

1956-57. Sinai war, leaving the kibbutz and job- hunting in Israel.

As recounted previously, during my stint in the Israeli Army, we laid ambushes to prevent the Fedayeen from crossing from the Gaza strip into Israel to carry out terrorist attacks. In 1956 alone, about 250 Israeli's had been killed due to Fedayeen activity. Not only was there terrorist activity, but Egypt under Nasser had blocked Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal and the outlet to the Red Sea from the Israeli port of Eilat through the straits of Tiran. In the summer of 1956 Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal and had threatened the shipping of other countries. The British and French formerly administered the canal, and Britain owned a large number of assets in Egypt. To finance the building of the Aswan Dam, Nasser turned to Russia after the western powers turned down his request for assistance. These events triggered a short war in October of 1956 known later as the Sinai or Suez War. Israel's aim was to stop the Fedayeen, destroy the Egyptian army, and open the port of Eilat on the Red Sea. The French and British wanted to retake control of the Suez Canal. A repeat of this was to happen in the future (1967) in what is known as the six- day war. Thus the two wars should not be confused. Neither the British or the French were involved in that second war, although the root causes, Nasser's attempt to throttle Israel by blockading the Red Sea port was the same.

As soon as the war started we were on high alert. Having just been demobilized we expected to be inducted into the army immediately. However it took a day or so before this happened. I remember we milled around uncertain as to what to do. We were ordered to muster in Haifa, and then were transported to a camp, Sarafand, an old British Army camp in the center of Israel, not far from Ben Gurion Airport. Haifa to my surprise was full of French sailors, with their red pom-pom caps, being carried in trucks, and giving the V- sign as we passed them by.. This was so totally unexpected, and unbelievable, that we asked ourselves what's going on? We could hardly believe our eyes.

France and Britain formally entered this war a few days later ostensibly to protect the Suez Canal from damage, but in reality to gain control of the canal. We (the public) were completely unaware of any collusion between Israel and the

French and particularly the British, who only a few years before had been enemies of the Jewish State.

By the time we got to Sarafand the war was half over, (we did not know that of course) and I think there must have been a shortage of equipment, since we were told to wait for rifles, and machine guns, and instead of seeing action we sat and played bridge. I remember being very bored. The news was upbeat about victories in the Sinai, and Israeli troops reached the Suez Canal, with the French and British attacking from the western side of Suez. The Israeli strategy was the use of air power and paratroops. Israel demanded the opening of the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping and lifting of the blockade of Eilat.

Unfortunately the US (President Eisenhower or was it Dulles, the foreign minister) disagreed with the aims of the UK and France and through the UN ordered cessation of hostilities. There was fear in the US that the Russians might intervene on the side of Egypt, as well as the position that the US could not condemn the ongoing Russian invasion of Hungary and at the same time support the “ imperial” powers. This bolstered Nasser, and instead of a defeat he claimed victory. Personally I think this was an enormous error on the part of the US and had repercussions for a long time (and probably still does to this day). One can imagine how much more peaceful the Middle East would have been if Nasser had been deposed and Britain or France had maintained some type of foothold in Egypt. Subsequent events such as the Six Day War of 1967 were a result of this US policy. However Israel proved that it had the ability to defeat once again a major Arab power, it occupied the Sinai and for some time prevented incursion of the Fedayeen. Although there was unceasing pressure from the US to withdraw from the Sinai, and even threats of sanctions against Israel, it was not until Egypt agreed to open the straits that Israel withdrew from the Sinai. To a large extent, Eisenhower and his foreign secretary Dulles prevented Israel from enjoying the fruit of victory and if it was not for internal public pressure the US would have sided completely with Egypt.

Some of our group did see action. At least three members were parachuted into the Mitla Pass, the site of a major battle in the Sinai. These were Francis Van

Emden, Mike Leaf, and Phil Shearsky. Mike was seriously wounded but made a complete recovery. He today is a very well known artist with an international reputation and works from a studio in Safed. Van has remained a good friend, lives in Haifa, and for many years worked for ZIM the Israeli shipping company. Phil although unscathed from the war died of cancer in the 1990s. He experienced trauma from the war, having seen the massacre of Egyptian prisoners. Phil and I were close friends, being on Hachashara together, worked together with the sheep and were in the same tent in the army. He had married one of the beauties of our group, Elisheva from Holland. He was a very shy individual, very much a product of the English working class, with little knowledge of Judaism or Zionism before joining our group. He later moved to Moshav Timorim, in the northern Negev with his wife. Elisheva died shortly after Phil also from cancer.

