed English, German, Yiddish and Polish.

Except for having studied English in school, and having, on a few occasions, the opportunity to converse, I was not very proficient. I was able to understand and converse in Yiddish, a language I liked, but could not read or write in it. German and Polish, I could only understand. I did not think that I would ever be asked to deal with any languages other than English.

As my army service was the first and only place I worked at, the only recommendation I had was from my boss in the army. I mailed the forms, not sure that they were impressive enough. Impatiently I waited for an answer and was relieved to be asked to come to Jerusalem for an interview at the beginning of July.

That June, I was set to go out on the blind date that my friend Yossi arranged with Dr. Dov Schmorack of the Foreign Office. I couldn't believe my eyes when I opened the door. It was warm outside, but Dov was

wearing a suit, a long-sleeved white shirt with cufflinks and a tie. He had a nice face and a small mustache. He immediately extended his hand and said, "I am Dov Shmorack."

"I am Miriam. Please come in," I said.

We shook hands, as I showed him in with a big smile. To myself, I thought, "I can't believe what I see. A suit and tie in such warm weather. He must be a real stiff, someone I would never go out with except once." I knew that I should quickly change my attitude, as he might be a very important contact.

We went to the salon (living room) where my parents were seated, and I introduced him. I watched my father trying to hide a chuckle and saw my mother's face glowing. I knew I'd better be very nice to him, as he could be very helpful in getting me the position I sought.

We chatted with my parents for a few minutes, and he got very excited to find out that my parents came from Poland. He was born in Poland and came with his parents to Israel at a very young age. Some of the conversation was in Polish, but not for long. My parents let him know that they avoided speaking Polish and preferred to speak only Hebrew.

On our first date, he asked many questions about my work in the army, my hobbies and if I liked going to the theatre and to concerts. He also told me what the Office was about and he asked about my schooling. When I told him that I registered for classes in international relations and sociology at the University, he thought that was a good idea. Then he asked, "Why do you want to work in the Foreign Office?"

"I am interested in politics, but not only in Israel. I'd like to know more and experience other countries' cultures and politics. My most favorite subject in school was geography, and I spent a lot of time studying the different countries. My dream is to eventually go and see many of them. I thought the more interesting way to do it would be through this office, working in one of the embassies or consulates."

"This sounds interesting, but you need to know that it takes five years of work before you can be considered for a job outside Israel," he said.

"I have time, and I am ready to work for it," I answered.

"Do you know anyone at the Office?" he asked.

"Yes, I have a friend at the Rome embassy, and he thought that I was very suitable for the Office and suggested that I should apply."

He just smiled and never asked for my friend's name. He did a lot of talking, telling me about his job and the advantages of his work and his hopes for the future. His dream was to become a consul or ambassador and he was working towards it. I listened and didn't interrupt him. At that time, not always being too sure of myself, I would listen more than I would talk. I was more outgoing when I trusted and knew the person I was with.

I had a few dates with him, and he was a real European gentleman. He loved the theatre, concerts and ballets, all of which I enjoyed very much, too. He did not love the movies. Dating him was very different from dating someone from our group of friends, as they never went to these kinds of venues. That's why, in the past, it was my parents who accompanied me to these performances.

Dov was somewhat too serious and intellectual for my taste, and I knew that I would stop seeing him once I was accepted to the Foreign Office. I knew that it was not a very nice way of going about it, but I felt that this would be a most helpful recommendation.

On the first of July, I took a sherut (taxi service) to Jerusalem for my interview, wearing a light summer suit and high heels. I was somewhat nervous about my typing. I taught myself to type Hebrew and English the blind way, without looking at the typewriter keys, which was a requirement. Although I sat, day after day, for many hours, practicing, it worried me that I was still too slow. I told myself that I had to stop worrying, as it was too late to do anything about it. I knew that I could lose my cool and not be calm enough for the interview. I was happy that my appointment was early in the morning and gave myself a lot of time to make sure that I would not be late.

I arrived at the Office about 45 minutes too early, but did not go in. The Foreign Office occupied a large area of a one-story building connected by cement passes with beautiful bushes and flowers in between. I thought it was poor-looking for this type of place where diplomats and other dignitaries come to visit. I reasoned to

myself that because the country was only six years old, there was no time to put up a more impressive structure.

Fifteen minutes before my interview, I was directed to the personnel office. I knocked on the door and was told to come in. The woman who welcomed me was seated behind a large desk in front of a big window that faced a garden. In front of her desk, there was a small table that held two typewriters. The keys of both typewriters were covered completely. A girl was sitting in front of the typewriters, seemingly waiting for instructions.

“You must be Miriam Wachsberger. My name is Ahuva. Please sit down on one of the chairs and wait.” She was an older woman with a round face and glasses. She looked very stern and didn’t crack a smile. I tried to look outside the window behind her, as she was very intimidating.

Ahuva told the girl who sat at the typewriters to start typing. First she typed on the Hebrew typewriter and then on the English one. There was a large piece of paper with text on it, which she looked at and then started to type at a very fast speed. Within minutes, she moved to the other typewriter, typing at the same speed again. Watching this, I didn’t think I would have a chance to get the job. Compared to her, I typed at the speed of a turtle. I quickly had to calm myself down and get ready for my turn.

When she was done, the woman said, “Thank you. We will let you know.”

Once the door was closed, Ahuva signaled me to sit in front of the typewriters. As I sat down, I saw her open a file with my name on it. She looked over my application and asked me questions similar to those that Dov Shmorack had asked me. Then, she showed me what to type. First, I had to type printed English text on the English typewriter, and then I had to type printed Hebrew text on the Hebrew typewriter. I typed at a very slow pace and didn’t raise my eyes even once to look at Ahuva’s face. When I finished typing, I got up and gave her the pages I typed. She checked the typing without looking at me, even once. She thanked me and said they will let me know. It seemed to me that she was very unhappy at what she saw. I walked out very upset and figured that I’d better think of someone else who might be able to help me. My friend, Israel, at the embassy in Rome, gave me the name of his friend who was the head of the personnel department. He suggested that I should see him. He never mentioned anything about having to make an appointment. Being so upset, I decided to go see him right then. I went from one door to another until I saw the name Shmuel.

I knocked on the door and heard, “Come in.”

As I entered, he said, “You must be Miriam Wachsberger.”

“Yes, I am,” I answered, smiling, as he asked me to sit down.

“How did you know who I was?” I asked.

“Israel wrote me about you and described you. He thinks you would be very good for the Office and told me that it was his idea that you should apply for a job here.”

He asked me the same questions that I was asked before. Once I answered them, he said, “I also have a very good recommendation from Dr. Dov Shmorack. He has a very high position here and is very well respected, so that counts. Your boss from the army also sent in a great recommendation, saying that you can be trusted and that you are a good worker. I don’t have the file in front of me. I will get it at the end of the day and study it. We will get in touch with you, but I can tell you that your chances of getting the job with these recommendation are good.”

“Thank you,” I answered greatly relieved. I only hoped that my bad typing would not change his mind. I went home and told my mother about my day. I also told her that I was not sure if I got the job. She was always an optimist and told me that I will get it. My father felt the same.

I could hardly wait for the acceptance letter to arrive. I didn’t go anywhere near the typewriters at home, which I knew I should have. For two days, I was hardly home. Mostly, I spent my time during the day on the beach and in the evenings I went out. An acceptance letter arrived on the third day, welcoming me and telling me to show up for work on October 1st, at the end of the Jewish High Holidays. A day later, I received an acceptance letter from the Hebrew University notifying me that classes were starting in the third week of October.

I set up a date with Dov Schmorack after I received my acceptance to the Foreign Office. When he came to pick me up, in his suit and tie again, even though it was July, he had a great smile on his face. I realized

immediately that he already had the information about my acceptance. He told my parents how well I would do and that he was very happy for me.

We went to a small café and he wanted to know all the details about my day in Jerusalem. I thanked him for the recommendation and told him that I will start work on October 1, 1956. He already knew about that too and probably had my file, as he told me that I had two other great recommendations.

As time went by, and we went out on some wonderful dates, I could feel that he was getting to like me more and more. I knew that I had to cut off this relationship as soon as possible. I had a few more dates with him, as I didn't want him to think that I kept it going in order to get a recommendation from him, which I never asked for.

One evening, coming back home, I had to do it. In the car, in front of our building, I said, "Dov, I think we should stop seeing each other. You are a gentleman, you treated me nicely and you are a brilliant man, but it is not for me. I like you as a person and I have learned a lot from you. I am sorry. Thank you for everything you did for me, but it cannot be continued."

He looked at me, took my hand and with a serious expression on his face he said, "I had a feeling this was coming. I have a proposition to make. I do like you a lot. You have all the things that I am looking for in a woman. You are beautiful, smart and polite and behave like a lady. You come from a very nice family and it seems you were taught well. You are not like a typical Israeli woman. I would like to marry you. You will learn to love me. We can have a wonderful, interesting life together. You are the perfect woman to be an ambassador's wife, to meet diplomats from other countries and be a very gracious hostess. I am up for the job, but I cannot do it myself. I need a partner, and you would be perfect in this role." He stopped talking, just looked at me and waited.

I was absolutely shocked, as I never expected this. I was quiet for a few minutes before I could say anything. Then I pulled away my hand and said, "Thank you, but no. I will not do it, and you will have to find someone else. I am not ready to get married. When I do get married, I will do it for love, not for any other reason. Good night."

I stormed out of the car and ran up the stairs, hoping my parents were up. I opened the door and saw them in the living room. I sat on the couch mumbling, "I can't believe it, and you will not believe it either."

They both looked at me, and then my father went to the kitchen to get me a cold drink while I kept repeating the same sentence. I had the water and calmed down. I told them what happened and said, "I can't believe the offer. To me, it sounded like a business deal. I am not sure if it was insulting or if I just felt angry that he thought I would accept it and be elated to hear his proposal."

My father kept quiet and just smiled.

My mother, on the other hand, said, "Miriam, this was a marriage proposal and you should take it as a compliment. He is a very nice man with a great future, and you could have a beautiful life with him. I like him very much. Maybe you should think about it."

I couldn't believe what I heard and became angrier. "I can't imagine having any close relationship with him ever. As a matter of fact, in making this proposal, he was more calculated than I was, and I don't feel bad anymore."

The next morning, my father said to me, "You did the right thing and forget about it. Don't feel bad and go forward. Take care of all you have to do for your stay in Jerusalem. You don't have much time and you must find a place to live." We never had any more discussions about the subject, which made me very happy.

It was already the month of August, so I went to Jerusalem in search of an apartment. Nellie was also accepted at the University, so we knew that we would share a room. As she was not going to work while going to school, she was not in a rush to find a place to live and left it to me. So, I went by myself to look for an apartment.

When I arrived in Jerusalem, I went to the university building to see the listings for student apartments for rent. The university had two campuses. One building was in the center of the city. It was the Tara Santa building, which was owned by a church and was used for lectures only.

A new, large and modern campus with its own dormitories was just completed at Givat Ram. The new

campus could be reached by a fifteen-minute bus ride. There was a direct bus connection from one campus to the other. The new campus was out of the center of Jerusalem. Some classes were held at the old campus, whereas other classes were held at the new one. Many times, a student would have to go back and forth from one to the other in the same day. I wanted to get a room that was convenient for getting to both campuses, as well as the Foreign Office, which was located at the entrance to Jerusalem.

With a list of available rooms in hand and knowing how much I could afford to spend on rent, I started my search. It was very important for me to be in an apartment that had a heating system. Jerusalem gets very cold in the winter, to the point that it sometimes snows. I looked at many apartments, but none of them met this criterion. The apartments were mostly in old stone buildings and were very dark and depressing. It was especially depressing for me, as I was used to living in a modern, new building in Tel Aviv. The new buildings in Tel Aviv did not have a heating system, as it did not get that cold in the winter there. On cold days, we just used heaters and wore heavy sweaters and heavy woolen dresses and suits.

By the end of the search day, I was left with only one apartment on my list. I hoped that it would prove to be the right one, or I would have to come back another day and keep looking. That last apartment was in an area of Jerusalem called Rehavia. It was a nice, quiet old neighborhood of villas and small apartment buildings, shaded by big old trees and filled with beautiful gardens with bushes and flowers. When I arrived at the address, I was very happy to be standing in front of a new building, which was right across the street from the villa of Ben Gurion, the prime minister. I observed the many lights around the prime minister's residence and the guards, thinking that it would be safe and that coming home at night would not be a problem. I tried hard not to get my hopes up too high.

I climbed the three floors and rang the apartment bell. A smiling woman opened the door and I asked to see the room that was for rent. She got the key and opened the door next to her own apartment.

The furnished apartment I walked into was small but looked sufficient. As you entered, there was a small foyer with a small table and two chairs against the wall. Right behind it, within one room, were a very small kitchen and a bathroom. The apartment had two small bedrooms, one on each side of the small foyer. The landlady showed me the available room and told me that it was heated in the winter. There were two twin beds against each wall. Under a large window, there was a big desk with two small chairs. A small closet and one dresser to share was all the storage room available.

I inquired about the rent, and it was slightly higher than I was ready to spend. But after splitting it with Nellie, I figured I could manage it even with my very meager salary. I was determined not to take any money from my parents, as I was already 20 years old and wanted to be independent.

"I will take it," I said. "I would like to move in on October 1st, and my friend will come somewhat later, as she will not be working while attending the university. How much of a deposit would you like to have? I have it with me, as I must be sure that this room will be kept for me."

She hesitated a minute and then said, "There is a slight problem. Two male students occupy the other room. I think you should discuss it with your parents first. I will hold the room for you without a deposit until Sunday when you'll call me with the final decision."

"I don't have to discuss it or ask my parents' permission," I said. "I will tell them about it, but it is my decision. Please take my deposit, and I will move in a day before the first of October, which is when I start my job at the Foreign Office."

"Are you sure?" she asked looking at me, with a serious face.

"One hundred percent."

So she took my money and I thanked her and ran down the steps feeling on cloud nine.

I understood fully why she wanted me to discuss the situation, but I was not going to take a chance on losing this room. By the time I came home, my father was home from work. My parents wanted to know if I found a room.

"Let's sit down and I will tell you about my day," I said.

We went to the living room, and proceeded to describe every apartment that I saw that day and how

terrible all of them were. Finally, I came to the last one. I described the area, letting them know about Ben Gurion's villa and how secure that made it. I described the new building and everything about the apartment. I also told them that I left a one month deposit.

"Yoffi (wonderful)," they both said.

"Do you know who is in the second bedroom?" my father asked.

"Yes. Two male students," I said, looking straight at them.

"No way you are going to share an apartment with two guys. What would people say?" my mother screamed at me. "You will get a bad reputation. You have to get back your deposit and look for another room."

My father didn't say anything. He just looked at me.

"I don't care what people think. You have to trust me. I have a lot of freedom at home. I never had a curfew, I came home when I was ready. You trust me, and I love that. It is time for me to support myself, and you need to keep your trust in me. I told the landlady that it was my decision, as the start of an independent life. I am determined to completely support myself. Forget what people will say. People at times spread rumors that are not true."

They both listened and sat there in complete quiet for a couple of minutes.

Then my father said to my mother, "Karola, she is right. We always trusted her and we should continue. She wants to be independent, which I understand."

Looking at me, he added, "It will be difficult to live on that meager salary. Let us buy your clothes. You will not have any money left for that and you are a young woman who needs to be dressed well."

I agreed to this deal immediately and thanked them.

After my father's explanation, my mother looked at him and stood up. I didn't know what to expect. My mother walked towards me and said to my father, "Zigmund, I guess you are right. But I don't like this arrangement." She then kissed my head and said, "But I want you to be happy."

I thanked them both for understanding me. I immediately went to the candy store to use the phone to notify the landlady. When she answered, I said, "I just spoke to my parents and explained the situation, and they are fine with it. Can I get the key on the last day of September, so I can move in before my job starts on October 1st?"

"Of course. Miriam, you must have been very convincing for your parents to approve. I would never have let my daughter get away with such an arrangement." I said goodbye and hung up feeling greatly relieved. Nellie came over in the evening and I told her all about it.

She said, "I will give you my share of the rent, although I won't be moving in until later."

"Wait. I will try to find somebody else for that period of time," I answered.

I spread the word within our group of friends, and Vivian, who was two years older than I, was interested. She was starting a new job at the same time as me, but did not want to look for an apartment until she started to work.

I spent the months of August and September having a wonderful time, as all my worries were gone. I had some additional winter outfits made from extra heavy fabrics that were better suited for cold Jerusalem. It was a fun time running around with my mother, shopping for fabrics and going for fittings at the dressmaker's. My father also wanted to get involved and went with me for some fabric shopping. He always insisted on buying the most expensive fabrics, which I mostly liked. My parents also insisted that I get extra custom-made, high-heeled shoes, made to match with my new winter outfits. When I tried to object, they explained how important it was that I look professional at work.

During the week, when I had some free time, I went to the beach. On weekends, I went on picnics, to cocktail parties, dancing and to the movies. Nellie made a deal with her father, so that we had a car when we wanted to go to a beach outside the city. I also had some dates outside of our group of friends. Many times, I had arguments with Nellie about it, as the guys were not rich or very successful, but nice and intelligent. I called her a snob and explained that money was not everything.

The only thing that put a damper on my good mood that summer was when a fedayeen (Arab guerrilla fighter) from the Gaza Strip, which was under the control of Egypt since 1948, attacked a bus on the way to Eilat, in the middle of August. A few people were killed and some were injured. It was the second such attack on the same road. The first attack was in the spring when I was a senior in high school. A bus to Eilat was ambushed. In that attack, most of the bus passengers were killed. As a result, our senior class trip to Eilat was immediately canceled. We all waited for an immediate retaliation, but there was none. That was surprising, and the public was upset and unable to understand the delay.

My father left for a visit to America immediately after Yom Kippur. Before he left, he drove his jeep and left it with a farmer we knew in Yazur, a small village, just in case a war broke out. Whenever the army planned a large operation, they called up many reservists. As the army did not have enough cars for transportation, during wartime, most private cars were confiscated, and my father did not want that to happen to his jeep.

By the end of September, we all knew that a war was about to break out. As I was packing to leave for Jerusalem, my mother tried to talk me out of going. She was upset that my father was not home to help her out.

“I am leaving. It is the job I wanted and worked hard to get. If I don’t show up, I will lose it,” I said.

The day before my job started, I left for Jerusalem in a sherut with two large suitcases filled with clothing and linens. Luckily, I bought a ticket in advance, making sure that I would not be locked out. Many people who didn’t buy a ticket in advance, because of unusual heavy volume, could not leave until late in the day or on the next day. The car left on time, and we had no problems on the road.

Just about fifteen minutes before entering Jerusalem, soldiers stopped all cars and long lines formed. Every driver received instructions as to where to leave their cars once they returned to their residence. We all understood immediately what was to be expected, and not one of the eight people in the car uttered a word. One could cut the air with a knife, as tension was very high. My stomach turned, and I got fearful thinking that maybe my mother was right. Silently, I convinced myself that I was doing the right thing. I told myself that I would face the problem when it happened. I reminded myself that sometimes confiscating cars was just an exercise to check the readiness of the country in case of war.

The car dropped us off at the main sherut station and luckily I found a cab to drive me to the apartment, as my suitcases were very heavy. When I got there, I carried one suitcase at a time to the third floor. I rang the landlady’s bell. When she saw it was me, she picked up the key and opened the door to my apartment. She then handed me the key and wished me all the best.

Once the entrance door closed, a young man came out of the other room. “I am Yehudah and my roommate, who is at work, is named Gad.”

“I am Miriam,” I said, and we shook hands. “My roommate, Vivian, will be here in two days and will share the room with me until classes start at the university. Then, my best friend Nellie will move in.”

I went to my room to unpack. By the time I was done it was early evening, and I decided to go out for a light supper and explore the neighborhood. I had to find a bus station that I could use to go back and forth to work and also to classes at the university. As I was leaving the apartment, Yehudah came out of his room in his pajamas.

“Where are you going and when will you be back home?” he asked.

I couldn’t believe my ears, and I answered kind of angrily, “My parents never ask me when I will be home, and you want to know? I will be back when I am ready.”

“Okay. Just let me show you how to open the door, as sometimes it is difficult to do,” he said.

“Thank you. I know how to open doors,” I answered and left.

I came back around 10:00 p.m., and, to my surprise, I was not able to open the door. I jiggled and jiggled the key, to no avail. Before I knew it, Yehudah, to my embarrassment and relief, opened the door. I excused myself, thanked him, said good night and quickly entered my room and closed the door behind me.

A few minutes later I went to the bathroom to get ready for the night. When I was done and ready to come out, I could not open this door either. I tried again and again and finally decided that I will sleep in the bathtub. Suddenly there was a knock on the door and I heard Yehudah’s voice, “Let me help you.” He then

instructed me on what to do, and very quickly I was able to get out. Once more, I was very embarrassed and thanked him again. With a smile on his face, he bade me good night, and I went to my room. I could not believe how everything went so wrong, and I knew that I'd have to apologize to him again in the morning.

I left for the Office very early in the morning, as we started work at 8:00 a.m., and I did not want to be late. I arrived early and waited outside until about fifteen minutes before starting time. Then, I went into the personnel office to find out to which department I was assigned.

Ahuva was seated at her desk. We greeted each other, and she asked me to sit down. "We would like you to start at the filing department. As you know, many people were called to the reserves. There is no one left in the department, so the filing will be your responsibility. Once everyone is back, we will move you to another department."

I thanked her and left very disappointed. I hoped the filing would only be for a very short time. A person met me at the archives to show me how the filing system worked. After a half hour, he left me alone. For the first two days, I filed without reading any of the content. By the third day, I couldn't do it anymore and I started to read some correspondence that seemed interesting. For lunch, I went to the cafeteria and sat together with others at long tables and made conversation. After being on the job for a short while, I managed to make some contacts.

On October 29, 1956, a war with Egypt started. The Israeli army was asked by Britain and France to help them to regain control of the Suez Canal, as President Nasser of Egypt nationalized it, and the Americans were not ready to get involved. The canal is an important waterway from the Middle East to the Far East.

Meanwhile, in the short time that Vivian and I were living in the apartment, we became friendly with Yehudah and Gad. We decided that each few days we would alternate cleaning the bathroom, kitchen and foyer. We pulled our money together and bought food for breakfast and supper at a small makolet (grocery store) around the corner, which was very helpful.

A few days before the war started, the mood in Jerusalem became very tense. The Jordanian army had conquered the old city of Jerusalem during the War of Independence in 1948 and divided the city. Therefore, in case of war, it would be easy for Jordan to attack the Israeli part of Jerusalem. The heightened tension in the city led some people to panic. They hurried to stock their homes with food. Shelves in grocery stores and the markets were emptied out. Those who were in the reserves were called to join their units.

On the evening the war started, Yehudah came to the apartment in his uniform and said, "Miri, are you alone? Where is Vivian?"

"She went back home," I answered.

"You cannot stay alone in the apartment. An attack is expected tonight. Do you know anyone you could go to and spend the night in their apartment?" he asked.

That same day we were told in the Office that we should try to go back home and come back at the end of the war, as they had no way to take care of people whose home base was not in Jerusalem. There was a skeleton crew of people who lived in Jerusalem and could take care of emergencies. Also, in the worst case scenario, they could stay over in the Office.

I had a friend in the Office that I knew shared a villa with friends on the main street. I also remembered that they had a phone, as one of the guys was working with the American author James Michener on the book Exodus. I went to my landlady and used her telephone to call my friend. When my friend picked up, I explained the situation and asked if I could spend the night in their apartment. I was relieved when he answered positively. I packed a bag and walked over, while Yehudah went back to his unit.

When I arrived at the apartment, I was told that I could sleep in the living room. So, I put my bag there. As they were ready to have dinner, I went into the kitchen and joined the four guys who shared the apartment. One of them loved to cook and was just finishing the preparation of an Indian meal. He used a lot of curry that had a very strong smell and made me somewhat nauseous. I started to eat, but couldn't continue. I asked him what spices were in the curry, and I said that I might be allergic to one of them and did not want to take a chance. Luckily, he also made plain rice and an Israeli salad. Since that time, I do not eat Indian food, as it reminds me of the war.

We sat for a while talking and then went to sleep. As we bade each other *lilah tov* (good night), my friend asked me to lock my door to the living room. I was surprised to hear this from him and told him that I didn't think it was necessary, but he insisted. I laughed and locked my door.

In the morning, after having an early breakfast, I said that I would try to get a *sherut* to Tel Aviv. Moti, one of the guys, said he would like to go to Tel Aviv too, as he lived in Petach Tikva, which is not far from Tel Aviv. He thought it would be difficult to get transportation and volunteered to go and check it out. The station was a short walk from where I stayed, but it took him about forty-five minutes to come back. He was told at the station: "All the taxis are booked, and people without tickets or advanced reservations cannot go. All the seats are booked for the next three days." He tried two other stations, the second one being where a friend of his worked. He asked him for two tickets to Tel Aviv. He waited outside until his friend told him that he should come back at three in the afternoon, as he was able to reserve two seats for us.

I was very happy to hear that, as the tension in the city was very high. We went somewhat earlier, just to make sure that we would have our seats. We stood in line, and a worker called the names of the people who had a reservation. I was relieved when we got into our seats. As the car left, Moti told me that he might have a hard time getting transportation from Tel Aviv to his parents' home in Petach Tikva. I told him that he could stay at our home. When I got home, my mother was very happy to see Moti and me.

I said, "Moti is going to stay with us for the night, as it is too late to get a ride to his family home."

She looked at me and said, "This is fine, but your aunt Rachel is on the way here with your cousins. Your uncle was called to the reserves and we decided to stay together. He is welcome to stay and we will put a mattress on the floor."

I told Moti and it was fine with him, but I didn't think he'd be very comfortable. So I called Vivian from our neighbor's apartment. I told her about our trip from Jerusalem and asked her if Moti could stay with them. She immediately answered positively. I walked him to her home, about three blocks away. He couldn't get home for almost a week. They fell in love and, a few months later, got married.

The war went on for about a week (October 29 - November 5) and the Israeli army took over the Suez Canal. The British, French and Israelis were happy, as they were now guaranteed free passage through the canal. During the days, we were very busy listening to frequent reports on the radio. I mostly stayed home helping my mother and my aunt with chores. The news, in quiet times, was only broadcast in early morning, midday, early evening and late evening. During wars, the news was broadcast more often. The morning newspapers and late afternoon editions were sold out quickly.

A state of emergency and a blackout were declared. All windows in all buildings were covered in black fabrics, so no light could be seen in case of an air attack. There were no lit windows in stores, and lights on taxis and buses were covered in black paint. The streets were very quiet, as most buses and taxis were in army hands. Most people stayed indoors, as most cafes were closed.

One evening, I could not stay home anymore and asked my friend Tzvikah if he was willing to go to a movie. We decided to walk all the way to the north of the city to see the musical *Our Town*. My mother and his parents tried to talk us out of this idea, but they did not succeed. We told them that we would take a bus on the main street.

It was an adventure. When we came to the bus station, we realized that it will take a very long time to get a bus, so we decided to walk. It was difficult, as we could not see anything. In order to step off the sidewalk, we had to drag our feet slowly to feel the end of the sidewalk. We did the same, after coming to the other side of the street, feeling our way up to the sidewalk. It took us over an hour to walk to the movie theater, something that usually took about twenty minutes. The streets were deserted. Once in a while, a person or two could be seen. I guess we felt somewhat uncomfortable, but neither one of us wanted to suggest going back. Instead, we both started to laugh and didn't stop until we arrived at the movie theater. We bought our tickets and, when we went inside, saw that there were less than ten people in the seats.

The movie was fun. It had a lot of good music, singing and dancing. It was a great escape from real life. We were happy that we went, and walking back home we were now experts in negotiating the streets in the dark.

We came home after midnight, but it was an experience that we always talked about.

Classes at the university were postponed until after the war. Once the war was over, I went immediately back to Jerusalem to my job. I was back at filing and not too happy about it. I decided to wait for a while before asking if I could be transferred to another department. Things were proceeding slowly, and it took over a month before everyone was back to work.

Just before I went back to Jerusalem, Nellie told me that her father would not let her move in with me because of the two guys who were sharing the apartment. She told me that she and her father were going to look for another apartment and hoped that I'd move in with her when they found one. I explained that I was living on a strict budget. She did not want to be the one to tell that to her father and asked me to tell him, instead.

They came to Jerusalem and stayed at the King David Hotel, the most expensive hotel in the country, at that time. The night before they were going to look, I was invited to have dinner with them at the hotel. Nellie's father asked me a lot of questions about work. At last, he asked me about the apartment, which I described in details. I also mentioned that my roommates, Yehudah and Gad, and I were getting along very well together. We shared expenses and cleaning chores.

Only then, he looked at me and said, "I will not allow Nellie to stay there. I am here to look for another place and hope that you will move in with her. I don't even like to think about what people will say and gossip about girls sharing an apartment with two guys. It is not right."

At this point, Nellie kicked me under the table. I looked straight at him and with a sharp voice said, "Mr. Adler, you need to understand that I live on a very tight budget. I do not make a lot of money at my job. I do not depend on my parents' help, and I live according to my means."

"I am very surprised that your parents are not against it," he said. "They are well off. Aren't they worried about your reputation?"

"No, they are not. I feel very strongly that at twenty years old, after serving in the army, I should support myself. They also trust me. It took a while to convince them, especially my mother. I basically do not care what people say. I only agreed to accept my parents' help to buy my clothes, as there is not even a penny left in my budget for that. You should know that I would not pay even one extra penny more for rent." I could see him getting red in the face, as I said all this in a very challenging voice. I didn't care, as I knew he couldn't stand me, and it was mutual. I walked home fuming, but feeling good about myself.

The next day, I had an appointment with them to meet for dinner at the first Chinese restaurant in Israel. It was a very expensive restaurant, but very ornately beautiful, and the food was great. It was my first introduction to Chinese food. Nellie told me that they ran around all day looking for an apartment and were getting frustrated with what they saw. Finally, by late afternoon, they found a room, a few blocks from where I lived in Rehavia. It was on the first floor of a nice old building, and it had heat. It was part of a large apartment that was owned by an elderly German widow. She rented two of the three bedrooms to women only. There was a kitchen and one bathroom to be shared by all.

"What is the rent?" I asked. Her father told me. It turned out to be almost double what I was paying. That made me upset, so I angrily said, "Sorry Mr. Adler. I made it very clear what I could afford, but it seems that you did not take it into consideration. Sorry, but I am not moving in with Nellie."

Angry looks were exchanged between Nellie and her father. Finally, he said, "Okay. You will pay what you can afford, and I will pay the balance. I want you to move in with Nellie, as I don't want to break your friendship and, if you do move in, it will make me feel better."

I had a feeling that he thought that I would be ready to change my mind about the payment in order to live with Nellie. As a matter of fact, after a few months, he came to Jerusalem and, while we were all having lunch, complained to me that Nellie was spending too much money, especially on jewelry. When he asked if I do the same thing, I said, "I don't have the money for any extras. If you would allow Nellie to work, which she would love, she would know what it means to earn money and live accordingly."

He got all red in the face and dropped the subject immediately. Nellie turned her head, so her father would not see that she liked my reply. She was very happy and kicked me under the table.

When I came home that night, I told my roommate, Vivian, that I'd be moving out to share a room with Nellie. She was thrilled that she would be able to stay in the apartment. She immediately found another student to share the room with her. A few days later, I packed my suitcases for the move. Yehudah offered to help. I accepted his offer, as the suitcases were very heavy. We walked over to my new quarters. When I rang the bell, Mrs. Yacobovitz, the landlady, opened the door. She was a short, petite woman who had a heavy German accent. She welcomed me while looking at Yehudah with a questioning expression, wondering who he was. At that moment, it seemed to me embarrassing to introduce him just as a friend. I did not want to explain and tell her that he was a colleague.

Instead, I said, "This is Yehudah, my brother," and I saw her smile.

We entered into a large dark foyer at the center of the apartment. There were two large bedrooms on the left side and one bedroom, ours, on the right side. The kitchen and bathroom were across from each other and were spacious too. The entire apartment was very dark because of very old, large trees outside in the back yard. They gave a lot of shade and kept the apartment cool. The landlady's bedroom was in between the rented rooms. The other bedroom was rented too. With pride, Mrs. Yacobovitz told us that the other tenant was Dahlia Kenneth, the daughter of a Supreme Court judge, also from Tel Aviv. She asked if I knew her, and I answered that I did by sight only.

Once my newly-adopted brother left, the landlady knocked on my door and said, "I would like to give you some instructions. We all share the kitchen and the bathroom, so there are some rules. Since you'll be using my dishes and utensils, you must make sure to leave everything very clean and in its right place after usage. Your shower or bath will have to be short. I do have hot water every day, but not much. Also, Jerusalem's water is in short supply at all times, not like in Tel Aviv. Therefore, water must be conserved at all times. When you brush your teeth, after the first rinse, while you are brushing, you must make sure that the water is shut. It is the same situation whenever you need to use water, it should never run without a reason." She continued, "You can have friends, boys and girls visiting you, but no parties. By 11:00 p.m., all visitors need to be out of the apartment. When you come home late, you must make sure that you are very quiet."

I listened and agreed with her. It sounded almost like army rules, but they made sense. Until today, the sound of running water that's not being used is annoying to me, and I shut it off immediately.

I realized then that telling her that Yehudah was my brother was the right move. I asked her permission for Yehudah to come in anytime and stay in our room for as long as he needed, while we were away. I explained that the new campus and dormitories at the Hebrew University in Givat Ram were not completed yet. Therefore, some lectures were given in the new campus, which was a bus ride from our apartment, whereas others were given in a building two blocks away from the apartment. Yehudah was fortunate to get a room at one of the completed dorms, where the rent was much less than any place in the city. Because of this, many of his lectures were divided between the two campuses. She had no problem with that and gave me an extra key, which worked out very well for him.

The next day, Nellie moved in and, by the time I came back from work, her father was gone, which I was very happy about. The landlady gave her the same instructions that she gave me. Nellie and I got along very well. We had very different hours, as she only went to the university. I had to leave for work early, while she slept late. I laid out my clothes the night before and got dressed without opening the light, as I did not want to wake her up, although she said that I should open the light. She asked me how I felt about this situation. I made it very clear to her that I didn't mind at all, as I handled my life the way I wanted.

We shared a large closet that covered an entire wall. We also used to exchange clothes, but we checked with each other the night before about which outfit we could borrow. We never saw each other until early evening when we would go out together - to have supper or to a Maccabi basketball game, as my friend Matti, who was on the team, would give us free tickets.

Nellie left Jerusalem early Thursday afternoons after her classes for the week ended, while I went back home on Fridays after work.

Once in a rare while, we met for a late lunch at the "Shemesh" restaurant, which I frequented every day.

This restaurant was the most popular in Jerusalem. It was very small, about 20 tables in a narrow and deep space. It was known for having the best Middle Eastern food. It was especially popular with Knesset members, as it was a block away from their offices.

Yechezkel and Margalit, husband and wife, were the restaurant owners. Margalit was in the kitchen cooking, and Yechezkel was in the front, welcoming everyone with his wonderful smile. Yechezkel was a smart businessman and always came up with new original ideas for improving service. The most appreciated idea was having Knesset members receive phone calls while they were dining. Once, a phone call came in, he would bring the phone to the table where the person was seated. No other restaurant had this service.

I loved the food and the atmosphere and ate there every day after work. Most of the times, I came by myself. It was usually at a slow time for the restaurant, after most diners had already left to go back to work. I never ordered any dessert. I just ate one of the appetizers and a main dish, as it was pretty expensive.

One day, Yechezkel joined me. He asked me many questions about myself. He was so charming and warm that I did not mind answering him. We developed a nice friendship. Some time after that, while we were having one of our daily conversations, he said, "I notice that you never order any dessert. Is it because you don't like any, or you are not allowed to eat sweets?"

"Oh, no. It is not within my budget. I don't like any of the other restaurants, which are cheaper, and I would rather come here and skip desert," I answered.

He excused himself, got up and returned with dessert. At the same time, he also introduced me to his wife, Margalit, and told her what I said.

"This is on me," he said. I told him that was not necessary, but he insisted, and his wife agreed with him. Most of the times, he would join me at the table and we had nice conversations. Many times, his wife joined us too, and they felt like family.

A week after Nellie and I moved into the apartment, Dahlia moved in. The landlady introduced us and then told Dahlia the rules of the house. She was a beautiful girl and had many dates. Many times, she would bring a date to her room. She did not work either, but Nellie did not like her, so they hardly spoke to each other. Because of my hours, I rarely saw her.

One day, I was called to the security office at work. I could not understand why I was called and got somewhat nervous. When I arrived and gave my name to the secretary, she showed me into the head of security's office. She left, and he asked me to sit down.

"Do you know why you are here?" He asked, looking straight at me. I told him I had no idea. "There is a problem with Dahlia Kenneth, the girl who shares the apartment with you," he said. I could not figure out what was wrong. "Are you aware that, at times, she brings dates to her room, mostly in the evenings?" he asked.

"Yes, I am. What does it have to do with me? I never speak to any of them," I answered. At this point my stomach was getting tighter by the minute.

"She mostly goes out with United Nations employees. This is not a good thing for you. You are working at this office and are exposed to information that should not be shared with anyone," he continued very seriously.

"I do not. I never speak to them, or even greet them. As a matter of fact, I hardly speak to Dahlia. I don't discuss my work with my roommate Nellie either, or anyone else," I answered.

"Yes, I do believe you. You had wonderful recommendations from your boss and others in the army, and I am very trustful of you. But, we cannot take a chance."

"So what am I to do?" I asked.

"Very simple. You must speak to Dahlia immediately. Tell her that she cannot invite any United Nations employee to her room. If she does not agree, you will lose your job."

I could not believe my ears, but I also felt relieved knowing that I could still keep my job. "I will take care of it immediately," I answered.

He bade me goodbye. I quickly got up and left. I was shaking all the way back to my office. As soon as I got there, I called my South African friend and asked him to meet me for lunch. When we met, I told him about my morning and he suggested I take care of it immediately, as it was very serious. I wasn't too hungry, but he

ordered me a sandwich and stayed around until I finished.

