

Amiad: First years: 1954-55.

Following our stint in Beersheba (Machane Nathan) we returned as demobilized citizens (non army) to Amiad. I knew the kibbutz very well from our stay in the Nachal quarters. It basically was like returning home, not to a new place, but one I lived in even if in huts up the “ mountain” for quite some time. Thus this time we were new members of the kibbutz. Amiad had been founded in 1946 near a ruin of a khan (inn) called Jeb Yusef. Although only 6 -7 years old when we joined it was quite a thriving kibbutz, with a large communal dining room (not air conditioned), a few hundred sheep, a large herd of cattle, lul (chicken and egg production) and the usual other agricultural branches. The kibbutz also had land on the shores of the Kinneret, at Tabha where the climate was different, and was good for growing bananas. Tabha is a famous site, mentioned in the Bible. It is the site of the Gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. The small hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee (Kineret in Hebrew) is known as the Mt of the Beatitudes, and is where Jesus delivered his sermon on the mountain to the multitudes. It is very close to Capernaum, with its ancient synagogues and churches. I have a picture of myself driving a tractor with bananas, which was taken at this time, or perhaps while we were in nachal, since during that period we worked normal agricultural work. Bananas require intensive agriculture. They grow as large bunches that are wrapped to prevent insect attacks. Each bunch weighs a lot. This site was picked because it has a tropical climate, and there is ample water available from the Kinneret. During the 1950's the banana plantations and other fruit orchards, mostly avocado, and much later Kiwi fruits, were the mainstay of the kibbutz. This later branched out to a winery making wine from fruit, such as Kiwi wines. This unfortunately did not make a profit and when the kibbutz was privatized a few years ago a local businessman bought it. However it still did not make a profit and is no longer in existence. Eventually the main income of the kibbutz came from an industrial plant to design and make equipment for irrigation, particularly water filters. This has been very profitable and is the main source of income today as well as source of employment. Amiad filters can be found all over the world. The kibbutz maintains a controlling interest in Amiad Filtration Systems, now a publically owned company with some 550 employees

(about 80 Amiad members) worldwide. The Industry provides Amiad's major, but by no means only, source of income.

I settled down very quickly and was given a small house (one bedroom, and adjoining toilet and shower), which I shared with Piers Coleman. Piers was from Dublin and I had known Piers for quite some time mostly from our time together on Hachshara and later in the army.. Both of us were quite slobs, and the room was mostly in a chaotic state. Today Piers and his wife Rosie, (from Manchester) run an antique store in a small shopping center, in Even Yitzhak, a suburb of Netanya, Israel. It specializes in Victoriana and Rosie is a physiotherapist,.

Our small apartment (really just a room) was in a block of four identical rooms. We had a small porch in the front in which we could sit outside in the evenings, and interact with our neighbors. The houses are still standing today and look as they did some 40 years ago.

The banana plantations, a few miles from the kibbutz were looked after by an Arab guard, named Mustafa. He was a tall swarthy guy, and talked a sort of broken English and "broken" Hebrew. He always seemed in a good disposition, always joking and laughing. I could never find out how many wives he had, although from conversation he had many. One day he invited Tommy and myself to come to his village for a wedding, I think of his brother. The village was called Deir Hanna in the Western Galilee, not far from Karmiel (which was not in existence in those days). I do not remember very much about the weekend, except it was quite exotic. We drank lots of "Turkish" coffee, and I remember being impressed by the fantasia of horses, rifle fire, and dancing of debkas by the men. There was a lot of food to eat, including lamb, and everyone ate out of a common large bowl, with his fingers. I remember being a little put off by this, but eventually joined in. I have since become quite accustomed to this "custom", since I had the same experiences in India where one eats "sticky" rice with ones fingers. We slept on the floor wrapped in blankets. I remember waking up in the morning and scratching myself, since I was covered by bites, most probably bed bugs. Mustafa and family were very hospital, and I have met this Arab (Bedouin) hospitality on other occasions while in the army. Certainly there was no hostility and we were not afraid. I do not think it occurred to us that we might be in any

sort of danger (we were not). I don't know why he invited the two of us. Tommy thinks it had something to do with being from Scotland, some of the elders of the village having served in a "Scottish" regiment with Glub Pasha in Jordan. Maybe! In these days relations with the local Arabs seemed quite good, although Deir Hanna was a Moslem village

