

Chapter 7. Arrival in Israel and Kibbutz Gal-Ed

As stated previously, I and two other members of the group left England on route to Israel in the fall of 1952. Two of us were escaping from the British Army, or at least I from the RAF after receiving draft papers. We crossed the channel by boat, and boarded a train to Paris. This was before the Channel Tunnel had even been conceived or thought possible. This was also the first time in my life that I had been outside of the United Kingdom. I do recall a feeling of total freedom, we could do as we pleased until we arrived in Marseilles and boarded the ship for Israel. We saw some of the sights of Paris, indulged in French food, including for me the first time bacon with eggs. At the David Eder Farm we maintained a kosher kitchen and my parents kept kashrut at home in Glasgow. One evening we went to the Follies Berger, the famous cabaret. The girls wore fantastic costumes; I do not think there was any complete nudity just a lot of semi-nudity. I do not recall where we stayed and whether Habonim had a house in Paris. After a couple of days we boarded the train for the South of France. Once in Marseilles, we boarded an Israeli ship the Artza. This was an old vessel built in Germany in 1930. The German Navy had used her during WWII. After the war she was reconditioned by an Italian line and travelled between Italian Ports, Cairo and Haifa. She was called the Mare Ligure. Zim, the new Israeli shipping line bought her in 1949 to carry immigrants from Europe to Israel. She carried about 550 passengers per voyage, making non stop return trips.



The ship was crowded with immigrants mostly from North Africa making their way to Israel. I hung out with a group of young Tunisians who were on their way to a kibbutz. I became very enamored of one of the girls, but do not even remember her name. We never met again. We spent the evenings together singing Hebrew songs, and dancing the Hora. As we neared shore of Israel, we crowded onto the deck and were excited and emotional at seeing the coastline and the white city of Haifa on Mt 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. I can't remember why, but this made a deep impression on me, and prompted me to do something I should never have done. Apparently I signed a paper opting out of Israeli citizenship. Did I have some doubts? . If I did, I kept them to my self, and did not think of it as important for a long time. Signing this document had many ramifications later on, and even to this day causes me some problems. Although I served in the Israeli army I am not certain of my citizenship status. Shortly after arrival (or was it then ?) I received my identification card, which identified me as an Israeli citizen. Following the signing of some other 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 a short wave radio, some records and books. I did not have very many private possessions.

The trip to Gal Ed from Haifa was by truck through the winding hills of Ephraim, as they were then called. I think they are now called the hills of Menashe. (This must reflect the Biblical tribes who lived in this area). We drove by a number of kibbutzim on the way, including Kibbutz Dalia known for its dance festival and Kibbutz Ein ha-Shofet (“well of the judge”) at that time a well-known and established left-wing kibbutz called after the US judge, Brandeis. Gal Ed, founded in 1945, was originally called Even Yitzhak, after Yitzhak Hochberg a South African philanthropist. The words Gal Ed mean memorial, and it was called thus in memory of those Habonim members who fell in WWII. The drive was quite beautiful through very hilly countryside and just before the kibbutz gate a large vineyard with large bunches of green grapes, hanging from the vines the best grapes I have ever tasted. Today this area is near parkland known as the cyclamen hill or Ramat Menashe Park. In the spring it is covered with purple cyclamens, with hundreds of families picnicking. The flowers are protected and can not be picked.

On arrival we were shown to our houses for the next year. These were single bedroom attached cement dwellings, each with a small toilet and sink-shower attached, and a small terrace. I shared a room with Jerry.Pitch. whom I had known from our training farm in England.



Above is a picture of Jerry Pitch . P and myself (in the white shirt) outside our room, at the age of 20 or 21.

All the single men lived in the same style room, adjoining one another, usually two or three per room. Others lived in tents opposite the row of houses. The married couples from our group had slightly better accommodation and the older members of the kibbutz, even fancier.

Jerry was a typical London East-ender, with a very strong Cockney accent. He knew all the dirtiest ditties, and could curse like a trooper. He had been on Hachsharat Noar at the Eder Farm and was slightly younger than I. Although we were very different types, we got along well, and we eventually worked together with the sheep when we later moved to Amiad. Eventually Jerry married an Israeli from another kibbutz, moved with her to Yizrael and changed his name. I lost contact with him for many years although I did meet him once at a group reunion. During a visit to Israel as a lecturer in 2002, I was told that he was terminally ill with esophageal cancer, which prompted me to

visit him. He was a shadow of himself, having survived many surgeries, and outlived by a few years the doctor's predictions. Although told he would not recognize me, he did and we talked about our days as shepherds. He was a real fighter.

On arrival at Gal-Ed I immediately sensed disappointment and lack of enthusiasm within my group, who had arrived a few months earlier. Somehow kibbutz life had not turned out as expected. In particular 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 our girls worked in the agricultural branches of the kibbutz, partly because the work was considered too hard, and partly because of the unbearable heat. The general ambience in Gal Ed was also not as expected. We were newcomers not readily accepted. The original founders had come from Germany or Holland, and spoke German or Dutch among themselves. We were known as the "Anglim", and I must admit that we felt much more comfortable speaking English to each other rather than Hebrew. We felt a little like second-class citizens. We did have courses in Hebrew, but it was a slow process, learning a new spoken language.

