As stated previously, Dov Capitanchik, Phil Shearsky and myself left England on route to Israel in the fall of 1952. We went by boat across the channel, and the next day arrived in Paris. This was the first time any of us had been in France (or really anywhere outside of the United Kingdom). I do remember having a feeling of total freedom, we could do as we pleased until we got down to Marseilles and boarded ship for Israel. We saw some of the sights of Paris, and indulged in French food, including for me the first time ham or was it bacon and eggs (really not very French). Obviously all the time we were on Hachshara we had a kosher kitchen and I kept a sort of semi-kosher diet in Glasgow. I really have no recollections of the time we spent in France, other than that we went to the Follies Berger, the famous nightclub, known for the can-can. All I remember of the performance were the fantastic costumes, I do not think there was any nudity. Somehow we got to Marseilles by train, and then boarded the Israeli ship the Artza. The ship was very crowded with immigrants making there way to Israel mostly from North Africa. In particular I hung out with a group of young Tunisians on their way to a kibbutz. We spent the evenings together singing Hebrew songs, and dancing the Hora. I did not become seasick, which I would have expected from past experience going to the Hebrides as a child, but the Mediterranean was very smooth. As we neared shore, we were very excited at seeing the coastline and the white city of Haifa on the hills of the Carmel from afar.

Reality hit on arrival. We were taken aside, and each one of us covered with DDT. I assume this was to get rid of any lice or other bugs, but still it was insulting. However this was the normal routine at that time, since many people were arriving from the DP camps of Europe. Following the signing of some papers we were loaded onto a truck with our worldly possessions and headed for kibbutz Gal Ed. Either I brought with me, or had shipped items like an short wave radio, electric gramophone and some records and books. I did not have very many private possessions.

The trip to Gal Ed from Haifa was through the winding hills of Ephraim, as they were then called. I think they are now called the hills of Menashe We passed quite a number of kibbutzim on the way, including Dalia, famous for its dance festival and Ein
ha-Shofet at that time a well-known and established kibbutz. Gal Ed was originally known as Even Yitzhak, after Yitzhak Hochberg a South African Philanthropist. Gal Ed means memorial, and was called thus in memory of those Habonim members who fell in WWII. The kibbutz was founded in 1945. The drive was quite stunning, through empty hills and just before the kibbutz a large vineyard containing the best grapes I have ever tasted. Today just next to the kibbutz is parkland, known as the hill of the cyclamens. On arrival we were shown to our houses for the next year. These were single bedroom attached dwellings, made from wood with a small bathroom attached. To shower one had to go to the communal shower. I was to share a room with Jerry Pitch and Piers Coleman.

Jerry was a typical Londoner, with a very strong cockney accent. He knew all the dirtiest ditties, and could curse like a trooper. Piers was from Dublin, and I suppose like most of us considered himself an intellectual. He had a fantastic collection of books. All of us single men lived adjoining to one another in the same style room, usually four being in the same building. Some of us also lived in tents opposite the row of houses. The married couples had slightly better accommodation and the older members of the kibbutz, even fancier.

I immediately sensed a sense of disappointment and lack of enthusiasm among my group on my arrival. The bulk of the group had arrived a few months earlier. Somehow kibbutz life had not turned out as expected. In particular I think for the girls of the group, it was a life of drudgery, since instead of equality, they found themselves in the laundry, or cooking in the kitchen, or looking after the children. Very few of the girls worked outside in the fields, partly because the work was too hard, and partly because of the heat. Also the atmosphere in Gal Ed was not as expected. We were newcomers (the original founders had come from Germany or Holland), they spoke German among themselves (or Dutch) and we were not easily accepted. We were known as the “Anglim”. Also life in Israel was harder than expected. There was food shortage, we ate tomatoes and eggplants as our sole diet, the work was very menial, particularly removing boulders from the fields to allow for cultivation, and there was very little to do in the evenings. There was the sense that this was a temporary stopping place until we formed our own kibbutz. Although the original plan from the movement was that after one year we would officially decide to stay in Gal Ed, there was quite some opposition to this. The
main members who were against the idea of staying in Galed were Moshe Gilbert and Shimon Levi the ideologues of the group. Shimon died very young in his late 30’s and Moshe eventually left Israel for political reasons and returned to England.