That evening, I couldn't wait until Dahlia got back to her room. Luckily, she came in early in the evening. I took a deep breath and knocked on her door. She was very surprised to see me. "I have to talk to you about a very important and serious matter," I said. She just looked at me and didn't say a word. So, I continued, "As you know, I am working at the Foreign Office in order to support myself. Today, I was called to security and was ordered to let you know immediately that you have to move out or stop entertaining United Nations soldiers in your room. Because I am exposed to high security information, it is not a good situation for me. I was given two days to speak to you and remedy the situation. Otherwise, I will have to move out, which I have no intention of doing. They were surprised to find out that a daughter of a Supreme Court judge is involved with them. They did not think your father would be happy to hear about this." The last detail I added on my own in order to make my statement very strong. I stopped talking and looked directly into her eyes.

All she said was: "I will not invite them here anymore. I understand."

I thanked her and went back to my room, where Nellie was waiting for me. I fell on my bed, breathing in relief. The next day, first thing in the morning, I went to security and told them that she understands and it will not happen anymore. I did find out quickly, through mutual friends, that she stopped associating with the United Nations soldiers, as she was afraid that her father would find out. When I heard about it, I was happy that I thought of mentioning her father.

Two months after the war ended, I decided it was time to make a move to another department. I called the personnel department and asked for an appointment, which was granted. I found myself again in front of Ahuva.

"Why are you here?" she asked.

"I started working here," I said, "when people in the reserves were called into active duty because of the war. I was told that I would start in filing and remain there until everyone was back at his or her job. By now, it is two months after the war, and everyone is back. I would like to be transferred, as I was promised. I did not apply to the Foreign Office just to stay in filing."

When I finished, she just looked at me kind of surprised. All she said was: "Let me see what I can do and I will let you know."

Two days later I was transferred to the Information department. The job involved typing in Hebrew and English. Their main objective was to promote the State of Israel through newspapers, magazines, lectures, seminars and all other ways. There were two other women typists who were excellent at what they did and very fast. My typing, in comparison, was terrible. I asked them to teach me how to set my pages, and they were helpful. I thought they were shocked to see how slow I was, as they needed a fast typist to reduce some of their load.

One day, I was told to go to the Eastern European department immediately and see the head of the department. I hoped that it might be an interview that would result in a transfer. When I arrived, a secretary led me to the office of the head of the Eastern European department who asked me to sit down.

He said to me, "I was looking for a person who speaks Polish. I was told that, on your application for the job, you stated Polish as one of the languages that you know. I have here an important document written in Polish that needs translation into Hebrew."

I almost fell off my chair when I heard that. I could understand some conversation, listening to my parents speaking when they did not want me to understand them. I had to think quickly about how to handle this problem. I decided to tell him the truth.

"You know that you lied on your application," he said.

"Yes, that is correct," I admitted. "But, I have a solution. My uncle has a sister here, who was a professor at a university in Poland. She has a good knowledge of Hebrew, and she could translate this document better than I would ever be able to. If you agree, I could ask her if she would like to earn some extra money. But, I must warn you that she is somewhat of an eccentric and might be difficult to work with."

"See what you can do and let her come here. Of course, she would get paid, as there is no one in the

Office who speaks Polish. If it would be in Russian, I could translate it. I hope to hear from you soon and that you have learned a lesson.”

With my face burning from embarrassment and fear that he would tell personnel about it, I left his office. When I went home on Friday, I immediately went to see my uncle Morty and asked him to speak to his sister Zoshka. I told him that I must see her on Shabbat and speak to her.

When I did, I explained what I needed her to do. I also told her that it might be the start of a very nice job and, of course, she would be paid for her work. I asked her to come to Jerusalem on Monday morning for an interview. Luckily, she agreed. I told her how to get to the Office and at what time. I was relieved and hoped that it would work out.

On Sunday morning, I told the head of the Eastern European department that the translator would be there on Monday morning. He was happy. When she arrived, on Monday, I met her and accompanied her to the department. Once I introduced her, I left. I never heard from her again, but my uncle told me that she accepted the job.

After a few weeks I was called again to see the head of the department. “Did you speak to Zoshka?” he asked.

“Not since she came here the first time,” I answered.

“You were right. She is brilliant and a great translator. I gave her a few jobs, but she drove me crazy. She was very irrational, and most of the time she could not deliver the work on time, so I could not rely on her. I finally let her go,” he said.

“Sorry about it. I did warn you,” I said and got up to leave.

“Wait a minute. I would like to take you out for dinner as a thank you.”

I was surprised, but refused his invite. “I can have lunch with you in the office only,” I said. “I will not have dinner.”

He wanted to know my reason.

“I know you are married and have a family. I do not go out with married men. I followed this decision through my army service too.”

He tried again to invite me, but I was consistent. A few times, when I went to the center of the city, between work and school, I saw him across the street. He was stalking me. It made me very uncomfortable. At one point, I crossed the street and faced him.

He smiled and said, “Did you change your mind? I see, we are not too far from the Shemesh restaurant, which seems to be your favorite. I know you go there a lot. How about coming with me now?”

“I thought you were following me, but I was not sure. Now I am sure. You have to stop it. If you do not, I will call your wife and tell her all about it.” He looked at me in disbelief. So, I repeated, “I will call your wife.” Then I walked away. I never saw him again.

At about the same time, I was transferred to the department of International Relations. I guess they could not stand my bad typing in the Information department. I was very happy in my new position. It entailed different responsibilities than what I experienced before: The main one was to research the different countries and their ties to Israel. I also had to deal with diplomatic mail that went out twice a week. This was a correspondence between our department and the embassies and consulates. The letters were hand-written and had to be typed and put in a diplomatic mail bag on time for pickup. It was usually a stressful day. Most of the time, there were last minute additions, and I and the other woman had to work quickly to make sure that the mail went out. The problem was that some of the handwriting was so bad that it took a long time to figure it out.

Most of the men in the department tried to be considerate and finish their correspondence in time. There was one guy who was South African and was considered a genius. He, however, had the worst small handwriting and always had to add one or more letters at the last minute. We asked him to consider the time limit, but all he did was give us a dirty look.

We were also responsible for making all the arrangements for welcoming heads of state. This involved a lot of work and, at times, extra hours at the office. The most memorable time was when we were expecting

Gandhi's sister Indira, who after his death became the president of India. We worked for weeks getting everything set on top of the routine work. The day before her arrival, we were in the office until two in the morning. When we left in cabs ordered by the office, we were told to be back at six in the morning and to make sure that we were dressed well. We were all exhausted but excited at the same time.

When we arrived the next morning, we were told that the trip was canceled. We were all very disappointed. No special reason was given for the cancellation, and all our hard work went to waste. It was a very important visit for Israel and very prestigious. Strengthening relations with India meant opening the door to other Asian countries.

This department had wonderful, smart and learned men who came to Israel from different countries. For them, it was the perfect workplace. It was also wonderful for me, as everyone was very friendly, and we all knew and learned the ins and outs of diplomacy. The head of the department knew everyone who worked there. He insisted that everyone should be aware of what was going on, no matter the position they had. He eventually became the head of the Israeli delegation to the United Nations. One interesting thing that I learned in this department was that what the public knows, on many occasions, is not what is really happening behind the scenes.

I became friendly with two men in our department. They were both married with children. At times, I had lunch with both of them and, at other times, with only one. We ate in the office cafeteria. They told me about their families, but I mostly had questions for them about the department and subjects that I was not clear about. Chaim immigrated to Israel from Egypt with his wife and two children. He came from a very large wealthy family. He was born and educated in private schools and university where he mastered English and French. He lived in a very beautiful home in the center of Cairo, and his family was very active in the Jewish community. Once Nasser came into power in Egypt, after deposing King Farouk in a military coup, Chaim thought it was time to leave and move to Israel. He begged his family to join him, as he thought Egypt was no longer a safe place for Jews, but they refused. He packed up his own family and moved. He did not have much money, as he was in the family business and his family would not help him, as they were angry with him for leaving. He needed a job, so he applied to the Foreign Office and was immediately accepted. He was a big asset, as he was fluent in Arabic, French, and English. He improved his Hebrew while working. He always worried about members of his family who stayed behind. When they finally realized that they made a mistake not leaving early on, they were stuck in Cairo.

My other friend was a South African who was also married and had two children. He immigrated to Israel for the same reason that Chaim left Egypt. He had a Master's degree in international relations, and when he applied for a job at the Foreign Office, he was accepted immediately. He worked very hard on improving his Hebrew knowledge. He conversed well, but had a hard time writing. At times, after a quick lunch, I would help him with his ulpan (a school for the intensive study of Hebrew) homework. He was the one I always went to for advice. And he would give me a thorough explanation of subjects I was not too familiar with.

When I couldn't have lunch with either one of my friends, I ate by myself. Very rarely did I go out with the other secretaries, who were older than me and with whom I had little in common. I didn't make any other friends, as I was busy running from work to the university, and on the weekends I always went back home.

Through that year, I stayed only for two weekends in Jerusalem. One weekend, I promised a friend from the office, who I could not refuse anymore, to go with him to a Friday night party, so I stayed. He wanted to prove to me that Jerusalem on the weekend was not terrible. I did have a nice time, but I told him that I still preferred being in Tel Aviv.

The second weekend, I stayed to study with my friend Yehudah for a final test in a class that we shared. I couldn't see myself studying day and night, which I knew he could. I went Friday, after work, and bought tickets for a late Saturday night movie to see *High Society* with Grace Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. It took hard work on my part to convince my friend to join me. He was ready to keep studying non-stop. He finally relented. In spite of himself, he admitted that it was a good idea, as he liked the movie. Of course, he received a much higher mark on the test than I did.

One weekend in Tel Aviv, I went to a party. While circling around and meeting people, I met a guy who came from Jerusalem. We started to talk and he wanted to know what I do in Jerusalem. I told him that I worked in the Foreign Office and that I liked the department I was at. We kept talking, and he asked me many questions about my army service. I told him as much as I was able to.

He suddenly said to me, "Would you be interested in changing jobs? I know you get paid very little and work six days a week. There is an opening in the Knesset for a secretary to a very important man. The salary is more than double what you get now and you only have to work from Monday to Thursday midday."

"It sounds very interesting and tempting," I answered. "Who is he?"

"Akiva Govrin, the head of the Labor party and Ben Gurion's right-hand man." I was surprised and quiet for a moment. Akiva Govrin was very famous in the country and known to have a great influence on Ben Gurion, the prime minister, and on the running of the government. "I think you will have a great chance to get the position, as I feel you have the right background and are also very presentable in looks and manners. So, should I set up an interview with him for the coming week?"

"Beseder (Okay). You will have to set it up in the middle to late afternoon, after my Office hours. I am not going to tell anyone, and I would ask you to keep it just between us," I answered.

On Monday, I was told that an appointment was set up for Thursday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. of that week. It was perfect timing, as Nellie left for home on Thursday morning, and it would be easier not to face her after the interview, as I decided not to share it and knew that I would be tempted to do so.

That day in the office seemed very long, but it finally ended. I got myself a sandwich before my interview. When I entered the building, the guard found my name on the security list and directed me towards the right office.

I knocked on the door and heard a forceful voice telling me to enter. Behind a large desk, I recognized Akiva Govrin, whose picture was often in the newspapers. I approached his desk, extending my hand while giving him my name. We shook hands, and he asked me to sit down.

He was a big man; tall with a large frame. He had a round face, large eyes and was bald. He exuded strength and authority. Right off, he started to describe the secretarial position. It basically involved handling reports, setting up meeting schedules and social appointments and doing anything else that came up. The most important aspect of the job that was stressed was secrecy outside the office. He then started to ask many questions about my army responsibilities, my family life and my social life. Next, he wanted to know my feelings about the Labor party. My stomach turned, as I knew it was very important that I come up with the right answer. It was a complete opposite of the opinions and idealism that I grew up with. I felt that he liked me, as I realized that if he would not have, the meeting would have ended in ten minutes.

So, I calmed myself down quickly and told him how important the Labor party was; their ideals and their standing up for the workers. I looked straight at him and could tell that he was happy to hear what I had to say.

When I finished, Akiva Govrin stood up, extended his hand to me and said, "You'll hear from me shortly."

"Thank you. Shalom," I answered and walked out of the office.

On Friday, I couldn't wait to get home and tell my parents. They were the only ones I decided to tell about my interview. There was no way that I would not share it with them. I waited until my father came home and asked them both to come to the living room. We all entered, and I shut the living room door as they sat down. They looked at me surprised when I shut the doors.

"I need to tell you something, but I don't want anyone else to know about it," I said. Then I told them everything about my interview with Akiva Govrin. "I know I am getting the job. I could feel that he liked me. If he hadn't, I would have been out of his office in ten minutes, and he kept me there for over an hour."

My parents were very quiet. Then, my father looked at me with a smile and said, "Miriam, You are very naïve. You will never get this job."

I got very angry with him and in a loud voice said, "Why are you saying this? You were not in the room. I was and could see how well it was going."

“You are really very naïve,” said my father again. “I am surprised at you. Don’t you think that they are going to check into our family background to see if we are members of the Labor party? And, what are they going to find? They will find that we are not members of Labor, but of the right wing opposition party, Herut (Freedom), and that we have been members of Herut since we came to this country.

“This job requires secrecy, as all matters, good and dirty, end up in this office. Akiva Govrin is the head of the Labor party and knows and runs everything. Get the idea out of your head. Whatever you told him about your beliefs and support of the Labor party will never be believed now, and the job will not be yours.”

I was so upset to hear what he said, although deep down I knew that my father was right. At the interview, for a fleeting moment, I worried about it, before I started to talk about my belief in Labor. But I was determined to give it a chance. This job sounded very exciting and wonderful on all levels.” Abba, I hope you are wrong,” I said and walked out.

I had a great time on Friday night and on Shabbat, but I remained somewhat anxious. I did not tell anyone about the interview. Sunday morning, I was at my desk at the Office, at 8:00 a.m., ready to start working. My phone rang and, when I picked it up, all I heard on the other side were curses in Hebrew and Arabic. I tried to find out who it was, but could not get an answer.

Suddenly, I heard an angry voice on the other side saying, “You embarrassed me to no end. You never told me that your parents are members of Herut, not Labor.”

“You never asked. I don’t believe in everything my parents do and I am not a Herut member. I am old enough to have my own opinions and to decide what party to believe in,” I answered.

With this, I heard another Arabic curse, and the phone was slammed down. That afternoon, I called my parents and told them about it. I never told anyone else. Except, many years later, I met Dudi David Govrin in Israel, the man who married my dearest friend Nitza. When I saw him, he reminded me of Akiva Govrin. I immediately asked if he was Akiva’s son and, of course, that’s who he turned out to be. It was the first time I told anyone, except my parents, about that interview. Since then, I have told this story many times, as I was urged to do so by Dudi, Akiva’s son, who has also become one of our dearest friends.

Jerusalem, at the time, was a very quiet city compared to lively Tel Aviv. The streets in the evenings were deserted. Jerusalem’s habitants kept to themselves, as they felt superior and more intelligent than anyone else, especially people from Tel Aviv. It was too cold and quiet for my taste. I shared my feelings with my friends in the Office. They told me that it took them a while to make friends, and that most of them came to live in Jerusalem with their families because of work.

After being in the International Relations department for a few months, and improving my typing, I was called to the office of the head of the Personnel department. It was a surprise, and I couldn’t figure out the reason. When I walked in, my old acquaintance, Shmuel, greeted me with a smile, so I was somewhat relieved. He asked me if I was happy in my department, and I told him that I was.

“I would like to move you to another department,” he said. I just looked at him and didn’t say a word. “It is the Department of Arab Relations. The only department dealing with Arab problems and contacts. It is a small department, only four people. The secretary left suddenly because of illness. We have a designated secretary who is working in one of our consulates and will be back in the office in about three months to resume her job. I thought of you and, checking with the head of your current department, got a wonderful report. I am offering you this interim position. I think you would enjoy it very much. It is the most secretive department and, when I called your army boss, he thought that it would work very well from all angles, including security. Do you accept? I need the answer now.”

“Yes I will,” I said.

“I am very happy. You start tomorrow morning.”

He gave me all the information I needed. I went back to my office to tell my boss, but he already knew. I had lunch with my two friends and told them about the transfer. They told me that I would love my new job and assured me that we would keep having lunch together.

The next morning, I came in earlier than usual and found my new boss already in his office. I introduced

myself and, after he asked me a few questions, three men who also worked in the department came over, and I was introduced to them. As the department secretary, I had my own office and two phones on my desk, same as the others. It was a nice large office with large windows overlooking the gardens. I was impressed and felt very good. I was given a detailed explanation of my duties. Afterwards, I had separate meetings with each of the other people who worked in the department. They told me their positions, their area of expertise and my connection to them. I found it all very exciting. Everyone told me that I should not be embarrassed to ask questions when in doubt. It was a peculiar situation, as the person whose position I was taking was not there to explain the details of my job. I found the three guys very warm and welcoming, which calmed me completely. I met my two friends for lunch and told them that I was happy to be a part of such a fascinating department. Although some of the time it was nerve-wracking and a lot more work than I did in the other departments, I loved it.

One weekend in April of that year, when I was in my room, my father came in and told me that he needed to speak to me. He sat next to me, on my bed, and said, "I want us all to immigrate to America. I do not want Isaac and Chaim to go to the army and fight. Isaac will have to register next year, on his 16th birthday, so we need to get out before then. (In those years, once one registered at 16, one could not leave the country until after finishing the service. These restrictions were dropped years ago.)

"I would like you to leave first. You had a high security job in the army and now have one in the Foreign Office. I am afraid that once I file for visas, and you are still here, the government might not let you out for security reasons. They would not like to see two boys leaving, especially one who is due to register next year." I kept very quiet, not believing my ears, as he continued.

"You will not have a problem getting a student visa, once you are accepted by a college in New York. I mention New York, as you can stay with your aunts and uncles and go to New York University. I spoke to them, and they will be very happy to have you. I stayed with them, and they were wonderful. Your uncle Joe, will sign an affidavit that he will be responsible for you financially, which is the American law. You will not be able to work on a student visa. I will deposit money for you, so you will not have a problem. I also invested money with your uncle Pinek Albirt in a rooming house in Harlem, so that we could have an income when we come. What do you think?"

Very quickly I answered, "Yes I will go. I do have mixed feelings, only because I now love my job in the Foreign Office, but I would have to move to another department when the permanent secretary returns. You also know that I joined the Foreign Office figuring that this will be the way to travel outside of the country after you opposed my joining El Al."

I could see the relief on his face. He gave me a hug and kissed me. He asked me to wait, as he had some more to tell me. He left my room and came back with forms in his hands. "These are the application forms to apply to NYU and a list of all the requirements you need to supply. My friend, the travel agent, will mail it for us, as he deals with agents in America, so the government will not get suspicious, as they would if I sent such a heavy envelope. Once you get accepted, he will make an appointment for you at the American Embassy to apply for a visa. He will also help you with all the copies you will need. Meanwhile, you will keep working and come home only on Shabbat, as you have been doing."

On the Friday following the conversation with my father, I met the travel agent at his office and he helped me fill out the NYU application forms. I gave him my matriculation report from Herzliya High School, a report from Seminar Levinski for Teachers certifying me as a teacher, as well as a note from the Hebrew University to the effect that I spent one year of study in sociology and international relations. I also had a recommendation from my army boss, as I knew that it would be impressive and another one from one of my teachers.

A week later, the application was mailed. At the end of March, I received an acceptance letter from NYU. I received 4 credits for my high school education in Israel. As a requirement, I would have to take three classes of English for Foreigners in the first semester, every day. The sociology program would start in the spring semester. With the acceptance letter and my uncle's affidavit in hand, we made an appointment for an interview at the American Embassy in order to get a student visa. It was granted, and I took a day off from work.

Before I went to the embassy, my travel agent advised me to keep calm and watch what I say. He

explained that many times the interviewers could get insulting, and if not satisfied with an answer, they would deny the visa.

I went to the appointment with all the necessary information. After a short wait, my name was called and I was shown into an office for my interview. A very tall, husky man, sitting behind a very large desk, greeted me, asked me to sit and to hand over my papers. He went through them one by one.

When he was finished looking at them, he said, "Why do you want to go to America, when you have a very good university right here in Jerusalem where you are in the middle of the first year?"

"I would like to study juvenile delinquency, which is part of sociology, and they do not give these courses here," I answered.

"I see you have two brothers. Are they juvenile delinquents? And are they, or were they ever, in jail?" He asked.

I thought it was very insulting but all I said calmly was "No."

Immediately following this he said, "Are you going to work in America? How are you going to support yourself?"

I knew that this was a trap that he was setting up for me. All I had to do was give the wrong answer, and he would deny my visa. So I said, "I do not have to work. My parents will pay for my studies and living expenses. I will stay with my aunt and uncle, so I will not have to pay rent. I know that one cannot work under a student visa."

"What are you going to do with the education once you are finished?" he asked.

"I will come back to Israel and work," I said.

"This is all I ever hear from you girls. But, most of you do not come back. You meet an American boy, get married, stay in America and our girls lose many boys to you."

I could not believe my ears. I kept very quiet for a moment, and then I said, "I will be back. My parents and brothers are here and I cannot live without my family."

He looked at me and with a smile said, "I am sorry that I was rough on you, but I do not like to give visas to you Israeli girls." I got very nervous not knowing what he was going to say next. He continued, "I am giving you the visa and hope that I am wrong in my prediction."

I got up and thanked him and quickly left. I practically ran to the travel agent's office that was four blocks away. I burst into his office, with tears rolling down my face, yelling: "I am getting my visa."

I told him all about the interview. I thanked him for warning me, as I was ready to explode, at times, but remembered to keep my cool. I promised my father that I would not tell anyone about the plan and I did not. It was the time now to tell my good friends in the Office and to give notice. I didn't tell any of my friends before that I was resigning from the Foreign Office.

When I came back to Jerusalem early the next morning, I asked my two friends to meet me for lunch, as I had something very important to share with them. When we met, they didn't say anything, just looked at me waiting. We got our food and sat down.

"I am leaving," I said, watching their wonder and surprised expressions. They kept quiet, waiting for an explanation. "I am going to New York to study at NYU. I was accepted to the university, and I already have my visa. I will stay with my aunt and uncle and am very excited. You know how much I wanted to go out of the country and have new experiences. I thought I would tell you before I go to the personnel office or tell my boss."

We had a few moments of quiet and finally they congratulated me and wished me good luck. They said that they fully understood this opportunity that I have. I did not tell them what inspired this sudden decision. I cut my lunch short and went directly to the personnel office. My friend was not in, so I asked to speak to the woman who was his assistant. She was also very surprised. I told her that I could stay until the middle of July, as I do not have to be in New York until the beginning of September.

I then went to my office and told my boss. I did tell him that maybe, if I could have kept my present job, my decision would have been delayed. He told me that he liked me, so he checked with personnel to see if my position could be permanent, but it was denied. He was told that I did not have enough seniority, and the job

was promised to a woman with ten years of seniority. Once I heard this, I felt relieved that I notified everyone concerned.

At this point, I told Nellie and some of my other friends. Everyone was happy for me to have this opportunity. Work, studies and social life stayed the same as before. The only thing that was added was getting ready for my trip. My parents felt that I should have some warmer clothes for the New York winter and enough shoes. It was fun going shopping with my mother, acquiring warm dresses and sweaters. The only item that we did not buy was a heavy, warm winter coat, which I would have to purchase in New York.

About a week after I gave in my resignation at the office, I was called to see the head of personnel. I was sure that I would be asked to leave immediately, but I was in for a surprise. When I entered his office, I was surprised to see his assistant there too. He welcomed me and said that he was sad to see me leave. I did not say a word. Then he said, "Miriam, we have a proposition for you. The Foreign Office is planning to open a consulate, in a few weeks, in Atlanta, Georgia. There is a Jewish community there that is growing rapidly. We feel that it is important for Israel to provide a presence there. We need a secretary for the consul and, at this point, to be the general secretary for the consulate. As we expand, your job will be to take care only of the consul's affairs." I kept quiet.

Then the assistant added, "I do remember when you took your typing test, how slow and pretty bad you were. I was somewhat annoyed that I was instructed to accept you. You have come a long way in a short time. You became a very good typist and had great reviews from the heads of the departments you worked for. We spoke to them, and they affirmed that they were very happy with your work and thought that this would be a good position for you. They felt that you are bright, dedicated, gracious and very polite. So, as long as you are going to America to study, we thought that instead of going to New York, you would go to Atlanta. There is a good university there, so you could still study. Because a consulate is considered Israeli territory, you would be allowed to work even with a student visa. Seniority of at least five years will not be a problem, as you are going anyway. The salary will be good and higher than here, and we will help you find housing."

At this point I said, "If I understand correctly, you will not pay for my ticket to America. I will still be responsible for it."

"Correct. And therefore we would not have a problem with seniority. It is a great opportunity for you to grow and be promoted to a higher position. What do you think? We do need a quick answer."

"I need to think about it before I give you an answer," I said.

"We will need an answer by tomorrow," he said.

I thanked them and walked out in a daze, not believing what I just heard. I passed by my South African friend and told him that he must meet me for lunch, as I needed his immediate help. When he showed up, I told him every detail of the offer and that I needed to come back to them with a decision in one day. He told me that, by the next morning, he would find out more information about Atlanta and the new consulate.

The next day, we met again for lunch and he had all the information. He said: "The consulate will be open in about two months. They are at the end of the renovation of the rented space. They will open with just a few people and see how it will develop. The Jewish community is small now, but research shows a fast growth in the near future. It will be an interesting and important position. Secretarial work will be heavy in the daytime. The position will also involve a lot of work with the community on both evenings and weekends. It is an interesting position, but it might take some time to get to a higher level. Moreover, you will be viewed not just as a secretary, but also as the liaison between Israel and the Jewish community.

"On the other hand, New York is a different story. Large Jewish community and I don't know exactly what jobs they have open. You basically will be one among many, as there is a full staff at all levels. I conclude my report." He stopped talking and started to eat his sandwich. I was thinking and nibbling on mine. Lunchtime was almost over, and I had to express my opinion.

"Thank you so much for the detailed information. I knew that you would be the only one to get back to me quickly. I know that you have friends in every department, and I so appreciate what you did.

"The job in Atlanta is very tempting. If I do it, I will have no family, and as you know, family is very

important to me. Although I never met my aunts and uncles before, I have a good feeling. I feel I know them from everything my mother told me about them. Now that I have your wonderful information, I've made my decision. I will thank them for the offer, which was very flattering. I will also tell them that I will accept the job in Atlanta if they will pay my fare. I will explain that it will save my parents a big expense, which will make me happy."

My friend looked at me with a smile and said, "Interesting decision. You are basically making a business deal. Let me know their reaction."

I went directly to the personnel office and told Ahuva that I have an answer. She called the head of the department and together we went to his office. I told them my decision and I was told that it would not be possible for them to pay my fare.

"Once we do that, we would have to award this position following seniority rules. This way, we can say that we are not paying for the trip, which will be a legitimate excuse and will release us from the rule of seniority.

"When you get to New York, go to the consulate and see if they have any job opening, as you told us that you would like to work."

"I have my teacher's degree and I will try to get a job in a Hebrew school. I will only go to the consulate as a last resort." (In New York, it turned out that I was unable to get that Hebrew school job, as I could not get a Social Security number on a student visa, and they wouldn't hire me without it.)

I was asked to stay at my job until the replacement came, and I agreed. I thanked them again, we shook hands and they wished me good luck.

On the way back to my office, I stopped to see my South African friend, again, to give him a report. He smiled and told me that he knew that my offer would not be accepted, but he did not want to stop me from going through the procedure. The next day, I met with my other friend for lunch and gave him all the details. The three of us kept meeting for lunch until my last day in the office. I appreciated their friendship and thanked them both for being such wonderful friends. My replacement came on time, and I ended my job at the end of June, the same time that all final exams at the university ended.

That year in Hebrew University was not easy for me. I realized that it would be difficult to carry a full load of lectures and have a full time job at the same time. By the time I came back to my room every night after classes ended, it was around 9:00 p.m. At that point, I still had a lot of reading to do, mostly in English. It was very frustrating, as my English was not that good and I had to use the dictionary most of the time. Also, from the four subjects that I took, I only liked one, which was about the history of the United States and its government, from its beginning in 1776 to the present.

The course of international relations was mostly about the philosophy of important thinkers, like Buber and others. The instructor was boring. We had to read many books. Before the final test, he warned us that we must read the actual books and not their summaries. He also warned us that in the test he would mention a chapter number or a page number from where we would have to get the answer to his questions, without having the book with us. Of course, most of the class failed and had to repeat the subject.

Another problem for me was the statistics course. It was a prerequisite for sociology classes, so I could not afford to fail. I always had problems with math. I found that I easily understood what was being taught in the first three classes in statistics. That made me very excited. I hoped the entire course would be as easy for me to understand, and that I would pass it. It was not. Very quickly it became difficult. Nellie was good in math, so she helped me with given assignments. When I sat down for the only test, which was the final, I almost fainted. The only thing I understood were three questions that were based on the first three lectures. I was certain that I would fail the course.

I looked around me and suddenly realized that the top student was sitting right in front of me. Once I was done with my first three answers, I bent over and whispered, "Move your body a little, so I can copy your answers, or I will fail."

He didn't budge. I repeated my request and he ignored me. At this point I was desperate, and I whispered again, "If you don't move a little, I will tell the professor that you have notes from which you copy answers."

He moved very fast, and I finished the test. Because he wrote in small letters, it was difficult for me to be accurate, but I did pass with a low mark. When I told some of my friends what I did, they thought it was a brave move, as this student was known in class as someone who never helped others, as he wanted to be the top student.

A month before finals at the university, Nellie did not show up for three days. I called her home from the office, but could not get hold of her. I finally got her father. He told me that she was well and that I will see her the next day in Jerusalem and he hung up on me.

The next day I came home directly from work, as I had no classes. I found my friend packing. She looked happy and asked me to sit as she explained the reason she was packing.

“I am in love,” were her first words. She continued, “I went with my father to dinner, and he introduced me to a very handsome, smart and very rich man from Germany. He is ten years older than me. He is very intelligent and speaks great English. We liked each other immediately, and the following three days were like magic for both of us. We were together from mid-morning until late at night. He told me that he loved me and wants to spend the rest of his life with me. He told me about all the different businesses he owns in Europe. He has a large house in Hamburg, Germany, where he would have to stay. He hoped I would be ready to live there. We would have a wonderful life traveling, and I would not have to worry about keeping the house in check, as he has a crew that takes care of everything. I am so in love and will get married soon and move to Germany. There is no reason for me to take the tests. Let me know when you will be back home, and we will get together.”

“I am so happy for you. As I told you, I am going to New York. I am leaving in the middle of August by boat. I am so excited.”

We went out for dinner and, as usual, had a great time. I listened to all the details about her love and was very happy for her. I had a little doubt about the living in Germany part, but decided not to say anything. I did not want to dampen her excitement.

When I came home on Shabbat, I called her home as she asked me to, but she wasn't there. When I finally came back home to stay, I called her a few times but never heard back from her. I was very hurt and could not believe that this was the end of our friendship. My friends asked if I talked to her, as no one saw her or heard from her. I told them that I didn't. I told them that she was dating a man from Europe and it seems to be serious. Everyone was very surprised.

As time got closer to my departure, many friends from my group expressed their wish to come to our home the night before to say goodbye. I thought that was very nice of them and told my parents to get ready for visitors. My mother, as usual, started to bake, and my father brought many folding chairs, which he set up around the terrace. As I did not hear from, or see, Nellie during the six weeks that I was home before my departure, I decided to call her when I was leaving. I had a feeling that her father wanted her to stay away from me. This was the reason I told myself to ease my hurt.

It was a very exciting time for me, getting ready for the move. At times, I was somewhat nervous about my decision. I got over it quickly, saying to myself that it is what I wanted for years, and that everything will work out. My parents had a wonderful dinner for my aunt Rachel and my Uncle Morty, my cousins Eli, Abe and Billa and my parents' best friend.

My Father had a photographer taking pictures. I wore my new suit, the one that I would wear when I arrived in New York. My father thought that this was a very important step for me and wanted it preserved. I was very thankful to him and thought it was brilliant.

The night before my departure, every friend of mine came over to say farewell. Then, I saw Nellie walk in through the open door. I said hello to her in a very icy voice. I was so angry with her that I could not help myself. I was polite, but could not handle any happy chitchat. What was so surprising to me was that she got a cold shoulder from everyone else who was there. Hardly anyone talked to her. After half an hour, she said goodbye to everyone, wished me all the best and left. I could see that she was upset and insulted by everyone's behavior towards her.

The next day, my parents and I and my brother Isaac went to the port in Haifa. Although I was happy to

leave, I was tense at the same time. I was very quite for a while, and my father tried to break up the tension.

It was a hot summer day. I wore a red and white striped summer dress, white high-heeled sandals and a pink straw hat that I got as a gift from a guy I dated for a while.

When we arrived at the ship terminal and gave the suitcases to a luggage handler, it was time to say our goodbyes. I hugged my father, as he told me, with tears in his eyes, to be a good girl. My mother hugged me, kissed me and tried very hard to control her tears too. The only one who hugged me and cried was my brother.

All through it, I tried not to cry and it was getting harder when I said, "Shalom, I will write a few times a week and tell you everything, and you must write too." Then I went up the ramp. When I was on deck, I took out a handkerchief and waived to them for a while. They left, and I went to my cabin where the suitcases were waiting for me. At that moment, a new chapter in my life started.



*Last day in Israel before leaving for the U.S., with parents at home.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Coming to America - September 1957

The ship I was sailing on was called the S.S. Israel. After my parents left, and I went looking for my cabin, I had no idea what to expect. I went down two flights of stairs and found the right cabin number. The door was closed. When I knocked on it, I heard a voice telling me to come in. I walked into a very small room that had four bunk beds, a small dresser, a small closet to share and two chairs. I was assigned to a bed on the second tier. There was a second door in the cabin that opened to a bathroom. The bathroom had another door that led to another cabin that shared it. We were eight women, four in each cabin. The women in my cabin were at least twenty years, if not more, older than I was. When I found out that the women in the cabin that we shared the bathroom with were all young, I got very upset. I went up to the ship's office and tried to change my cabin but the ship was fully booked. I came back to the cabin and knew that I would have to make the best of it. They were nice women, but we hardly talked, except for exchanging some pleasantries. One of the women was seasick throughout the entire voyage, vomiting and moaning day and night. The smell of vomit lingered all the time, even though the cabin was cleaned every day. There was only one round window that could be opened slightly and a working fan. There was no air-conditioning, but the fan and the fresh air coming from the ocean, made it somewhat bearable.

I started to unpack. Looking at my beautiful clothes made me feel better. I felt connected to home and couldn't wait to get dressed for dinner and go out to see who was around that was closer to my age. When it became late afternoon, I decided to go into the bathroom and get dressed for dinner. Doing so at such an early hour ensured that I'd avoid waiting too long for my turn. There was not enough room in the tiny cabin for four women to get dressed at the same time, so I had to find a solution to the problem. Getting dressed early in the bathroom worked well for me throughout the two weeks on board. It was perfect. I did not mind being early and just sitting outside on the deck all by myself and looking at the ocean. It was very relaxing.

When dinnertime arrived, I went to the dining room. I gave my name to a hostess seated by the door and received a card with a table assignment. There were six chairs by the table and I was the first one to arrive. I was anxious to see whom I was going to share the meals with. Slowly the others came in and introduced themselves. We were all from Tel Aviv and about the same age. Within a half an hour, the dining room was all filled. There were many young people sitting around the other tables too. The



*Last dinner at home with my aunt and uncle, Rachel and Motek, my cousins Eli, Abe and Billa, and my parent's best friends*

conversation around our table was very interesting. Every one of us told where we lived, where we went to school and where we served in the army. The food was very nice and very European.

Two of the people at my table, were a young couple who planned to get married in New York in the near future. The guy, Yechiel, was going to New York to get a Master's degree. His fiancée, Edna, was not going to study, but hoped to work as a Hebrew teacher. She had earned a teacher's degree while serving in the army, same as I did. They immediately told us that Yechiel's family did not like her. His father was a doctor in Tel Aviv who was famous and known all over the country. Yechiel's parents came from very old families in Israel and were very well off. Edna came from a working family and his parents thought that their son could do better, so they did not accept her. As Yechiel said: "My parents are big snobs and this is why we left the country." None of us were surprised to hear their story, as it was a common situation in Israel at that time.

Having befriended other people our age in the dining room, we became a group of about twelve young Israelis. We got along very well and spent most of the time together. We played different sports on deck, had interesting discussions and went dancing every night in the barroom until 11:00 PM. Because we all were assigned to very small cabins, which we hated, none of us wanted to go to sleep too early. So, we made a deal with the head steward of the first class. First class passengers had a separate lounge, on the top deck, where they could spend time away from everyone else. It had large, comfortable sofas and deep, large lounge chairs covered in velvet. Beautiful paintings hung on the walls, and there were many lovely Persian rugs on the floor. By 11:00 PM, the room always emptied out. The head steward allowed us to use the salon after that time. We had to promise that we would be quiet, keep it clean and leave the premises by 4:00 AM, which we always did. By that time, we were exhausted and happy to go to sleep for a few hours.

We participated in most of the organized activities, day or night. There were many parties and our most favorite one was a masquerade party. We all decided to go in costumes. We helped each other put together

outfits, collecting items from each other that were appropriate. It was very exciting. We had great food and wine. The wine was free, so we all drank. None of us had any wine with our dinners, as one had to pay for it and none of us was ready to spend the money. The orchestra played happy tunes for dancing and there was a competition for best costume. We were very happy and somewhat loud, so we decided not to go up to the first class lounge that night and, instead, found a deck, a distance away from the cabins, making sure that we would not disturb the sleeping passengers and be chased away.

There were two stops scheduled when the ship would dock in port and we would be able to get off. The first stop was Naples, Italy.

My father had made an arrangement with a distant family member who worked on board the ship. I knew Eli Wachsberger, as he visited us many times. My father told him that whenever I needed money, he should give it to me and he will repay him. The day before we were to dock in Naples, I was walking on the deck with my friends when I felt someone's hand on my shoulder. I turned my head and saw this gentleman. He bent over me, as he was very tall and whispered in my ear:

“Would you like to have some money for shopping, for food or a drink for the port tomorrow?”