Anyhow to get back to Amiad. After settling down I returned to work in the Tson (sheep). This was run by one of the older members (vatikim), Yoselke. There was myself, Piers, Les Collins and I think Gerry Pitch working in this branch either all the time or periodically. It was dirty, hard work, not really romantic. Going out with the sheep was difficult work, since in the heat of the day they would clump together as if one body and one could not move them. They would place their heads under each other's bodies, and stand like this for hours. I could scream and yell at them and they would not move. I would go out with the herd by myself with a donkey for company. The donkey was to carry back any injured sheep or lambs during the lambing season. Unlike the situation in England, we did not have a sheep dog, the rationale being that since these were sheep for milk, chasing them would lead to a drop in milk production. I would take the sheep a few miles from the kibbutz, in search of green pastures. The sheep would eat everything that grew, weeds, shrubs, saplings, and actually denude the land. This area of Israel is very rocky with basalt (black) rock, and the sheep would eat clumps of grass growing under the rocks. I would stretch out on a boulder and get nicely sun tanned. However one had to be careful since under these rocks lurked snakes (vipers) and scorpions. I occasionally met some of the latter even in my room. These were red scorpions, the sting of which could be very painful or even fatal.

There were always a few sheep that acted as leaders, and would even recognize their names. One was "ping pong," another "Marylyn Monroe". I would call out "ping pong, boi, boi" and she would come running, the others would follow. They always expected some "goodies" and I would oblige with some bread. Without these few lead sheep it would have been impossible to move the herd especially in the heat.

Milking the sheep was hard work. One put food in a long manger like contraption and the sheep would begin to eat. A lever was attached at each end, and pulling the lever trapped the head of the sheep in the "ibush" as it was called in Hebrew. . We then took our

buckets and milked the sheep from behind. The milk was collected, filtered, and put into large containers for shipment to Tnuva, the kibbutz cooperative. There were other aspects of sheep rearing and breeding that should be described. The sheep were dipped once a year just before shearing. We usually employed Arabs from a nearby village to do this job. It was very difficult work, the sheep struggling furiously to be released and not very happy with being manhandled and dipped in a sheep dip, which contained a mixture of insecticide and fungicide. The sheep often had ticks and other insects, and some times large scabs. Another difficult task was that of mating the ewes and the rams. Sheep were selected for mating to specific rams. The rams were kept separately, and there was always a strong smell of, I assume, semen. They would come rushing towards the 'estrous' sheep with a long red-rod like erections, penetrate, and it was all over in a few seconds. Sometimes we had to hold the sheep and lift her fatty tail. These sheep were fat tails or Awassi sheep found all over the Mediterranean. The mating season was in September, just after we wandered with the animals for stubble grazing. Although we did not realize it we were amateur geneticists. Each sheep had a number tag on her ear and a record of milk production, and we tried to pair her off with a different ram each season. We also worried about inbreeding and kept meticulous records of milk production and lambing.

I always went out armed with a Sten gun, and later an Uzi, just in case I encountered marauders (luckily this never happened). Occasionally I would see another shepherd, usually Arab, with his herd, and on one occasion I did meet and talk to the Arab shepherd from Akbara the village behind Amiad.

In the summer months and fall when the grass had dried up, we would take the sheep to clear the fields of (durra) sorghum and other crops in the Valley of Jezreal (Emek). We would wander from area to area, cleaning up the gleanings. In particular I remember spending a few days in a tent in Kibbutz Mizra. This was probably like our ancestors did with their herds. To make it " more biblical" we even had a few goats. I am not sure why but they always came along. I don't remember ever milking them.. This method of sheep rearing has probably gone on for 1000's of years unchanged, except for the gun.