Mimi anxiously waited my return to the kibbutz. She worried about my being drafted. I had written a few times from the 'battlefield', and was very much in love. It was shortly after this and after I had visited Mimi's mother in Kiryat Bialik and her mother visited Amiad that we decided to leave the kibbutz, and marry. Leaving the kibbutz was difficult for me, since I enjoyed my life in the kibbutz and was generally quite happy both with work and the social situation. I was not all that interested in money and material goods. I was satisfied with the little I had and being part of the group. I felt I was surrounded by friends and was responsible for an important branch of the economy of the kibbutz. Mimi had decided that she did not want to bring up our future children in the kibbutz and she had encountered some unpleasantness from one of the "old timers" who threatened her with a long period of work in the kitchen after she was married. Of course this would not have happened since a committee and not one person decided on place of work. The kibbutzniks did not live up to her expectations, were not idealists and that there was a great deal of pettiness and infighting. I was in love, and Mimi meant more to me than the kibbutz.

We had not thought through our future since I had no skills, apart from shepherding sheep, driving a tractor, and certainly no education, not even a high

school certificate. What was I going to do, and how was I going to earn a living outside of the kibbutz ? Our prospects were bleak. The idea of bringing up children communally did not worry me, since I thought it worked quite well, with ample leisure time to play with the children. I had enjoyed my experience of being 'abba' to Giora.

We moved out of the kibbutz to my mother-in laws house in Kiryat Bialik, in November of 1956. We were not yet married, a fact that did not bother Mrs. Reifer (Rutta). We did not share a bedroom I slept in the sitting room on the couch up to the day of our wedding. The apartment was small with two bedrooms, a small kitchen and a sort of hallway used as a sitting room. It was one of the apartments built very quickly in the 1950's to house new immigrants. It was in a three-story structure with 6 apartments per building. Interior Mimi had designed the furniture, which was very modern; Bauhaus style, with contrasting black and white wood. Although small the apartment was better than our room and bathroom in the kibbutz.

At one fell swoop there was a general exodus of members of my group from the kibbutz, with Mike and Thilda and their baby Anat leaving the same day, on the same truck, followed a few days later by Una and Van, Lottie and Barry and my co-worker in the "sheep" pens, Les Collins. All moved to suburban Haifa. All eventually found decent jobs, Van in Barclay's bank, Les in Shemen, a factory producing soaps, detergents, perfume etc. maintaining equipment, and Mike as a chemist with the Potash company. We helped Les find a job through Mimi's uncle Jacob who was a manager at Shemen. Leaving the kibbutz was like an infection that spread, and led to the disintegration of the garin (group) and everything that we had dreamed and worked towards for the last 10 years of our lives. We were not the first to leave the kibbutz other had left before us, mostly those with a solid profession. The reasons for leaving varied, mostly due to concerns about bringing up children in a communal fashion, the children sleeping apart from the parents. Gradually the "bleeding" from the kibbutz subsided leaving a core of about 20-30 of our group many of whom are still living in Amiad or buried there. Our little apartment in Kiryat Bialik soon

became the social center for gatherings of ex-kibbutznicks from Amiad, most of whom lived close by.

None of us received financial compensation for the years of work. We were not particularly bitter about this, since we really did not expect anything. However the lack of money made it difficult to start a new life. If it had not been for Mimi's mother living in Kiryat Bialik, and her desire for us to move in and live with her, until she went to the USA to join her husband, our initial independent married life would have been much more difficult. My future father-in-law, Salo, had left Israel, in 1954 for the United States. He had been quite unhappy in the new country, found it too socialist. Trained as a mathematician he did not want to teach in the Israeli school system, and instead was employed as a night watchman in a factory belonging to the minister of defense. When it was discovered that he had a degree in mathematics he was offered a position in a chemistry materials laboratory. However his brother Paul, in New York urged him to try his luck in the USA, which he eventually did. Ruta meanwhile decided to stay in Israel and look after Mimi. She was very content in Israel after the suffering through the war in Europe. She felt very much at home in Israel and her brothers and sister lived nearby. The move to the USA was something she dreaded, but was done to save her marriage. She felt that Mimi was now in good hands after her marriage.