“No thank you,” I said. Suddenly, I felt him putting money in my hand. I walked quickly away to rejoin my friends who had gone ahead, but he caught up and continued to walk alongside all of us, talking about Naples the whole time:

“Naples is a city in southern Italy located on the bay of Naples. You will have a free day and evening, which will give you a lot of free time to tour. You can join a trip to Pompeii or Capri, and you might want to spend some money there. I suggest you go to Capri, which is most beautiful. In the evening you should take the funicular in Naples to the highest point. From there, you will see the entire city and the harbor. Looks very much like seeing Haifa from mount Carmel. There is a known saying, all over the world: “To see Napoli and Die,” and many songs have been written about the place”. We all listened to him and decided to follow his suggestions.

So, the next day, in Naples, we got off the ship and boarded a ferry, which picked up and dropped off visitors in the different islands strewn nearby. It was very exciting seeing the marinas and quaint buildings. There were no wide beaches and large hotels like in Tel Aviv. It was very new to us, like looking at a large colorful painting. The small villages were very picturesque. After two stops, we finally arrived in Capri. It was similar to the other two villages we stopped at on the way, Sorrento and Positano. The ferry stopped at the marina. We then had to walk up the hill to get to the center of Capri. Most of the houses in all these villages were built up on hills. By the marina, there were some souvenir stores and small cafes.

We saw several older, tall attractive women with grey-coifed hair, beautiful outfits and expensive jewelry. They were holding the arms of very handsome, dark, tall beautifully dressed very young men. The women spoke very good English, whereas the young men spoke broken English with an Italian accent. We were all wondering what these relationships were. We asked the woman from the boat, who acted as our guide, about it.

“They are very wealthy American, divorced or widowed women, who are supporting the young men who keep them company at all times. The men are called gigolos. This is a very common custom here, it gives young poor men the opportunity to live like the rich and make money doing it, as they get paid,” she answered. Most of us never heard the term before, and we were surprised to hear about it. It was difficult for us to understand this way of life.

We started walking up the hill and finally arrived at the main commercial street. The stores here were fancy and none of us could afford to buy anything. We also went to some spots where we could see the beautiful sights from on high.

Because the beach, where swimming was allowed, was just a small strip of sand by the ocean, there were many spots with lounge chairs, in small areas, for people to sit and enjoy the views. After walking around for a few hours, we were tired and hungry. We stopped in a restaurant on the main street for lunch. It was a small restaurant that was run by a family. We mostly guessed what we were going to eat, and it was all delicious. We shared the food and the bill and got our energy back.

Afterwards, we decided to see the Blue Grotto, which was very highly recommended and we had been



*Masquerade party on ship.*

told not to miss it. We walked down back to the marina singing, as we were so happy, and boarded a small motorboat. On the way, it was explained that the Blue Grotto is a sea cave in the ocean. Through an underwater opening the sunlight passes and creates a blue reflection that illuminates the cave.

When we arrived at the cave, our boat's motor and all other boats' motors were shut down. Everyone became quiet. Because every small move or noise was echoed, it was necessary to eliminate all sounds to fully enjoy the place. It was a most memorable experience.

We did not know what to expect and passing through the cave's opening was dramatic. We went from bright sunlight on the ocean to blue light and mist. It was somewhat eerie because of the mist and some rays of light coming through different openings in the cave. For our fifteen minutes inside the cave, no one spoke. The boats were moved around by underwater currents. When we finally were back out on the ocean, we kept quiet for a few minutes before we talked, in order to process what we just experienced inside the grotto. By the time we came back to Naples, it was late afternoon.

At that point, we went looking for the funicular, which is basically two cable cars balancing each other and pulled up and down by cables. The funicular connects the city center with the hill districts. We decided to eat not far from the station, as we did not know whether there were restaurants on top of the hill.

By the time we arrived up there, it was dark outside. The area was very residential with only small houses. We walked down the streets looking to find the street where we could see the views. It was a very warm night and the windows in all the homes were open. Of course, we were curious and looked into the open windows while walking. Suddenly, one person in our group, who was ahead of the rest, shouted: "Come here. You need to see this."

We all approached him quickly, got closer to the house he was pointing at and looked through the window. We saw a small screen that looked like a movie screen. We were fascinated not knowing what it was, as we did not have anything like it in Israel.

"It must be what is called a television, where you can see programs at home, the same way we see movies in the movie house," somebody said.

We were fascinated and stood by quietly for a while. Finally, we decided to move and continue searching for the street with the view. We came upon the correct street and saw Naples, the bay and large ships with glittering lights. It was stunning, and together we said: "Looks like Haifa at night." Then, we started to sing famous Italian songs, describing the beauty of Napoli (Naples), and the love for Italy. We were all familiar with songs from many countries, especially from Europe. We heard them on the radio, in the movies and from records. Suddenly, we realized that we must leave immediately, as we hadn't been aware that we had spent a lot of time on the hill, and it was getting close to midnight when we had to be back on board. We barely made it, as the funicular did not run as often late at night as in the early evening hours.

At times, I liked leaving my group of friends and sitting in a lounge with some of the magazines that I had with me from home. I needed some quiet time for myself, as my friends were nonstop. One of these times, a gentleman asked me if the lounge chair next to me was occupied. I told him that it was not, and he sat down. He looked to me to be in his late thirties or early forties. He was very tall, built solid, had a handsome face and a crew cut.

I went back to reading my magazine when I heard his voice, in English, "Sorry to disturb you. Do you understand and speak English? I just came from Israel and am on my way back home."

"Yes. I know some English, but it is not very good," I answered.

"I just wanted to tell you that I had a wonderful time in Israel, learning about the country, the lives of the people, the War of Independence and the hardships of living. I also learned about the people's love and determination. I am a Jehovah's Witness minister and have to tell my people all about the country. I spent a few weeks traveling with a guide and meeting Israelis. If you don't mind, when you have time, I would like to talk to you."

From that day on, we sat together talking almost every day. He wanted to know about my childhood, army service and social life. He wanted to know about my plans in New York and whom was I staying with.



*Capri, Italy on the way to New York by ship.*



*On a ship to the US, with the Azores Islands in the background.*

He had a very gentle way of asking questions, and I liked him. He was very upset when I told him about my experience when I went for my visa.

One of his statements that I always remembered when I told him how much I loved living in Tel Aviv was: “You would immediately love New York, as Tel Aviv is a mini New York, and you are a city girl.”

Although some of my Israeli friends could not understand what I saw in this man, I told them that I enjoyed his company and our talks, for he is very intelligent and teaches me a lot about America.

In Naples, some passengers got off the ship and new passengers came on. There were two young males who came on board in Naples and they were Americans who met while traveling in Italy. They both came separately after touring Israel for a few weeks. When they heard us speaking Hebrew, they joined our group and stayed with us for the balance of the trip. David was a third-year law student at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., and Henry worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

They both loved Israel, and had a lot of questions for us. Both sat at our table in the dining room. I, Yechiel and Edna became very close with them, as our English was better than that of the others in our group, who were somewhat afraid to speak.

The second stop was the port of Gibraltar. The approach to the Gibraltar peninsula has high waves at all times and we were all warned about it. It only took about an hour to pass through the waves, so it was not that bad. It is a narrow peninsula, located at the most southern tip of Spain, not far from Africa. It is a British colony, and although there are many inhabitants from many cultures, including a tiny Jewish community, most citizens like to consider themselves British.

The Rock of Gibraltar, which is very impressive, was used as a fortress to fight various enemies throughout history. We were told that we have three hours to spend in the place and that there are many different stores for shopping, all accepting American dollars. We all laughed when we heard that. In the early fifties, when the State of Israel was very young, the government did not have a large supply of dollars in the treasury. No person who left the country was able to get more than \$10 from the bank. Of course, for many years there was a black market in dollars. Many Israelis, including some of my parents' friends and family members, would exchange the Israeli money for dollars to keep at home.

Our first impression of Gibraltar was: “This looks exactly like the city of Jaffa in Israel.” The attached, two-story gray buildings, were occupied by small shops on the bottom and apartments on top, where most of the merchants lived. The shops carried many different household items: There was inexpensive clothing, high-end fashions in nice boutiques, hardware, jewelry, perfumes, liquors and a separate market for fresh and prepared foods. The big difference between Jaffa and Gibraltar was that the amount and variety of merchandise in Gibraltar was far greater than what was available in Jaffa after the war.

We had a wonderful time roaming around, looking and touching everything. While we walked on one of the side streets, we saw a small sign with the name of a synagogue, which was part of a cement fence enclosing an inner court yard filled with trees and flowers. In the back of the courtyard, there was a small, two-story building. We became curious and went in through an open swinging door. As we walked in, a man came through the door. He was the guardian of the place and was thrilled and excited that we stopped by. He called his wife and children to come and meet us. Within minutes, cookies, fruits and cold drinks were brought out for us. He then ushered us in and told us about the synagogue. It was an experience for all of us, who almost never walked into a synagogue at home. When we left, we were hugged and kissed by all and felt so welcome, although, except for a few words of English, we couldn't converse too much. Afterwards, we talked about this wonderful stop that we made. It was a nice break from wandering around in stores. None of us spent a penny, but time went by very fast and it was very exciting.

When we came back to the port, I was stopped by my father's friend who asked, “So Miriam, did you buy anything? I know your father told me that you wanted to get a skirt made from straw, like they wear in Hawaii. Did you?”

“No I didn't. I know it cost \$20, as I asked in one of the stores that carried all manner of clothes from Hawaii, but I couldn't figure out where I could wear a skirt like it, and could not understand what I was



*My outfit to get off the ship in NY.*

thinking,” I answered. I tried handing him back the \$10 he had given me earlier, but he refused to take it.

After Gibraltar, we left the Mediterranean Sea and went out into the Atlantic Ocean. It was a long trip and all we could see for days was ocean and no land. As it was still summer and days were sunny at all times, the ocean was very calm. There was only one day when a storm arrived and the ship was pitching from one side to the other. The waves covered the first decks and we all stayed indoors. The dishes in the dining room were sliding from one side of the table to the other and we had to hold on to them. Many passengers skipped their meals that day, and many were seasick. Luckily, I only felt a little nauseous and did not eat too much. We were fortunate that it only lasted one day. The sister ship, S.S.Zion, that made the same trip about a week after we came to America, was almost lost at sea. They had a whole week of much stronger storms than we had that one day.

One day, when I went to the cabin during the day, I found an envelope on my bed. I was surprised, not being able to guess who it was from. When I opened the envelope, I found an invitation to join the Captain’s table for dinner, that night. I didn’t know what to feel. On the one hand, I was perplexed as to why was I chosen. On the other hand, I got very excited, as I knew that it was a great honor. I ran looking for my group wanting to know if anyone else was invited. No one else was and I got nervous.

When dinnertime arrived, I wore my most dressy dress and showed up in the dining room on time. I was led by the hostess who introduced me to the captain. I was then shown to my seat. I was the youngest guest at the table. It was a mixed group of Americans and Israelis who were much older than I was. I was a little intimidated and only talked when I was asked a question. I felt like a baby at the table, but tried to enjoy myself. I couldn’t understand why I was chosen, but couldn’t ask the question. I was very happy when dinner ended. I thanked the captain for the invitation. I was happy to get back to my table the next day. When I was asked if I enjoyed the dinner at the captain’s table, I told them that I did not and it was good to be back.

We kept busy day and night until suddenly it was announced one day that we were going to dock right outside New York harbor that evening, too late to get off the ship. We could hardly eat our dinner, and ran to the upper deck where we stood against the rails. They were still the same rails but now in a different country. After sailing for two weeks, from Israel to America, we arrived at a new future in a new country. When we passed the Statue of Liberty, we all became silent. Reality sunk in that we came to our destination and there was no return at that point. Slowly darkness fell. The lights of New York were coming on. It was very exciting to see the lights on the skyscrapers and on the many cars driving fast on the highways along the water. It looked so beautiful and unreal to us. We stayed on the deck, standing, until the early hours of the morning. We could not sit. We talked about our doubts and fears, not knowing what to expect, although our plans were very clear and we all knew our destinations. Finally around 4:00 AM, we went to our cabins to sleep a little, pack and get dressed, so we could have breakfast and be ready to disembark.

I put on my blue suit, my white beret and my high heels. I felt elegant and sophisticated and hoped that I would recognize my family, who wrote my parents that they will be meeting me at the port. I had contact information for Yechiel and Edna, as they would be staying in New York too, and so they gave me the address where they’d be living. Almost everyone else was going to different parts of the country. The only one we could contact by phone was Henry who lived with his parents in Manhattan, on Central Park West. He invited the three of us to come to his parents’ home on the first Saturday night we were in New York. He wanted us to meet his parents and some friends of his. We accepted the invitation.

The time to disembark came and we had to stand on line to meet with the Immigration officers. The suitcases were picked up by porters and dropped off on a carousel. I parted from Henry and David, shaking hands, as they went to a special line for American citizens. We saw a lot of people waiting for passengers beyond the immigration officers.

When my turn came, the officer who asked me to sit down, welcomed me. I handed him my passport and all the other papers.

“Are you French? You look French and your accent is the same,” I heard him ask before he looked at my documents. I was so surprised to hear his question and immediately answered: “No, I am Israeli,” and he smiled in response. He checked my passport and the other papers, stamped many of the papers, including my passport,



*Captain dinner on the last evening on ship before docking in NY.*

handed them all back to me and wished me “Good Luck.” I thanked him and walked to the exit hoping to find my family.

After I took one step, a beautiful woman came over and with a smile said: “Are you Miriam, I am your aunt Blumka.”

I answered with relief and a big smile, “Yes.”

Before I could say another word, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Henry was standing next to me saying, “I this your family? Are you sure? I wanted to make sure that you are in safe hands.”

“Yes I am sure. This is my aunt Blumka.”

“Okay, Miriam. See you Saturday night,” he said smiling.

“Yes. Thank you for everything,” I answered, and he left.

Before I knew it, the rest of my family, my other aunt and the two husbands approached and we all hugged and kissed. I immediately had a great feeling that everything will work out and I will be very happy. We all squeezed into one car. I was told that we were going to Forest Hills, Queens. They immediately told me the living arrangements, so I didn’t have to wonder. I was going to sleep at the apartment of my mother’s sister Hanka and her husband Pinek Albirt and their son Harry. I was taking over Harry’s sister Sarenka’s convertible chair, in the living room, as she had gotten married in the spring. She and her husband Alec also lived across the street. For dinner, I was going to go every evening to the apartment of my mother’s brother Joe Newman and his wife Blumka, who had two young children, Sherry and Harold. They lived across the street from where I would reside. There was a lot of excitement in the car, and I was asked many questions. I answered, but my eyes were glued to the outside. I was so excited and amazed to see the large office buildings and skyscrapers of Manhattan.

As we drove into Queens, getting closer to where my family lived, I saw that the apartment houses were not higher than six floors. I also observed narrow, metal stairs going from the top of the buildings to the street.

I asked surprised, "Is this the way we have to go in and out of the apartment?"

My uncle Joe laughed and answered: "No Miriam. This is a fire escape. In case of a fire, this is what is supposed to be used to escape. We have stairs and elevators going from one floor to another."

"Oh, I never saw something like this," I answered, feeling a little embarrassed.

When we arrived in Forest Hills, I was slightly disappointed. Seeing the address in Israel, I imagined an area with many trees along the streets, which I didn't see here, but I kept quiet. We were dropped off in front of an apartment building. Then, both my uncles took my luggage from the trunk and brought it inside the building and left it next to the elevator. We said our goodbyes, and I thanked Joe and Blumka for picking me up. I was told that we would all have dinner at their home that evening. We took the elevator to the fourth floor and Harry, who was my first cousin, opened the door. He was a young, skinny kid, about ten years old. The only word he said to me was: "Hi," and then he went to sit on the couch in a large living room.

I saw a large portable black chair which would be my bed. There was a piece of wood furniture that housed what turned out to be the only television in the apartment. We put the suitcases near the one large bedroom. My aunt Hanka and uncle Pinek shared the room with their son. She then showed me the bathroom we would all share and a large kitchen where there was a table at which we would have our meals. It was somewhat difficult for me to think of living without a terrace. By now, I was not surprised about that, as on the way from the ship, I didn't see terraces on any of the apartment buildings. Then, Hanka showed me an empty drawer in the dresser, which I could use, as well as a part of a closet that she had emptied for me. She apologized for the tight space. I told her about my small room at home and that I would have no problem with it. She suggested that I unpack and be done with it. As it was Labor Day weekend, I took my summer clothing out and kept the winter clothes in the suitcase.

When lunchtime came, she said we would go out for lunch, which got me excited. I changed from my suit to a shirtwaist cotton dress and high-heeled sandals, as it was warm and felt like summer. We walked to the main thoroughfare, Queens Boulevard. I was surprised to see the number of cars on the road. Hanka told me that this road connects Queens to Manhattan. We passed many small stores until we arrived at the popular restaurant and ice cream parlor "Jan's." The décor was dark wood panels and mirrors, with color lights hanging from the ceiling, something I never saw in Israel. It was very busy, and we waited for a table for about ten minutes. Once we were seated, the hostess handed us the menu. I was very surprised to see so many items on the menu and so many different ice cream flavors.

I told Hanka, "I don't know what to order. I am not familiar with a lot of the food, and don't know all the different names."

"I like very much a sandwich of bacon, lettuce and tomatoes. Why don't I order the same for you and we can drink Coca Cola?" she suggested.

"What is bacon?" I asked, and she explained. "Okay. I will eat it. I like to try new food," I told her, and I found I liked it. I asked her the meaning of some of the other foods listed in order to learn to understand menus.

I felt so good being with her, as she was so warm and talkative. We spoke in English, and sometimes she used some Yiddish expression, which I had no problem understanding.

When we went out of the restaurant she asked, "Are you tired and want to go home to rest, or would you like to go with me to meet some of my women friends. They are watching their children play in the playground. After school starts, that's where the women also sit who wait for the older children to come out of school. Some of us women knew each other from the concentration camps. The others we met when we lived together in Frankfurt after the war."

Then she added, "Because it is the Friday before Labor Day, many of the other women are still in the country, in the Catskills, where we go every summer, to run away from the heat. We all stay in the same bungalow colony and have a great time. The children can be outdoors and are free to play and swim in the pool all day. The men come to the country for the weekends. Some come to the country on Thursday and some on

Friday. Almost all of the men go back to the city to work on Sunday night, or they leave at 6:00 AM Monday morning. The women play a lot of cards, sometimes during the day, after shopping, cleaning and cooking, and every night. We mostly play in the casino, which is a wooden building with a big room and a kitchen that we use for parties and other activities. On some weekends, when the men are back, we go to the large Catskills hotels like Grossinger's, the Concord and some others. We go to the nightclubs to dance and see shows. This area is called the Borscht Belt and it is mostly visited and occupied by a Jewish crowd. The many hotels sign up comedians and all other performers. The largest hotels engage big name entertainers. The smaller hotels have had some unknowns that got their start in the Catskills and then became very famous. We were happy to come home before the weekend this time, so we could pick you up."

I thought it was so wonderful that she enlightened me about their friends and I said, "I am not at all tired and will be happy to meet your friends."

With a big smile and a hug she said: "I am so happy that you want to go."

It was a ten-minute walk to the playground. As we walked she acquainted me with the streets that lead to and from Queens Boulevard. Shortly, we came to a school to which was attached a very large, spacious playground. It had many benches, swings for toddlers and separate ones for older kids. It also had a large sand box and cement chess tables with attached benches. I was surprised that I didn't see any grass or flowers. There were very few trees that gave some shade. I didn't say anything, as I realized that everything is different than in Israel, and I should not compare.

When we entered the playground, my aunt knew exactly where her friends were sitting. They were about four or five women, most of them blond and all dressed very well. My Aunt introduced me: "This is my niece Miriam, from Israel. She is my sister Karola's daughter, who some of you met when she visited me in Frankfurt." They all welcomed me with big smiles and hoped that I would enjoy being in New York. They all had the same accent when they spoke. I had heard it before in Israel, when I met some Holocaust survivors. We sat with them for a while and they asked me many questions about my parents, my trip and my plans in New York.

On the way back home Hanka said, "I heard the young man in the port saying that he will see you Saturday night. What was it all about?"

"Henry invited me and a couple that was in our group on the ship to come to his home on Saturday afternoon at 5:00 PM. He lives with his parents on Central Park West. He would like us to meet his parents, and then show us some of New York. He also invited his friend David, who was on the ship with us. He had to do it right away, because David was leaving on Sunday to start Law School in Washington. He wanted him to spend the evening with us," I said.

Between 5:00 PM and 6:00 PM, the doorbell rang and a young woman came in. She approached me directly with a big smile and said: "Welcome to New York, Miriam. I am Sarenka," and immediately hugged and kissed me. She also told me that she came directly from work, as she wanted to see me immediately, although it is somewhat late for her and she soon has to go home and make dinner. We sat down on the couch and she said, "You know Miriam. You are going to sleep in my bed. It is a mazaltic (lucky in Yiddish) bed. I just got married in June and I know it will bring you good luck too. I married a wonderful guy whose name is Alec and we are very happy. We live across the street, and I hope we can be friends, not just family." I felt a little overwhelmed but happy to get such a warm welcome.

It was only at this point that Hanka was able to talk and she said, "Sarenka is my step daughter. Although she's Pinek's daughter, I feel that she's my daughter too. Pinek and I met in a camp during the Holocaust and I watched over Sarenka. When we were sent to a DP Camp in Salzheim, Germany, we got married and Harry, our son, was born in Frankfurt am Main."

Sarenka asked me a few questions, excused herself and left for home to cook dinner. My Uncle came home a few minutes after she left, and we all went to my aunt Blumka and my uncle Joe's home. I met Harold and Sherry who were very young and their sleep-in maid. She was a young German woman that they brought with them from Germany.

The dinner table was set very beautifully with a white tablecloth and lit Shabbat candles. We sat down to

a traditional dinner of gefilte fish, chicken noodle soup, chicken, many sides dishes and a homemade cake for dessert. Every dish was very tasteful, and I quickly realized that Blumka was a great cook and baker.

My uncle Joe told me that they would like to take me on Saturday night to a nightclub in Manhattan. He was very surprised to hear about my invitation from my friend. He immediately said: "Okay, I understand and will give you a ride to the city. I want to see where you are going. It is a very nice location where you are going, but I will feel better dropping you off. I can also pick you up."

"It will not be necessary. Henry told me that he would take me back home, as it might be late." Uncle Joe agreed to this.

On Saturday, I stayed home just resting. I felt very tired from the excitement of the first day in New York and from meeting everyone. It was a very hot day. For the first time, I tried to read an English newspaper. It was not easy, and I realized that although I knew some English I still had a lot to learn. I also did a lot of sleeping until it was time to get dressed to go. Hanka asked me if she could stay in the bedroom and watch me get dressed. I loved the idea and told her so. It reminded me of my mother who sometimes liked to do the same. Within one day, I noticed that they tried to take my parents' place so as to make me comfortable.

I had a beautiful sleeveless, fitted dress made out of slightly shiny cotton that looked like silk. A large floral pattern in pastel colors of pinks and lavenders was printed in large intervals on it, leaving a lot of a white background. My white, high-heeled sandals completed the outfit. All I wore with it were light pink earrings made of glass. They looked like a bunch of small grapes and they were my favorite summer ones. I also made sure that I had my short cotton gloves to take with my white bag. It was the fashion at the time to wear or hold short white silk or cotton gloves.

"Miriam, you look beautiful. You need to wear silk stockings with your sandals," Hanka said.

I looked at her in disbelief. "Stockings in the summer with sandals? It is so hot. I never heard something like this. Do I really have to wear them?" I asked.

"Yes, you must. It is not ladylike not to wear them." She went to the dresser and took out a pair of stockings and handed them to me. I did not have any with me. I wanted to buy my stockings in New York, as I knew that American stockings were made of nylon fibers and lasted a long time. Nylon stockings were just starting to arrive in Israel. They were much more expensive in comparison to the silk stockings we had that tore and had runs quickly. In Israel, stockings were brought to a cleaning store that had a special machine to fix the runs. I put Hanka's stockings on and was ready to leave. My aunt called my uncle and I went downstairs to meet him.

My uncle Joe was waiting in his car in front of the building. He welcomed me when I came to sit next to him with a kiss saying, "You look very beautiful, Miriam."

I thanked him with a smile and felt so well and happy. It did not take us too long to arrive at the address on Central Park West. We stopped in front of a big old impressive building. A doorman in a navy blue uniform and hat came out to open the door for me. It was a new experience for me, which I knew about from the movies. My uncle wished me to have a good time. The doorman took my hand to help me out of the car and shut the door behind me. On the way to the building, he asked me for the name of the people I was going to see. When we entered the lobby, he repeated the name to another uniformed man who was seated behind a desk, and I was pointed in the direction of a man who operated the elevator. By the time the elevator stopped and the door open, Henry was waiting for me. He welcomed me with a big smile. We shook hands and we went through an open door directly into the apartment.

When we entered the apartment, both his parents were waiting in the living room. It was a very large room with very high ceilings and a large window stretched across the width of the room and facing Central Park. The room was furnished with large pieces of furniture, some modern and some antiques. Very fine large paintings were hanging on the walls, and there were also some lovely sculptures. Beautiful area rugs covered some of the wood floors. Large vases filled with fresh flowers were placed in different areas of the living room. It was very impressive.

His parents, who had been sitting on the couch, got up when we came in. Henry introduced me and



*On ship.*

we all shook hands. Both his parents were very tall and slim. His father was a handsome man, but somewhat reserved. His mother was blond and very beautiful. She had a wonderful smile and was very warm and talkative. We all sat down, and I was asked many questions about growing up in Israel, my reasons for coming to New York, my army service and all about my family. I was also asked about my future plans and they expressed hope that I would be happy in America.

While we talked, a maid in a black dress with a beautiful white apron came in carrying a large silver tray with cold drinks, cookies and fruit. David and two of his other friends joined us. He told me that the other couple would join us later in the evening for coffee. We stayed for a while and got ready to leave.

At that point, Henry's mother said, "I see you don't have a sweater with you. It can get chilly later on. I will give you one of mine and you will give it to Henry after he brings you home." I tried to refuse, but she insisted. Before I knew it, she brought me a light white sweater. When we were ready to leave, she hugged me and wished me good luck. I thanked Henry's parents for their hospitality and we left.

When we got down to the street, a big black car was waiting for us in front of the building. Henry got behind the wheel and the five of us got in the car. We drove around different parts of Manhattan, and when it got dark, Henry drove slowly through Times Square. All the different colored lights and advertisements were amazing. I never saw anything like it before, and I could hardly speak. Henry circled around a few times, so I would not miss anything. One of the most amazing advertisements that impressed me very much was a man smoking a Camel cigarette with smoke rings rising from the cigarette on the billboard. I was also fascinated with seeing the news running nonstop on the wall of a building in bright lights.

I told Henry, "I think one night of electricity that is used here will give Israel a week of electricity, if not more," and everyone laughed.

From there, we went to Greenwich Village, where we were going to meet Edna and Yechiel for coffee. They stayed over the weekend with family, but were busy looking for an apartment to live in, and after they settled down they planned to get married, in a Rabbi's study, without their parents. When they arrived at the cafe, which was small and quaint, they looked very happy and all smiles. We stayed at the cafe for a little over an hour, after which we decided to walk around.

I liked the village. It was quaint with many small restaurants, bars and boutiques. The window displays of clothing for women and men were not the run of the mill that was sold in department stores. It was more suited for very young and artsy people. Many of the young men strolling in the street had long hair. The paintings displayed in the small galleries were very unusual and contemporary, as were the sculptures and accessories. The entire area had a bohemian atmosphere. It became my most favorite area of Manhattan. We also passed by New York University where I was going to study. I was thrilled to realize that it was in Greenwich Village. I immediately knew that I would frequent the Village at every opportunity, and so I ended up doing.

It got late, and it was decided that it was time for everyone to go home. Edna and Yechiel said their goodbyes and the rest of us walked towards Henry's car. While we were in the cafe, I had a chance to mention how much I loved to play and watch Tennis. I was told that the US Open had started and that they are now playing in Forest Hills stadium, not far from where I lived. I knew about it, as we were always informed at the tennis club all about it.

Walking back to the car, I paired off with one of Henry's friends, who said to me, "Miriam, I have an extra ticket to the tennis tournament tomorrow. Would you like to join me?"

"Yes, yes," I answered quickly, without any hesitation. "Thank you so much for asking me. This is a dream come true for me."

"I will pick you up and would like to go early so I can show you around," he said. "It is so near your home that we can walk there." We decided on a pick up time, and, at that point, he left with his friend, as they were staying in the city.

I could not believe about this wonderful opportunity that came my way the third day I was in America. Henry, accompanied by David, then drove me home to Queens. I was so excited that I kept talking about it all the way home. We went to Queens with the 57th Street Bridge. The sight of the city from the bridge was

breathhtaking. It was fantastic daytime too, but so dramatic at night. I thanked Henry for everything and wished David the best in school. Although we said that we would meet again, we did not, but the memory of those first two days in the city was fabulous.

The young man who I was going to the US Open with was an avid tennis player, ever since he was a young boy. My uncles and aunts could not believe that I was going out again, but they were happy for me. The Forest Hills Tennis Club was in an area called Forest Hills Gardens. This area was filled with many large, private old residences. Most were built in the Tudor style and were surrounded by beautiful gardens and tall trees that gave a lot of shade. The area looked like a British neighborhood. There was also a subway station and a train station connecting with Manhattan and Long Island. The main shopping street had small stores, selling unusual clothing.

After I was picked up, it took us about a half an hour to walk to the stadium. It was a good thing that we walked, as drivers of private cars had a tough time finding parking spots. Many private homeowners allowed cars to park in their driveways, for a steep fee.

We had good seats. My companion was surprised at how much I knew about the players. Every seat in the stadium was occupied. The matches were wonderful and two of the players were from Australia. They were very good and well-known. The afternoon passed quickly. We walked back to my home and I thanked him before he left to go back to the city.

I had dinner with my family and had to tell them in detail how I spent my time over the past two days.

On Monday, Labor Day, I took a walk, and then I prepared for all the errands that I had to take care of immediately in the coming week. I had to see Mr. Hodos, my immigration attorney, register for classes and start looking for a job in a Hebrew school.



*Waving good bye to my family from ship.*

# MIMI'S GOT A STORY

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### New Life in New York

On Tuesday morning, I woke up early, trying to figure out what things I needed to take care of first: I had to see the lawyer, to register for my courses at NYU and to find a teaching job in a Hebrew school.

I wanted to meet the immigration lawyer that same day, as I did not want to waste any time. I called Mr. Hodos, an immigration lawyer that many Israelis used. He gave me his address as 150 Broadway. He told me I could come by at any time, as he will be in his office all day. I was excited that I would be able to accomplish this immediately.

My uncle Pinek gave me instructions for getting there by subway. My uncle Joe, before he went to work, phoned me to see what I was doing. When I told him that I was going to see the lawyer, he offered to take me, as he did not want me to get lost.

I thanked him and said, "Thank you, but I would like to go to Manhattan by myself, as I have to learn how to use public transportation and to be independent. Pinek gave me directions for how to go by subway."

He asked me to repeat the directions I had, and told me not to be shy about asking people for help.

Then he asked again, "Are you sure, you don't want to go with me?"

"No, thank you," I answered.

I had breakfast with my aunt, got dressed in a straight, navy skirt, white shirt and high heels. I made sure that I had all my papers, and my aunt made sure that in addition to bills, I also had some change for phone calls, my address in Queens and her telephone number.

I finally left. It was a very warm day but I was not bothered by it, as I was used to heat. I was very excited to go out by myself to the city. I went down the subway station steps, not knowing what to expect. I was surprised to feel how much hotter it was down at the subway station, than outside. When the subway arrived, I was disappointed not to see a very new, shiny train, but rather a black, dirty old train.

At one point, I had to change trains. I was not sure what train to take. I approached a young woman who was standing on the platform and asked her how to get to 150 Broadway. She told me to go uptown and get off at 150th Street. I did as she suggested. When I came out of the subway, all I saw were residential buildings. It did not make sense to me. I stopped another person and showed him the address. I was told by this man that I was uptown, but have to be all the way downtown on Broadway, in building number 150. He gave me instructions on how to go back by subway and told me that it was a long ride. I was upset, as it was already 2:00 p.m., and I was determined to see the lawyer and not to waste the whole day.

I hailed a cab, and to make sure that the driver was clear about the address, I said, "Go to downtown Broadway, building number 150."

I could not believe that it took about forty-five minutes to get there and cost me \$20, which was a lot of money in those days. Luckily, I remembered the lesson my parents taught me, to always go out of the house with 100 shekel (or in this case, dollars) in my wallet.

When I finally arrived at the right building, I was relieved. But the large tall office buildings on Broadway and the surrounding streets overwhelmed me. They seemed enormous in comparison to office buildings in Israel. I took the elevator to a high floor and found the lawyer's office. I knocked on the door and walked in. I was welcomed by a secretary who asked for my name, which she found on a list in front of her. She asked me to sit down, which I did.

Within a few short minutes, a door opened. A short, stocky man with a round face and some gray hair walked towards me. He introduced himself as Mr. Hodos. I told him my name, and we shook hands. He asked me to follow him. We walked to his office, which was a large room with a very large old desk, many file cabinets and two chairs in front of the desk. He asked me to sit while he walked around to his seat behind the desk.

"Tell me why you came to New York, what your plans are and where you're staying," he began.

I gave him the information, and also told him about my mistake in getting to his office. He laughed, and told me that I was not the only one to have had such an experience. He said that, for a person coming from Israel, New York is overwhelming and suggested taking it slow in the beginning, asking many questions about directions and writing them down. He then asked for all my papers which his secretary made copies of for a file that he opened for me. He wanted to know more about what my job in the army entailed, and did I work after my release and where.

After writing all this information down, he thanked me for coming to him so soon after my arrival, as he liked to know all the details about a new client in his office. He also informed me of some rules that needed to be observed, and told me that I could call his office any time that I had questions. When the meeting ended, he wrote instructions for me to get back to Queens.

On my way back, I read all the signs carefully to make sure that I followed his directions exactly. I wanted to get home without a problem, and I did. When I arrived, I told my family about my day and they laughed.

My uncle Joe said, "You remind me of your father. We knew he was coming for a visit, but did not know when. One evening, we got a phone call from him. We thought he was going to tell us when he would arrive. We were surprised to hear that he was calling from Manhattan. He said: 'I wanted to surprise you, and not bother anyone to pick me up from the airport. I took a cab, and then realized that I don't have the address with me. I told the driver that I have to go to 99th Street, so he took me to 99th Street in Manhattan. I will take another cab, and, this time, you will give the driver the exact address,' and so we did. He finally arrived, and we had a good laugh. After this expensive deal, he never took a cab again and used only public transportation."

"I will not take cabs again either, as they are too expensive," I said. "Following exactly the written directions from the lawyer, I had no problem coming back by subway. I must learn, and this is the only way that I will."

The next day I went to NYU to register for my courses. I found out that before I could take any sociology courses, I had to take one semester of English for Foreigners. My classes would be held every morning, from 9:00 to 12:00, would be taught by three different professors and would include foreign students from many different countries. Registration was fast, so I had almost the entire day free.

In order to find a job in a Hebrew School, I had to register with the Jewish Board of Education. Before going there, I asked one of the assisting students at NYU to write travel instructions for me. It was a very quick ride by subway to 57th Street and Broadway.

When I arrived, I took an elevator to another high floor. I was fascinated by all these tall buildings, and I was starting to get used to taking elevators in them. When I came to the right place, I stated my purpose for coming and was led to a small office. Behind a desk, there was an elderly gentleman, probably in his late fifties or early sixties. He was tall and heavy. I extended my hand to shake his, but it was ignored. He told me to sit down.

He was not smiling or welcoming.

“You are an Israeli,” he said. “I guess you are looking to teach Hebrew. Do you have your diploma with you?”

I did, because I carried all my papers with me at all times. He also asked to see my passport and my visa. I also handed him the recommendations I had from the army and the Foreign Office. I was very tense, as I felt that he did not like me, because he did not smile even once.

“Why do you want to teach?” he asked, looking at all my papers. I knew I’d better have a good answer, or I will not have a chance to get a lead and a list of schools that needed a teacher.

“I like children,” I began. “And, because Hebrew is my native language, it is the only subject I can teach here. I also like the Bible and everything else that is connected with Hebrew teaching. And, of course, I like to teach.”

“So why did you work at the Foreign Office and not teach after your service?” he asked.

I was a little shocked to hear this question. I shot back, “That was the only chance for me to try to study and live outside Israel.”

“I don’t like Israelis,” he said. “They are only trouble and they don’t care about their jobs.”

“I am not like that. I take every job I have seriously. I would not have such great recommendations from former bosses, if I was not responsible,” I answered quickly after hearing his shocking statement.

He looked at me and did not say a word. I started to regret my answer, and was not sure what he was about to do. To my surprise, I saw him looking in one of his drawers, and then he took out a paper.

“Here is a list of information for three schools in Queens that need a teacher. I picked the ones in Queens, because that is where you live with your relatives. Don’t wait too long to go to speak to someone at these schools, as they start classes immediately after the Jewish holidays.”

I thanked him and practically ran out of the office. I felt discouraged and angry at the way this man handled the appointment.

The next morning, I called all three Jewish centers to get directions on how to get to them. I was told that I could come at any time of the day. All the Jewish centers were located in small communities in Queens. Most people in those communities lived in one- or two-family homes surrounded by beautiful gardens and trees. The only way to get to these communities was by bus, as no subway serviced the area.

I arrived at the first Jewish center around 1:00 p.m., after learning that lunch was between 12 noon and 1:00 p.m.. As I entered, I noticed that the building was very quiet. I went directly to the office, and was surprised to see a television on, and all the workers watching a baseball game. Shortly, a secretary approached me and asked, “Can I help you?”

“Yes,” I said. “I came from the Board of Education, and was told that you are looking for a Hebrew Teacher. I am interested in the job. I graduated from Seminar Levinski in Tel-Aviv and have my diploma with me.”

“Before we go any further, do you have a Social Security number?” she asked.

“What is that?” I asked, and she explained.

I told her that I was a student at NYU and am here on a student visa.