This also must have been a “ dry” season since we did not milk the sheep at this time. Somehow as time passed I was nominated and placed in charge of the whole sheep section of our economy. I must have been considered quite successful since a few years later I was nominated to be in charge of the agricultural economy of the kibbutz, but lost out in a public vote to Elhanan, one of the senior members. However there was no doubt that there was some struggle between the “ anglim’ and the ‘vatikim “ (old timers, not necessarily old, age about 40) for control of the kibbutz. One of our group, Shalom, a non-Jewish member (later evidence indicated he may have been a descendant of conversos from S. America) was later voted secretary of the kibbutz.

I remember being involved somehow in the vaad ha tarbut (cultural committee) and the building of a Beth tarbut (Culture center) in the kibbutz. This was to be a large structure, made out of concrete at the edge of the kibbutz, and used for concerts, meeting place, and later as a sort of “ pub”. There was to be a music room, and since I played the piano, I helped design this with Miriam Bartel the piano teacher of the kibbutz. As mentioned elsewhere, playing the piano was also a means of attracting young woman, and worked apparently quite successfully. I would go to the Beth tarbut and play quite often as a means of relaxation. I visited Amiad this year (2010), and found part of the building closed. It looked very neglected, and was used to store the kibbutz archives. Part of it has now been turned into a seminar cum class room by the regional HQ of Kupat Cholim

Who were my friends at Amiad? I suppose there were many, most of whom I had been with for a long time. First there were those that I worked with. In particular Piers Coleman and Les Collins. The latter was a large tall guy, very intelligent, and basically self educated (actually thinking about it, all of us were, since none of us had a formal education.). Piers was an intellectual, interested in music and reading, whereas Les was much more the outgoing type, a bit of a tough guy, threatening to beat anyone up who annoyed or insulted him. I recently met him, and he has not changed. Although I think he was born in North Africa, he was of British-Jewish origin, and very much the Brit.

I was friendly with two “ women” who had joined the kibbutz and were not from our group, one was Yael Neumann, a typical sabra and the other Mirke. I used to have long intellectual conversations on books, and music with both of them, and I was quite smitten

by Yael. I do not know what happened to Yael after she married my friend Ronnie Sillers, a marriage that did not last long and Mirke, married Moshe Gilbert. I met Mirke a few years ago, now a grandmother. Moshe had returned to England, disillusioned with Israeli politics. He had left the kibbutz, was a real estate agent for some time in Jerusalem, and then returned to England. He had changed his name to Moshe Gilad and died a few years ago. Mirke returned to Israel and works as a tour guide. She spends a few months of each year in London. Other friends included Gerry Pitch, Tommy Berman, Malcolm Tatarsky (Tasker on returning to the UK) and Ronny Silverman (Sillers). Again both Malcolm and Ronnie are no longer with us.

One affair that stands out during this period, was my “love” affair with a volunteer to the kibbutz. She was a single woman with a small child of about 1.5-2 years old. She was of Yemenite origin, very thin, frail, dark, and could not be mistaken for anything but a Yemenite. Since I was rather lonely, and my friends were all getting married, I started going out with her. Most members of the kibbutz approved, particularly since I would take the child for walks, and he would call me abba. This was the first time (since Esther on Hachshara) that I really was going out with someone seriously. We also slept together on occasions, but I soon found out that she was terrified of becoming pregnant. After one of these nights together, after we had been going out together for a few months I learned that in fact she was not divorced as she had told me, but that her husband was abroad, and was expected to return soon. This quickly put an end to the affair, since I did not want to get mixed up in a family brawl, which according to her would be very dangerous for me. Very shortly afterwards she left the kibbutz and I never met her again.