Somehow or other I found myself working in the Tson (sheep branch). I do not remember whether I volunteered for this or was assigned to this work. Although I could be called a shepherd, and one can picture this as being romantic, in reality it was not very romantic. The reason for keeping sheep was for their milk, and cheese (feta) production. These sheep belonged to a breed known as “fat tails” or locally as Awassi. In Israel they are bred for their milk production. Their wool is very coarse and can only be used for carpets. Working in the sheep pens was work that very few people wanted to do. It was dirty and smelly and one’s clothes stank from milk and lanolin from being close to the animals. There must have been a few hundred sheep; one would line them up by putting food in troughs that had iron bars, which the sheep would stick their heads through. We would pull a lever and the sheep would be trapped. We then took a wide circular and not too deep bucket and sat behind the sheep, and milked them by hand, as one would do with a cow, except this was from behind rather than from the side. Everything went into the milk, both pellets of sheep droppings, and occasional urine. It was very difficult to withdraw the bucket in time. Perhaps this gave the Feta its pungent taste! The milk was passed through a filter before being shipped off to Tnuva (a large co-operative for purchasing and selling agricultural products) for processing. I must admit that for years I could not bring myself to eat Feta cheese. After the milking, the sheep would be taken out to pasture in the nearby hills.

I enjoyed the freedom that came with wandering over the hills, among fields filled with cyclamens or wild irises. It also was a lonely job, since after the first few times I would take the sheep out by myself. This had its advantage as I could take a book or just sunbathe. I did not play the ‘haleel” (flute) so that I had no musical accompaniment. A short distance from the kibbutz, passed the cultivated fields, one came upon an abandoned Arab village. It was in ruins, and the sheep would graze among the Bustanim (orchards). This was my first contact with a different reality of Israel. The village looked
as if it had been abandoned in a hurry. Many of the buildings, made out of stone were
destroyed, others were intact. I delighted in the smell and taste of the figs and other fruit.
Cactus (Sabras) were growing everywhere. I was very surprised to find this place, and
felt a little sorry for the previous inhabitants. I do not know whether a battle was fought
here, or whether the inhabitants were chased out or left of their own volition. I do know
that the kibbutz benefited from the nearby lands, which were now worked by them. No
one was ready to talk about the fate of the village or its inhabitants. This probably was the
village of Khubbaiza. destroyed by the Irgun according to Palestinians sources. None of
us gave much thought to the fact that the Arabs had fled. We were too engrossed in our
own future and ourselves. Somehow all our education in the movement had ignored the
reality of an Arab population. There was no feeling of hatred towards them; it was as if
they just did not exist. We always went out armed with a Sten gun, in case of Arab
marauders, but I did not connect that to the destroyed village. I suppose I was young and
naïve and did not realize that this had been home to someone else.

I worked with two of the “veterans” of the kibbutz, one was Shlomo, whom I
think was from Holland and the other was Dan, whom I believe was Indonesian or half
Indonesian. Dan taught me a side of kibbutz life that I did not expect. Dan also worked in
the sheep pens and we became quite good friends. One day he asked if I would like to
join him for tea in the house of Margalit, who was also from Holland. I had heard talk of
this mysterious Margalit. She lived by herself in what must have been the tower of the
original tower and stockade settlement. In the early days when a kibbutz was established,
a stockade of wood filled with stone or stone stockade was built with a tower in the
center for a guard to sit in, as a watchman. Initially the settlers would live in tents inside
the stockade and the first building to go up would be the communal dining room, laundry,
showers etc. Gal Ed had passed these initial stages, and the tower was now occupied by
Margalit. She had it furnished in “Dutch” style with table, sideboard and the typical
small oriental rug on the table, similar to what one would find in a middle class Dutch
household. I did go with Dan for tea. Margalit was a large blousy woman, rather course
and loud in the Dutch style. I was so naïve that I did not realize that Margalit offered
more than tea! I became aware of this when Dan said he spent the night there, or when
there were jokes about Shlomo, head of the sheep branch of the kibbutz, and who was
married, and must have been in his 30’s or 40's also spending the night with Margalit. She provided favors to the bachelors of the kibbutz, and even to married men. I unfortunately do not know her history. In a recent visit to Gal Ed (2010) I could not find the tower, and no one remembered Margalit. She may have been a passing phenomenon, or perhaps I imagined it. (I doubt that). Gal Ed today is a very prosperous kibbutz, mostly based on a plastic factory and the production of parts for John Deere tractors. No sheep in sight.

The early 1950’s was a time of mass immigration into Israel, not only from Europe but also Jews from Arab countries. The kibbutz received children through an organization called Youth Aliya, which was an offspring of the Jewish Agency. These were kids of about age 10 and up, who went to the kibbutz school, or to a special school established for them to learn Hebrew and other skills. Many of these kids worked in the tson (sheep pens), and I became familiar with children from Kurdistan, Iraq and Turkey. I enjoyed working with these children and helping in their education. Many were orphans and members of the kibbutz would adopt them, inviting them home, or going with them to the dinning room for dinner. Somewhere I have a photograph of one of these kids holding a newborn lamb.