“I am so sorry, but we only hire teachers who have a Social Security number,” she said softly with a smile.

I said my goodbyes and left surprised. I was wondering if I would hear the same thing in the next place.

When I arrived at the second Jewish center, all the office workers there were also watching television. I received the same answer: “We do not hire teachers without a Social Security number, as it is against the law.”

This time, I was not surprised, but I did wonder why I was not told about it at the Jewish Board of Education. I decided not to go to the third address, figuring that I’d hear the same thing. On the bus back, I was thinking that the only other place to call and try to get a job was at the Israeli Consulate in Manhattan. I came home very disappointed and told my family about my next move.

The next morning, I called a friend of mine that I knew from Israel who now lived in Manhattan. Abe was married, and we were close friends and shared many good times together in Israel. He held a prestigious

post at the Israeli Consulate in New York. When he and his wife moved to the US before I left Israel, they made sure that I had their phone number and could get in touch with them when I got to New York.

When I called him at 9:00 a.m., he immediately took my call. He was very happy to hear from me the first week that I was in New York. He wanted to hear in detail about my trip and where I was staying.

When I told him that I lived with my family in Queens and that they are wonderful, he said, "Miri, this is not good. How are you going to meet young people? You have to live in Manhattan. No one will come to Queens to have a date with you."

I laughed and answered. "I must first find a part-time job. Meanwhile I live rent free with a wonderful, warm family. Once I have a job, I might think about moving."

"I thought you planned on getting a job as a Hebrew school teacher," he said.

So I told him about my experiences. Then, I said, "So Abe, I need your help to get work in the consulate. Do you think I will have the same problem there?"

"No, the consulate is considered Israeli territory and you do not need a Social Security number to work there, and you can work with a student visa," he replied.

I felt relieved.

"Let me call the personnel department and get you an appointment. I'll call you back soon."

He called back within a few minutes and told me to come Friday morning for an interview.

I left home early on Friday, and got to the consulate around 9:30 a.m. I had to take a subway to Manhattan and then a bus to Fifth Avenue and 70th Street. I got out of the subway on 53rd Street and Fifth Avenue and took the bus uptown. On the corner of Fifth Avenue, there was a small museum, the Frick Museum. Next to it was a beautiful, four-story old townhouse where the consulate was located. I went up a flight of steps and opened a big, heavy glass door with a dark wooden frame and an intricate black grill. I entered a large area with dark wood floors and a high ceiling going up four floors. A round staircase with a very beautiful, intricate wrought iron railing led from the first floor to the top of the townhouse. I was fascinated by the beautiful staircase, which I had heretofore seen only in the movies. There was a semi-circular large desk where a receptionist sat. There were two young men who seemed to be security guards next to the desk. I told the receptionist that I had an appointment with the head of personnel. One of the security guards walked me up the stairs to the second floor for my interview.

An older man welcomed me and asked me to sit down after I shook his hand.

He wanted to know where I lived, my purpose in coming to New York and the nature of my work in the army and at the Foreign Office. Since I was going to school every day, he wanted to know when I would be able to work. I told him that I could be at work at 1:00 p.m. and work until the end of the day. He told me that he needed some time to check my security credentials with the Jerusalem office and would call me.

Although my father told me that I didn't have to worry about money, as he told my uncle to give me as much as I needed, there was no way I was going to go to my uncle for money. I hoped that I would get the job. I knew that security credentials would not be a problem. I was, however, worried that the people in the Jerusalem office would remember my telling them that I would only ask for a job at the consulate if I was not able to teach.

The next morning I got a call to come back to the consulate. I was elated. I got dressed and flew out of the house.

When I arrived at the consulate, I was immediately sent to the head of personnel. I was so excited; I had to talk to myself to calm down. As I walked into his office, the head of personnel got up and we shook hands. I was waiting for him to ask me to sit, but instead he said, "Follow me. Let's go to the top floor of the building." I followed him, both of us walking quietly up the stairs.

I was sure that we were going to another office. However, when we arrived at the top floor, he stopped and said, "We talk here. Eventually, you will understand why." I kept quiet, as he continued, "The office in Jerusalem sent an immediate approval to hire you. Your security clearance was excellent. It was a very important requirement for the department where I want to place you. It is a very small department and very secretive. It only employs three people: the head of the department, his secretary and one more person, which will be you,

provided you accept the position. This office is known as the Journalism Department. It deals with very high security subjects and jobs. Only heads of departments know the actual work that is carried out there.”

“I would have no problem with that, and would be happy to accept the position. As you know by now, I had the same situation in Jerusalem, and I managed well,” I answered.

“There is one major problem that you must know about,” he said. “Bogus telephone company workers, electricians and other workers always visit the department, unexpectedly. They are really State Department employees who check up on us to see if we are spying on the US. It is known that all embassies and consulates here, and all over the world, spy on the country where they’re stationed. If they get caught in these activities, then the departments that are involved get shut down. Their employees are immediately sent back to their country and can never come back to the US. Therefore, when these bogus workers show up, you need to cease any phone calls and any business talk. We never had a problem. But you must be aware that if it does happen that the department is shut down by the American government and its employees are sent back to Israel, you can never come back here, not even as a tourist.”

“I definitely understand, and I will accept the job,” I said.

“But, in case that happens, it won’t matter if your entire family is living here, you would still not be able to be with them,” he stressed.

“So, they will come to visit me,” I answered quickly, and he smiled.

“I just want to add another small detail. You will probably not have friends here, as you would not be able to describe the actual work that you do. All you can say is that it has to do with newspapers and not elaborate. Also, the office is located in a part of the building that has an elevator but no stairs. This elevator leads to the offices of the counsel, all the top officials and their personal secretaries only.”

“No problem,” I said, as he kept smiling and nodding his head from side to side.

After this conversation, we went ahead to the department. The office was a large room with a big window. There were three large desks, with a phone on each desk. Only my desk had an English typewriter. Adjacent to it, there was a small room that looked like a converted, big walk-in closet. It had a small desk, no phone and Hebrew and English typewriters. I was introduced to the head of the department, Raffi, and his secretary, Bathia. Then, the head of personnel left.

After a few words with Raffi, I sat down with Bathia to listen to my job description. The first thing I had to do was choose a code name for myself, which I decided would be Dorit. The second thing was to learn the combination for a lock to a very big metal closet where all the files and papers were stored and locked at the end of each day. The lock made me nervous, as I always had a hard time operating these types of locks. I was then told that I would do all the typing in English and Hebrew for our office, answer phone calls and, at times, go on errands. I would also have to learn how to translate coded messages from Hebrew to English and from English to Hebrew. It was also important for me to understand that at times I would be called to come to the office on weekends and holidays, if necessary. My regular hours would be 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m..

I was going to start at the job after the Jewish Holidays, which were in late September that year. The current secretary was leaving then, which would give me the opportunity to learn my tasks from my boss’s assistant without interference. I liked the late start, as it gave me a chance to adjust to school and explore the city. I was on cloud nine when I walked down Madison Avenue, where I knew I could catch a bus going downtown in case I got tired while walking to 53rd Street to take the subway home. I was so engrossed with window-shopping and impressed with the beautiful window displays of clothing, jewelry and art galleries, that it felt like a very short walk.

When I got home, I told my aunt Hanka about my job without going into too many details. In the evening, at dinner, my uncle Joe was pushing me to go into more specifics about the job, but I did not.

I started school during my second week in NY. The curriculum for English for Foreigners included language, grammar, American history, American government and a language lab. The class had students from many different places. We were three Israelis, three Arabs, two Cubans, African and French students. We three Israelis spent three hours a day together, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, five days a week, and we also walked

together from class to class. We decided immediately to reach out to the Arab students and show them our friendship. When we went over to them, they did not know what to expect.

We extended our hands and said, "We are your friends and hope to enjoy classes together and talk to each other."

With a look of surprise, they extended their hands too and said, "Happy to be friends."

From that moment on, we had a very friendly relationship and never discussed politics.

The two Cuban students were at each other's throat every day. One of them favored the dictator Batista and the other was for Fidel Castro, who started a revolution in Cuba against Batista. They began every day with a heated conversation, went on to scream at each other, and were always prepared to fight to back up their point of view. We had to separate them from fighting and hitting each other before our professor came to class.

We had three young professors. All of us were surprised at how young they were, as every one of us was used to being taught by older men at university. The first professor was an African American young man. His class concentrated on reading, grammar and writing. We wrote short essays, mostly concerned with everyday life and American politics. We read our essays out loud and students corrected each other's mistakes.

The professor was of average height and husky, had a round face and was soft-spoken and encouraging when we were upset and frustrated about mistakes that we made. His was an interesting method of teaching; it helped us to learn new words to use in daily conversations and to understand what we read in newspapers. He also found ways of introducing us to the American way of life, holidays and customs. He was very likable and easy to talk to.

One day, just before Christmas vacation he asked me to stay after class. I was very surprised, as I could not figure out the reason.

When all the students were out of the classroom, he said, "Miss Wachsberger, I would like to invite you to spend Christmas Eve with my family. I would like you to learn firsthand what Christmas is all about and how it is celebrated. I thought it would be of interest to you, as it is the first Christmas that you are experiencing in America."

I had to think quickly how to answer, as I was not sure how my family would react when I told them. So, I answered, "Thank you. I love the invitation, but I need to check with my family that I live with, to see if they have any plans. I would like to come. I will have an answer for you tomorrow."

"Okay," he said with a smile, as I left the classroom.

I thought it would be so exciting and interesting for me to be exposed to new customs and celebrations differing from the Jewish traditions. I liked him and felt very good about it. Although, I was not too sure how my aunts and uncles would feel about it.

When I told my aunt Hanka, she was completely against it. Then, when I went for dinner to my uncle Joe's home, she accompanied me. She was not going to stay for dinner. She waited for my uncle to come home, and we all sat in the living room to talk about the invitation. I told him about it, and said that I would love to go, as I never experienced something like it and thought it was a great opportunity. I also told them that my professor would bring me home.

"Absolutely not!" my uncle said in a loud voice. You are a Jewish girl and it is not your holiday, and it is also a black family and that is not a place for you. I am sure your parents would not let you go either, and we are responsible for you."

"Please think of it. Nothing will happen to me, I will not change my religion. It is an interesting way to see and learn how Christian people celebrate their holiday. The professor is a very nice, intelligent man, and he thought I would like it."

At this point, my uncle got up and said in a loud short voice: "No Miriam. Let's eat."

I got the message. I also knew that my parents would not have let me go, and so the subject was dropped. The next day, I stayed after class and told the professor that I could not come to his home, as my family invited some distant, out-of-town relatives to come and meet me for the first time. I told him how sorry I was, and he told me that he understands. I knew that he understood that it was only an excuse. I did not tell anyone in class

about the invitation.

The second class was a language lab. This professor was even younger looking than the other two. We could not get over it. In this class, he gave each of us a microphone. In the first lesson, he had each of us talk, and then he played what we said back to us. Our accents were amplified and we sounded terrible. Once the entire class went through this exercise, the professor asked us, "So, how did you like hearing yourself speak?" We all covered our mouths and no one answered, as we were in shock.

"There is a reason for this experiment. Most Americans only speak one language -English. Therefore, most of us have the same accent, with slight differences, according to where we live. It gets very boring. It is so nice to hear different accents. Do not try to lose your accents. They are charming. Instead I will teach you how to talk and pronounce the words correctly."

We were surprised to hear this explanation, and it made sense. Consequently, we took the class seriously. After a few lessons we started to feel more comfortable talking. We were amazed and thankful when strangers told us that we spoke English well. Although we knew that it was not so, it was encouraging and it made us feel good.

The third professor, in the last class of the day, concentrated on American history. He was very interesting, but not very well liked. He was very tall, had a great build, bright blue eyes and blond hair. He looked very much like a Swede. (Later on, when I was informed that he was a WASP, a term I never heard, I had to ask for an explanation.)

While he was teaching, he moved among the students, very erect and hardly ever smiling. I had a crush on him, and, at times, I flirted with him and got a mild response with a half smile. The only work we had in his class was reading and discussing what we read. He involved every student in the discussions and encouraged us all to speak, which at times was embarrassing, but good for us.

In order to improve my English, I watched Jack Paar on the Tonight Show, every night, while lying in my bed. It was a great show, and I learned a lot from watching it. I liked Jack Paar for his demeanor, sense of humor and his interviewing skills. I understood very little in the beginning of my viewing, but, after a short while, I improved quickly.

Every day, once my last class ended at 11:45 a.m., I ran out of the classroom, rushing in order to have a quick lunch and be at work by 1:00 p.m.. It was a long way from 4th street in the Village to 70th street and Fifth Avenue. I learned that I could get to work fast by subway, or take the slow Fifth Avenue bus that stopped on every other block to let off and pick up passengers. I tried the bus route before I started work, and found out that it took between forty-five minutes to one hour to get to the office. By subway, I could get to work in about twenty-five minutes. I decided to take the bus daily, as it was one block away from school. It also felt to me like sitting in a coffee house, watching beautiful window displays and elegantly dressed women and men walk by.

"Chock Full O' Nuts" was a restaurant right across the street from the building where I had classes. The restaurant had only counters with high stools. The food was very inexpensive and service was quick. It took me exactly ten minutes to have lunch. I only ate two items from the menu that was displayed on top of a wide opening to the kitchen. Every other day I ate a crunchy hot dog on a roll with mustard and sauerkraut, accompanied by an orange drink. On alternating days, I ate dark, nut and date bread with cream cheese and a cup of coffee. I liked the taste of both lunches and the cost that was under two dollars was perfect for my budget. My salary at the consulate was low and had to cover all my daily expenses, as I did not want to dip into my father's money. I never deviated from this food. I always got to the bus station on time and was able to get a seat by the window, as I was at the beginning of the line. My friends in class thought I was nuts not to take the subway. They could not understand my reasoning, and I ignored them.

One day, as I was walking to the bus, I heard someone call out, "Miss Wachsberger, where are you going every day?"

I turned around and was surprised to see my handsome, blond professor. I got very uptight, not knowing why he was following me.

I answered swiftly in one long breath with a very annoyed voice, "I go to work at the Israeli consulate

uptown, where I am allowed to work on a student visa, as it is considered Israeli territory.”

He smiled and said, “I followed you a few times after seeing you run out of class so fast that I never had a chance to speak to you, or even to call out your name. I became curious. I wanted to know more about you. I’ll walk you to the bus.”

At that point, I relaxed and smiled back.

As we were walking, he said, “I would like to take you out for dinner or have a cup of coffee with you. I am interested to hear more about your growing up in Israel and the life in your country.” My heart skipped a beat, and I needed time to think it out. “I will let you know,” I answered and stepped quickly on the bus. I was excited that he asked me out, but did not think that going out with him would be a good idea. I was going to tell my family about him, and was almost sure that they would be against it. I was not 100% sure, only because he was white and not African American. Deep down, I hoped that they would be against it, and happily they were.

My uncle said, “I would not let you go out with a goy. You should only go out with Jewish men.”

I did not argue this time.

The next day, I kept the same routine, and halfway to the bus I heard my name being called again. When I turned around, knowing who it was, he immediately asked, “So, what is your answer Miss Wachsberger?”

“Sorry, but I can’t go. My days are very long and tiring. Thank you for the invitation.”

“See you in class,” he said, and we each went in opposite directions. Nothing changed in class, and I was relieved. I stopped flirting with him.

The winter came, rain and some snow, and I wore three-quarter high, warm and waterproof laced shoes that my father bought for me when he was in New York. One day, on the way to the bus, I heard my name called again. I knew who it was and could not believe it. I turned around to greet the professor, not being able to figure out why he was there.

After we greeted each other, he said, “I hope you will not be angry with me, but I have to tell you something. I see you wearing these shoes whenever it rains or snow. They make you look terrible. You are a beautiful young woman, and this is not becoming. I hope you can get rid of them and get regular boots. I just could not hold it in anymore and had to tell you. I hope you are not insulted Miss Wachsberger.”

I was very surprised, and thanked him with a big smile. After I came home and told my aunt, we went immediately to a shoe store to buy boots and left the ones I had on in the store for them to give away. The next day, I wore my new boots, and when I came to class, the professor nodded his head in approval and smiled. Nothing was ever said again, and at the end of the semester he shook every student’s hand and wished us all the best.

The following semester I was able to take three classes. Two required courses and one elective of my choice. I chose a sociology course - Marriage and the Family Among Different Religions. I thought it would be an easy course to start and keep up with.

The professor was a middle-aged, matronly-looking woman. We were told that in addition to attending her lectures, we each would have to research and present to the class a paper that she will assign to each student. She was a very interesting instructor, full of life and good humor.

At the end of one of the lectures, she called my name and said, “Miss Wachsberger, as you lived in Israel you must know a lot about the family and traditions of the Jewish and Arab societies. Please prepare a lecture to give to the class.”

Listening to some of the other students presenting their research, I was not sure that I could manage it. I was the only foreign student in that class, and my vocabulary and speech wasn’t anywhere near the level of the rest of the students who were native-born Americans. I was frightened, but did not say anything. I got friendly with a female student seated next to me. I told her I needed information about the Arab traditions, as I did not know enough for a lecture. She suggested that I go to the Arabic Department at the central public library on Fifth Avenue.

I told my boss about the lecture and he gave me permission to skip one afternoon and go to the library, as I had only two days to get ready. When I arrived, I was very impressed by the building the library was in. I was directed to the Arabic Department. I told the librarian the subject I needed to research and she told me to sit down at one of the desks and she will bring me the books. I was very happy. I sat down, opened my notebook and waited. Before long, some books were put in front of me.

At that point, a young man approached me. I immediately knew that he was an Arab. I could tell by the color of his very black eyes, black hair and slightly dark skin.

He said, "Shalom. My name is Ahmed. I am an Arab. I could tell by your accent that you are from Israel. I know that we are enemies, but I can help you. I heard the subject you have to present to your class. I can give you all the information in twenty minutes, if you let me, and that will save you a lot of time."

It was the first time that I personally met an Arab face to face. I had mixed feelings, although I wanted to accept the offer.

I looked at him and said, "We are not enemies. We don't fight with each other and I will accept your offer."

He smiled and was very happy. In twenty minutes, he dictated to me all the information, and I was thrilled.

Once he was done, we shook hands and I said, "Thank you Ahmed for all your help. I hope one day our people can stop fighting and have peace."

He nodded his head in agreement and left. As I was returning the books to the librarian, she said, "This was nice, to watch both of you working together. I was relieved when you accepted his offer. You handled it very well, and I'm sure your report will be very accurate and interesting. I know this young man, as he comes here a lot. He is very intelligent and knowledgeable. He studied sociology and is planning to go back to his people to help them improve their lives."

I thanked the librarian for the information, and went home to finish my report.

I was nervous when my turn to lecture came, worrying about my English. I walked to the front of the class with my head up showing confidence, while my stomach was in knots. I only relaxed when I saw that the students and the professor were listening with interest. When I ended the presentation, my professor thanked me for the very informative and accurate report. I received a high mark for the work.

It was a very busy time and I was finding it somewhat difficult to combine school, work, study and a lot of daily traveling from one place to another, while also trying to have a social life and go on dates.

By the time I started my job at the consulate, I was settled in my classes. I liked the free time I had before I had to report to work. It gave me a chance to explore the city and to have lunch with the few Israeli friends that I knew from Israel, who were now living in New York. I also had dates, mostly blind dates, which I accepted. Most of them lasted one or two outings at most. I went out on blind dates because I was not ready to go to dances at hotels to try to meet people, which was the norm at the time. I asked one of my dates to take me to a dance, only to see how it worked. We stayed at one dance for ten minutes, and I knew that it was not for me. I didn't like the way the women were standing against a wall on one side of the room and the guys on the other side, with the women waiting for the guys to come and invite them to dance.

My dates always picked me up at my aunt's home, so that my aunt and uncle could see whom I was going out with, which was also the custom in Israel. Their son, my cousin Harry, was about eight or nine years old at the time. Whenever I was picked up, he sat next to my aunt on the sofa. As soon as I left, he expressed his opinion about my date, which my aunt told me about the next day. I thought it was very humorous.

The only person I dated more than twice was an optometrist from New Jersey. He was pleasant looking and a gentleman. The best thing about him was that he was off on Wednesdays, had a convertible car and offered to pick me up at NYU on Wednesdays after classes. This was an offer I could not refuse. He always had a plan on where to have lunch and what area of the city to go to. With him, I went to all the tourist attractions that you had to pay to visit. It was great, as I went by myself to the free ones. That fall, the weather was unusually beautiful, and it was so exciting to be in his convertible, driving all over the city. I hardly talked in the car, only listened to

explanations of things we were seeing. I remember feeling so overwhelmed by all that I was seeing that I even wrote home about it.

Once I started working, I could only see him on Sundays. Our dating went on for a few weeks, and then we stopped seeing each other, as he was going on vacation to Europe

I liked my work at the consulate. Although the pay was low, it was enough for pocket money, which made me happy. I also liked my job.

My boss Raffi was a married man, but he and his wife had no children. He was a very nice person. He was very tall, handsome and had fine manners. His secretary was married too, and her husband worked part time and was going for a master's degree. She was nice too, and we all got along very well.

I made no friends at the consulate, as I had no time, and I also lived in Queens, while mostly everyone lived in Manhattan. In addition to my daily routine, I spent at least three hours a day in traveling from one place to another. I also was not able to talk about my work, and most of the people my age who shared apartments in Manhattan also shared stories about their work, something I couldn't do.

I often went to lunch with Raffi. He introduced me to some small diners and hamburger places on Madison Avenue. At times, he liked to go to lunch to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where we sat indoors by a beautiful round pool with a fountain. This was my favorite place to go for lunch. Whenever he asked me to accompany him for lunch, he picked up the bill. He never let me pay, although I offered. He would say, "I get a much higher salary than you, so do not worry about it."

Bathia and I rarely went out to lunch. She either had errands to take care of, or else she brought lunch from home in order to save money, as she supported herself and her husband.

Raffi and I had very nice talks. He always asked me about my social life, as it was different in Tel Aviv than in Jerusalem where he grew up and always lived. Raffi and I became good friends. At one of our lunches, he poured his heart out. His facial expression became very somber and he said, "I have a miserable time. Whenever I come home late in the afternoon, my wife is always in her pajamas and her housecoat and hardly ready to go out. This is why I stay in the office late in the evenings. I hate to go home. The apartment is in such disarray. If I didn't wash the piled up dishes in the sink and bring dinner home, we would not eat. All she does is watch television or read. She basically hates living in New York. She misses her family and her friends. I have to finish my time in New York, as I want to be promoted when we go back to Israel. She is an intelligent person, but is afraid to speak English and be made fun of. We can have great fun here, but she refuses to do anything. I already told her that she could go back home and I will finish my tour of duty in one year instead of two, but she refuses."

"Thank you for sharing that with me," I said. "I was wondering why you are in the office before I come in and leave so late. I did not want to ask Bathia."

One day, we went to the United Nations building to have lunch in their special dining room. Raffi asked me if I could skip some classes and meet him in front of the UN around 11:00 a.m., and I immediately agreed. He was entitled to do it, and also to bring guests, because he represented the Israeli consulate. At times, he would introduce Knesset members to the place, or have meetings with the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations there.

The ambassador at the time was Dr. Levine, a perfect diplomat in looks and behavior. I knew him from the Foreign Office and he remembered me. We shook hands and talked for a short while. He had been the head of the Department of International Relationships, when I worked there. He was always very friendly and warm to the workers in the office. He was very happy in his appointment, although I learned from Raffi that he had to follow instructions from the Jerusalem Office.

We first went into the diplomatic lounge, which was a very large room. The furniture was in the old European style and upholstered in heavy brocades. The large windows were framed with heavy silk draperies and left open, so as not to block the beautiful view of the East River and Queens beyond. It was a very formal décor. All the diplomats wore suits, white shirts and ties, my boss included. The attire for all consulate employees was business attire. Waiters in black were serving drinks. It was very crowded, filled with diplomats standing or sitting, talking softly and appearing to be very friendly with each other.

I told Raffi my impression and he said, “Don’t let it fool you. There are no fights here, and this is why they are called diplomats. They try to settle problems quietly. But it does not mean that whatever was discussed and agreed on will be achieved. Every diplomat here must report to his or her government about their discussions and get instructions on how to proceed. Many times, the final outcome is the opposite of what was discussed and agreed upon. At times, final decisions are completely changed and come as a last minute surprise to the people involved.”

As it was too early for lunch, I went on a tour of the building. I was so impressed by the building and its architecture. I told Raffi what a great idea it was to have such an organization and hoped that it would help to achieve and keep peace in the entire world. He smiled at me, probably thinking that I was young and naive. I knew it was just a dream, but did not want to argue with him about it, so I kept quiet.

We then went to lunch at the diplomatic dining room. It was a very elegant large room. Round tables were covered in white damask tablecloths. The tables were set with white porcelain dishes decorated with the UN logo, crystal wine and water glasses and glittering silverware. Beautiful flower arrangements in the middle of every table made the dining room look festive, as though set for a wedding celebration. Most of the tables were occupied, and we were led to a table for two by the window. I needed help understanding the menu, as there were dishes on it that I was not familiar with. Our orders were taken, and I turned down his invitation to drink wine with my meal. Everyone was involved in conversation, but in hushed voices. Classical music played in the background, the volume turned low, so as not to disturb any conversations.

While waiting for our lunch, I said to my boss, “Thank you so much for inviting me today. This is a very special place and there is nothing like it in Israel. I also want to thank you for all you taught me today about the place, the people and the politics. I have learned more today than I did at Hebrew University in a whole semester. You are full of information and thank you for taking me out of the office today.”

He smiled and said, “It was my pleasure. I could see how attentive and excited you were. I will share with you something that you are not to share with anyone. I am always the one to take any Knesset members for the same tour that you went on, and to eat here. You can’t imagine how many times I am being told ‘The Knesset building in Jerusalem is nicer.’ It angers me to no end that they are not able to appreciate what they are experiencing. I always thought they were narrow-minded and dumb. I never react to their remarks, because I do not want to argue with my visitors. I knew that taking you would be a different experience for me. This was a great day for me too.”

I only went there with him one more time. But from then on, I always made sure to take anyone who came to visit me from Israel to tour the UN.

At times, I had lunch with my friend Abe, who usually brought sandwiches that his wife prepared. It was the only time that I had an opportunity to talk about some of my work and to share with him what was happening in my life. I liked these lunches, as I always trusted him, and I had been very close to him and his wife in Israel. He had a very high position at the consulate, and his office was on the same floor as my office. Whenever I happened to pass by his office, I’d wave to him.

Work itself was good and interesting. I experienced “electricians” and “telephone company workers” walking through our office door unannounced a few times a week, exactly what I was told to expect. Business talk stopped immediately and subjects of phone calls were changed too. The only time I didn’t have to do that was when I was working in the tiny room, which looked like a closet. I often had to type long reports in English, on plain white paper without any headings. On those occasions, I could not be disturbed. Once a typing mistake was done, it could not be erased. The page had to be typed again from the beginning on a new piece of paper. It was a very difficult task and the minute my mind wondered, even for a split second, a mistake occurred. A few times it happened on the last sentence of the page. Two hundred percent concentration was needed; otherwise it could take hours to finish typing one job. One long document took me three days to finish. I was locked in the closet and making mistakes, usually in the spelling of big words that I didn’t understand. The only breaks I took were for lunch and for going to the ladies’ room. Many times, from frustration, I banged on the desk and was happy that no one could see or hear it.

Sometimes, I went by cab to deliver reports to different offices in the city. At other times, I delivered a lot of cash. The other secretary would meet different people in different spots and pick up various reports and documents, which mostly had to be returned the same day.

Another task I was assigned was to translate telegrams that were going back and forth between the offices in Jerusalem and the consulate. When the telegrams arrived in plain language, I had to look at a list and translate the important words to different words, which brought the true message to life.

The first time I had to translate such a document was during my first New Year's Day in New York. I got a phone call at around 1:00 P.m., telling me to come to the consulate to translate a telegram as fast as I could. I was very surprised, as I did not expect this on New Year's Day. My aunt and uncle could not believe this call and wanted to know why I was summoned. I made up some kind of a story and ran out. It took a very long time to get to the office, as subways and buses were running on a holiday schedule.

When I arrived at the consulate, I was let into the building by the guard, who was told to expect me. He gave me a telegram and I took it to my office. The list with the translated words was behind the locked doors of the closet. I wished that I was able to open it just using a key. But it had a regular lock with numbers that had to be moved in a certain combination. I always had problems with locks like this and usually was able to avoid them. I tried to be calm about it, but that did not help. I started to sweat, and there was no one to ask for help. Finally, after half an hour of trying again and again, the closet opened. I started to cry with relief.

It took me a very long time to translate. It was my very first translation and I wanted to make sure that I was doing it correctly. I was relieved when it was done. Afterwards, I returned home and went to my aunt and uncle's for dinner. My uncle Joe was curious to know what I do at the consulate that I had to go in on New Year's Day. He didn't stop nagging me. Finally, I said, "It is a very interesting job, but I cannot describe it. Please stop asking."

He looked at me and was surprised that I turned my head and got up to leave the table. He was smart, so he said, "Stay. I will not ask anymore. I was just curious."

"Thank you," I answered, stayed at the table and the subject never came up again.

My mom's second cousin was getting married, at the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan, and I was invited to the wedding, as were my aunts and uncles.

I decided to wear a tight-fitting, red dress that I brought from Israel. I had this dress custom-made for me after seeing a similar one worn in a play.

As a young girl, I loved accompanying my parents to the theatre, the ballet, the opera and everything else that had to do with the arts. On this particular night, we went to the Cameri Theatre, which experimented with a lot of new plays. The play that night was *Look Who is Coming for Dinner*. (Not the same as the movie that we are familiar with, which is called *Guess Who's Coming for Dinner*?) All I remember about the plot is that the main character was waiting for a date in her apartment, and was wearing this very sexy, long-sleeved red dress, closed all the way to the neck and with a narrow "V" opening in the back.

At intermission, while we were discussing the play, my father had this mischievous look in his eyes. He asked me, "Do you like the play?"

"Yes," I said. Because you know I love Hanna Maron. But, I especially love her dress and would like to have the same one."

mn,mn,He laughed and said, "I knew you would say that."

My mom was very happy to hear that I wanted such a dress. The next day we went to get the material. I made a sketch of the dress, and we went to my favorite dress maker. She made it for me.

Whenever I wore the dress, my father, who thought it was very sexy, would smile and refer to it as the "work" dress.

So, there I was at the wedding wearing this tight red dress. There were many family members there that I had not yet met. I was especially excited about meeting my maternal grandfather's brother. I never met my grandparents, as they perished in the Holocaust. I sat with this small old gentleman, who was crying like a baby from excitement. He was very gentle and kept hugging me, probably feeling the same connection that I did. His

English was very good as he lived here for quite a few years and, luckily, as my tears were rolling down my face, I was able to mumble a few English words.

After I spent about 20 minutes with him, I made my way to the bathroom to clean up my face. I passed by a group of young people standing in a semi-circle. I quickly went by them, but on my way back, as I passed by them again, I heard one of them calling: "Hey you!"

I turned around and saw this very tall, dark and handsome young man who asked me for my name. When I told him it was Miriam, he asked, "Attached or unattached?"

I did not understand what he meant so I asked him and he wanted to know if I was married. I answered negatively, and when he wanted to see my hands, I spread them and showed him that I had no wedding band.

I don't remember anything about the wedding ceremony that night. All I know is that I was asked by Carl to sit with him and his friends wherever they will be sitting. It was a buffet wedding and there was no assigned seating. We ended up sitting together and talking the whole afternoon.

I danced with all his friends and had a great time. When the party ended and Carl asked if he could take me home, I told him that I came with my aunts and uncles and would be going home with them. He asked me for my phone number, which I couldn't remember. I went over to my uncle, he told me what it was, and made me repeat it a few times. I gave Carl the phone number, as well as my aunt and uncle's names and address. I said goodbye as I did.

While I was waiting with my family for the valet to bring their car, I told them, "Did you see the guy I sat and talked to? I am going to marry him." They all laughed at me and thought I might be a little drunk, but I knew it, even then.

Coming home, sitting down and going over all the details of that afternoon, I suddenly realized that I made a mistake in the telephone number by switching the numbers. I was upset and waited for Carl to call for over a week. I decided that if I didn't hear from him, I would wait for the young married couple to come back from their honeymoon and get his number from them. But, he did call.

When I wrote my father about meeting Carl, he wrote back, "Did you wear your 'work' dress?"

We started to date. Carl planned all our dates and they were wonderful. I told Carl that I loved the theatre. So, for our first date, we went to see *Romanoff and Juliet*, starring Peter Ustinov, who was a very respected and famous actor. The play was a modern version of the classic play *Romeo and Juliet*. It was the first time I went to the theatre in New York. We had very good tickets in the fourth row, slightly to the side, in the orchestra. I was surprised to see how old the theatre was, as I was used to modern theaters only. I enjoyed the play, but found that it was difficult for me to understand everything. I was also somewhat distracted, as every once in a while I snuck side looks at Carl. I was totally in love, but not ready to say anything. I knew it was real, as I never felt that way before. I was in seventh heaven when Carl took my hand and kissed it lightly and kept holding it. After the play, we went for coffee and cake at the *Éclair* coffee shop on 72nd Street on the Upper West Side. It was a very popular place for desserts.

Taking me home, after that first date, Carl asked me in the elevator, "Can I kiss you, although it is our first date? What do you do in Israel?"

"You do what you feel," I answered.

He smiled and walked me to the door without kissing me. We shook hands, I thanked him for a nice evening, and he said he would call me.

It was difficult for me to fall asleep, as I regretted my answer in the elevator. I was upset with myself, and surprised at his reaction. As much as I wanted to be kissed, I could not say it. I was afraid that Carl would never call again. At this point, I knew that I would have to be honest about my feelings, and not be as cynical as I used to be in Israel, where I tended to keep a physical distance from my dates. Some thought I was a "cold fish and calculating," but I never loved anyone, and didn't care if I gave that impression.

I was very uptight during the entire week following our first date. I was elated when Carl called on Wednesday night and asked me for a second date. My aunt Hanka told me that all dates should be arranged at the latest by Wednesday. No girl should accept a date after that night. I immediately told my aunt that I would not follow this custom if I was interested in a person. It did not make any sense to me.

As my English improved somewhat, I felt more comfortable conversing. At this point, I asked Carl to tell me about himself, but he asked me to do the same first. We were in a very small romantic restaurant. I thought it was time to know more about him, and I was anxious to tell him more about my growing up in Israel. I knew I would be somewhat nervous because of my broken English. I wore a fine, horizontal-striped, two-piece turtleneck dress, in black and dark green colors. I always felt very comfortable wearing it and very confident. Carl asked me to go first and I was happy about that, as it meant that I would not have to worry about my delivery when done, and could fully listen to him. I went into details about my parents and brothers and how important family, including aunts, uncles and cousins, were to me. I talked about school, the army and my social life. At times, when I got stuck looking for the right word,

I chuckled and smiled and was helped. He seemed very attentive and interested. When I was finished, I asked if he understood me.

“Yes I did. You really had a wonderful childhood growing up,” he said.

“So, now it is your turn,” I said.

It was so interesting to hear and see what a different life and background he had from mine, but I knew that it could work out between us. We went to movies, theatre, dancing and some small romantic places. He introduced me to new experiences and places.

I remember one of our Sunday dates, on a very cool, beautiful day in the late fall. I never asked where we were going, but made sure to always dress well. I always wore high heels. The only flat shoes I had were white, simple canvas sneakers, which I only wore when I played tennis. When Carl picked me up, he told me that we were going out of the city to Bear Mountain. He wanted me to see people ski. Although it hadn't snowed yet, the ski slopes were just opened and were covered with manmade snow. I loved the idea, but knew that I was dressed wrong. I wore a very heavy and warm tweed coat dress.

All my wool dresses and suits were heavy. In Tel Aviv, there were no radiators in the apartments because of the mild winters. So, on winter nights and damp rainy days the apartments got very cold, and heavy wools kept us warm.

When we arrived at Bear Mountain, I was fascinated by the surroundings. The only time I had seen people skiing was in the movies. I could see that the skiers, all dressed in ski outfits, were staring at me, as I was dressed all wrong. We stayed for a while. Then, when the sun started to go down and it got colder, we went back to the car.

“Would you like to go to a bowling alley where friends of mine are bowling this afternoon?” he asked.

“What is a bowling alley?” I asked. I had never been to one because Israel did not have any, yet. We drove back and went to an alley in Washington Heights, where Carl and all his friends lived. I chose to sit and observe. I was introduced to his friends, and told Carl that it is fine with me for him to bowl. I was curious to watch and understand the game. I liked the body movements needed in order to get the ball going the right way and score high. They were all good players, and they met once a week as part of a league. I realized that Carl was very good, and felt proud. I also thought that he looked very sexy. As I was sitting and watching the game, I realized that, in a very short time in New York, I learned and saw so many new things, which were completely different from life in Israel. I loved it, and I knew deep in my heart that I would not have any difficulty living in and loving this country.

One Sunday, Carl and I met Abe and his wife Jukie at Fort Tryon Park in Washington Heights. We sat together for a long time, having coffee and cake and talking. The next morning in the office, Abe told me that whatever I told him about Carl was true, and that I never went out in Israel with such a handsome, smart and wonderful man.

“No wonder you are so much in love with him,” he said.. “Miri, we never saw you like this with anyone you dated in Israel. You look so happy and you are glowing. We both wish you all the best and are very happy for you.” I was thrilled to hear it from Abe, as I always trusted him and his wife to be honest with me.

A week later, on a date, Carl and I went to the Living Room, one of our favorite places. I told Carl what Abe told me of their impression of him. The place was semi dark, and had low round tables with marble tops.

On top of each table there were nuts, pretzels and other snacks. A baby grand piano was placed in a corner and a pianist was playing some familiar classical pieces, but mostly jazz and popular music, old and new. The chairs by the tables were lounge chairs covered in beautiful fabrics and very comfortable. There was a large bar and only light food was served. It had a romantic atmosphere and guests spoke in very low voices, so as not to disturb those listening to the music. We liked going there a lot. A very similar bar was at the St. Moritz Hotel on 59th Street and Sixth Avenue. We went to this bar more frequently as it was more accessible than the Living Room.