Life became routine during this period. Getting up early to milk the sheep, working hard all day, sweating in the dining room during the summers. It was so hot in Amiad that the sweat would drip from the forehead into the soup in the dining room. These were the days before air-conditioners. Food improved but was not great. As a shepherd getting up at the ungodly hour of five to milk the sheep we were privileged and had halva and an omelet before going out. We had a lot of our own produce from the meshek, tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers galore, and of course egg plant salad. We would start each meal by making our own salad. There always seemed to be a shortage of knives at each table, they probably

were taken home for other tasks. Thus the cutlery was placed in the center of the table for sharing, as was a "Kol-bowl" a metal container for leftovers and scraps. However we did eat three meals a day in the dining room, although with time, people began to make tea in the room and sometimes cookies appeared. This was a period where tea invitations were coveted, in particular by the single guys. For entertainment there was the occasional movie, which would be shown on the lawn outside, with someone cranking the sub-titles in Hebrew, which usually did not keep pace with the film. We occasionally would go to Semach (about 15 km away) to see a play. The kibbutz economically seemed to be doing well, and there was talk of building a swimming pool and other "luxuries". This eventually happened.

My friend Tommy meanwhile had left the kibbutz to study. He had received a Waksman Scholarship from Rutgers that made it possible for him to study and later reparations from the Germans for "loss of education" in Czechoslovakia. He had relatives (an aunt and uncle) in New York. He thus had taken leave of absence from the kibbutz and was studying agriculture at Rutgers. We did correspond periodically and his decision to study in the States was to have an influence on me later.

In the summer of 1956 we went up with the sheep to the newly drained Hula swamps. This year I did not go up alone but was accompanied by Zev, a kid from the garin, (pre-army group) which had just arrived in Amiad from the suburbs of Haifa. Zev was a "real" cowboy, young, tall and handsome. I was not really much older than him, and our talk turned to discussion of the girls in his group. I was interested by this time in one of them Miriam (Mimi), and Zev warned me that I did not have a chance. All the boys in the Garin were interested in her and she had refused to go out with any of them. I suppose this must have been the time when I decided I would give it a try.

I quite enjoyed the solitude of living in a small hut at the edge of the Hula and wandering around with the sheep. As mentioned above, a new group had taken our place in the Nachal quarters behind the Kibbutz. There were quite a lot of good-looking young girls among them. One day I ended up working in the kitchen with one of them, Mimi, an attractive, intelligent, blonde girl, who to my advantage also spoke English quite well. We seemed to have fun washing up, and we had an interesting conversation. She soaped the

dishes and I did the washing, something we still do together over 50 years later. As far as I remember she had borrowed some books from Piers, and I invited her to our room, which always was a mess. According to Mimi, her first visit to our room should have put her off, since it was dirty and untidy. We had quickly taken our dirty clothes, shoes etc, which were on the floor and put them on the bed and covered them with our bedspread. There really was nowhere to sit except at the edge of the bed. Mimi says she found herself attracted to the “ wild looking, piano playing, shepherd”. We started going for long walks together and often hikes in the Galilee. She would come and wake me up at ungodly hours to go hiking. I should have realized that she was a “ morning” person and I was not. To this day I still get wakened up at dawn, particularly in the summer.. After a short time she moved into my house and Piers moved out (this was the regular scheme of things). All my friends approved of this match (some had not approved of my previous affair). Mimi was attractive, very intelligent, and very full of life. I do not think at this time that I realized how strong willed she was, and that in fact she had a stronger personality than mine. Sometime during our early stages her mother came to visit the kibbutz. Mimi moved out not wanting to embarrass her mother, but introduced me to her mother as her boy friend. I was struck by what a beautiful woman she was, even though she had suffered during the war, and her husband was in the USA, which made life in Israel even hard for her. Later on I visited her Mimi’s mother in Kiryat Bialik, and since she approved of me (this was before I even thought of studying), we decided to get married.

It was during this period that my garin (group) began to fall apart. Many of the group decided for various reasons, although I think mostly to do with bringing up children to leave the kibbutz and settle in town. I believe among the first to leave were Sylvia and Harold, he finding a position at the Weizmann Institute. Many of the single girls met future husbands and left for other kibbutzim or for the city. Others left to return to Britain. There seemed to be a general unhappiness. The next thing I knew we were at war with Egypt. This was to be what was called the Sinai war.