On my days off I would explore the neighboring kibbutzim. One usually could hitch a ride on the many trucks carrying produce from the kibbutzim to Haifa, which was about 25 miles away. These kibbutzim along this road belonged to the left wing movement Hashomer Ha’zair as opposed to Habonim. I cannot forget my first impression of these kibbutzim, red flags and pictures of Stalin and other Russian leaders everywhere. It is true the Soviet Union to everyone’s surprise had voted in the UN for the establishment of the State of Israel, and the war of Independence had been won because of help from Czechoslovakia in the way of arms. However by this time most of us knew of the excesses of the Stalinist regime. The Prague trials of communist leaders had taken place, and most of the Jewish leaders were hanged. The Doctors plot, wherein Stalin accused Russian Jewish Doctors of plotting to kill the leadership was ongoing, and yet despite this these kibbutzim still believed in Soviet propaganda, and that Russia was the new Gan Eden (paradise). This actually continued for many years, and many kibbutzim broke up because of an ideological split between those who believed in Communism.
Soviet style, and those who were “less socialistic”. In 1952 the kibbutz movement was split over the Soviet Union. Hashomer and Ahдут Avoda (United Labor) saw Joseph Stalin as "the sun of the nations," while Mapai viewed him as a mass murderer. The whole kibbutz movement was split. It was to split again over other matters such as “hired laborers” a few years later.

I did leave the kibbutz a few times, either in organized tours to other parts of the country, to Jerusalem, or to the Negev. However it was difficult to go out on my own, for the simple reason that I did not have any money. To get about I was dependent on hitch-hiking, and even if I did go into Haifa or Tel Aviv I had no place to stay. My father had a sister and family living in Ramat Gan a suburb of Tel Aviv, and I did visit a few times, if I could get there by “tramp” an appropriate Hebrew word for hitch hiking. The problem of money and private property did bother me quite a bit. There was obviously no equality on the kibbutz. It did provide us with what we needed, in terms of clothing, toothpaste, etc but some people did have money from family, later reparations, and even items like radios and records became bones of contention since some had and others did not. One of my mother’s cousins visited during this first year in Israel and gave me the equivalent of 20 pounds, indicating that he would get it back from my parents. I know it caused a row, and I do not know whether he did get it back, but it gave me some freedom to move around the country. I do not think I bought anything with it, just used it for spending money. I hoarded this money for my occasional visits to Ramat Gan.

One has to understand that life was very difficult in Israel. The was the time of mass immigration, tent cities had been set up all over the country to handle the thousands of immigrants. Bus service was poor, crowded with people, chickens goats etc; it was in reality a third world country. The war of Independence was only over a few years before, and there was constant harassment from fedayeen. It was also a time of idealism. There was hope to build a better society in the world, and that eventually there would be peace with the Arabs. The country was also very socialistic. Religion did not play a part in my life, nor of anyone else in the kibbutz or in our group. I am always being asked about this subject, and in general there was no religion in the kibbutz. It was not kosher and there was no synagogue or place to pray and our ideals were on restoring the Jewish nation not
the religion. At that time we thought it was possible to do the one without the other. Unfortunately it looks as if things have turned out differently.

After a few months our group started looking at possible places to settle permanently. No one really wanted to stay in Gal Ed. I think the only one who wanted to stay was Trudi who had a boy friend from the kibbutz. The kibbutz movement decided that we should join an existing Kibbutz, and came up with a few suggestions. These included Gonen, a new “sabra” (native Israelis) kibbutz right on the Syrian border and Hachoshlim (later called Amiad). Gonen to me was attractive because of the age of the group, and it had a true Israeli (sabra) atmosphere. Hachoshlim had been settled by Sabra’s and Dutch Habonim with a few Romanians. It was a well-established and economically wealthy kibbutz. It appeared at that time to be wealthier than Gal Ed. I do not remember the discussion but after a vote it was decided that we would join Hachoshlim. This would also be our base for army duty (Nachal) later on. It turns out that Gonen would have been very tough. It was under constant attack from the Syrians and was on the front line of the Yom-Kippur war. Today it is a very small kibbutz with less than a 100 people with a “country inn”, as have many kibbutzim in the area.

We were a large number of bachelors at Gal Ed. Slowly our group was getting married, and there was a shortage of available women. We were quite dependent on visitors for sexual experience. Most of us in our early twenties were still “virgins”. I remember one incident in which there was visit of a group of Jewish-Indian girls. We as usual flirted with them in a fun sort of way. However in the middle of the night, Zvi Fried, (deceased) who was rather a portly individual woke us all up with cries “I did it, I did it”. He had successfully lost his virginity. I personally do not remember going with anyone in particular from these Gal-Ed days. I must have been too tired getting used to the land, the climate and the hard work.

Next chapter..the army!