We both connected and had a wonderful time, although I was not sure for a while if Carl always understood everything I was saying. He was a gentleman, so he did not ask me to repeat what I said. He was intelligent and could figure it out. In between dates, we talked on the phone and felt very free and happy with each other and in love.

At this point in our dating, I felt that it was time to buy myself a new dress. I saw a very beautiful black dress with white cuffs and a white collar made in the latest style, a chemise. It was in one of the fashionable store windows, on Austin Street, in Forest Hills.

When I was in Israel, I was used to always wearing the latest fashions. I told my aunt Hanka about the dress and asked her to come with me. I needed her to push me to buy it, as I thought it was too expensive. It was a good move on my part. She loved the dress and thought I should buy it and feel good about it and not worry about the money. When we went out of the store, she hugged me and congratulated me on my first important purchase in America. I was so excited, and could not wait to wear it on our next date. In order to make up for the money that I spent, I started bringing lunch to the office from home and eating by my desk. Instead of taking the bus to the subway after work, I walked. I kept cutting some other daily expenses, and saved some of the money that I spent, but not all of it. I did not tell my aunt about it, as I knew that she would think that it did not make sense.

A few weeks before Christmas, I was fascinated to see the holiday decorations all over the city, as I never saw anything like it before. I thought they were very beautiful. I liked the Christmas music, as well. I was told about the special window displays at some of the department stores, went to see them and I loved it. I went all over by myself, whenever I had the time, and felt like a kid in wonderland.

I was also very excited that Carl asked me to spend New Year's Eve with him. I realized that it was a big night of celebrations, which was not so in Israel. My dilemma was that I wore all my outfits and needed something new. I was not ready to spend more money. I told both my aunts, and my aunt Blumka opened her closet and told me to choose any of her outfits. I was very touched. She was very fashionable and had a lot of beautiful outfits. As we were not the same size, I started to try on dresses until I found one that I liked that fit well. We laughed a lot, and it felt like being in a high fashion store where both my aunts were the salesladies. I found a beautiful button-down, pink shirtwaist dress. It had a fitted top, cinched at the waist with a narrow belt and a full flowing skirt reaching mid-calf. It looked very festive, and I felt very good and sexy in it.

It was a very special evening. We went to a few parties, not staying too long at any of them. The first one was in a townhouse, across from the UN. All I remember is climbing up a flight of steps and walking through an open door into a dark room with loud music and people drinking, dancing, laughing, speaking loudly and it generally being very noisy. I was very happy that we did not stay too long.

Back at the first floor, just before going outside, Carl pushed me gently against the wall, hugged me and said, "I hope it is the first of many new years that we will spend together." Then, he kissed me more aggressively than at any other time.

"Yes" I answered, and for the first time ever responded positively to a statement like this. I was absolutely elated and felt so happy. Whenever I pass that building, that memory of that first New Year's Eve always comes back to me and I smile to myself.

From there, we went to a party somewhere on the Upper East Side, near Central Park, where we were to meet his cousin Curly. All I remember is going into a bathroom and being introduced to someone very drunk who was sitting on the floor with a half-empty bottle of booze in one hand, a glass in the other and leaning against the tub. Carl introduced me, but I didn't think Curly understood anything he was told.

At the third party, we met one of Carl's friends, who, after a while, had to bring his date back to her home in Brooklyn. He had a car and asked if we wanted to go with him for a ride. We agreed, and had a great time necking and kissing in the back seat. I did not want the ride to end. By the time I came back home, it was 3:00 a.m.

The next morning, at a late breakfast with my aunt and uncle, I was asked many questions. I did not mind sharing with them. Many times, when I came home after a date and they were up, my uncle Pinek would come out of their bedroom in his underwear and ask me to join them. My cousin Harry, who shared the room with them, was always fast asleep by then. I would spend some time telling them all about my date. I felt good doing so, as it reminded me of what I used to do at home. The only way I could communicate with my parents in those days was by mail, which was not very satisfying. At any rate, I wrote home three times a week and felt good about doing so, as they always wrote back.

Carl's birthday was coming up on January 13. I decided to buy him a gift. It was the first time that I bought a gift for a man I dated. It took me a while to decide what would be proper, as I wanted it to be nice and useful, but not something that would make me look pushy. I finally decided on a silver cigarette case and had it engraved with his initials. With it, I also gave him a few pages of writings, not in a very good English, and filled with spelling mistakes, expressing how lucky I felt to have met him and conveying my love. I wrote it in a small book with a colorful cover made of a silk fabric. Carl was very surprised when I presented him with my gift, and he thanked me and gave me a hug and a long kiss.

In February, we were invited to visit with Carl's friends, Siti and Gunter, in their apartment in Washington Heights. They were the first couple I met of his friends. They invited us for Saturday night, after Shabbat, as they were and are Orthodox. That same day, was also Valentine's Day, which I did not know anything about. My aunts told me what it meant. That Saturday, the city was blanketed by one of the heaviest snowstorms ever. It looked so beautiful, but I was very upset. I knew that my date with Carl would have to be canceled, as it was impossible to drive from Washington Heights to Queens.

Our neighbors from Israel, the Lapin family, were in New York and staying at the Majestic apartment hotel on 72nd street and Central Park West. I was very close with their daughter, Rachel, in Israel. So, I called her, and while we were talking, I mentioned how upset I was about not being able to see Carl. She immediately insisted that I take the subway and sleep over at their apartment. I called Carl and told him about it, and he was very happy and suggested we keep our date. I immediately packed a bag and took the subway to the city, leaving myself enough time to sit and chat with Rachel.

When Carl came to pick me up, I was very excited to have him meet my dear friend. We sat and talked for a while, and then we left. When we were at the semi dark hallway, on the way to the elevator, Carl motioned to a bench standing against one of the walls.

"Let's sit down for a moment," he said. So we did. "Today is Valentine's Day and I would like to give you this gift," said Carl. Then, he took a wrapped present out of his coat pocket. I opened the blue velvet elongated box, which contained a beautiful charm bracelet with four charms. I was very surprised and delighted. This was very unexpected.

"I'd like to tell you about the charms," he said. "Each of these charms represents you. The first charm is the boat that brought you from Israel. The second one is the Statue of Liberty. The third one represents my heart and the day we met, which was a lucky day for me. And the fourth one is the Jewish star which tells who you are. I hope that with time we will add more charms. I love you!" he said softly. I held my breath and we hugged and kissed. It was the first time he told me that he loved me. At the time, I was wondering about it. Deep down, I had a feeling that he did, but I had to give him more time to express it. Up to that point, he had not declared his love, so I was not exactly always sure that he did. Therefore that Valentine's Day's evening was so very special.

We went out of the hotel holding hands and walked through the high snow to catch a bus to go and meet his friends. Luckily, my aunt Hanka, while the weather was still good, made sure that I had boots, a warm winter coat, a warm scarf and gloves.

It was my first excursion to the Lower East Side. All the storekeepers were Jewish and had very successful

businesses. The Lower East Side was known to have lower prices than were charged by department stores. Very rarely did my family go shopping in department stores. The only big store we went to was S. Klein, on 14th Street. It was the first large discount store for women's fashions that carried everything that a woman might need.

We had a lovely dinner at his friends' apartment. It was easy for me to converse, as Siti grew up in Israel and spoke Hebrew. She was able to sense when I got stuck, understanding or speaking, and helped me out. At breakfast the next morning, I told Rachel all the details about my evening and showed her the bracelet. She was very happy for me and it was like old times in Israel, sitting and chatting. She told me that she never saw me that excited about a guy and so in love. She wished me the best and hoped that I would get married to Carl. She agreed with me that he was the best man I ever went out with.



*Me as a baby being held by my mother, Rosel with my sister Trudy*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER ONE

### Carl's Early Childhood in Germany

I was born in Germany in a village called Nieder-Ohmen, in the province of Hessen. The village, together with 11 other villages, is now part of the community known as Mueke. This new community came into being in the year 1972 through Hesse's municipal reforms. Nieder-Ohmen, currently with 2,800 inhabitants, is by far the most populated of the 12 villages of the Mueke community.

Nieder-Ohmen is located along a river known as the Ohm. The word "nieder" means below or underneath. Therefore, our village was located at the end of the river. A neighboring village was named Ober-Ohmen. The word "ober" means above, and that village was located at the beginning of the river. I was born on Friday, January 13, 1928. Although many people have superstitions about bad things happening when Friday falls on the 13th, I must honestly say that it has always been a lucky day for me. As an example, whenever I took an exam on Friday the 13th, I usually got very good marks. Later on, when on Friday the 13th I had an appointment with a potential new client, I always felt confident that the interview would go well and I would land a new client. Even today, when I make an investment in a new security on Friday the 13th, I feel most confident that this purchase will ultimately yield us a profit.

I have a sister, who was born on April 1, 1926. Her given name was Gertrude, but to everybody she was known as Trude, or Trudy. We were always very close, and later, when we came to the U.S., she looked after me while our parents worked long hours. I can recall that, in those years, whenever we walked together on the street, she would generally hold my hand. She was very protective of me and kept a close eye on what I was doing.

Since she was the oldest, she took it upon herself to delegate to me all the chores that she was not particularly fond of. Like most siblings, we did have our occasional differences, but this did not come between our strong feelings for each other. My sister passed away, after a short illness, on May 7, 2014.

My father's name was Julius, and he too was born in Nieder-Ohmen, on April 5, 1896. His parents' names were Seligman and Dalphina. My grandfather was also born in Nieder-Ohmen. As a matter of fact, the Stern family can be traced back to Nieder-Ohmen to as early as the year 1750. My father had two sisters and a brother. His brother, Moritz, was married and also lived in Nieder-Ohmen. The two sisters were married and lived in towns not too distant from our village.

In those days, very few people had cars, and the most common form of transportation to get to a town located some distance from your own town was the railroad. The problem with this was that many small towns did not have a railroad station or only local trains would stop in the town. As a result, travel to



*My mother's parents, Hannchen & Kalman Oppenheimer*

another town, even one not far from your own village, was a complicated and lengthy undertaking.

Both sisters married men with the first name of Julius. Supposedly, when they talked to each other, they would refer to their own husband as “my Julius,” to the husband of the sister as ”your Julius,” and to my father, their brother, as “our Julius.”

My mother, Rosel Oppenheimer, was born on November 9, 1900, in a village called Ober Seemen. Her father's name was Kalman, and her mother's name was Hannchen Adler. The Oppenheimer family was quite orthodox, and certainly more observant than the Stern Family. My mother had four sisters and one brother. She was the second youngest of the children, the tallest and by far the most pretty of the girls. All the siblings married and had children. Moritz, my mother's brother, was always on the lookout for a match for one of his sisters. It was customary in those days that a brother would not marry until such a time that all his older female siblings were wed. I once saw a postcard which Moritz mailed home while serving in the German Army during the First World War, in which he stated that he ran into a very nice young Jewish man, who he thought might be a good match for one of his older sisters. The young man seemed particularly interesting, since he owned two cows and about six chickens.

Exactly how my parents met, I am not quite sure. I recall hearing that they possibly met at a dance for young Jewish singles, and/or that someone introduced them, which is most likely. I know that by the time they were married, on May 12, 1925, all four of my grandparents had passed away. As a result, I never had the opportunity to know any of my grandparents, which is something I deeply regret to this day. I frequently tell my grandchildren that they are fortunate that they are growing up knowing their grandparents. They all very much agree with me.



*My mother, Rosel, as a young bride.*

I was named after my grandfather Kalman, as were most of my male cousins on the Oppenheimer side of the family, namely, Kurt Oppenheimer and Kurt Rosenbaum. In the years before the Holocaust, I had nineteen first cousins. Today, in the year 2016, only 2 of my cousins are still alive. Six of my cousins passed away in the Holocaust, and the other eleven died of natural causes.

Around mid-1930, the town of Nieder-Ohmen had a population of about two thousand residents. Most of the gentile residents in town were engaged in farming. The town had about twenty-five Jewish families, and they were mostly engaged in cattle trading or selling of dry goods. One of the Jewish residents operated a kosher butcher store, where the local and Jewish residents from surrounding communities purchased their meat products.

We had a synagogue, and the community engaged a cantor who also carried on the duties of teacher, rabbi and schochit (butcher). Jewish families from towns surrounding Nieder-Ohmen, without their own house of worship, travelled to our town to partake in our Jewish services. They would either walk from their own homes to our town on Saturday and holidays or stay over in town with a Jewish family. The community was not really ultra orthodox, but very observant and strongly followed tradition.

The Jewish families observed all of the Jewish laws, including eating only kosher food and observing the Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. My father, until he died, prayed every morning and on weekdays put on his tefillin (phylacteries). Having said all this, I strongly feel that most German Jews living in small villages had a very limited Jewish education compared to the Eastern European Jews coming from similar surroundings. The Jewish education in these communities basically consisted of attending a few hours of Hebrew school each week, learning to read the prayer book and some introduction to the bible. To the best of my knowledge, all the Jewish children attended the same Hebrew class, regardless of age. The members of the congregation knew how to read from the prayer book, but basically did not understand what they were reading. Even today, when I go to services, I enjoy following the services in Hebrew, however, I have difficulty understanding what I am reading. We are fortunate to have English translations.

The town had a public school attended by students from the age of 6 to 14. To the best of my knowledge, age 14 was the end of compulsory education in Germany at that time. After graduation, you could either go to a school of higher education, or become an apprentice in a wholesale or retail business or for a craftsman. For instance, my mother was sent to a larger village where she did her apprenticeship in a medium-sized retail establishment of women's wear. In addition to helping out in the store, she was also required to do some housework. My father also became an apprentice to a wholesaler of men and women's clothing located in a small city. My parents both served an apprenticeship for a period of two years.

During the period of apprenticeship, they received limited, if any, compensation, but were given free board and lodging. According to an article in the Wall Street Journal, dated October 17, 2016, this system of apprenticeship, which is rooted in medieval guilds, and still practiced in Germany today, is currently under attack. This system makes it most difficult for young people and new immigrants to find good paying jobs, or to start a new business.

Nieder-Ohmen had a stop on the railroad route that went from Frankfurt to Giesen to Alsfeld. Most trains heading or coming this way stopped in our village. Kids, myself included, would frequently wait for the train and sit along the tracks waving to the passengers. There were many neighboring villages that had no railroad stop, and the trains would just pass them by. The town, however, had no theatre or movie house.

There definitely was no kosher restaurant. The only eating establishments were the local taverns. Jewish families would eat all their meals and entertain family and friends at home. Besides cooking, the ladies were busy taking care of the children and with knitting and sewing.

The relationship with the gentiles in town was cordial. Our immediate neighbors were farmers, and they got along real well with my parents. They had a barn with quite a few cows and calves. I spent a lot of time either watching them work in the barn or riding in the farmer's wagon to the fields. I recall that one of our neighbor's daughters was our Shabbos goy. On Friday nights, Shabbat and Jewish holidays, the "Shabbos goy" would come to our house to turn on and off the stove and the lights. After we came to the United States, my parents left a



*My sister's first day of school.*



*My Uncle Moritz in World War 1.*



*The house I was born in.*

small flame burning on the gas range over Shabbat. They also had a light that was connected to a timer. This advancement of technology replaced the “Shabbos goy” in our house

My father, after finishing his apprenticeship, worked together with his uncle, Leonhard Stern, in a dry goods establishment in Nieder-Ohmen. After my parents got married, my father took over the business from the uncle and also bought his house. I think that, until his death, the uncle continued to live in the house with my parents.

My sister and I were both born in this house. The house was located on a street known as Juden Berg (Jewish Hill). Around 1965, when I returned to Nieder-Ohmen with Miriam for the first and only time, the street was still known as “Juden Berg.”

Surrounding the house, we had lots of fruit trees and a field for growing strawberries, blueberries and most of our vegetables. My parents, over the years, made substantial alterations to the house, including building a new dry goods store in a section of the main floor. At the end of the street where we originally lived, there was a small building with a huge oven. It was here that the women would come to bake their bread, challahs and cakes.

My dad travelled around to neighboring towns and sold to the residents, mostly farmers, dry goods, home furnishings and men and women’s wear. He would set out each morning on his bicycle to visit his customers, and probably saw each customer once a month. The goods that the customers ordered would be delivered on his next trip or shipped by parcel post. Most customers had a running account, and would pay down their account with a monthly payment. Accounts were kept in a book, and no interest was charged on unpaid balances. This was really a unique method of doing business, since the customer remained on the books almost indefinitely.

When he left in the morning on his bicycle, bundles containing goods ordered by customers were hanging from the side and back of the bike. My father returned home every night. Once in a while, when we had no school, my father would take me along on his daily trip. I remember how special those days were for me - sitting in the back of my father’s bicycle and watching him deal with his customers. When my father was on the road, my mother ran the store in the house. My mom, having been an apprentice in this field, was a very talented businesswoman.

Once a year, my parents ran a sale in the store, which was the highlight of the year. My parents hired a car service to bring all the customers from neighboring villages to the store. The customers were served drinks and small sandwiches. My parents were probably the only merchants in the area who promoted their business in this manner. At the time, the main source of transportation in these small towns remained the horse and buggy. Giving the locals the opportunity to be driven in a car was something they very much looked forward to, which made the annual sale a big success. There was a lot of preparation for the sale, and the shelves were stacked with merchandise.

I recall one year, a day before the start of the sale, my father was just unpacking new wooden yardsticks that he had purchased. The yardsticks were used for measuring out yards of fabric from the fabric bolts. Apparently, I did something I was not supposed to do, and my father was angry and struck out at me with the new yardstick. Fortunately for me, he missed me and hit the counter with the yardstick. The yardstick splintered, and my Dad was very upset for a few minutes, until he finally hugged me and gave me a lecture.

From time to time, my Dad would travel by railroad to Frankfurt or Giessen to visit wholesalers and buy goods for the store. His credit rating was very good and he had an excellent reputation with suppliers, customers and competitors.

When I reflect upon how well my parents got along in jointly running the business, I think growing up and watching this relationship helped me later in life when Miriam and I worked together in business.

The town had very little to offer to its residents for relaxation. There were no movie houses, bowling alleys or skating rinks. To most of the non-Jewish population, the local tavern was the chief place for getting together to eat and have a beer or two. The Jewish crowd gathered in each other’s homes and usually played cards. My father played a card game called Skat, which was somewhat similar to pinochle and hearts.



*My closest friends: Siddi, me, Bertha, Siegbert, Stern*



*First class in Jewish School in Bad Nauheim.*



*My first day of school.*

Many of the families were interrelated and would get together to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries. Of course this was before television, and only a few households had a radio. Our family had a telephone that was used almost exclusively for business purposes, and we also had a small radio.

Every so often, our family would get on a railroad and visit my aunts and uncles and their families in another village. I always enjoyed these trips and looked forward to playing with my cousins.

Other than the trips to visit family, I do not recall my parents ever taking a vacation during our time in Germany.

In the summer, one of the local stores made delicious ice cream. One of my favorite treats was when my father returned from a business trip to a large city and brought some toys for me. However, what I liked most of all was when he came home with bananas, which to us were a real delicacy.

There were not too many kids my age in town as I was growing up. My best friend was a girl, just a couple of months older than me. Her name was Bertha, which later on, in the United States, was changed to Terry. Her last name was also Stern, and her grandfather and my grandfather were brothers. I remember having another good friend, a non-Jew, and his name was Walter. I spent a great deal of time sitting in a wagon and tying sticks with string to the wagon and making believe that I was riding in a wagon with horses. This was really my favorite toy.

Practically no one had a car in town and a few people drove motorcycles. The year was 1934, and I was about 6 years old when my parents bought a more modern house from my father's uncle and cousin, Adolph and Moritz Stern. The synagogue was attached to this house.



*Jewish girls standing in front of synagogue.*

Hitler had just come to power a year previously, and some Jewish families had the feeling that the future for Jews in Germany was not very bright. Adolph and Moritz had close relatives in the United States and decided that it was time to get out of Germany and immigrate to the U.S. To make sure that the Synagogue would not fall into gentile hands, my father bought the property and sold our home. The house we moved into was quite different from our old home. Although it was more modern, it had very few trees and surrounding garden space. The biggest difference was that we had an indoor bathroom with running water, whereas before we had a bathroom without running water. The rooms in the house, as well as those in the connected store, were substantially larger. The location of the house was more in the center of town, and very close to the railroad station. I am certain that my parents moved only to preserve the continued existence of the synagogue.

The new house came with a dog that I did not like very much. As a matter of fact, I was really scared of him, particularly when he barked the minute someone approached him. He had a doghouse in the backyard where he was tied down, and I cannot remember anyone ever taking him for a walk. I am certain my father or mother made sure the dog was comfortable.

Both houses were heated with a coal stove and both had electricity. Once a week, my mother would set up a tub in the kitchen and fill it with hot water and my sister and I would get our weekly bath. There was no refrigeration in either house, and the food was stored in a sub-basement, which in the local climate was sufficient to preserve the food.

At the age of six, in the year 1934, I started attending the only public school in the village. The first day of



*My mother's younger sister, Elly with Leopold Rosenthal.*



*Their three sons: Manfred, Martin & Kurt. All perished in the Holocaust.*

school was a big event, and I know from pictures I have seen that I got a new outfit and a rucksack (knapsack). Apparently, every new student on the first day of school was given a huge pretzel.

I recollect very vividly that, after 1934, in one corner of each classroom stood a flag with a swastika. In 1936, the town passed an ordinance that Jewish children were no longer permitted to attend the public school. My parents enrolled both my sister and me in a Jewish boarding school located in Bad Nauheim, a city about one and half hours from Nieder-Ohmen by train. The Jewish community bought a building and land formerly utilized as a home for children with disabilities. The word "bad" in Bad Nauheim means bath, and the city was famous all over the country and attracted visitors who came for various periods of time to take curative baths in the hope of curing their ailments.

My sister and I were among the first kids enrolled at the school. When we started, there were about 100 students of all age groups. Some periods were devoted to studying Hebrew, in addition to regular academic courses. I made a lot of friends in this school, and, early in 1990, there was a reunion organized for its former attendees. We met at a hotel in the Catskill Mountains, and people came from all over the country to attend. As a matter of fact, a former teacher was able to be present, as well. It was really most enjoyable to meet up with people who you had not seen for close to 55 years. However, most of us did not recognize each other.

Every few weeks, my sister and I, together with some other kids from our town, would get on the train and travel home for the weekend. Parting from one's parents was not easy for an eight-year-old. For my sister and me, the stay at the Jewish Boarding School was not very long. In mid-1937, when I was 9 years old, we left Germany for the United States.

The first visible sign of anti-Semitism was when we were expelled from the local public school in year 1936. In 2009, Miriam and I visited a number of Jewish museums in Berlin, mostly dealing with the life, and later the persecution, of Jews in Germany. I was absolutely amazed when we read the government regulations dealing with the treatment of Jews and learned that the Federal law with regard to expelling Jews from public schools was not effective until the year 1940. It's ironic that in the small communities where Jews and gentiles lived peacefully together for centuries, this became law years earlier. In 1934, I recall the Brownshirts, young Hitler Youth,



*My father's brother, Moritz, and his wife, Lena, both perished in a concentration camp.*

marching through town every morning on their way to a work site accompanied by a band. My friend Walter (a non-Jew) and I would march together with the Brownshirts. On one occasion, someone questioned Walter as to my religion, but he assured the person that I was okay.

One night in 1936, when Trudy and I were home from school, we heard a horrible noise coming from the synagogue which adjoined our house. It turned out that a bunch of hooligans were vandalizing the synagogue and throwing prayer books on the floor and out of the windows. The Torahs were spread all over the ground. My sister and I crept into bed with my parents. The four of us huddled together in bed, fearful that the next target of the gang would be our house. The dog, tied up in the back of house, who would normally bark at the slightest intrusion, did not make a sound that night. Apparently, he was fed something to keep him quiet.

This action took place years before the attacks on Jews all over Germany in 1939, which became known as "Kristallnacht." That was when the Nazis broke into synagogues, homes and stores owned by Jews and destroyed almost everything in sight. Again, this is evidence that in the small villages anti-Semitism was present years before it spread to larger communities. It is also very strange that no one in our community interfered. The neighbors, who had been our friends for years, claimed that it was outsiders, not locals, who were behind the break-in of the synagogue,

I think that our getting expelled from public school and the break-in at the synagogue started my parents seriously considering that it was time to leave the country. There is no question in my mind that my parents mutually agreed that we should get out, but I think my mother took the lead in this matter. To get permission to immigrate to the United States you needed an affidavit from an American citizen. An affidavit is a document indicating that a person is ready to sponsor a foreigner for residence in America. The sponsor has to show that they have sufficient assets to care for the immigrants, and that they will not allow said immigrants to become a burden on the federal, state or local government. In addition, there was a quota system in place limiting the number of persons who could immigrate to the U.S. from a specific country.



*Visiting Uncle Moritz in Paris on the way to the U.S.A.*

My mother contacted her mother's cousin by the name of Greentree, formerly Greenbaum, living in Richmond, Va. The Greentree Family were owners of a women and men's ready-to-wear store. They responded that they were not prepared to send us affidavits, but would be ready to help in some fashion once we came to the U.S. The response was disheartening for my mother, but she did not give up. For the record, once we settled in the United States, we received occasional packages containing ladies and men's wear from the Greentrees.

My mother next wrote to a cousin of her father's by the name of Amelia Colman, residing in Deadwood, South Dakota. Amelia had left Germany in her teens when her father remarried, as she did not get along with her stepmother. She ultimately came to Denver, Colorado, where she met and married Colman, formerly Kugelmann, who had also come from Germany at a young age. The Colmans had three living daughters: Blanche, the first female attorney in the State of South Dakota, Teresa, an accountant working for the State and Anne, who was married and living in Chicago. We received a letter from Blanche asking us for some details about our family, and letting us know that they would consider being our sponsors. My parents responded in broken English with the help of an English-German dictionary. Within weeks, we received the affidavit from Blanche and Tess, prepared in perfect legal form, sponsoring us to emigrate to the United States. It is most important to say here that Blanche and Tess definitely saved our lives plus the lives of at least six other families, all related to us.



*My cousin Doris (Kanter) and her younger brother Alfred.  
Alfred perished in a concentration camp together with his parents.*



*My adopted grandparents.*



*My father in World War I.*



*My father with his platoon in World War I.*



*My cousin, Dina, at her wedding to Erich Kaiser Bluth in Argentina (both deceased).*



*My father's sister, Katinka, with her children: Siegfried, Dinah, Selma (all passed away in Argentina).*

A few years ago, Miriam and I had friends over to our house and in the discussion this question came up: "What person was the most important in your life?" There is no question that my parents,

Miriam, our children and grandchildren are very important to me. But, without hesitation, I selected Blanche and Tess, since there is a strong possibility that without them, I would have perished in the holocaust together with my entire family. It is unfortunate that in those years in the U.S. there were too many people like the Greentrees and too few like Blanche and Tess. If more American Jews had opened their hearts, many more could have been saved from the Holocaust.

A few months after the affidavit arrived, we received notice to appear at the American consulate in Stuttgart, Germany. The Office of the Consul had the power to approve or reject our visa to the United States. The interview went very well and our papers were stamped "Approved" without any problem. I think our interviewer was very impressed with the professional preparation of the affidavits, which resulted in the quick approval. For the next couple of weeks, our parents were very busy liquidating the business, selling the house, buying new furniture and clothing for shipment to the U.S. and arranging our voyage. The German law at the time restricted the amount of money you could take out of the country, but there was no limit on personal property.

The day we left Germany was an emotional time for my parents. After all, this was the village where my father was born and where our ancestors had lived for centuries. This was the country for which my father and some 90,000 other Jews had fought during World War I. We soon realized that this was a great day for all of us when we crossed the German border and left the NAZI BASTARDS behind.

On our way, we first traveled by railroad to Paris to visit my mother's brother, Moritz, and his family. My uncle and his family left Germany in 1936 and started a kosher restaurant in Paris. When we boarded the train

in Frankfurt for Paris, the four of us each had a Leica camera strapped around our neck. The Leica was a high quality camera and quite expensive. The intent was to sell the cameras once we settled in the United States.

It was in Paris that my sister and I saw our first movies. Walking on the street one day, we also came face to face for the first time with a Negro. We kept staring at this person until he finally yelled at us. Then we ran down the street very quickly.

From Paris, we went by train to the port of Cherbourg to board our ship, SS New York. The vessel that we were boarding was too large to dock in the harbor, requiring us to take a small boat from the pier. When the ship headed out to the Atlantic, the four of us clung tightly together as we thought about our future in our new country.



*Stern family leaving Germany.*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER TWO

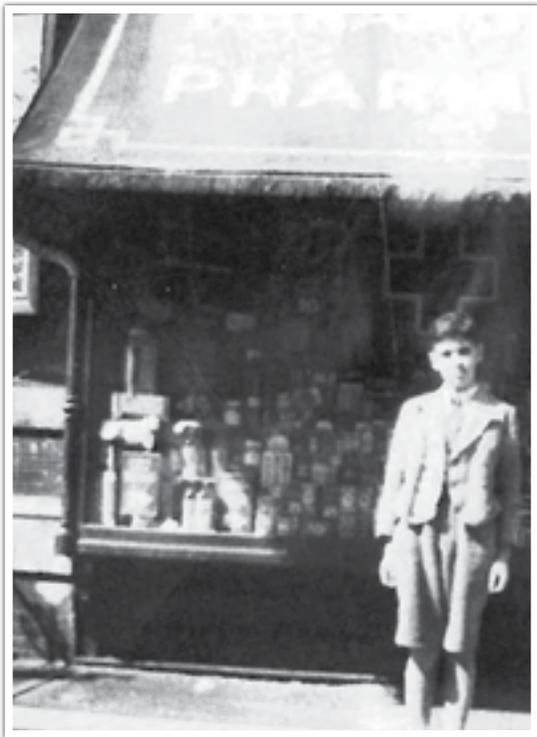
### Carl Comes to America

It took the ship New York about seven days to cross the Atlantic. Our family of four shared a cabin. It was early August, and although the Atlantic was mild in the month of August, we all suffered from some seasickness. The service on the ship was friendly, even though the ship belonged to Hamburg American Line. Pursuant to our request, we were served only kosher food. I remember one day the waiter told us that for dessert they had ice cream, and he added sarcastically that even that was kosher.

It was a very exciting day when we sighted land, and before long got a glimpse of the Statue of Liberty. At the time, I was probably too young to fully appreciate the significance of that day as we were about to sail into New York harbor. From time to time, I have often reflected as to what must have gone through my parents' minds - the happiness of leaving Nazi Germany with their children and now looking forward to reestablishing themselves in a new country.

We finally arrived in America on August 7, 1937. Our boat docked around 42nd Street in Manhattan. All new immigrants arriving in New York and New Jersey in 1890 and in the early 1900's were first sent to Ellis Island to undergo medical examinations and further review of their immigration documents. By the year 1937, however, only selected immigrants were routed to Ellis Island to get clearance to enter the country. In some cases, because of medical conditions or for other reasons, people were denied entry and had to return to their home country. We had no problem, and were able to disembark in Manhattan. A few years later, my mother's sister's husband, Leopold Nathan, was detained and sent to Ellis Island for further examination. I recall that night the entire family sitting around in our apartment fearing that Uncle Leopold might be returned to Germany. Fortunately, the next day, my uncle was released from Ellis Island, and we were all extremely happy. Other than that incident, I do not recall any other relative or acquaintance having to spend time on Ellis Island. Around 1954, Ellis Island ceased to be used as an immigration inspection center, and is now a museum featuring the history of immigration to the United States from as early as 1800.

Moritz Stern, my father's cousin, from whom we had purchased our second house in Nieder-Ohmen, was at the pier to greet us. The Sterns had rented an apartment for us in the Bronx, just across the street from where they lived. Driving by taxi from the pier through parts of Manhattan was eye-opening, particularly for our family coming from a small village. As we approached the Bronx, we started to see mostly five and six-story buildings with metal staircases on the outside of the buildings. I was somewhat frightened at the thought that those metal staircases were the only way to and from the apartments, until I learned that they were fire escapes to be used only for emergencies.



*Carl arriving in the U.S.*



*Our first home in the U.S., 163rd St, Bronx, NY*

We finally arrived at 796 East 163rd Street, the building which would be our home for the next four to five years. The building had no elevator, and our apartment was on the fifth floor. The apartment consisted of a living room, an eat-in kitchen, a main bedroom and two smaller bedrooms. The monthly rental was \$38. The apartment had an ice box, but no refrigerator. Electric street cars, known as “trolley cars,” ran on tracks on 163rd Street and all our bedrooms faced that street. It took some time to get used to the noise made by the trolleys, particularly late in the evening. We were very fortunate that the trolleys stopped running completely after midnight, or had much reduced hours, depending on the day of the week.

Those trolley cars ran on tracks, were powered by overhead electric wiring and made stops at the end of each city block. It was not uncommon to see boys on roller skates illegally hanging on to the back of the trolley cars to get a joyride. Trolley cars were ultimately discontinued in the city and replaced by buses.

Within a week after our arrival, the container with our personal belongings arrived. The truckers were not allowed to open the container until an inspector from the immigration department arrived. The purpose of the inspector was to make sure that we did not attempt to smuggle in any drugs, agricultural products or goods requiring the payment of duties. The furniture we brought was much bulkier and heavier than furniture made in the U.S. The truckers had a very difficult time walking the furniture up to the fifth floor. It was very exciting for my sister and me to see, for the first time, all the furniture, dishes and clothing that my parents bought and shipped to the U.S.

Years later, when the family moved to different apartments in New York City, it was always a hassle to get the movers to lug our bulky German furniture in and out of apartment doors and down and up staircases. My parents continued to live in walkup buildings until they moved to their last apartment near Fort Tryon Park. My first reaction to New York City was positive, although apprehensive at the same time.

Our building was located on the corner of Union Avenue and 163rd Street. When you turned right onto Union Avenue, the first block was completely occupied by African American families. On the next block, there was an indoor and outdoor market. The outside market consisted of stalls where individual



*Shortly after our arrival in the U.S. (Carl & Trudy)*



*Members of our congregation on a picnic in the Bronx.*

shopkeepers sold fruits, vegetables, ready-to-wear items and household goods. The inside market had butchers, both kosher and non-kosher, bakeries, appetizing stores, stores selling cheeses and dairy products and grocery stores, all of which were operated by individual owners and their families. It was here that we did most of our shopping, particularly, since the prices were generally the lowest to be found. I recall that in those early days, whenever we went to the market, a certain produce dealer would pull me aside and pinch my cheeks and say to me, “Shainer buche” (nice boy).

Immigrants have a tendency to move to areas where people of similar backgrounds have established their homes. This was particularly true of German Jews. The first German Jews who came to the Bronx in the mid-1930's immediately looked for a place where they could daven (pray) at least on Shabbat. The first such schul (synagogue) was at the home of my friend Isfried Neuhaus. By the time we came to the community, the schul had moved to a building previously utilized as a catering facility. The congregation was growing very rapidly from the steady influx of new immigrants coming to the Bronx. The name of the congregation was Shaare Tephila and the rabbi, at the time, was Rabbi Simon. On our first Saturday in New York, we went with Moritz and Adolph Stern and family to services. After services, we were introduced to some of the members and to the rabbi. My parents met people that they knew from Germany or people who knew someone who had lived in their village. After people were introduced by name, the very next question was, “What town or city are you from?”

That same Saturday, my good friend Gerry Breidenbach and his family also came to services for the first time. Years later, when my parents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at another schul, the Breidenbach's also celebrated their 50th anniversary on the same Shabbat at the same schul.

After services, I met, for the first time, boys my age or a little older. Some of them remain my friends to this day. On that day, I met Isfried Neuhaus, Jerry Seelig, Gunther Weiskopf and Gerry Breidenbach for the first time. Services at the temple were conducted in accordance with German tradition and the sermons and announcements were made in German. It was a good day for our family, since we all made new friends in our new country. On the walk home from services, my old friend from Nieder-



*Services at the Bronx Congregation (men and women sitting separately).*

Ohmen, Bertha Stern, walked with me and pointed out certain highlights of the neighborhood.

German Jews at that time generally moved to three distinct neighborhoods in New York City. The wealthier Jews mostly lived in Upper Manhattan between 70th and 96th Streets. Washington Heights, in the northern part of Manhattan, the area between 150th and 185th Streets was normally where the immigrants of the lower or middle income range, from cities and larger villages, made their homes. New immigrants, from smaller villages and small towns and of moderate means, settled mostly in the Bronx.

Between the years 1937 and 1941, the congregation had a large influx of new members. Over the years, the congregation moved a number of times to new and larger quarters and also engaged new leadership. Most members socialized together and visited each other at home, particularly to participate in celebrating special occasions. By the year 1940, sermons and most announcements were made in English. During those years, members of the congregation would on Sundays go on picnics together to parks in the Upper Bronx. Very few, if any, had cars, and people would generally go by subway and buses. The synagogue was the place where the new immigrants socialized and made new friends. It was also here that people heard about employment opportunities and available apartments. For me, it was here that I met my good friends, who, as you will read later, helped me to make crucial decisions in my life.

By 1942, this neighborhood in the Bronx changed very dramatically, and most whites, including practically all the Jews, moved out of the area. The congregation was ultimately dissolved, and most members joined German Jewish congregations in other parts of the city.

In September, 1937, my sister and I started our first day of school in America at PS 23, in the Bronx. By this time, Trudy, was 11 and 1/2, and I was 9 and 1/2. In accordance with the policies of the principal of this school, all new immigrants started in first grade. All elementary classes in New York City were split into A for the first part of the semester and B for the second part of the semester. We started in grade 1A, the lowest grade in school after kindergarten. However, it was the policy of the school to promote the foreign students very quickly until they ultimately reached their proper grade. I am almost certain that my first teacher's name was Mrs. Fried. Since we spoke no English, Mrs. Fried communicated with us at times in broken German, which was really Yiddish. We did not speak Yiddish, but, because of the similarity to German, we were able to grasp what she was

telling us. For some reason, the German refugee kids were considered far more advanced in arithmetic than the American kids. The teacher would always call on us first to give answers to questions in arithmetic. There were times I disappointed the teacher when I did not know the correct answer.