The first task after leaving the kibbutz was to find employment for both of us. We had many plans for the future, all in Israel. We looked into the possibility of growing flowers for export (a thriving business in Israel) on land left to the family by Mimi's grandfather. This was land not far from Kiryat Bialik, bought by him in the 1930's. Although zoned for agriculture, when we inquired about getting water to the area, we were told this was impossible for the foreseeable future. Since we were up against Israeli bureaucracy, we quickly gave up this idea. This land is still in the family, still untouched, and being used by one of the nearby kibbutzim for growing

grain. It should have been rezoned for building, but this has been pending for many years and nothing has happened. Perhaps if we had settled down and thought it through we would have fought the bureaucracy and obtained permission to put in water, but it would have been a long fight, and we did not have the funds to hire a lawyer.

Mimi found a job without difficulty as a chemistry lab technician for Hemed (the army research branch), and I went for interviews to agricultural schools for a position as an instructor in some field. I was offered a job at the agricultural high school in Nahalal to teach, “shepherding”. This was a well-known agricultural school, but the position was only part time, and did not pay very much. Here my ex army sergeant and now friend, Zvi Goffer, intervened. (Zvi had married one of our girls, Chava, while in the army). He felt I could do better than this and suggested I turn the job down, find something better and consider studying, which was in his plans. Zvi had been our sergeant in the army, was slightly older than I, and both Mimi and I valued his wisdom. He was originally from Argentina, and after completing the army had investigated the possibilities of studying chemistry. He decided it was easier to do this abroad and encouraged me to do the same. Eventually he completed a BS and then a Ph.D., at London University and later was a professor of chemical archaeology at the Hebrew University. His book, Archeological Chemistry a part of which I reviewed and edited, is an authority on this subject.

I thus declined the position at Nahalal, continued job-hunting, and found a position in an office of the agricultural ministry in Haifa. This was interesting work, helping a Ph.D. candidate from the Hebrew University School of Agriculture. Michael Taran, was completing his Ph.D. on the effect of high temperature on poultry in the Jordan Valley, and also studying the incidence and genetics of leukemia in chickens. My job was to crunch numbers on coefficients of inbreeding, and to accompany him to the Jordan Valley (Ashdod Yaacov, Kinneret, Degania) to obtain records of egg production and to analyze whether the severe heat of the Jordan Valley had an influence. It was a good job, and I enjoyed it, although a co-worker once warned me that I worked too hard! If I remember correctly heat had no effect on egg

production. The temperature in the Jordan Valley, one of the lowest spots on earth often reached 100 degrees F.

The office was a small one on the third floor of a large building on “ rehov Atzmaut” (Independence Way) in the downtown section of Haifa. This was close to the port and the area contained all the foreign banks and trading offices of the mandate. It was near the old Arab section of the city, which was partly destroyed and quite run down. I took a bus every day from the “Tsrif” in Kiryat Haim, close to our apartment to downtown, a ride in these days of about 15 minutes. I worked in the office with a Mrs Leiberman, who kept an eye on me in a nice way. Mrs. Leiberman was a middle-aged woman, probably of German-Jewish origin, long hair tied back in a bun, and appeared very strict. However she was very protective of me. The head of the department was a decent guy, a Dr. Zvi. Ben Adam who later gave me excellent advice, and was instrumental in my being accepted by Cornell University, or at least he must have written a good reference. In the office we talked a mixture of English and Hebrew, so that language was not a problem. When I started work I had no intention of going to the States, and I was quite happy with the position.

We adjusted quite well to our life in Kiryat Bialik. We had two groups of friends, mine from the kibbutz, and Mimi’s high school friends, although at this time most were in the army. They were mostly Sabras i.e. native born and found it difficult to accept an immigrant from the UK into their midst. I likewise found them immature and childish, and this did become a source of friction between Mimi and myself. My Hebrew was not good and this made matters worse. With the passing of time, I have become more acceptable to this group and when we meet now I feel quite comfortable, despite my “ broken” Hebrew. We meet approximately once a year in our visits to Israel. We have continued our friendship with those of my group who have survived the years, Barry and Lottie, Van and Unna, Shalom (Lionel) and his new wife, Cati, and most recently renewed acquaintance with Thilde.

Unfortunately this group has been dying out, Barry having died a few months ago as of writing.

Thus that first year of marriage we established a routine. Both of us worked and enjoyed the Shabat. We had a very tight budget, and kept to it (we rationed ourselves to one record a month. I still had my gramophone, a wedding present from my uncle David.). This gramophone made it all the way to the USA with us, where we found it had to go extensive modification to get it to work. We lived very frugally but enjoyed our friends. We also became friends with neighbors, in particular those from English speaking countries. We had no idea that we would be leaving for the US in a year.