At this time in the United States, many citizens did not look favorably on anything German. People did not want to have German sounding names, dress like Germans or even look German. As an example, when we first came to the United States, my father had a mustache, that was somewhat similar to Adolph Hitler's mustache. This was considered too German, so he quickly shaved it off.

The first day I came to school, Mrs. Fried asked me to write my name on the blackboard. I took the chalk and wrote "KARL." Mrs. Fried took the eraser and said, "From now on, your name is CARL." From that day forward, the spelling of my name became CARL, except for some old friends and certain relatives who wanted me to become even more Americanized and called me Charlie. I never liked that name and tried to rid myself of it, but, to this day, certain old friends and relatives still call me by that name.

A couple of days into the school term, a new student came to class. Mrs. Fried asked him to write his name on the blackboard, and he wrote "HEINZ KAUFMAN." The teacher took her eraser and wrote "HENRY" and said, "This will be your new name."

A few weeks earlier Mr. Gustav Kaufman, approached me in school and told me that his son Heinz would soon arrive and we would become good friends. Mr. Kaufman was absolutely right, as Henry and I became very good friends and remained classmates all through elementary and junior high (middle) school. Even today, we continue to be friends and see each other periodically. In hindsight, it is surprising that we were always promoted together. Henry was always the smarter one, and I guess the teachers did not want to embarrass me by leaving me behind.

Those first few weeks in school were difficult for both my sister and me. Not only were we older and taller than the other kids in our grade, but we also dressed differently and could not communicate with our classmates. For lunch, we walked home, and many times children made fun of us. We were probably guilty for some of this reaction since we would stop and stare at the black kids. Remember that, up to now, the only black people we had seen were the few we passed on the streets of Paris. At this time, I would guess that the population of PS 23 was 30 percent black.

Going to school, I wore short pants, which were the only pants kids my age wore in Germany. Here in the U.S., my classmates wore knickers (pants which ended around the calf of the leg) or long pants. The first thing my parents bought for me in the U.S. was a pair of corduroy knickers. With my knickers and improved English, I soon became more like an American. Slowly, we were more accepted by the kids and we began to feel more comfortable.

One day a week, the entire school had assembly and everyone had to dress in a similar way. All the boys had to wear white shirts and blue knitted ties. The girls wore special white blouses with long collars and a red kerchief around the collar.

Both Henry and I had no American friends at this time. Instead, our close friends were the Jewish immigrant boys we knew from temple.

Henry and I graduated together with kids our age and we both went on to middle school PS 52 in the Bronx. During my first year at middle school, we moved to a new apartment at 920 Avenue Saint John in the Bronx. The neighborhood was deemed to be better, and, although we lived closer to Middle School PS 51, I insisted on finishing middle school at PS 52. Since the school was further away, I brought my lunch to school every day. My French teacher, Mr. Kirsch, liked me, and asked if I would go to the neighborhood candy store for him every day to get him a chocolate malted. I was very happy and proud to do this for the teacher, and hoped that this would get me consideration for a better mark. One day, walking up the staircase with my teacher's malted, I was surrounded by a couple of tall black boys. They asked me what I had in the container, and I responded that it was a malted for Mr. Kirsch. I was told to open the container, and one of the guys spit into the malted milk, and then they ran away. Fearing retaliation, I finally decided to just give Mr. Kirsch his malted milk without saying a word. To this day, I still regret my reaction to this incident.

Another incident that I recall from middle school was when my father found out that I had been lying to him. Henry and I, together with another classmate, played almost every day after school a game called “off the wall.” At this time, my father worked nights, so he was home when I would normally come from school. Whenever I came home late, he would ask me why I was late, and I would always answer that the teacher kept us after school. He accepted that answer until one day when he went to the market and ran into Henry’s grandfather who lived with Henry. When my father remarked to him that the boys have a tough teacher, since he keeps them late in school most every day, the grandfather responded, “No, they play ball every day after school.” When I came home, my father was waiting for me and asked, “Are you late because the teacher kept you in again?” When I responded, “Yes,” he took off his shoe and threw it at me. The window was open and the shoe flew out of the window. I quickly ran down the four flights and retrieved my father’s shoe. By the time I got upstairs again, my father had calmed down somewhat, but threatened me that he would take more severe action if he caught me lying again.

Exactly why I lied to my parents about playing after school, I really do not know, except that I think I felt guilty about not coming home immediately after school to help my parents with shopping, cleaning and preparing dinner. There was a definite feeling on my part that my parents worked very hard and that I should help make life easier for them. Time to play should come after the work was done. However, as I was a young kid, sometimes temptation called and I set aside my feelings of guilt.

In the year 1937, when we came to America, the economy was still very weak, and the recession of the early 1930’s was still very much in evidence. Unemployment was widespread, and it was extremely difficult for a new immigrant, without any particular skills and with a language barrier, to find employment. Unemployment did not really decline in the U.S. until 1939-1940 when the country started to tool up for a possible war and the first men were drafted into the armed forces. Years later, there were many people who felt strongly that in order to have low unemployment in this country, we must be at war or preparing for a possible war.

The new refugee, particularly the German Jew, in the year 1937, was ready to take any available job. Some men worked as dishwashers in restaurants, as dishwashing machines were not yet in use. Other jobs included digging graves in cemeteries, sorting used clothing for export and all types of menial labor in stores and factories. Unions were very prominent in the labor market, and it was difficult for a newcomer to become a union member.

My father’s first job was as a baker’s helper for a dairy restaurant chain known as Farmfood Dairy Restaurants. The company had three or four restaurants in midtown Manhattan and all the baking was done at the facility located around 47th Street. My father helped the main baker and did the cleaning of baking utensils, pots and stoves. He worked nights for a weekly salary of \$9. A fringe benefit was that he brought home a large cake every morning. When relatives and friends came to this country and stayed with us for a brief period, the pineapple cheesecake was a tremendous hit. My father continued to work at this job for a number of years with some pay increases.

As the economy improved, he was able to become a member of the bakers’ union. He found a job in a wholesale bakery, which produced baked products for markets and restaurants. The bakery produced probably a few hundred of the same cake each day.

When I was about 14 or 15 years old, I was eager to make money, and accompanied my father to work very early one Sunday morning. The person in charge gave me an apron and put me in front of a long table with a moving belt, where identical chocolate cakes would rush past my station. My job was to put a cherry in the center of each cake. It was a tiring day, and I did not want to get near a chocolate cake for a long time thereafter.

My mother was now 37 years old, and she looked desperately to find some work to supplement my father’s salary. As with so many other women who were new immigrants, her first job was cleaning homes for American Jewish families. As you can see, the new Jewish female immigrant did the identical work done today by new immigrants from Poland, Mexico, South America, etc. What my mother earned, I really do not know. In addition to that, she did work at home for novelty manufacturers. I remember that every so often a man would come by and bring us bags filled with novelties, or pieces from which to make novelties, that had to be assembled



*Rosel Stern (mother of Trudy & Carl) relaxing in the country.*

and/or stuffed. The pay here was piecework and strictly in accordance with the number of units produced. My sister and I, and sometimes my father, would sit around the table and help my mother with this work.

Ultimately, Mom got a job in a factory producing handmade ladies' leather gloves, where she and other women sewed the gloves by hand. Here, again, the pay was strictly based on the number of pairs of gloves one sewed. After you finished sewing a pair of gloves, a forelady would inspect the gloves for any sewing defects. In case the inspector found defects, it was up to you to correct the mistakes before the gloves were credited to your account for payment. My mother was not that good at sewing, and she had some arthritis in her fingers, which made the task of sewing leather gloves even more difficult. I can still see her sitting late at night, or even early in the morning, in the living room, working on gloves that she brought home to fix or start from scratch. The memory of seeing my mother struggling with the sewing of the gloves has remained with me ever since.

To help balance the budget, my parents rented one of the apartment's two small bedrooms to a non-Jew, who actually was my father's foreman at the bakery in the restaurant. He was a very quiet man, and paid us somewhere in the area of \$6 per week. In addition to the room, he also received breakfast. Many newcomers supplemented their income by renting out rooms. Later on, there were families who rented large apartments, six or seven rooms, and subleased all the rooms to various individuals. This became an alternate way of making a living for some individuals. My parents only had the one boarder for a short period of time.

My parents brought a small amount of money from Germany and they also converted to cash the four Leica cameras we had strapped to our necks when we came to the U.S., which together gave them a safety net. I think in those first few years, my parents were forced to dip into savings to make ends meet. During this period, I was taught the importance of saving money for a rainy day. Miriam, coming from Israel, on the other hand, believed in living for today, because one never knows if he or she will be around tomorrow. In our 58 plus years

of marriage, we learned to compromise on this subject. Eventually, I was converted particularly on the point that it is better to spend than to give the money to the doctor. However, I was able to convince Miriam and she soon agreed that you cannot spend money that you do not have.

In mid-1946, my father's dream finally came true when he was able to get back into his own business. He took the plunge and bought a cleaning store at 4520 Broadway in Upper Manhattan, not far from where we lived at the time. To swing the deal, he borrowed a few hundred dollars from Julius Kanter, my cousin's husband, which he was able to repay within a very short period. The cleaning was sent to a wholesaler who returned the garments the next day, not pressed. The store had a pressing machine, and the operator was an elderly black man by the name of Carter, and his pay was based on the number and type of garments he pressed. The other employee of the store was an old time tailor, and he too was paid a percentage of what the customers paid for the alteration. After a year or so, my father started to buy men and boys' pants, which he sold in the store. This was the part of the business that my Dad liked best. When he came home at night, the first thing he would tell us was how many pairs of pants he sold that day. We sometimes joked that he counted the number of pants he sold twice: first, when the actual sale was made, and second, when the customer picked up the pants after they were altered.

Here again, I saw my parents work together. The store was open on Saturdays, and it was the first time that I can recall that my father worked on the Sabbath. My mother never went to the store on the Sabbath, or on any Jewish Holidays. My parents operated the store together until my father retired at age 65. Although, my parents did not make a lot of money from the store, they were happy working together in their own business.

In the beginning of 1950, the German government obligated itself to pay restitution to Jews who were forced to leave the country and run from the Nazi government. It was deemed that Jews leaving the country sold their houses and businesses under duress, and as a result the government paid the difference between market value and the price received from the buyer. The difference, if any, was paid to the Jewish seller as restitution by the German government. Also, my parents, and others like them, received a pension based on a complicated formula of what they earned in the United States, as compared with their earnings in Germany before they left. The pension was paid monthly, and continued for the rest of the applicant's life, after which a certain percentage was paid to the surviving spouse.

New opportunities were created for lawyers with understanding of German and former German lawyers or accountants who, for a commission, filed and processed the necessary forms with the German government. The Germans agreed to make these payments basically because of pressure brought on by the Israeli government and Jewish organizations in the United States. All monies due to those that perished in the Holocaust who had no living descendants were paid to the State of Israel. As a result, Israel received huge sums of money from Germany, some of these payments continue to this day.

The lump sum payment and the monthly pensions were really a windfall for not only my parents but for most German Jewish refugees. This enabled them to live comfortably in retirement and to enjoy travel and other activities that they would not have been able to afford if they were solely dependent on social security and their small savings.

Around the early 1950's, my sister and I both received \$1000 from the Germans to indemnify us for the loss of education in Germany. Personally, I felt that since I was only 9 years old when we left Germany, I really was not entitled to this money, so I donated my money to a charity.



*My sister and I in the Bronx, on the day of my Bar Mitvah.*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER THREE

### Growing Up in the Bronx

The first time I met some of the boys that were to become my friends was in August, 1937. Today, 79 years later, those of us that are still around meet up occasionally to discuss the old days. That first Sabbath in Schul, I met Isfried Neuhaus, Jerry Seelig, Gerry Breidenbach and Gunther Weiskopf. Over the next few years, as new refugees came to schul, we were introduced to additional boys who soon joined our group. By 1939, we had a group of boys that ranged in ages from 11 to 14. The following is a listing of the group according to age, with the oldest listed first (with an asterisk after the name denoting the person has passed away):

Herman Stern\* (no relationship) also known as the horse  
Isfried Neuhaus  
Fred Srill\*  
Jerry Seelig  
Gunther Weiskopf  
Seymour Weil\*  
Gerry Breidenbach\* (Shrimp)  
Gunther Rosenberg\* (Red)  
Henry Kaufman  
Kurt Rosenbaum\* (Curley) my first cousin  
Carl Stern (Charlie)

In addition, depending on the activity, from time to time we were joined by other kids, including Helmut Katz and Herbert Katzenstein. We all had a few things in common: namely, that we were all newcomers to the good old U.S., most of our families struggled to make ends meet, we all went to schul on Saturday and getting a good education was of prime importance to our families.

From the listing above, you can see that I was the youngest in the crowd. The four of us, Red, Curley, Henry and myself were not only the youngest in the crowd, but we also went to the same elementary and middle schools. From all the boys, we were the only ones who lived west of Prospect Avenue.

Prospect Avenue was a busy street filled with stores, including men's and women's wear stores, furniture stores, bridal stores and movie houses. It was a street that had a subway and bus stops. It was a main thoroughfare of the East Bronx, later known as the South Bronx. Prospect Avenue was a long street, and Crotona Park was located not far from where we lived. That park was great. It had ball fields, picnic grounds, playgrounds

and a large outdoor swimming pool.

Most of the talk among the boys centered on sports, particularly baseball. The guys were split between Yankees and Giants fans and an occasional Dodgers fan. Whenever a new kid was brought into the crowd, it was very important to the fellow who first introduced him that the newcomer become a fan of his favorite team. When I first met Issy Neuhaus, he told me in no uncertain terms that, when it came to baseball, I would be a "Giants fan." There was strong competition as to who had the majority of followers in our group, the Yankees or the Giants. Baseball was a complete unknown to me, but I became a Giants fan. From that point, until this very day, I have been a Giants fan, even after they left New York City and relocated to San Francisco.

As quickly as we learned the English language, we learned about baseball, the names of the Major League teams and their players and even how to hold a bat.

Television was not around at the time, so we listened to the games on radio. Unlike today, announcers did not always travel with the team when they played out of town. Instead, the announcers would sit in a studio in New York, and details of the game would be forwarded to the studio via Western Union. The broadcaster would read the message, and then recreate the game on radio. The broadcast was always delayed by some seconds behind the actual game.

The baseball we played was called softball, as compared to regular baseball which was called hardball. The ball used for softball was larger and softer than the ball used in regular baseball. The softball we tried to play used a slow ball pitcher, unlike another game of softball, which used a windmill fastball ball pitcher.

In addition to softball, we played different forms of baseball such as: stoop ball (hitting a Spalding ball off a stoop and running the bases, curb ball (hitting the ball off the curb and running the bases) and, of course, stickball (hitting the pink Spalding ball with a broomstick and running the bases). In case we only had two to four boys available, we would play "off the wall." This was another form of baseball played without any base running. The game required two walls facing each other, and you threw the ball from one wall against the other. Your opponent was supposed to catch the ball as it came off the second wall, or, if the catch was missed, each bounce of the ball was considered a single.

Stickball was a game that was first played in the Bronx, and it was a very favorite game of the streets. Bases similar to a baseball field were laid out in the street, and, instead of a bat, you used a broomstick. It could either be played with a pitcher throwing the ball on a bounce to the hitter holding the broomstick as a bat, or the batter could directly hit the ball without a pitcher throwing the ball. It was an extremely popular game. On many Sunday mornings, I would go to watch older guys play the game. They excelled at the game and played very hard, especially if money was wagered.

Since the game was played in the street, occasionally a ball broke a window. People often called the police to break up the game. To make sure that the police would not confiscate the broomsticks, since they were not easy to obtain, a non-player would do nothing but be a lookout for the cops. When the police were spotted, the broomsticks would be pushed down into the manholes and everybody would slowly walk away. The minute the cops left, the broomsticks were retrieved and the game went on. The superior batters could hit a ball that would travel at least 2 to 3 manholes. Even today, there are still stickball tournaments being played annually in the Bronx,

One summer day, probably in 1939, I was playing stickball on Union Ave., around the corner from my house, with some friends. Cousin Curley was sitting on a parked car reading a comic book. A fellow who was batting hit the ball, and accidentally threw his stick and it hit Curley straight on the forehead. Curley was bleeding profusely, and we went to a neighborhood drugstore to see if the pharmacist could help us stop the bleeding. The pharmacist said that the forehead required stitches, and we should go to a doctor or hospital. We had no money for a doctor, and did not want to ask our parents for money. After walking around for a few hours, Curley's forehead was stitched up in a neighborhood hospital, and we all went home reluctantly and quite embarrassed.

We also played a simulated game of baseball in school. All the boys sat together in a designated area. Some of us, instead of praying, would play a form of baseball, which required the use of the prayer book. We would

open and close the pages of the siddur (a book of daily prayers), and, by adding up the page numbers, we would determine if the hitter (person opening the pages) got a hit or made out. After totaling the numbers of a specific page, if the last number of the total was a one, you got a single, a two would get you a double, a three would get you a triple, a four would signify a home run and a five meant a double play. All other numbers were considered an out. After three outs, the other player would get his turn to be the hitter. All the time that we were playing, we were on the lookout for the shamas (assistant to the rabbi in running the synagogue, also called a gabbai), who, among his many responsibilities, was in charge of seeing that the boys were diligently following services.

We would also play the same game in homes with about four or six dice. We usually played this on hot summer afternoons while listening to a baseball game on the radio. Each player would represent his favorite team, either the Giants or the Yankees, and keep records of the teams and the players in the lineup. Gerry Breidenbach and I would play this game for hours, and keep accurate records of wins and losses, batting averages and pitching records. This was our introduction to what is known today as “fantasy games.”

Another popular game played on the city streets was box ball. This was played on the sidewalks of the city. All you needed was a Spalding ball and boxes on the sidewalk of approximately equal size. The playing area consisted of three equal-sized boxes behind each other. Each player had his own box, with the middle box remaining a neutral area. The idea of the game was to pitch a ball into the opposing player’s box, and for him to hit it back into your box. If the ball was hit into your box, and you caught it without the ball bouncing, it was an out. Otherwise, the number of times the ball bounced determined whether you got a single, double, triple or home run. It was amazing how adept we became at spinning the ball, and how difficult it was for the opposing player to return the ball.

All of these games were a takeoff on baseball, the “all American” game. It is also surprising how quickly we refugee kids became involved in America’s favorite sport.

Sometime in late October of 1937, just about two months after coming to America, I, suddenly one morning, felt pain in my stomach. My parents put me to bed and gave me hot tea, but the pain did not subside. After a few hours, they called Dr. Feldman, the brother of the owner of Feldman’s pharmacy, which was located on the corner of Prospect Avenue and 163rd Street. A short while later, he came to the house to examine me. As he tried to lift my right leg, the pain increased substantially. His immediate diagnosis was that I needed to go to a hospital and have my appendix removed. My parents were not ready to accept the diagnosis immediately. Instead, my parents contacted Dr. Goldenberg, a son of a German Jew, for a second opinion. After a couple of hours, Dr. Goldenberg came to the house and agreed that I had appendicitis, and urged my parents to get me to a hospital. I was finally admitted to Mt. Sinai Hospital as a nonpaying patient, or a charitable case.

My English was very poor at this time, since I was only in the country about 2 months, and so I did not understand what people were saying around me. I do recall that a bunch of people were standing around my bed, examining me and discussing my case. It seems that since I was a charity case, the people around me were mostly medical students. Hours later, before the appendix burst, I was finally taken to the operating room for surgery. When I got to the recovery room, I wanted to call for the nurse, but had no knowledge what the correct English word was. In German, a nurse is known as schwester, which is also the translation for sister. Not knowing any better I called, “Sister” to get the attention of the nurse. It worked. The nurse came to help me.

My stay in the children’s ward of the hospital lasted almost three weeks. My parents were allowed to visit me on weekends only. However, Rabbi Simon could visit every day. The Rabbi was a somewhat peculiar individual. He was single, but apparently loved women. I can vividly recall him coming to my bed, blessing me and disappearing, as he chased the nurses around. The children’s ward was not the best place to be. However, during my stay, I did learn quite a few English words such as: doctor, nurse, pins and needles.

After I got discharged, Dr. Feldman came to the house to remove the bandages and to examine my scar. He assured my mother and me that by the time I got married the scar would be invisible. Well, Dr. Feldman was very wrong because even today, almost 80 years later, I still have a scar about 2 inches in length and ½ an inch in width. The lesson I learned from this is: if you can, never get admitted to a hospital as a charity patient.



*The day of my Bar Mitzvah.*

To the best of my recollection, my parents had no medical insurance coverage until the early 1950's, except for basic hospitalization coverage through the bakers' union. This is quite different from today, when a determining factor in deciding whether to accept a position with a certain company is the type of medical coverage offered to the prospective employee. To some employees, the medical coverage available is more important than the salary offered.

It was decided among my buddies, since we were doing so many things together, that we should organize our own club. The club activities would be both social and athletic. We were able to get the use of a room one night a week at a community center located on Forest Avenue in the Bronx, known as the Council House.. We met every week at the Council House, and the meetings were conducted in accordance to strict rules and regulations. Our meetings were supervised in a very limited way by a social worker employed by Council House. We named ourselves the Typhoons. We elected officers such as president, vice president, treasurer and secretary, and minutes were recorded of each meeting. All members were required to pay dues of a few pennies a week. Anyone cursing or not paying dues was fined. We also elected one person as captain of the baseball team. Meetings were usually devoted to when and where we would next practice softball, and whether we should invite girls to an upcoming meeting. You must remember here that, even though I was only 13 years old, some of the other guys were between the ages of 15 and 16. We had some parties and picnics with girls, and the favorite game was "spin the bottle."

We started baseball practice as early as March, and sometimes had to build a fire to keep warm. Unfortunately, we were not very good athletes, especially when it came to baseball, and no matter how much we practiced, our play never seemed to improve.

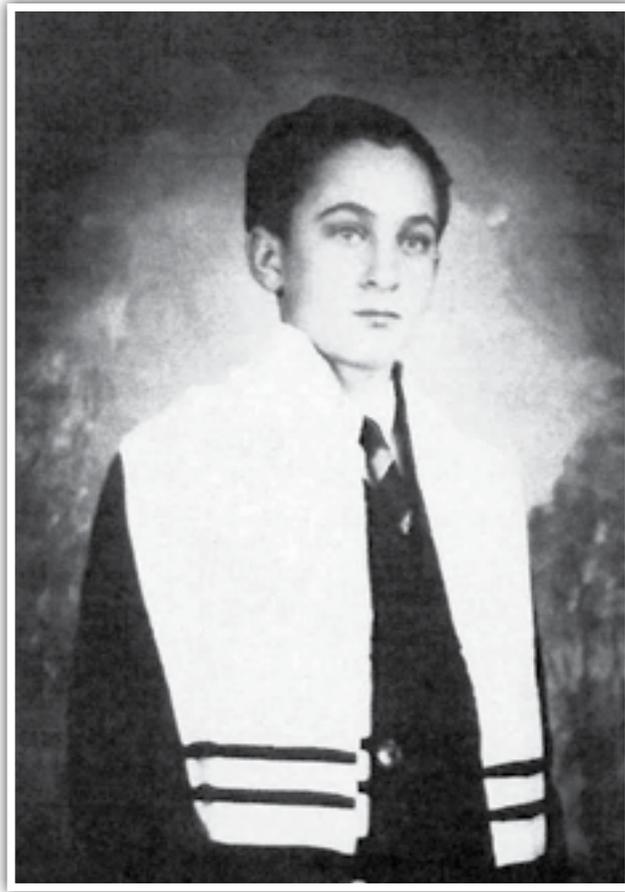
Council House would annually open its doors for kids and their parents and offer some entertainment and food in an effort to raise funds. This particular year, the Typhoons undertook the operation of the "spooky house." The purpose of the spooky house was to scare anyone who dared to enter, after paying a small admission fee. The room was completely darkened, and we scattered all over the room making noises, shooting water or doing other activities to scare the kids. I was stationed a short distance past the entry door in a very dark corner. My task was to wear boxing gloves and gently hit the kids as they passed my station. The trouble was that the kids punched back and, at the end of the day, I had quite a few bruises on my face and arms.

At one point, we bought T-shirts for each member with "TYPHOONS" written across the front and a designated number on the back of the shirt. We wore our shirts for practice and for games. The number on the back of my T-shirt was "6."

In the mid 1970's, we held a reunion in our home in Queens for the Typhoons and some of the girls that we hung around with. Before the gathering took place, early one morning, I took our son David to the Bronx, and we took pictures of the houses us boys lived in and the schools we attended. Almost everyone was able to attend the reunion, including those who lived out of town. In a few cases, it was the last time we saw each other.

When I turned 13 years old, I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah, reading from the Parsha Vayera. I received my Bar Mitzvah instructions from Rev Greenwald, who was fairly new to the congregation. My friends were instructed either by Rev Bachrach or Rev Hirsch. However, by the time I came of age, both had left the congregation. The congregation frequently changed the professional leaders. The changes usually resulted from political differences in the congregation or from better job offers. Luck was on my side, because for the first time in the history of the congregation, they had two Bar Mitzvahs on the same Shabbat. I struggled because I had difficulty carrying a tune, so having someone share the readings was very welcome. Just a few days before my Bar Mitzvah, Paula Stern, the wife of Moritz Stern, and mother to Bertha and Sidi, suddenly died of cancer at the young age of about 40. It was a shock to our entire family and to the community.

After services, my parents had a luncheon for family members in the basement of the schul. Both Bertha and Sidi looked forward to celebrating my Bar Mitzvah, and I was delighted that their father agreed that they could attend my luncheon. In the afternoon, almost every member of the congregation came to our house to congratulate the family and to have some schnapps, cookies and cakes. I entertained my friends in one of the bedrooms.



*My cousin Kurt at his Bar Mitzvah.*

The story of my Bar Mitzvah would be incomplete without describing the purchase of my Bar Mitzvah suit. One night, a couple of weeks before the affair, my father took me to a men and boys' store near Southern Boulevard. In those days, every boy wore a dark blue suit and a white shirt for the Bar Mitzvah. The storeowner brought out a blue suit, which he stressed had ample material to let out as I grew taller and broader. My father instructed me to try on the suit, which fit me pretty well. Next came the key question, "how much is this suit?" The storekeeper quoted a price. My father responded that the price was ridiculous, and told me to take off the suit. The bargaining started while I was taking off the suit and putting back the clothing I came with. As we headed out of the store, the owner followed us and lowered his price by a few dollars. Before the purchase of the suit was finalized, I must have put the suit on and off at least three times. My father, in those days, would seldom buy anything without bargaining down the price. Meanwhile, I felt quite embarrassed about the long haggling over a few dollars. On the other hand, at that time, a few dollars meant a lot to my parents.

To go with the suit, I got a white shirt and a tie with the Empire State building on its face. The tie was my favorite, and when I got home after the luncheon, I took it off. That Saturday night, I examined all the gifts I received, which included multiple fountain pens and tie clips. Before going to sleep, we carefully put away the new suit and shirt. However, there was no sign of my tie. We searched all over, but the tie never showed up again.

Our apartment, as I mentioned earlier, had only an icebox and no refrigerator. Every few days, a man would deliver a large cube of ice and place it in the icebox. Ice was delivered from mid-spring to the end of fall. Once colder weather set in, we put a specially-made metal box onto the fire escape. The

box had a sliding door for opening and closing. All perishable products were stored in the metal box, so it was unnecessary to buy ice during this period.

In our kitchen, behind a door, there was a shaft containing a wooden box with some shelving. This was called a dumbwaiter. It was very similar to what Edna and Dan now have in their kitchen in Utah, except that it was operated manually instead of by electricity. At an appointed hour every day, the superintendent would ring a special bell located in your kitchen signifying that the dumbwaiter had arrived at your floor. You would open the door and place your garbage in, and when you hollered "OK," the superintendent would pull the dumbwaiter to the next floor, or, if full, to the basement.

Our building at 796 East 163rd Street, was built in a sort of a semicircle. From our kitchen, we were opposite our neighbors' kitchen with about 30 feet in between. People would stretch laundry lines on a pulley between the apartments. After washing the laundry in the sink or bathtub, it would be hung on the laundry line. This was our "dryer," and the laundry always had a fresh smell.

Between the years 1937-1940, I frequently accompanied my parents to the piers in Manhattan to pick up relatives who had just arrived in the United States. It was always an exciting time when they finally came down the plank from the ship. Lots of kisses and hugs were exchanged. Many of the relatives spent their first few days in the U.S. living with us.

When I was about ten years old, I looked for a way to make some money and help my parents to make ends meet. Curley and I found a guy who delivered laundry with a horse and buggy. He gave us a job delivering laundry from the buggy, while he waited for us in front of the buildings. The trouble was that our only pay was tips we might receive from the customers. After climbing up as many as five floors to make a delivery, and returning to the buggy without getting a tip, our boss would always ask us who was home, the old lady or the young lady? When we answered, "the old lady," he would respond, "the young lady always tips, tough luck." Likewise, if we came back without getting a tip and told him the young lady was home, he would respond, "Tough luck, the old lady always tips." We went all day without making a penny. From this point forward, I learned that you must always be paid for your work.



*One of my new friends in Washington Heights, Egon Manheimer.*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Carl as a Teenager

Starting at about the age of 10, I always looked for part-time jobs to make a few dollars and to help bring some additional money home. We were a very close family, and both my sister and I had the deepest respect for our parents. They were good loving parents who only wanted our best and gave us as much as they could with the limited funds available. Frequently, on a Saturday night in 1937 and 1938, the four of us would drop by the corner candy store, and for 5 cents got one ice cream Dixie cup, which we all shared. Around this time, I decided that I would never ask my parents for money to buy anything that I did not absolutely need. When all my friends bought baseball gloves, I refused to participate, since I felt it was something I did not absolutely need.

Around mid-1939, at the age of 11, I got a job helping out in a grocery store which was located in the Union Ave Market. This grocery store was located in a long narrow building. As you entered the building, on the right side, there was a kosher butcher. Immediately on the left side, there was a commission bakery (a bakery that sold goods that were baked elsewhere), followed by a grocery store and a fish market. The couple that owned the grocery store had recently immigrated from Poland or Russia. The husband, unfortunately, had a stroke after they bought the store and was partially paralyzed. He limped around the place, mostly taking the money from customers. Coffee, rice, sugar, flour and salt were sold from large bags and weighed out to the customer's requirements. Canned and package foods were stocked quite high on shelves and, in order to reach them, we utilized a stick with a grabber at the end. The idea was to surround the package or can with the grabber and bring it down from the shelf. Many times, you let the item loose from the grabber and caught it on its way down.

My job consisted of many things, including waiting on customers, stocking the shelves and delivering orders. I think we used a little hand truck to deliver orders. Sometimes, deliveries had to be made into less desirable areas, and there was a possibility that you could be stopped by young negroes and searched for money. This was a frequent occurrence. However, I do not recall that anyone ever got seriously hurt.

The job also required collecting the money for the deliveries. In order not to lose the money in case of a search, I used to put the money under the sole of my shoe. I can recall that on one particular day it was raining, and I was wearing rubbers over my shoes. After collecting money for the order, I put it between my shoes and the rubbers. Lo and behold, as I left the building, two guys surrounded me and asked for my money. I emptied my pockets and took off my shoes together with the rubbers, and there was no money

visible. Within minutes, I was back on my way to the grocery store. I do not recall how long I worked there, but I do know the pay was not very good. However, I got a lot of experience.

During the summer months of the same year I got a job delivering milk for another grocery store located in a much better area of the Bronx. I went early in the morning by bus to the store. I picked up the bottles of milk and made deliveries according to a prepared list. Usually, by 8:30-9:00 o'clock in the morning, deliveries had to be completed. I worked until noon, stocking the shelves the rest of the time. The father of the present owner, who had opened the store many years ago, was now along in years and somewhat senile. He sat mostly in the back room of the store and refought the first World War. For a twelve-year-old, this was a comical scene. In hindsight, it was not funny, but instead rather sad.

Isaac's Department Store was a small ladies' wear store selling brassieres, corsets, stockings, underwear and other garments for ladies. My friend Gunther Weiskopf worked here as a stock boy. When he left the job, I was introduced to the owner and took over Gunther's position. Before leaving, Gunther acquainted me with the stockroom located in the back of the store, and also showed me a little peeping hole over the dressing room. From time to time, I glanced through that hole. Again, the pay was not too good, but I had a good view.

Mastercraft Smoking Pipe Company, located on 47th Street just off 5th Avenue, was a manufacturer of smoking pipes. I first started working here part-time around 1943 when I was 15 years old. The NY State labor laws at the time required that if you are under 16 years old, you must have working papers allowing you to work for the employer wishing to hire you. The law further stated that under 16 years of age you cannot work in a facility that uses any type of machinery. Mastercraft, had the pipes made in another facility or overseas. On 47th Street, they only had offices and one or two small machines that stamped the name Mastercraft on the product, and a couple of small drills that were used to put filters in the pipes and for some repair work. My job was to work in the latter area. In addition, they had ladies sitting around a table placing the pipes in individual cloth bags and putting them in small cartons with instructions and other literature. The pipes sold by the company were of a high quality and pretty costly.

When I applied for the job, I told them that I was 16 years. For some reason unknown to me, I was able to get working papers. However, they clearly stated my age correctly as 15. This left me in a predicament, since I had told the employer that I was 16. Not to worry, I used an ink eradicator and changed my age to 16. Unfortunately, the working papers were printed on yellow paper. The minute the eradicator ink hit the yellow paper, it turned white. A good forger, I was not. And when I turned in the papers to the office manager at the company, I laughed and said it got wet. Now you must remember that the year was 1943. Men were being drafted into the Armed Forces and factories were hiring for defense work. As a result, companies like Mastercraft had difficulty in finding employees, and they did not scrutinize work papers too carefully.

It was a nice job with pleasant surroundings. The only male employees here were my friend Gerry Breidenbach, Semi Plaut. (Gerry's uncle), who was a part-time cantor, Mr. Baum, an elderly gentleman who loved music and another elderly gentleman who had worked repairing and producing pipes ever since he was a young man. This gentleman was my and Gerry's immediate boss. Semi and Mr. Baum would sing together for hours. And every Wednesday, Semi would begin practicing for the coming Shabbat services. One afternoon during lunch hour, I decided to light up a pipe. Within minutes, I started to feel ill and could not get to the bathroom fast enough. I apparently inhaled, which nauseated me. My employment here ended very abruptly when I found out that a labor inspector would be coming the following day. I did not want to face a lot of questions or become known as a liar or forger, and so I left, never to return.

In the years 1944-45, I held numerous summer jobs. With the country being at war, companies were looking for help and were ready to hire workers just for the summer months. In some instances, we gave the false impression to the employer that we were no longer going to school and were looking for full-time jobs. Our leads for jobs basically came from employment agencies which were located on Warren Street in Manhattan. Employers listed job openings with the agencies and, when they were able to fill the job vacancies, the agencies received payment from the companies.

Sabret Frankfurter Roll Company was located in the Bronx. They baked frankfurter and hamburger rolls.

Gerry Breidenbach and I reported for work at 8:00 a.m. to a fellow who was our immediate foreman. There was a machine that shaped the dough to the size of a roll, and a worker was standing high up in front of the machine feeding dough into the machine. The dough came down on a conveyer belt. Our job was to catch the dough, shape it and quickly put it on a tray. There was no let up, because the guy just kept feeding the dough into the machine, and we had to keep up with him or the dough would fall all over the floor. At around 10 o'clock, there was a ten minute break, at which time Gerry and I looked at each other and decided to leave and never to return.

Lee Chemical Company was located in a storefront on 14th Street around 8th Avenue. Again, Gerry and I were sent by an agency to two potential jobs: one was at Lee Chemical and the other at Everlast Sporting Goods. We first went to Everlast, and they were looking for someone to stuff boxing gloves and baseball gloves. The people at Everlast decided that they would hire Gerry, and I went on my way to Lee Chemical.

When I arrived at Lee Chemical, I was met by Miss Lee, a cute little middle-aged blond woman, who introduced herself as the owner of the company. The company was in the business of bottling and selling a mosquito repellent. The chemical came in large barrels, and my job would include filling bottles with the chemical from the barrel. The bottles were labeled, and either six or eight bottles, depending on their size, were packed into a carton. Miss Lee would leave orders on the desk for me, together with shipping labels and invoices. It was up to me to fill orders, gather the bottles for the order and get the shipments ready for pickup by a trucker. Miss Lee was out most of the day calling on customers, and I was the only other employee.

In addition to having pretty much the run of the place, there was another fringe benefit that came with the job. I went home on the subway with the same clothing that I worked in all day. Apparently, the odor from the repellent was quite strong, and on many occasions people would get up from their seats on the subway just to get away from me, and to my delight I had a seat all the way home.

Wasserstein Ribbon Company sold ribbons in all different colors and sizes. The ribbons were all clearly marked and stocked in the warehouse. My job was in the shipping department, and included going to the warehouse to get the ribbons required for a specific order, cutting the quantity required and rolling it on a spool. This was interesting work and I was kind of sorry when the summer ended.

There were other jobs including feeding paper into the printing presses at a company that printed advertising materials for outdoor signs.

From the age of 15, I worked full time every year during my summer vacation. The thought of going to a summer camp was never an option for me.

There is no question that, in Junior High School PS 51 in the Bronx, I was an above average student. However, in the year 1942, when I had to decide on what high school to attend, our country was at war, so there was a surplus of jobs to be had. Most of my friends and many of my classmates decided to attend the nearest academic high school, namely, Morris High. This, by the way, is the same school that General Colin Powell attended years later. At the time, college was not on my agenda, and my aim was to get into the labor market, and to take advantage of what seemed to me the opportunity to get a good paying job. This was particularly true when I compared the salaries being offered at the time to my father's salary when we first came to America. As a result, I enrolled to attend Samuel Gompers Vocational High School in the Bronx to learn to become an electrician. A few of my middle school teachers talked to me in an effort to convince me to attend an academic high school. I cannot recall ever having a discussion with my parents about what school to attend, nor were they in a position to guide me in this matter.

At Gompers, they taught kids how to be electricians or automobile mechanics. The curriculum was pretty much divided equally between vocational courses and academic courses. For the vocational courses, the classes were conducted in shops at the school, and every student had to wear overalls while taking courses at the shop. The student body was generally of a lower caliber, as compared to students attending the regular academic schools. I learned early on that I would never become an electrician, particularly when, after wiring a project, I was afraid to throw the switch to complete the circuit. The academic and theoretical courses dealing with electricity were no problem for me, and I excelled in most of those courses.

Many students were very robust and hard for the teachers to control. We had a few new young female

teachers who were hired to replace the male teachers drafted into the Army, and the rough students really made life for these teachers quite miserable. It was not uncommon to see one of those young female teachers sit in front of the class in tears.

Luckily, by the time my junior year came around, I decided that I must expand my learning by taking additional academic courses. At this time, we were living in Washington Heights very close to George Washington High School, and I enrolled to take night courses in geometry, algebra, and physics. This is the high school that my friend Henry Kaufman attended during the day. Among other well known alumni are Henry Kissinger and Allan Greenspan. A few years ago, I met Henry Kissinger and we talked about George Washington High School, and he told me that most of his high school education came at night because he had to go to work to help support his family. Kissinger was another German Jewish youngster who felt obligated to assist at home.

When we moved to Washington Heights, I was probably in my first or second year at Gompers. I continued to travel to the Bronx every day, never once considering changing schools in midstream. Seeing something through to the end has remained with me until this day.

Choosing to go to a vocational high school was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. The education was far inferior to that received in a regular high school. When I talk to young kids, such as my grandchildren, who are getting ready to go to high school, I always like to stress the importance of this part of their education. To me, high school is a steppingstone for your future, since good grades will determine what college you will go to, and ultimately what you will do with the rest of your life.

My sister, Trudy, also went to a vocational school, where she learned the millinery trade. After graduation, she worked in this field for a number of years.

From what I hear, we still have vocational high schools in existence today, and I sincerely hope that their academic curriculum has improved. There is a definite need for vocational or technical schools, because not every student is college material or wants to attend college.

Around early 1941, living conditions in the Bronx were beginning to deteriorate. Many German Jewish refugees living in our immediate area moved to other parts of the city, such as the Pelham section of the Bronx or the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. My parents wanted to move to Washington Heights, but I very much resisted that move, since all of my friends at that time were still living in the Bronx. Ultimately, my parents found an apartment, within their price range, at 920 Avenue Saint Johns, in the Bronx. The building we moved to was much more modern than our former building, and the area was a mostly white stronghold. We were able to walk to the same school, and I continued to live close to my Typhoon buddies. It was a very nice apartment, a fourth-floor walkup with two bedrooms. My sister, Trudy, and I shared a bedroom.

Two years later, when our lease for the apartment was up for renewal, it was decided, that for the good of everyone in the family, we should leave the Bronx and move to Washington Heights. We moved to 65 Wadsworth Terrace near 190th Street, into a second-floor walkup with two bedrooms. By 1943, some of my friends had already left the Bronx and moved to Washington Heights, so this time I was in full support of our decision to make this move. My sister was now 17 years old, and my parents wanted her to be able to socialize with more young adults her age. Because of her age, my sister was given the second bedroom, and I slept on the couch in the living room.

In those first few years, we did not have a telephone in the apartment. I would guess the main reason for this is that it was wartime and no new telephones were installed in residences unless absolutely essential. There was a coin-operated telephone installed near the superintendent's apartment in the basement, which the tenants could use to make and receive phone calls. Trudy, was now of dating age and she would quite frequently get calls from young men looking for a date. The super would pick up the calls, ring our bell from downstairs and holler up loud enough for the entire building to hear, "Trudy, there is a guy on the phone for you." Embarrassed and red-faced, Trudy would run down the stairs to answer the phone.

By the time we moved to Washington Heights, there must have been at least 6-8 German Jewish congregations in a radius of 20 blocks. Almost immediately, my parents joined Congregation Gates of Hope led by Rabbi Hanover, which was located at 183rd Street and Broadway on the second floor above Jack's Furniture

Store. The German Jews conducted their services in accordance with the way it was done on the other side of the Atlantic. Although there were quite a few non-German Jewish temples in the same area, most German Jews were not ready to join these temples where the congregants were mostly of Polish and Russian descent. In the early 1940s, most children of German Jews married boys and girls of the same background. Most likely, had I met Miriam in those years, we would never have married, since she was of a Polish background. A German marrying a non-German in those days was equivalent to today marrying out of the religion. Exactly why the German Jews considered themselves so superior, I had and still to this day have difficulty in understanding.

Congregation Gates of Hope built a new Temple about 55-60 years ago on 179th Street between Broadway and Fort Washington Avenue. My parents and Mr. & Mrs. Breidenbach celebrated their 50th wedding anniversaries at this temple on the same Sabbath. In 1958, the Sabbath prior to our wedding day, it was here that I was called to the Torah for a special blessing. Most of the other German congregations have disappeared or consolidated as the population of the area drastically changed and the older members began to pass away. However, Gates of Hope is still hanging on today.

As a result of introductions and from meeting fellows at the temple, I became acquainted with a completely new group of guys. Among my new acquaintances were Henry Goldschmidt, Egon Manheimer, Fred Schloss, Harold May, Al and Max Bender, Howie Baer, Werner Straus, Walter Bechhofer and many others. Most of my new friends were closer to my age, so, for a change, I was no longer the youngest. They all lived in the area between 170th Street and 180th Street and between Audubon and Fort Washington Avenue. By this time, some of my Bronx buddies, namely, Henry Kaufman and Red Rosenberg, were already living in Washington Heights. Our usual meeting place was at a park on Fort Washington Avenue between 175th Street and 178th Street. Besides being a park where people could sit on benches underneath trees, it had a dirt baseball field.

Right from the beginning, I realized that my new friends were far better athletes than my old buddies from the Bronx. One day, the old Typhoons, some still living in the Bronx, arranged to play softball against the guys from Washington Heights, where I now lived. The game was played on a neutral field, across the street from Yankee Stadium. I can't recall what the final score was, but I do know that the old Typhoons got slaughtered.

In the Bronx, I was the youngest of the boys. Some of my friends, at the age of 15-16, started to hang out with girls. Even though I was only 13 years old at the time, I followed suit and started to get friendly with girls. One day at this time, we took girls on a picnic to Tibbetts Brook in the Bronx. A girl sitting next to me on the bus took the palm of her hand and swiped it across my cheeks and remarked, "You're still a baby, you don't even shave." I was deeply embarrassed and made up my mind that no girl would ever say that to me again. When I got home, I locked myself in the bathroom, lathered up with my father's soap, took his straight-edge razor and proceeded to shave. A straight-edge razor, as I soon learned, is very difficult to use. Within minutes, my face was bleeding from cuts created by not using the straight-edge razor correctly. After that experience, I got myself a Gillette razor and started to shave on a regular basis, even if it was not always necessary.

Beginning in 1944, some of my friends, particularly those from the Bronx, were being drafted for service into the U. S. Armed Forces. The first of the boys to go was the oldest of the gang, Herman Stern, followed by Issy Neuhaus and Jerry Seelig. Within a year, my buddies from the Bronx were all serving either in Europe or in the Pacific. Whenever someone was getting ready to leave for service, family and friends had a little get together for them. Usually, as a parting gift, they received a ballpoint pen to make sure that they had no excuse not to write. Ballpoint pens were first marketed at this time with a price of between \$10 to \$20 each. All of the boys ultimately returned from the Army without any injuries, except Al Bender, a friend from Washington Heights, who caught malaria in the Pacific.

Economically, our life had improved during this time, but unfortunately many of our immediate relatives were unable to escape Germany and my parents were deeply concerned about their wellbeing.

My new friends in Washington Heights were younger, and so most of them were not drafted until 1945 to 1946. Werner (Rocky) Straus was older, and he served with the occupation forces in Europe. Gunther (Red) Rosenberg volunteered for service in the Navy and my cousin Kurt (Curley) volunteered for the Merchant Marines. The rest of the gang served in the Army later on, or some were drafted for service in the Korean War.



*Carl's House on St. John Avenue.*

Economic conditions improved in the United States as the defense industry started to gear up throughout the country. My father continued to work in a bakery, and my mother continued stitching gloves. Commencing in early 1940, the American public was introduced to rationing. Among the items rationed were gasoline, oil products, meat, sugar, tea, coffee, eggs and certain clothing products. Each person received a rationing book entitling them to buy a certain quantity of a product over a specified time period. Most people in the country accepted rationing without a complaint. However, for a small minority, this became an opportunity to make large sums of money illegally by engaging in what became known as the 'black market.' Rationing of certain products continued in the U.S. until the year 1948.

Americans were united in their effort to win the war both in the Pacific and in Europe. In order to get money into the Treasury, private people would buy Series E United States Savings bonds. For an investment of as little as \$18.75, you could buy a bond that at maturity, which I think was 20 years later, would pay you \$25.00. Employees could invest in Series E bonds through regular payroll deductions. It was not unusual for people to purchase bonds as gifts for weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. The government raised a huge sum of money from the sale of Series E bonds, since the average citizen wanted to support the war effort.

Throughout the country, there were people who protested against our involvement in the European War. However, they were a small minority. In general, the country was unified and supported our troops. In our household, we readily approved the rationing, since we were probably entitled to more than we required.



*On a picnic in Palisades Park, NJ.*

Among my friends from Washington Heights, there was a fellow named Teddy May. Teddy was by far the oldest of the boys with very poor eyesight, which resulted in his not being accepted by the Armed Forces. Teddy was classified as 4F, the classification for all persons not qualifying for service in the Armed Forces for medical reasons. All the boys looked up to Teddy, and he was their leader.

Around 1945, some of the boys, including Teddy, got together and purchased an old car. One night, Teddy persuaded the boys that in Mount Kisco, New York, he knew a guy who would sell them gasoline without using a rationing coupon. Although I was not a partner to the car, that night I was invited to come along. To make the story short, we never found the guy who was going to sell us gas on the black market, nor is it likely that Teddy knew such a person. Teddy, it turned out, had a date with a girl in town, and getting the guys to drive him was a simple way for him to get to Mount Kisco. All of us except Teddy took the train back that night, since the car had insufficient gas to get us to NYC. Teddy and the car stayed behind.

Once the war started, immigration of Jews to this country declined to a trickle. There were definitely some signs of anti-Semitism within the country. People were opposed to modifying the immigration laws to allow a greater number of Jews to come into the U.S. and escape the Holocaust. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the country in 1932, at the time of the deepest depression. Through legislation, he was able to help the masses slowly get back on their feet. Roosevelt, who was deeply admired by the people, especially the Jews, was reelected to the Presidency in 1936, 1940 and 1944, an unprecedented fourth term. In almost every Jewish home, a picture of Roosevelt was proudly displayed. It has always been a puzzle to me that Roosevelt was so admired by the Jews, since he did very little to help Jews come to the U.S. to escape the horror of the Holocaust.

Before the U.S. entered the war, there were many demonstrations throughout the country demanding

that America not enter the war against the Germans. At Madison Square Garden in New York City, there were frequent pro-German and anti-Jewish demonstrations. At this time throughout the country, Jews were still not able to get jobs in certain corporations. It was well known that Consolidated Edison, which was located in New York City, was one of many that did not hire Jews. In addition, Jews were not able to join certain country clubs, or purchase homes or rent apartments in certain areas. For example, Forest Hills Gardens, not too far from where Miriam and I later owned a house, was off limits to Jews. Also, rumor had it that the number of Jewish students accepted to medical schools was artificially limited. Once the war started, Jews were able to find employment with companies that previously did not hire Jews. By late 1940 or early 1950, these restrictions on where Jews could work or live were basically eliminated. However, anti-Semitism still exists today in certain parts of America, probably more so in smaller cities and towns

During the early part of this period, monies I earned from part-time work was mingled together with the family kitty. My friends and I earned passes to movie theaters from distributing movie programs in the neighborhood. We generally went to the movies early Sunday afternoons and watched a triple feature and a "chapter." The chapter was generally a cowboy movie, the story of which would unfold over several weeks. The good guy was always in deep trouble as the episode ended, and you would have to come back the following week to see how he escaped his terrible situation.

In Washington Heights, I continued to go to schul every Saturday morning, usually accompanied by my parents. After schul, I would meet up with my friends and we would make plans for the afternoon. Sometimes, on Saturday afternoon, we would play curb ball or "off the wall," or we would walk down to the park along the Hudson. Frequently, here we would meet girls who also attended our schul or other German Jewish congregations. In the summer, we could spend hours here talking or playing catch.

On the Sabbath we only walked, no matter how far, even though some of our other activities were really not in compliance with the laws for that holy day. Since I lived up on 190th Street in Washington Heights, and most of our Saturday activities took place around 170th Street or lower, I registered a lot of mileage on Saturdays.

Most of the guys that I ran around with both in the Bronx and in Washington Heights were even-tempered and would go out of their way to avoid any kind of trouble. Sometimes, we were confronted by guys, both black and white, who gave the Jewish kids a rough time. I remember an incident in the Bronx when we were playing ball in a schoolyard. A group of black guys came along and wanted to chase us off the field. Some words were exchanged, and a black kid pulled out a knife. Most of us were ready to leave, except, Jerry Seelig. Jerry was something of a hothead. He pulled the knife out of the black kid's hand, cutting the palm of his hand. With blood spurting from the kid's hand, everyone picked up their things and ran fast and far away. I spent the rest of the day with Curley, sitting on a bench upstairs at the Prospect Avenue subway station. Our big concern was that these kids most likely attended our junior high school and would be waiting for us the next school day. I am happy to say that nothing further came from this incident.

Until my 16th birthday, I went with girls occasionally, but certainly did not have one girlfriend. In Washington Heights, I started to hang out with girls from German Jewish families. We had good times together, frequently going to parties and picnics, mostly as a group. I met my first real girlfriend just before I turned 18. Her name was Dorothy Vogelsang. She lived in Flushing, Queens and was a distant cousin to Henry Goldschmidt. Henry hosted a New Year's Eve party in 1946, and it was here that I met Dorothy. For the next few months, I would see Dorothy almost every weekend until I left for Army service.

I had no car, so it was very difficult to get to Flushing from Washington Heights. To meet Dottie, I would take the train to Times Square and get on a Flushing train until the last stop. We would generally meet on Main Street to go to the movies or for a cheap dinner. Afterwards, we usually wound up at her house. On my way home late at night, I would sometimes fall asleep on the subway car running from the first stop in Flushing to the last stop, which was Times Square. Sometimes I would wake up and find myself heading back to Flushing.

Dorothy, who was my age, or possibly a little older, became very serious about our relationship, and wanted some commitment from me. When I was inducted into the Army, she got me a beautiful silver bracelet. We corresponded for some time after my induction, and saw each other whenever I came home on leave. Our

relationship ended when she told me that an old boyfriend was getting his discharge from the Army and asked her to marry him. I was just 18, and certainly not ready to make a commitment, so we said goodbye.

Generally, while living in the Bronx, I did not get out of the immediate area very frequently. In the summer, we walked to Crotona Park to go swimming in the public pool. On some Sundays, we took the subway and bus to Orchard Beach in the Upper Bronx. Occasionally, we would take the subway and bus to Far Rockaway, in Brooklyn, to go to the beach. Back in 1939, I went a number of times to the World's Fair, which was held at Flushing Meadows Park in Queens. The theme of the fair was "World of Tomorrow," and, in hindsight, many of the exhibits that seemed unreal at the time are now part of our everyday life. In addition to visiting the Fair with my parents and friends, we also went there on a couple of daily excursions with our public school.

Looking back, I cannot recall ever going to midtown Manhattan until I was 14 years of age, unless we were picking up new immigrants at the pier. Once I got to high school, I became more independent and my visits to Manhattan became more frequent.

The immigration laws of the United States required a new immigrant to live in the country for 5 years before becoming a U.S. citizen. To become a citizen, you had to appear before a judge, and were required to answer some questions pertaining to U.S. history and government. In 1942, five years after coming to this country, my parents were preparing to become citizens. In those years, my parents still struggled with the language and were afraid that they would not pass the test. The immigration office made a booklet available to potential new citizens outlining the procedure. It also included possible test questions and answers. My sister and I reviewed the questions and answers with our parents to the point where when we read them the first word of a question, they knew the answer. The day finally arrived when they were called to appear at the immigration department for their test. They came home very excited and as American citizens. My sister and I, since we were under 18, automatically became U.S. citizens on our parents' papers. When I was drafted into the Army, I received citizenship papers in my own name.

After being in the country for 5 years, my mother's oldest sister, Aunt Hilda, was ready to become a citizen. The story has it that when she was questioned by a judge and had difficulty understanding him, she said, "Is there nobody here who speaks German?" The end result was that she passed the test and proudly became an American citizen too.

All of the German Jews were eager to become citizens of the U.S., and many of the husbands and sons served in the Armed Forces during World War II. It seems to me that many new immigrants to this country today are less eager to learn the language and become citizens of our great country. I was always puzzled, and am still today, that recent immigrants to this country refuse to learn our language, and that we accommodate them by teaching them in our schools in their foreign tongue.

As I look back on those years, people were making a much lower salary compared to today. The words "fringe benefits" or "medical coverage included" were never an issue when looking for a new job. I don't know how people paid for hospital or doctor fees, except that the cost was a fraction of what it is today. Pension or retirement plans for most employees, other than public servants, were unheard of. Around the year 1946, my parents finally got some medical insurance.

Certain professionals, such as doctors, dentists and lawyers immigrating to this country faced a difficult problem. They were unable to practice their professions without taking courses at a university, passing exams and getting licensed by the state. In some cases, professionals set up offices at home before being licensed, and offered their services for a lesser fee. My parents took me to a dentist with an office at home, and I assume still unlicensed, when I had a toothache. I can't recall what my specific problem was, but I do recall the dentist pulling out my tooth without any sedation. The pain was quite bad, but the fee was most reasonable.

Before leaving this time period, I must add that we were all good kids, eager to do well in school and respectful of our parents. Most of my friends from the Bronx went to college and became engineers, accountants and economists. Many of us were able to attend college because of the benefits offered to veterans by the G.I. Bill of Rights.



*Carl in uniform.*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Army

On January 13, 1946, I turned 18. Within a few weeks after that date, I received notice to report for a physical exam from the U.S. government for induction to the Armed Forces. The exam was conducted in downtown New York City. All potential inductees went in the nude from one doctor to the next. Each doctor exam-ined a different part of the body. When the exams were concluded, you got dressed and took all your test results to an Army officer. After looking through all the papers, he would either stamp the documents "Accepted" or "Rejected." My papers were stamped "Accepted."

There is a story that used to go around about a guy who made believe all through the exam that he could not hear. When he finally reached the desk of the officer, he was told that he was rejected. At this point, he immediately said, "Thank you." The officer realized that the hearing disability was all a farce, and immediately changed the records to "Accepted."

The war in Europe had ended in May 1945, while in the Pacific, after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered in September, 1945. In March, 1946, I received a notice to report for active duty to the U.S. Army. The war was over, most of my buddies had been discharged by this time, and I was just about to report for duty in the army. This situation created some is-sues for me.

After a goodbye party with friends and family, I reported early the next morning to a designated building downtown. Together with about 100 other new inductees, we were loaded onto buses destined for Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Fort Dix was a staging camp where you received your uniforms, shoes and blankets, got injections, listened to lectures and watched some movies about life in the Army. All of your clothing was stuffed into a duffel bag, which stayed with you throughout your army career. To get the injections, you lined up and, without fail, some wise guy who was just injected would pass by the line and tell you to watch out for the "crooked needle." So, as you went through the line to get injected, you were scared shit because you expected the next needle to be the crooked one.

After a week at Fort Dix, you received your orders to report to a camp for basic training. Guys got orders to report to camps all over the United States, but I got lucky. My orders were to report to Camp Aberdeen in Maryland, which was only about 4 hours by train from N.Y.C., as it was located between Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Once we got to the camp, we were issued some more gear, including Eisenhower jackets, a long



*My friend, Gunther Weiskopf, who was almost ready to be discharged when I was drafted.*

winter overcoat, two complete sets of winter and summer uniforms, two sets of fatigues, plus, of course, a rifle and a mess kit. Once you were outfitted, you proceeded to join the company to which you had been assigned. Every soldier wore a “dog tag” around his neck, which had imprinted on it your first and last name, the serial number assigned to you and your blood type. All soldiers were required to wear their dog tags at all times.

When you arrived at your company, a non-commissioned officer greeted you and assigned you to a specific barracks. Once you found your barrack, another non-commissioned officer directed you to your assigned bunk.

The barracks had two rows of about 20 bunks on each side separated by an aisle in the center. Down the center aisle, there were racks used to store your rifle in a designated spot. Between bunks, there was a space of about 2 and 1/2 to 3 feet on each side. In front of your bunk, stood a footlocker for storing your personal belongings, including the underwear and socks that had been issued to you. Behind the bunk on the wall, there was a rack to hang your uniforms, including your shirts and overcoat. On the right, as you entered the bunk, were the quarters for two non-commissioned officers, a sergeant and a corporal. On the other side of the hallway, there was a bathroom. The bathroom had about 6 sinks and 6 urinals across from about 6 toilets. There were also 5 showers in the bathroom. Curtains surrounded the showers, but the toilets were completely in the open. It took a while to get used to sitting on the toilet trying to relieve one’s self with guys all around.



*Carl in Army with his brother-in-law Martin.*

Once we got settled in, the sergeant appeared, introduced himself, laid down the rules and elaborated on what the Army expected from us while at Aberdeen. All the guys in the barracks were new inductees, mostly between the ages of 18 to 20.

Some time that afternoon, I was pleasantly surprised when suddenly my friend from Washington Heights, Henry Goldschmidt, showed up in my barrack. How he found me, I really do not remember, but Henry had been inducted a few weeks before me and was also stationed at Aberdeen.

After a little bit of talk, Henry told me that he would teach me how to strip and reassemble the rifle. He took the better part of the rifle apart, but before he could get it all back together, he claimed that he had to return to his unit. I still had about 20 pieces of the rifle lying in front of me, which I really did not know what to do with. A bunkmate from Texas who watched me struggle assisted me in reassembling the rifle. From that point, I made sure that the kid from Texas would remain my good friend all through basic training.

Aberdeen was a huge camp basically used to test new weapons and equipment. Wakeup call in the morning was at 6:00 o'clock. First formation was one hour later. Before leaving the barrack, you had to shave, shower, make sure that your bed was correctly made and that the area around your bunk was clean. After inspection by a sergeant and some announcements by the officers, we marched to the mess hall for breakfast. At the mess hall, you picked up a tray with various compartments for food. With tray in hand, you walked along a counter where soldiers put the food on your tray. The mess hall had rows of long tables with benches on which platoon members sat together to eat. At the end of the meal, you emptied your tray and placed it in a rack near the exit.

At a designated time we had to fall out in formation. After all were accounted for, a sergeant announced that he was looking for volunteers to do a specific task. Before I was inducted, my old buddies who had served

in the army made it very clear to me to never ever volunteer for anything while in the service. They further told me that when you line up in formation, never stand in front or back, but rather get right into the middle. Taking the advice from those experienced soldiers, I squeezed right into the center of the formation. Not a single person volunteered, which left it up to the sergeant to pick guys to do the task. He picked six guys, not from the front or back, but right from the center, which included me. For the rest of that day, I shoveled coal from trucks for the barracks.

Basic training consisted of about twelve weeks of physical training plus about two weeks of training for duties in foreign countries. The physical training included a lot of long marches, sometimes with full pack, running around the camp and exercises to build up your body. Periodically, you would be marched into an auditorium where an officer would lecture on weapons, compass readings and safe-guards in sexual relations. Venereal disease was a big problem for the army. They hoped that through lectures and movies on this topic, they would educate the soldiers and reduce the exposure.

Your bed had to be made in a specific way with hospital corners. The blanket and sheets had to be extremely tight and tucked into the mattress. It was not un-usual for an officer to test the tightness of your blanket by tossing a coin on the cover to see if it would jump up. The rifle was another area that was constantly in-spected for dust and dirt. A soldier's uniform had to be clean and correctly pressed. The bunks were constantly inspected for cleanliness, sometimes even with white gloves. The entire bunk, or individuals, could be penalized for failure to pass inspec-tion. Penalties might consist of canceling weekend or evening passes or the imposi-tion of additional duties. There was a saying that "The grass is green in Aberdeen." One of the penalties handed out was for guys to sit in the evenings, or on weekends, on the grass and use knives to remove weeds.

The guys in the bunk came from all over the United States. I became friendly with the fellow from a small town in Texas who early on helped me reassemble my rifle. When I told him that I was a Jew, he told me that the only Jew he had ever met was the fellow who owned the corner store in his town. The storeowner apparently sold on credit, therefore, he had to constantly remind his customers to keep up to date with their payments. As a result, my bunkmate concluded that all Jews were money hoarders. Ultimately, I hope I succeeded in getting my bunkmate to understand that Jews are made up of many different types, the same as all other people.

In the 1940s, the Armed Forces were still segregated. The black soldiers were assigned to all-black companies with black and white officers. However, no black officer was in command of a white unit. Even in combat in the Second World War, soldiers were not integrated. In New York City at this time, black and white children went to the same public schools, although they did not live together in the same apartment buildings. It was not unusual for a block to be occupied by blacks, bordering on a white neighborhood. In the early 1950's, New York City's school system decided to reduce segregation and to bus black children into predominately white neighborhoods. All of the white liberals were very much in support of this move. However, when busing reached their immediate neighborhood, enrollment in private schools suddenly increased. Segregation in the Armed Forces does not exist today any longer.

While in basic training, soldiers were expected to perform certain special du-ties, including KP (kitchen patrol or police), or barrack fireman and, of course, guard duty. Every week, a rostrum was posted indicating to what detail you were assigned on a specific day. KP started early in the morning before breakfast and ended after supper at night. When you reported to the kitchen, you were assigned to a specific task, including dishing out food, washing dishes, cleaning pots and pans, cleaning the dining room or separating the garbage between edible and non-edible waste. In the summer months, I particularly preferred the garbage detail. The advantage to this detail was that it was outdoors and, once you completed your task, you had nothing further to do. On the downside, the smell was pretty bad. The fireman detail required you to keep the furnace in the barracks burning. Guard duty required you to patrol a certain assigned area. You usually patrolled your area for two hours at night, followed by a two hour rest period.

One of the things I disliked most in basic training was shooting the rifle. From the very start, you will recall, I was very fearful of having to reassemble my M1 rifle. Your rifle was continuously inspected for cleanliness, and a failed inspection could require you to have to strip your rifle and very carefully clean every



*Home on leave from the Army.*



*Camp San Miguel in Yokohama, Japan*

part. A failed inspection could also result in delay or cancellation of a weekend pass, or even in having the rifle assigned as your mate in bed.

One day, our company was assigned to the rifle range for target practice. The idea was to shoot at the target from prone, standing or kneeling positions from a distance of about 50-75 yards away. When it got to be my turn, the bullets landed about 20 yards in front of me. I think when I got ready to pull the trigger, I closed my eyes and the bullets wound up far short of the target. Those of us who shot poorly on the first go-around were supposed to come back after everybody had a turn for a second round. I kind of slid in with those that passed the test and never went back for a second round of shooting. One thing is for sure, I never got nor deserved the “sharp shooting” medal.

Toward the end of basic training, the entire company went on bivouac. The destination was somewhere in the hills of Virginia, which was probably not very far from where Camp David, the Presidential retreat, is now located. Everyone was loaded on trucks, together with duffel bags and rifles. Some trucks transported the field kitchens, while others transported equipment, including tents for sleeping. Jeeps carrying the commissioned officers and some non-commissioned officers were also part of the caravan. We got underway very early Monday morning, and were scheduled to return mid-Friday afternoon. When we arrived at the campsite, we were assigned locations to put up our tents.

Around mid-week, after supper one night, we were informed that we would go on a night hike, and needed to be alert against being captured by another company. During the last few weeks of basic training, I had been promoted to platoon leader. A platoon consists of about a dozen guys, all from the same barracks. Before leaving on our night hike, I was given a compass told to walk my platoon in a certain direction following a specific compass reading to get us back to the campsite. We walked for a couple of hours in the pitch darkness with little help from the compass. It turned out that neither I, nor anybody else in the platoon, could accurately read a compass. After some discussion, we decided to rest until the appearance of some light. With first daylight, when we got back on our feet, we were no more than 100 yards from the road which we had been searching for. We were all most embarrassed when we reported back to camp. However, some other platoons turned up even



*Carl and his Japanese assistants working on an electrical problem in the factory.*

later than us.

On the day before we broke camp, it was announced that we would be heading to a rifle range. This made me very unhappy, since I was determined not to shoot my rifle. Once we got to the range, guys started to line up to shoot. After firing a certain number of rounds, they were ordered to line up across the road. I slowly followed the guys across the street, never once shooting my rifle. Had anyone caught me, I would have been in deep trouble. After our return to camp, it was announced that, once we showered, there would be an inspection of all rifles. All those passing would be free to go on a weekend pass. I was among the first guys to get his pass because my rifle passed inspection easily.

During basic training, I was able to get home at least 5-6 times for weekends, always bringing my laundry. My Mom was happy to have her son home, and gladly washed my clothes. Saturday nights, I generally went on a date or hung out with the guys. On one Saturday night, Jerry Seelig fixed up Gerry (Shrimp) Breidenbach on a blind date with two girls from Hoboken. They were supposed to meet the girls at the bus station in Manhattan. A couple of the other guys, including me, went along to see what the girls looked like. We were standing on the sidelines, as the girls got off the bus. When Gerry Breidenbach realized that his date was very tall and fat, he took off as fast as he could, not to be seen again that night.

I generally caught a train on Sunday night from New York City that would easily get me to Aberdeen on time. As the train headed southwest and passed Trenton, New Jersey. I recall a large sign on a building near the railroad station which read, "Trenton Makes the World Takes." Of course, this was before the factories departed the region for points south or, ultimately, to the Far East.

One weekday night, I arranged to meet my cousin Curley in Wilmington, Delaware. Curley, had volunteered to the Merchant Marines and was currently posted in Baltimore. After having dinner, we visited a few bars in the vicinity of the railroad station. The train I was supposed to take to get back to camp left without me, but as luck would have it, I got on the next train, which got me to camp just before curfew.



*My favorite Japanese assistant.*

For the next few weeks we attended lectures and watched some movies until we finally go our posting for our next station. My orders called for me to report in 10 days to Camp Stoneham, in Pittsburg, California, not too far from San Francisco. To get to Stoneham, soldiers were given an allowance of a certain amount of money, which they could utilize for any form of transportation. I decided to travel cross country in coach on a railroad. This allowed me to pocket some of the allowance, while at the same time getting a good look at our vast country. It took about four days to get to the West Coast and, during that stretch, I had the opportunity to observe some interesting goings on in coach. Some young people sitting next to each other who started out as complete strangers became lovers by the end of the trip.

Camp Stoneham was a transient Camp, where soldiers were prepared for their overseas duty. My assignment was with the 8th Army, as part of the occupation force stationed in Japan. In Stoneham, we got some injections and attended lectures about the duties of the occupation force and the correct treatment of the Japanese people. While waiting for a ship to take us across the Pacific, I had an opportunity to visit San Francisco.

It was late September or early October, 1946, when we boarded a small troop ship headed for Japan. I had been told by various sources that once you had experienced sailing the ocean, you would not get seasick on any future trip. Since I had previously crossed the Atlantic, I felt very confident that I would not have to deal with seasickness. Things turned out slightly different. We were just a few miles beyond the Golden Gate Bridge, when I dashed for the railing and heaved into the Pacific. Conditions on the troop ship were quite awful, with the troops quartered on the lower deck. The soldiers slept on bunks stacked six high. The ocean for this time of the year was unusually rough, resulting in extreme seasickness. When a soldier laying on a bunk above you threw up, it was not uncommon for him to puke straight on you if you happened to stick your head out. The weather got so bad that the waves swept one soldier overboard, never to be seen again. At times, when the weather was bad, and you were sitting in the mess hall with your tray in front of you, the trays would start to slide along the table and you would find yourself with someone else's tray.



*Close friends from the NYC area.*



*Home of Japanese family close to our camp.*

For lunch, every day, they would serve a ham sandwich with an apple. I remember every day trading my sandwich for an additional apple. The enlisted men on board were assigned to some small details, and lined up daily for some calisthenics. Most of the time, we just hung around playing card games and shooting dice. Some civilians, most likely government contractors or employees, sailed with us and were quartered on the upper deck. They could be seen lying on the upper deck on lounge chairs with drinks in hand while we stayed in tight groups below.

Ten days later, we finally sailed into the Yokohama harbor. As we approached the harbor, small vessels came along our ship begging for chocolate and cigarettes. The soldiers threw cigarettes and other goodies at the boats, which the Japanese retrieved from the water.

After disembarking, we were immediately assigned to various camps located in different parts of the country. I was assigned to Camp San Miquel, which was located on the outskirts of Yokohama. Together with a dozen other guys, I arrived at the camp on early Saturday afternoon. The camp consisted of about six quonset huts lined up next to each other. A quonset hut is a one-story building made from metal with a round roof that is easily put together. In front of one of the buildings, we saw a line of about ten soldiers. To our surprise, inside the hut there were two Japanese girls that the soldiers were using to satisfy their sexual desires. It turned out that this was not an unusual practice for weekend relaxation.

I was assigned to this camp because my records indicated that I had gone to school to learn to be an electrician. The soldiers stationed at this camp were all involved in servicing an old Ford auto plant that had been taken over by the Army. I was put in charge of three Japanese workers, and we had the job of all the electrical



*Office building in Tokyo in 1946*

work required to maintain the building and the equipment, as well as the campsite.

Shortly after arriving in Japan, I was promoted to technical corporal (T5). The function of the plant was to service all Army vehicles in Japan. The Japanese hired by the Army did most of the work. The American soldiers were mostly in supervisory positions. My Japanese helpers and I were situated in a small building. I had a private office with a telephone, and the Japanese employees stayed in the outer office. Whenever there was a breakdown of a machine, or bulbs needed replacement, I would get a call and send out my helpers to fix the problem.

For lunch every day, the Japanese would bring a small metal container stuffed with rice and fish, which they would heat up on the wooden stove in the outer office. The smell of the food was not very inviting, and I had no urge to taste it. On one night after my helpers had gone home for the day, all the lights went out in camp. I was called upon to get the auxiliary generator up and running. You will recall that although I studied to be an electrician, I was not a very good mechanic. With a flashlight and tools in hand, I went about the task of getting the generator going. I struggled in the dark and cut my hand, but finally somebody came to my rescue and the lights were restored. Everyone in Camp congratulated me for a job well done.

On the ship going overseas, I met up with two guys who were also assigned to the motor vehicle pool at Camp San Miquel. The younger of the two was Bernie Schoenfeld, who came from the Bronx. The older fellow was Sid Moskowitz, he was from somewhere in the Chicago area, had sergeant stripes and reenlisted in the Army for another term. I never found out the reason he joined up again, but I am certain it had to do with a personal situation that he was not keen on discussing. The three of us were the only Jews at camp and we became close friends.

Five Quonset huts were used for living quarters, while the sixth served as the kitchen. Each hut had bunks for 20 guys plus bathroom facilities. At 7:00 in the morning, we were lined up for our march to the mess hall for breakfast. We returned to the camp for lunch between 12 noon and 1:00. Our workday ended at five

when we returned to camp for some rest before dinner, unless we were assigned to special duty.

Every two weeks, you were assigned to guard duty, which was at night and involved guarding the outdoor perimeters of the camp and the kitchen. When reporting for guard duty, the soldier had to first pass inspection. Guard duty was an all night affair, and quite boring. The day following guard duty, you were required to report to your usual daily duties.

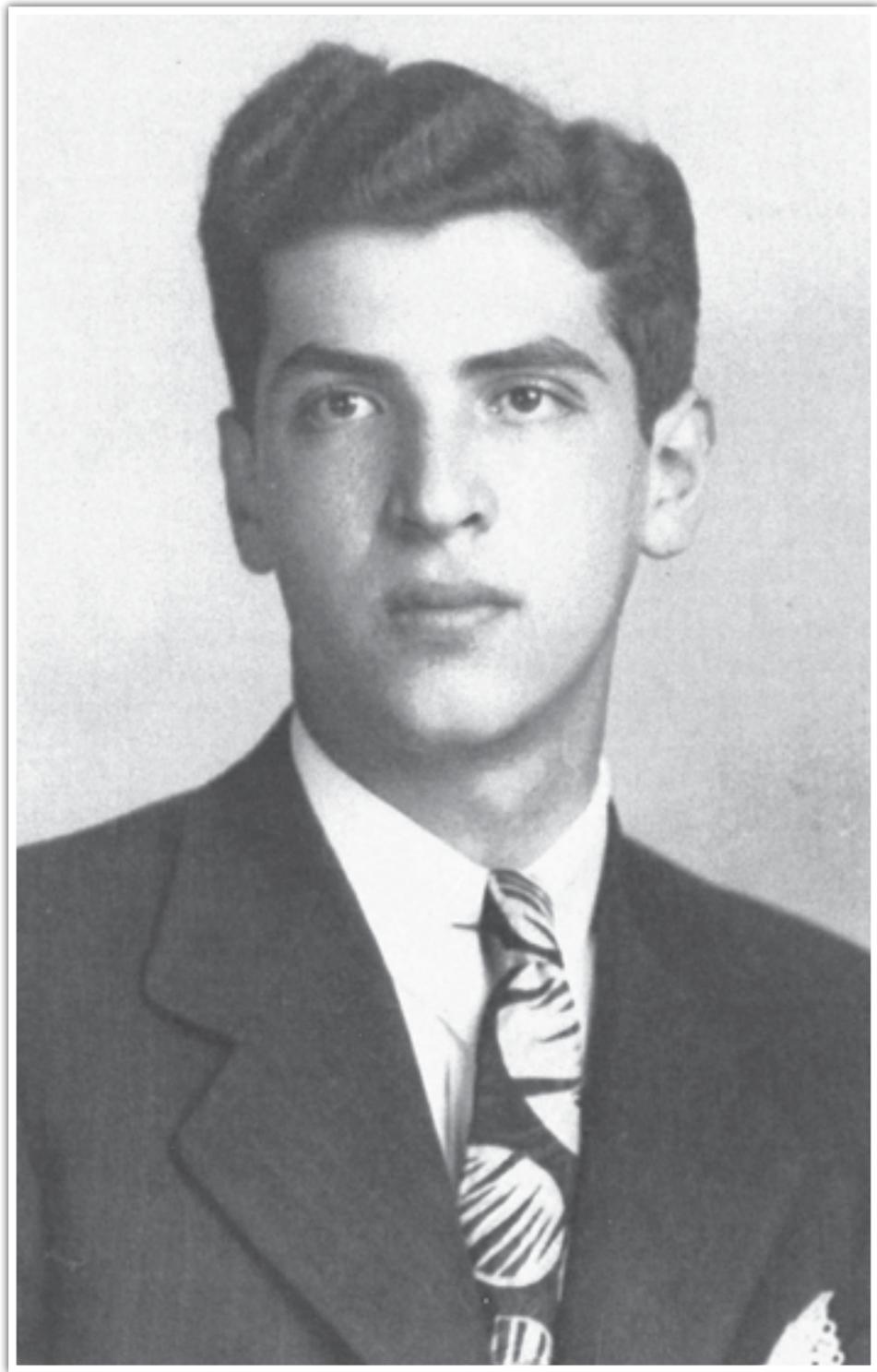
One day, Schoenfeld and I decided to confront the captain of our base to re-quest that soldiers like us, who held very important positions at the plant, should not be required to pull guard duty. The captain said he would take the matter under consideration before excusing us. The next time I had guard duty, I was assigned to patrol around the kitchen. The kitchen crew reported around six to get breakfast ready. Shortly afterwards, I walked into the kitchen to warm up and get some hot coffee. Minutes later, the captain, to whom I complained, entered the kitchen and told me in no uncertain terms to get back on guard duty. This incident, plus the one about not shooting the rifle, were immature acts on my part, for which I was very lucky not to be disciplined.