I have often thought of the Utopian idea of the kibbutz, and why it did not completely succeed. I think the disintegration of my group was a result of general dissatisfaction with kibbutz life, the reality, as opposed to the dream. We discovered that people, no matter how idealistic, were human, and had human foibles. There was jealousy and nastiness, there were those who were more ambitious than others, and those who wanted to "lord" it over others. Some did not like the idea of someone else (whom they did not like or appreciate or disparage) bringing up their children. That children, including babies slept together in the children's homes under supervision was not agreeable to many of the female members. After a few years, children's care was modified when an extra room was built on to the houses as bedrooms, and became the norm in most kibbutzim, except for those of the left wing Hashomer Hatzair Kibbutzim. There were also economic considerations, the resentment that some members had more money than others, either from parents or other sources (reparations from Germany). These were not shared with the group. In particular the problem of reparations from Germany was a tricky one.

One of my friends, Tommy Berman, received quite a sum since his parents died in concentration camps. He decided to put the money aside so that he could study in the USA. I don't know whether anyone handed their money into our kibbutz, although I am certain this happened in other places.

The girls in the group objected to working all day in the kitchen, washing up, or in the “ machsan” sewing and ironing clothes. Where was the promised equality to the sexes ?.

As an economic unit the kibbutz was quite successful, although subsidized by the labor government of the time. The overall economy was capitalistic, so that the kibbutz competed in the free market with other businesses. It sold its produce to a co-operative, Tnuvah, who in turn sold the produce to retail stores. The culture that we had experienced in Hachshara, the intellectual discussions, the listening to music together, the discussion of ideas and principles was absent. Work tired us out. Also the family unit began to dominate social life, whereas on hachshara we were young and mostly single, with no parental responsibilities. Now parents collected their children for a couple of hours after work, and by the time they had dinner and returned the children to the children’s home they were too tired to do anything other than sleep. Later on it became obvious that the family replaced the individual. This was most apparent in the dining room where tables were often occupied by members of the same family, in particular as the number of children and grandparents increased.

I have often wondered what it would have been like to remain on the kibbutz. Today, when I visit Amiad, I find that many of those remaining have little in the way of personal belongings to show for a life of toil. The housing situation has not changed in years. Agriculture is no longer the mainstay of the kibbutz. In the case of Amiad there is a factory for the manufacture of water filters and sophisticated filtering equipment. Workers are paid salaries based on their position in the factory. Many of these workers come from outside the kibbutz. The kibbutz has undergone huge changes with privatization, private ownership of houses and other property, reallocation of resources, pensions to older people, car ownership by individuals, in fact everything is in flux. Even without these changes brought about by generation three of the kibbutz, life was disappointing for many. In some cases the children of the first generation (the founders) have left for the city or even for the USA/UK or other countries. I think the biggest blow, is seeing one’s children

leave the kibbutz, since sacrifices had been made for future generations. To have your children leave the kibbutz is a failure. For those who stayed there must be a sense of betrayal and bitterness. What made it worse was that some of the children immigrated to the USA or “ returned” to the place their parents came from, namely the U.K. The first and second generation born on the kibbutz did not want to be farmers or work in the kibbutz industries. Rather they wanted to go to university, study literature, sociology or architecture, professions that were unimportant to the kibbutz. Thus the experiment to create the educated peasant generation succeeded but only for one generation. One factor was the industrialization of the country and the loss of agriculture as a mainstay of the economy. Israel became high tech, no more growing tomatoes and oranges. With the increase in population came urbanization and many kibbutzim (not Amiad) found themselves at the edge of cities, or even incorporated into the city, if not physically but culturally. What do you do when there is a shopping mall at your door?.

Tommy B., my childhood friend from Glasgow was one of the few who seemed happy. His children except for one who immigrated to the USA stayed in the kibbutz He has grandchildren who remained, and for most of his life was an academic performing research in a government sponsored laboratory on limnology of the Sea of Galilee. This offered him the opportunity to travel and work elsewhere. He even had a new species of algae found in the Kinnereth called after him. Tommy died last year in an accident while exploring the Galapagos Islands. Others of the group who remained are now teachers, or retired teachers from junior colleges in the Upper Galilee. Most took classes as the kibbutz became wealthier and finished their education in middle age. In the end most of my “garin” had managerial or teaching positions within the kibbutz or even outside in middle and old age, so that their life changed, albeit very slowly.