We had a pretty nice life at camp, which included watching movies at night. Everybody got along quite well. The food, which came mostly from Australia, was good. On weekends, unless we had special duty, we were free to leave camp to travel to other parts of the country. The Japanese girls were readily available to accommo-date the soldiers. There were some soldiers who got very involved with Japanese girls, even promising to take them to the U.S. On occasion, you heard stories about a soldier getting poisoned by a girl he wanted to leave behind. Controlling the spread of venereal disease was a constant problem for the army of occupation. Periodically, we were forced to stand in front of our bunk for a surprise penis (pecker) inspection by the medical officer. The six girls working in the kitchen were constantly receiving medical examinations, which made them very desirable sex partners.

While visiting Tokyo one day, together with Schoenfeld, I stopped in an art gallery to arrange to have a portrait painted of my sister in her wedding gown from a wedding picture which had been mailed to me. On my next visit to Tokyo, I went to the gallery to pick up the painting, which really turned out pretty good, except that Trudy's eyes came out slightly slanted. Years later, the painting hung in the sub-basement of my sister and brother-in-law's house in Fairlawn, New Jersey.

In early 1947, Congress passed legislation that all draftees be discharged from the Armed Forces. This, of course, included me. And so, after spending about six months in Japan, I was on my way home. My impression of Japan at that time was that I could not understand how they dared to attack the United States. To me, Japan seemed to lag many years behind America in their industrial and agricultural methods.

The trip home seemed much faster, and the ocean was much smoother. Again, most of the trip was spent playing either dice or cards. I got pretty lucky early on in the dice game, and was ahead quite a nice sum of money. I gave most of my winnings to a friend to hold for me until the trip concluded, and instructed him not to return any of the money to me under any circumstances. As my luck turned, I badgered my friend to give me some of my money, which he reluctantly dealt out to me piecemeal. Before I had lost all my winnings, I bought a gold watch from another soldier who was desperately looking for cash. That watch remained with me for many years. The Army again gave us an allowance for our trip from California to New York. I followed the same route, traveling in coach on the railroad. My Army career was now over and the next chapter of my life was about to begin.



*Graduation from college.*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER SIX

### *After the Army*

My discharge from the Army went fast, although there were a number of attempts to persuade me to sign up for a few more years. I turned the offers down, and was happy to get back to civilian life. While I was away, my sister married a really great guy, Martin Stein, whom I remembered vaguely from the Bronx congregation. Since my sister was no longer home, I found myself for the first time with my own room. It was really a great feeling to move from the couch in the living room to a bed in my own room.

The other big change in the Stern household while I was gone was that my father went into business for himself. Dad, since he was a young man, had always been an entrepreneur. The summer after my Army discharge, I occasionally helped out in the cleaning store, including delivering orders. During retirement, my parents made themselves a very nice life. They moved from Wadsworth Terrace to an elevator building on 190th Street just off Fort Washington Avenue. The building was located on a cliff overlooking the Hudson River. Like most other refugees who were fortunate to escape the Nazi regime, my parents received monthly restitution payments from the German government. The payments from Germany made it possible for my parents to live in retirement free of any money concerns. They travelled to Argentina to visit my father's sister Katinka and her family, just shortly before she died. They also had the opportunity to visit Israel. After my father's death in 1976, my mother continued to live in the apartment until her death in 1980.

Even though the war had ended before I was drafted into the Army, I was still considered a veteran of the Second World War. Veterans were entitled to many outstanding benefits, including being paid \$20 a week for the first 52 weeks after being discharged. That \$20, in 1946, is easily equivalent to \$240 in present currency. The next three months were probably the only time in my adult life that I did almost nothing, thanks to my weekly check of \$20, which at the time went a long way.

The benefit of greatest value available to veterans was the G.I. Bill of Rights, which entitled you to a free education in any college or technical school of your choice. Many veterans, including myself, who most likely would not have been able to go to college for financial reasons, found that the G.I. Bill made it possible for them to extend their education.

Although I served only a short period in the Army, the fact that I was drafted under the Selective Service Act of World War II exempted me from being drafted for the Korean war, which started in 1950. A number of my friends who were not drafted in World War II, or were exempt from the draft because of volunteering to the Merchant Marines, became subject to the draft during the Korean War.

Looking back now, I must say that the Army was very good for me, not only because of the great benefits,



*On vacation with my friends Henry Goldschmidt and Egon Manheimer*

but also because it was the first time that I lived away from home, and it gave me the opportunity to meet young men from all over the United States.

Compulsory Army training for a short period during peacetime for 18-year-olds is perhaps something that our government should consider. I also feel very strongly that all persons should be required to serve in the Armed Forces, including those excluded for medical reasons. There are plenty of jobs in the Armed Forces that could easily be performed by those who are handicapped or excluded from service for other reasons

Most of that summer, I spent hanging out with friends; going to the theater, the beach and ball games. The Broadway stage had some wonderful plays that year. I recall going to see a play at least once a week, including *Tobacco Road*, *Stars and Garters* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. The Giants and Dodgers still played in the Polo Grounds and at Ebbets Field. On Saturday afternoons, my friends and I would occasionally walk down to 157th Street and Edgecombe Avenue to sit on Coogan's Bluff overlooking the Polo Grounds and watch the Giants play baseball. From our vantage point, we could only see the right side of the field. However, some old timers (based on their many years of watching the games here), sitting alongside us, were always ready to fill in the action we were unable to see. Portable radios were not yet in general use.

On Saturdays, we did a lot of walking since most of the boys continued to observe the Sabbath. We were very actively dating girls, particularly those from the neighborhood and also going to parties and picnics.

Here I am in the summer of 1947, nineteen and a half years old, out of the Army and undecided about what to do with my future. As a result of my unfortunate choice of a high school education, not every college was ready to accept me. One day, I sat down with my friend Isfried Neuhaus, who I always kind of looked up to as if he was an older brother. Isfried had been discharged from the Army prior to my induction, and was currently attending Pace Institute where he was studying accounting. He told me that he decided to major in accounting because he felt very strongly that no matter what you ultimately wind up doing, knowledge of accounting would be beneficial. Later on, when I entered the business world, it became very clear to me how true my friend's



*Hanging out with Henry Goldschmidt and Gunther (Red) Rosenberg.*

statement was. Unfortunately, I found many talented people who when they started their own business were at a great disadvantage because they had no knowledge of accounting. During the last 50 years, I have been asked frequently by young people what courses I recommend they take in college. Without hesitation, I always answer, "Take accounting. It will be of help no matter what you decide to do later."

The advice from Isfried made good sense to me, and a few days later I went to Pace to fill out an application for admission as an accounting student. Within a few days, I was notified by Pace that my application to begin my studies as an accounting student was accepted, commencing with the September, 1947 semester.

Pace occupied three full floors in a large office building diagonally across from City Hall and next to the Woolworth Building. The building set aside two elevators solely for the three floors occupied by Pace. At the time I enrolled at Pace, it was known as an Institute, not a College or University. It was the only non-College from which, upon graduation, the State of New York would permit accounting majors to sit for the Certified Public Accounting Exam. In addition to accounting, the school prepared students for the fields of advertising and marketing. In 1947, the school was busy filing credentials with the NY State Department of Education to be recognized as a college, with the right to issue bachelor degrees to graduates. During my time at Pace, the school met the necessary requirements and became known as Pace College and my class was the second class to graduate students with a degree. At the same time, the school population increased substantially, and the college bought a building on the east side of City Hall. Today, Pace College is known as Pace University, with one campus in lower Manhattan near City Hall and a second, larger campus in Westchester County. At the University today, students can graduate with Bachelor, Master or Doctorate degrees in a wide variety of professions.



*The wedding of my sister Trudy and Martin Stein.*

The curriculum at Pace was divided about equally between accounting courses (including courses in commercial law) and liberal art courses. The student body, when I started at Pace, was quite different from the population one finds at colleges today. Most of my classmates were veterans of the Armed Forces taking advantage of the G.I. Bill. Many of the students were older, in the high twenties to low thirties, married and sometimes with children. I would say that generally these students came to Pace to learn a profession and get into the labor market as quickly as possible. Pace had no campus and no athletic teams until my junior year. Instead, the emphasis was on learning the profession of your choice, and in case of the accounting students, getting them prepared to pass the C.P.A. examination.

Before I started my education at Pace, I had never laid eyes on anything resembling a set of books. Here I was, at the age of 19, and never had my own checking account, nor did I ever write out a check. This was not unusual, since almost none of my friends had checking accounts. We used cash or money orders to make all of our payments. On the other hand, we all had savings accounts, since we were taught at home that it is good to save for a rainy day.

The use of credit cards was unheard of in those years, and actually I did not have my first credit card until several years after Miriam and I were married. With regard to credit cards, I recall an incident when Miriam and I were on a vacation in one of the Caribbean islands. I suddenly realized that I might be running short of cash, basically, from losing at the casino. I went to see the manager of the hotel and asked him to approve that the cashier could cash a check for me. Normally, a hotel will cash your personal check only if you remain at the hotel long enough for the check to clear the bank. We were scheduled to leave within a couple of days, and so did not

meet this requirement. Ultimately, the Manager approved cashing my check, but it was the last time we travelled without a credit card.

My first accounting course was Principles of Accounting taught by Mr. Horkimer, an instructor that I had for a number of other courses during my college career.

Like many of the other instructors at Pace, Mr. Horkimer, taught part time while being engaged in the public accounting profession the balance of the time. The basic principles of accounting were extremely difficult for me to understand. I had a hard time with debits and credits, as well as with assets and liabilities, or what goes on the right side or the left side of the ledger. Likewise, I was lost when Mr. Horkimer tried to explain to us the relationship between “balance sheets” and “profit and loss statements.” Many of my classmates had taken elementary accounting courses in high school. For me, however, accounting was completely new and foreign. I struggled those first few weeks in class, and even at times considered ending my college career. I will always remember getting back my first test in Principles of Accounting. In order to impress the instructor, I printed all the answers instead of writing them in long hand. My test score was “F” with a note from Mr. Horkimer: “You are a big boy now, learn to write.” To say that I was disappointed is to put it mildly.

One day, I sat down with my friend Isfried, and asked him to explain to me the mysteries of accounting principles. It was during this session that suddenly the light came on, and everything about debits, credits, assets and liabilities started to make sense to me. Once I understood the basic principles of accounting, I started to enjoy the accounting courses and my marks started to reflect my understanding of the subject. Unfortunately, many of my classmates who never fully understood the basic theory struggled their entire college career with accounting courses.

Most of us who started together in accounting that first year remained together in all accounting courses throughout our college career. I became very friendly with two classmates, and the three of us were in every class together throughout college. Robert Smith had been an officer in the US Navy, was married when he started college and was a really very good student. Alexander Weill was an Army veteran, married with two daughters and at least four to five years my senior. Alexander was also a good student who was required to work part time while at school to support his family. After graduation, the three of us continued to get together occasionally and socialize with our respective wives. After a few years, I lost track of Robert Smith, but I remained in touch with Al Weill. Years later, when I had my own practice, Al worked on a per diem basis for our firm for a number of years.

In the year 1947, accounting was predominately a profession for men. In our accounting program at Pace, we had a total of one female student. Today, I would guess that at least 50 percent of practicing accountants are females.

During my second or third semester, I started to work part time for a small accounting firm. The principal of the firm was Ernest Larson, a German refugee who most likely came to the United States a few years prior to my family. A large percentage of the clients were also people who immigrated to America from Germany or other European countries. Many of these immigrants had started businesses in the New York area and became quite successful. It is not uncommon for people coming to a new country to seek out professionals such as accountants, lawyers and doctors with a background similar to their own. This reaction is today very predominant with new Asian immigrants coming to the United States. I recently came across an accounting firm, located in New Jersey, whose principals are Asian and the bulk of the clientele is also Asian.

Mr. Larson asked me to report daily to one of his clients to help them bring their records up to date. The name of the firm was Klinghoffer Brothers, and their business was expanding at a very rapid rate. In the year 1985, Leon Klinghoffer, who was in a wheelchair, was thrown overboard to his death from the cruise ship, Achille Lauro, when the ship was attacked by terrorists from the Palestinian Liberation Front. This story shocked the world and was produced years later as a play and an opera.

When I reported to work the first afternoon after school ended, I was introduced to the office manager, Ralph Berger. Ralph found a desk for me, gave me the accounts receivable ledger together with copies of sales invoices and asked me to post the invoices to individual customers' accounts.

This was the first time I ever saw an actual ledger, and I proceeded with my work immediately. After an hour or so, Ralph came by my desk to see how I was doing.

To my surprise, Ralph told me that I was posting the amounts to the wrong side of the ledger. He immediately noticed how embarrassed I was, and took time to sit with me and help me to regain my confidence. Over the next few years, the company grew immensely, and Ralph and I worked together for many years, and also became very close friends.

By the late 1960's, Klinghoffer Brothers had grown into a huge manufacturing business operating under the name Roto Broil. Around this time, Ralph confided in me that he would like to go into business for himself, and asked me if I knew of any opportunity which might be suitable for him. By this time, I was a partner with Ernest Larson, and one of our clients who had a successful manufacturing business, at times, indicated that he might be interested in bringing in a younger partner. Ralph had a charming personality, and I thought that he and our client would be a perfect fit. The two met, and almost immediately came to an agreement and remained partners for many years.

After I left the partnership and opened my own practice, Ralph transferred his account to my firm. Together with our respective wives, we continued to be close friends until his death.

Working part time and carrying a full curriculum at school was not easy. However, getting practical accounting experience made me a far better accounting student. One of my proudest moments at college was a day after taking a final exam in practical accounting in the last semester. The professor stood in front of the class and announced that one student scored 100 percent in yesterday's exam. The student was me, and it was indeed a moment that I am very proud of.

Our graduation took place in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Unfortunately, the ceremony took place on a Friday night and, because of Sabbath, my parents did not attend. I did bring a date and, together with some fellow graduates and their dates, we went to celebrate at Bill Miller's Riviera night club located in Fort Lee, New Jersey. The club was well known, and was considered the launching pad for such well known performers as Vic Damone and Sammy Davis Jr.

It may be of interest that I was the first member of our immediate Stern family to graduate college. A first cousin to my Dad, also by the name of Julius Stern, the youngest son of Adolph Stern, graduated university in Germany, and went on to become a professor at a university in Istanbul, Turkey. To the best of my recollection, I never met, Julius.

Since I took a full curriculum of courses in the summer months, I was able to complete my college education in 1950, at the age of 22, and was now ready for the next chapter of my life.



*My buddies: Henry Kaufman, Elon Manheimer, Harold May, Gunther (Red) Rosenberg*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Before Miriam

When I graduated in 1950, the economy in the United States was not particularly good, and it was quite difficult for new accounting graduates to find jobs. I remember seeing ads in the New York Times' "Positions Wanted" section, reading: "Accounting graduate looking for job, gaining experience most important, salary secondary."

For me it was a little easier, since I had had the opportunity to work part-time for Ernest Larson & Co. I took the easy route and accepted full-time employment with them. The reason that gaining experience was most important for an accounting graduate was because one of the requirements to becoming a Certified Public Accountant in the State of New York, in 1950, was that the applicant had to have three years of experience with a public accounting firm. In addition, the applicant had to pass exams in auditing, commercial law, accounting theory and, after attaining three years experience, the exam in practical accountancy.

The exams, during my time period, took place annually in the month of November and were held at the Armory on 168th Street west of Broadway. The facility was packed with those seeking to become CPAs, and the exams were conducted under very strict supervision. At a designated time, the exams were placed facedown on the desks of the candidates until such time that a signal was given for all to commence the test. The time allowed for each exam was about four hours. No candidate could leave the facility and return without being escorted by an official. I recall about thirty minutes after the start of the examination, in an absolutely quiet hall, one applicant stood up, threw the test papers up towards the ceiling and shouted, "The hell with this, I know a better way to make a living."

Being very ambitious, immediately after graduation I registered with the State of New York to enable me to sit for the next examination. In addition, I enrolled in courses that taught you how to prepare for the exam and the proper approach to take for answering test questions.

I was fortunate to pass the first three examinations on my initial try, and three years later in passing the final exam. When I received my certificate in the year 1953, I was 25 years old and one of the youngest CPAs in the State of New York.

Congratulations poured in, but the one that was most special to me was a note from our sponsors, Tess and Blanche Colman, telling me how proud they were of my achievement at such a young age.

Ernest Larson & Co., when I became a full time employee in 1950, basically consisted of Ernest Larson, the principal, Hyman Winick, and five to six other male and female employees. Nobody on the staff, including

Larson, was a CPA. The firm was a public accounting firm, but not a certified public accounting firm. Basically, both could do the same work, except that the Security Exchange Commission and, on certain occasions, banks, required that all accounting information submitted must be performed and certified to by a CPA firm. Immediately after accepting full time employment with Larson, I contacted the NY State Department of Education to inquire if employment with the firm would be recognized, and allow me to ultimately sit for the final part of the CPA exam. The response was positive. There were many firms engaged in public accounting at the time that were not certified. As a matter of fact, Ernest Larson later became President of the NY State Society of (uncertified) Public Accountants.

My starting salary at the time was, if I recall, \$75 per week, which today is the equivalent of about \$750. Once I received my certificate, my importance to the firm increased along with a substantial increase in my income. Larson was what you would call the “rainmaker;” or person bringing in new clients, and did very little actual accounting work. Hy Winick and I divided the supervision of clients. Except in the case of our biggest client, Roto Broil, we jointly shared the work. Within a couple of years, I developed a close relationship with most of the clients, and they turned to me readily for advice regarding their taxes, finances and other business matters. Larson had very little contact with the clients I serviced, except in the case of Roto Broil, where he attended monthly meetings. In addition to my job at the firm, I started to pick up some small clients on my own, which I serviced in the evenings or on weekends.

When I started to work at Larson, all tax returns were typed, and carbon paper was inserted to make copies. A couple of years later, we continued to type returns, but we now utilized carbonized tax forms, so inserting of carbon paper between preprinted forms was no longer necessary. The next improvement came with the introduction of the wet copier and, a year or so later, with the dry copier, namely the Xerox machine. At that point, it was no longer necessary to type tax returns. Within a few years, most tax returns were prepared by computer, initially by an outside service, and now most accounting firms utilize in-house computers for preparing tax returns, financial statements, and many other services. This was innovation in the field of public accounting.

Like most single people, after graduation from college I continued to live at home with my parents. I insisted that my parents accept from me a small stipend for reimbursement of my food and lodging. In hindsight, my actions again show me my continued concern regarding the financial freedom of my parents as they approached retirement. It is worthwhile mentioning here that this period was before the German government agreed to pay restitution to my parents and others like them.

By the time I reached age 23 or 24, some of my friends from the Bronx, who were quite a few years older than me, were starting to settle down and get married. We continued to remain good friends, however, I was now socializing more with my new buddies from Washington Heights. We were a group of about 8 to 10, and most of us were pretty close to the same age. As part of our social life, we frequently went to dances, which presented an opportunity for single girls and young males to meet.

Young entrepreneurs engaged in organizing the dances in the hope of making a profit. They rented a hall, hired bands and set up bars, and in return sold tickets for admission. On some weekends, we went to dances on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. Even after going to many of these affairs, dancing was not my strong suit, and I spend most of the time talking to the girls. On occasion, you would meet someone that appealed to you, and you would arrange to get together the following week, and perhaps even enter into a relationship.

In some years, during the summer months, most of us rented a bungalow on a lake in New Jersey. This was again a way to meet girls, similar to what people do today when they go to Fire Island or the Hamptons.

Like me, most of my friends would meet a girl early in the summer and, with few exceptions, spend the summer months with that girl. I have to admit, that I, particularly, had difficulty in ending a relationship with a girl and jumping into a new relationship with another girl all within the same environment. On Labor Day, our stay at the colony ended, and usually so did the relationship with the summer girlfriend.

Together with a few friends, I went for one or two weeks during the summer months to a hotel, located north of Albany, NY, by the name of Green Mansions. At this time, the NY Turnpike had not been constructed, and it could take more than 8 hours to drive to the hotel from NYC. The hotel was known as a destination for

tennis players, and most guests walked around the grounds carrying tennis racquets. Most of my friends and I were not serious tennis players, but, at Green Mansions, we too walked around with racquets.

Our hotel reservations commenced on Sunday afternoon, however, we headed up to the area on Saturday. We would stay Saturday night at a motel, not far from the hotel, and arrive at the hotel mid-Sunday morning. The reason for this timetable was to give us an opportunity to mingle with the girls who were in the process of checking out. I would always collect a few phone numbers and file them away for future reference. The other benefit from the early arrival at the hotel was that you had the opportunity to get first glance at the girls checking in.

The hotel offered nightly entertainment, usually consisting of Broadway plays, starring young, unknown performers. It was here that I had the pleasure of watching on stage for the first time a young performer by the name of Carol Burnett. As you watched her perform, you immediately realized that this was an upcoming star.

My friends and I spent a good deal of our leisure time playing cards. The card game that we played was called pinochle, and it was played with a special deck of cards. The deck of cards consisted of two copies of each of the 9,10, jack, queen, king and ace cards in all four suits. The game required a lot of thought and skill when played correctly. We usually played on Sunday afternoons, and occasionally on a weekday night. The game mostly took place in one of our homes, and normally we played with six players, three on each side. Today, I do not remember much about the game, but I do recall that, at the time, I very much enjoyed playing pinochle, particularly when I won.

As I write this, the thought occurred to me, "How is it that we played cards on Sunday afternoon, instead of watching football on television?" The answer is quite simple. Namely, television sets were rarely owned by individuals in those years, and football games were only shown on television once there was a larger audience.

Our group was also actively engaged in sports, as we played softball, handball and bowling. We organized a team and bowled in a league one evening a week. We were not the best team in the league, but, for me, it was always a thrill when you threw a ball down the alley and all the pins went down and you recorded a "strike." Among our group, the best athlete in all the sports we played was, without a question, Egon Mannheimer.

From the time I became 25 years old, my mother, sister and some other relatives began to question why I do not find the right girl and settle down. I certainly was a very eligible bachelor in the eyes of relatives and friends, and they approached me about going on blind dates with girls they knew. I basically resisted these offers. Although, I do recall going on some blind dates from time to time.

From the age of 23 to 29, I went out with many different girls, most of whom were attractive, had pleasant personalities and to whom I was sexually attracted. I would normally go out with a girl that I was attracted to for quite some time before I broke off the relationship, since I thought it was getting too serious and too involved.

The question you can ask is, "After dating so many different girls, did I really know what I was looking for?" The answer is that I had a picture in my mind of the girl that I was looking for to spend the rest of my life with. My dream was to meet an attractive girl that I was very much attracted to, who had a warm personality and was intelligent enough to be able to talk about life in general, including business matters. In addition, I had to feel fairly certain that the young lady would feel comfortable with my parents and, likewise, that my parents would be ready to accept her as a member of our extended family. I have previously indicated that my relationship with my parents was very close, and I was deeply concerned that this would continue once I got married. My parents were somewhat old fashioned and not fully Americanized, and for certain girls this could be a problem. However I continued to look for my girl.

Somewhere around the year 1956, Larson informed Hy Winick and myself that he was prepared to make both of us partners in the firm. We would now get an increase in pay and also a percentage of any profits. I was quite excited about this new arrangement, even though it meant that we were now required to turn over any income to the firm from individual clients that we had been servicing on our free time. Larson was always looking for possible mergers with other practitioners as a way of increasing the gross revenue of the firm. By having two younger men, Hy and myself, as partners, it would make a sole practitioner more attracted to a possible merger. Over the next few years, at least two or three different accountants signed some loose

agreements with our firm and moved into our offices. Unfortunately, most professionals, including lawyers and accountants, are not mentally ready to become true partners, since they are primarily interested in servicing their own clientele. It was basically for this reason that the attempted mergers with our firm all failed.

Shortly before I met the girl I had been waiting for, I was going out with a young lady for quite some time and things were getting somewhat serious. One Sunday afternoon, I decided to take my date to my sister's home in Fairlawn, New Jersey. My sister served coffee and cake. Before we left, my ten-year-old nephew, Larry, took me aside and said, "Uncle Carl, are you going to marry this girl? I do not like her." I was very close to Larry and listened to what he said. Within a few weeks, the relationship ended.

Although I was ready to settle down, I still had not found the right person...that was all about to change.



*The Colman sisters: Anne, Blanche, & Theresa*

# CARL'S GOT A STORY, TOO

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: APPENDIX

### The Colman Family

In Chapter I, titled "Karl's Early Childhood," I wrote briefly about the Colman family and their importance in our lives. Without the help of the two daughters, Blanche and Tess Colman, there is a strong possibility that the Stern family, including me, would have perished in the Holocaust, resulting in the nonexistence today of our wonderful family. It is for this reason that I feel it necessary to devote these next few pages to these exceptional ladies and their family.

Madel Oppenheimer was born in Schluchtern, Germany on November 23, 1852, the eldest child of Michel and Hanna. My grandfather, Kalman Oppenheimer, was her younger brother. Michel Oppenheimer was a writer and translator of Hebrew books. In 1869, at the age of 17, after the death of her mother, Madel left Germany and came to the U.S., where she stayed with relatives in Baltimore, Maryland and changed her name to Amelia. After a short stay in Baltimore, Amelia made the long trip to Denver, Colorado, where she again stayed with relatives. In Denver, she met Nathan Colman (formerly Kugelman), another German Jewish immigrant, born in Kassel, Germany, in the year 1850. Nathan lived briefly in New Mexico before settling in Denver.

On February 15, 1874, Amelia and Nathan were married in Denver. In the year 1877, after the birth of their daughter Anne, Nathan departed for Deadwood, South Dakota. A few months later, Amelia, together with her daughter Anne, travelled by stagecoach to join her husband in Deadwood.

Discovery of gold and other minerals in the Black Hills of South Dakota attracted new immigrants to this area, including many Jewish merchants, particularly to the Wild West boomtown called Deadwood. Nathan opened a tobacco store and was soon appointed postmaster. Amelia and Nathan had a total of seven children, including Anne, Blanche, Theresa and four others who died from various illnesses. Nathan was considered the lay rabbi of the community. He officiated at services on the High Holidays and other occasions in Deadwood and the surrounding areas. Nathan was elected Justice of the Peace, a post he held for many years.

Most of Deadwood, including the Colman home and store, was destroyed by a fire in the year 1879. Fifteen years later, in the year 1894, in another fire, the town and the Colman property were again destroyed by fire. After each fire, Amelia and Nathan had the courage and stamina to rebuild their home and business.

In the year 1903, Morris Niederman, a traveling salesman who traveled throughout the West, came



*The Colman sisters visit the Bronx: Tess, my mother Rose, Aunt Frieda, Blanche, & Aunt Clara.*

to Deadwood and the surrounding areas. On December 27, 1903, Morris married Anne Colman at the Franklin Hotel, in Deadwood, with Nathan Colman officiating. According to the local newspaper, "It was one of the most beautiful and unique services ever observed in Deadwood."

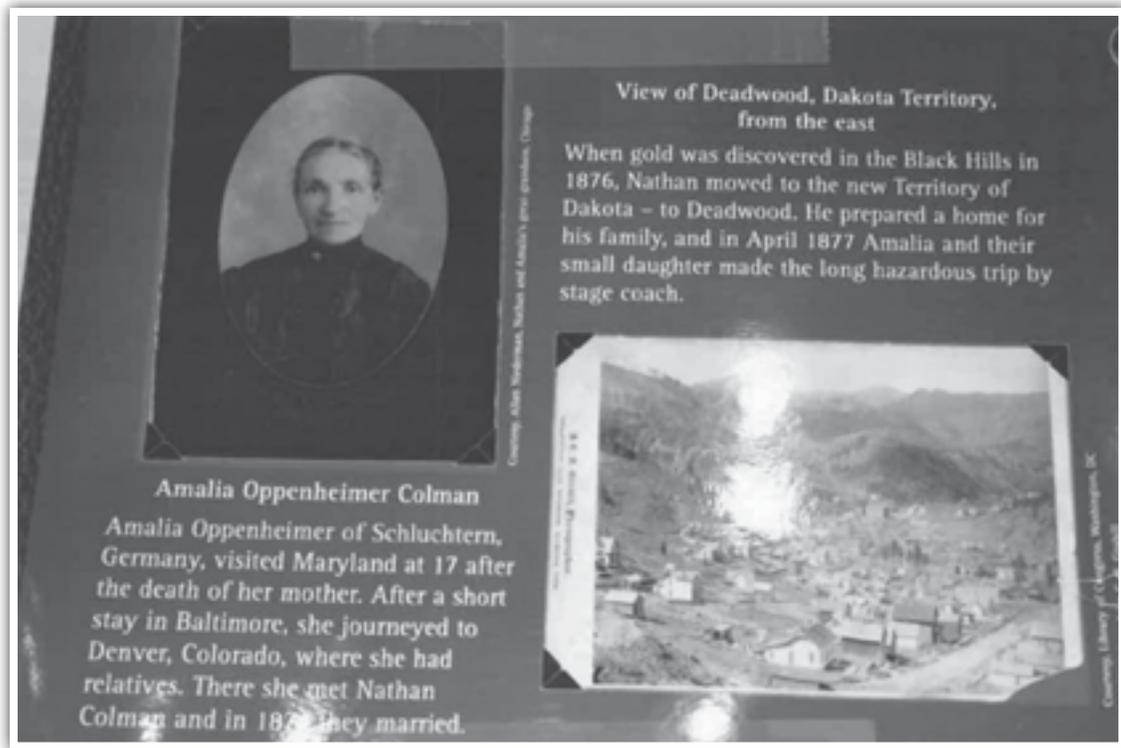
Morris Niederman opened the "Family Liquor Store" in Deadwood and also invested in mining claims. Ultimately, the young couple moved to Chicago, where they engaged in the furniture business.

Blanche, graduated from high school in 1902 and was employed by the Homestake Mining Company as a clerk in their legal department. After a short period there, Blanche was promoted to legal assistant. While working, she studied law on her own, and on October 3, 1911, she passed the Bar exam and became the first female attorney in South Dakota. In 1906, she was appointed secretary to Congressman Parker, and moved for a short period of time to Washington, DC. She did not like living in the big city, so she returned to Deadwood, where she worked for Attorney Chambers Kellar for the next 40 years. Kellar's major client was the Homestake Mining Company, the largest gold producing company in the western hemisphere. Blanche never married. It was rumored that she had a crush on her boss, Chambers Kellar.

Theresa Colman, after graduating from high school, worked as an accountant in the Deadwood area. She was elected and served as County Auditor of Lawrence County for many years. Tess never married either, and she lived together with her sister, Blanche, at the Franklin Hotel in Deadwood. After the death of Blanche, a maintenance person from the hotel found holes in the doorpost to their room, which they had occupied for more than 46 years, apparently from the mezuzah they had attached to the doorpost.

In 1889, after South Dakota became a State, Nathan served many times as a delegate to the Republican Convention. Nathan passed away on June 4, 1906, at the age of 56 years. Amalia passed away on April 2, 1939, at the age of 87 years. Both are buried at Mount Moriah Cemetery, in Deadwood.

In 1936, when my mother reached out to her aunt and cousins, it was the first time they ever had any contact. My mother explained that she strongly felt that we had no future in Germany, and pleaded that



*Amelia Colman, mother of Anne, Blanche, & Theresa*



*The envelope from a letter from Blanche Colman with return address of the Franklin Hotel.*



*Miriam and I attending celebration of opening of exhibition honoring Colman family in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

they help us by becoming our sponsors to the United States. Within a few weeks, Blanche and Tess replied that they would be our sponsors, and forwarded to us the necessary affidavits, which enabled our family to immigrate to the United States.

Sometime, around mid-1939, Blanche and Tess came to New York to meet us for the first time after visiting with their sister Anne and her family in Chicago. It was most exciting news for my parents, Trudy and me to learn of their upcoming visit. My mother cooked for days, preparing a very elaborate meal. At the time, we still lived on 163rd Street, in the Bronx, in a five-story walkup. However, our cousins from the West, had no problem climbing the stairs. Tess was the taller of the two, and in many ways resembled my late mother in appearance. It was a special afternoon for us to meet our cousins from Deadwood. In hindsight, I think Blanche and Tess came to New York to see how we were adjusting to the country. They must have been impressed with our progress, since, shortly thereafter, they sponsored my mother's sister, Frieda, and her family. I am almost certain that they sponsored at least five other families. After that initial visit, our cousins visited us almost every two or three years, each time coming to our home to have lunch with all the relatives. I am particularly delighted that Miriam had the opportunity to meet them when they visited us the last time.

My nephew, Larry, after graduating podiatry school, was obligated to serve for the years 1975 to 1977 as a podiatrist at an army base located not far from Deadwood. His wife, Shelley, together with their infant son, Richie, joined Larry for a good part of this time. On several occasions, they visited Blanche (Tess had already passed away) at her suite in the Franklin Hotel. Larry told me that on their initial visit, Blanche showed them a pair of gloves hand-sewn by my mother, which my mother had presented to Blanche as a gift. Larry also recalls Blanche taking them to Moriah Cemetery, the burial place of her parents and sister. There are approximately 45 to 50 other Jews buried in this cemetery, most of them in a section often referred to as "Hebrew Hill."

In 1976, someone from NBC TV, interviewed the 92-year-old Blanche for a television program featuring unusual and outstanding Americans. A short period thereafter, Blanche fell, which ultimately resulted in a stroke. Against her objections, Blanche was admitted to the local hospital, where the nurses called the famous little lady, "Miss America." Blanche passed away in the year 1978, and was buried together with other members of her family at Moriah Cemetery.

Anne Colman and Maurice (Morris) Niederman, had the following children: Nathan Niederman, Sarah Niederman Alschuler, Norman Niederman, and Dorothy Niederman Bogdanow.

In the September 27, 2002 issue of *The Jewish Week*, I read an article that was about an exhibit running through January of 2003, depicting, "Jewish Life in the American West" at the Autrey Museum, in Los Angeles, California. In December, 2002, while visiting David and his family, Miriam and I decided to take Joshua and Matthew to visit the exhibit. As we walked around the exhibition, we suddenly came across certain items earmarked as possessions of Nathan Colman, of Deadwood, South Dakota.

Included among the artifacts, was a cane adorned with Black Hills gold, given to Nathan by the Hebrew Congregation of Deadwood. Also included was Nathan's talit. I was eager to learn who the individual was that loaned these items to the museum. After some inquiries, we were introduced to the curator. When I explained to her that Nathan's daughters were my sponsors to the United States, she was completely overcome and began to shed tears. She explained to us that she was not permitted to disclose the name of the donor, however, she would be most happy to contact the individual, give them my name, address and phone number, and tell him about my connection to the family. When we left the museum, both Josh and Matthew seemed most excited about what they just learned about our family.

When we returned to New York a few weeks later, I found a letter from Allan Niederman, grandson of Anne Colman Niederman, son of Nathan Niederman, currently residing in Chicago, Illinois. He introduced himself, informed me that he was contacted by the curator of the exhibit at the Autrey Museum, and explained that the artifacts we saw were part of the collection belonging to his extended family. We spoke on the phone numerous times, exchanged photos of Blanche and Tess, and he also forwarded to me articles about the Colman Family of Deadwood. In January, 2004, Allan invited Miriam and me, to come to Indianapolis, Indiana to attend the opening of the exhibition of "Jewish Life in the American West" scheduled to open on February 26, 2004. The

night following the opening of the exhibition, Allan and his wife, Joyce, had a party in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary. It was at this party that I met other grandchildren of Anne Colman, including Al Alshuler, the son of Sarah Niederman Alshuler. I was happy to say a few words to my newly found relatives, explaining my connection to the Colman family and the importance of all of them to the Stern family.

Since we first met in Indianapolis, Al Alshuler and I continue to be in contact with occasional e-mail exchanges. Miriam and I visited Al and his wife several years ago at their home in Miami Beach, Florida, and we were delighted when Al, together with his wife, visited us less than a year ago at our home.

The entire City of Deadwood was designated a National Historic Landmark in the year 1961. A few years ago, HBO featured a series named Deadwood, which created great interest in this historic town.

As I got older, I began to think more frequently about Blanche and Theresa, I regret that I never really reached out to them, thanking them for what they did for our immediate family plus all the other relatives that they sponsored, most likely saving us from certain death in the concentration camps.

I hope that our children, grandchildren and hopefully great grandchildren will forever cherish the names Blanche and Theresa Colman, and never forget what they did for the Stern Family.

I would like to acknowledge that certain information stated above was obtained from articles appearing in the following publications: Pioneer Jews, A New Life In The Far West, by Harriet and Fred Rochlin and Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly, July, 1977.