Life in Israel was also tougher than expected. There was a shortage of food, which resulted in a limited diet of tomatoes and eggplants, the work was very menial, particularly removing boulders from the fields to allow for cultivation, and there was very little culture in the evenings, other than the occasional very old film. There was also 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 decide to stay in Gal Ed, there was general opposition to this. The most outspoken members against the idea of staying in Gal Ed were the ideologues of the group who thought we should start a new kibbutz or if not that at least join a new kibbutz. After much discussion the vote was taken to join another kibbutz and not to remain in Gal Ed,

Post script: I and my friend Tommy visited Gal Ed in 2013, and found a prosperous stable kibbutz. The local industry makes tractor parts for John Deere. I even have a distant relative living there, the daughter of Flora Lincoln, a first cousin. As a result I have visited the kibbutz a number of times.

Somehow or other I found myself working with the sheep and becoming a shepherd. I do not remember whether I volunteered for this or was assigned to this work. I worked with two of the “veterans” of the kibbutz, one was Shlomo, who was from Holland and the other was Dan, whom I believe was Indonesian or half Indonesian. Although the word shepherd conjures up a romantic picture in reality it was not so. The sheep were bred for their milk, and cheese (feta) production. These sheep belonged to a breed known as “fat tails” or locally as Awassi. In Israel and the rest of the Middle – East they are bred for their milk production, their wool is very coarse and can only be used for carpets. Very few members wanted to work in the Tson (Hebrew for Sheep branch), it was dirty and one’s clothes stank from milk and lanolin from being close to the animals during milking. This smell would encase one all day long. The herd consisted of a few hundred sheep; they would line up for food in troughs or racks, we would pull a lever and the sheep would be trapped with their heads between iron bars. We then took a wide circular and not too deep bucket, 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 (large cooperative 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 blooming with cyclamens, wild irises and poppies in the spring. It also was a lonely job, since after the first few times, when I was accompanied by Shlomo, head of the sheep branch, I would take the sheep out by myself. This also had its advantage as I could take a book or just sunbathe. I would take off most (or sometimes all) of my clothes and lie on one of the many large rocks scattered over the area. One had to be careful since often under the rocks would be hidden red scorpions, whose bite could be very painful. 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 were built from the local rock and were in ruins. I delighted in the smell and taste of the figs and other fruit. Prickly pears (Sabras) were growing everywhere. I was very surprised to find this place, and felt 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 the members. As far as I remember no one was ready to talk about the fate of the village or its inhabitants or perhaps I did not ask. 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 innocent and did not think too much that this had been home to someone else.

One interesting aspect of sheep rearing, or being a shepherd, was the need to move with the flock around the country during the summer. This was after the lambing season, and when the natural grass growing in the hills had dried up. The sheep would be driven slowly to the valley (Emek) where the crops had been harvested. I remember that Shlomo and I moved the herd to kibbutz Mizra in the Emek Yizrael, and the sheep grazed on the remains of the dura (sorghum). I have a brief recollection of living in a hut or tent. Supplies would be brought from Gal Ed daily. I assume that Shlomo, Dan and I must have taken turns at shepherding. Since the sheep were with the lambs there was no need for milking.

Dan taught me a side of life that I did not know in my naivety. 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. 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 Margalit now occupied the tower. 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. 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’ 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).

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 attended the kibbutz school, or a special school established for them, to teach them Hebrew and other skills. Many of these kids worked with me and I became familiar with children from Kurdistan, Iraq and Turkey. I do not know what happened to their parents, or where they lived. I enjoyed working with these children and helping to educate them. Many were orphans and members of the kibbutz would adopt them inviting them home, or going with them to the dinning room for dinner. Below I have a photograph of two of these children with a newborn lamb. Unfortunately I did not have any contact with these children after I left Gal-Ed.



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, 1952 most of us knew of the excesses of the Stalinist regime. In Czechoslovakia the trials of Jewish communist leaders, the Slansky trials had taken place, and most of the Jewish leaders were hanged. They were accused of Trotsky-Titoist-Zionist conspiracy. Of the 13 put on

trial 11 were Jewish. Many were condemned to death. 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 the Soviet propaganda, and that Russia was the new Garden of Eden (paradise). In 1952 the kibbutz movement split over the Soviet Union. Hashomer and Ahdut 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 divided and it was to split again over other matters such as "hired laborers" a few years later. This meant that a large number of members would leave the established kibbutz and start a new one. Families were often divided. These kibbutzim have remained separate to this day. Of course this was a transient phenomenon and today, 60 years later these kibbutzim, like most others are undergoing privatization, but they are still separate. For example, we often stay in in kibbutz Ein Harod in their guest-house. There are two kibbutzim nearby, Ein Harod-alpha and Ein Harod-beth. Today they often co-operate.

I did leave the kibbutz a few times, either on 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 possess 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's sister Kitty and family lived 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 lack of money and questions relating to private property did bother me quite a bit. There was really no equality, or only limited equality on the kibbutz. It did provide us with what we needed, in terms of clothing, toothpaste all our physical needs but some people did receive money from family, and later reparations from Germany, and even items like radios and records became bones of contention since some had and others did not. It is difficult or near impossible to legislate complete equality. One of my mother's cousins, Willie Shapiro, visited during this first year in Israel and gave me 50 pounds sterling, indicating that he would get it back from my parents. I know it caused a row at home, and I do not know whether was reimbursed, but it allowed me some freedom to move around the country. I do not think I bought anything with it. I hoarded this money for my occasional visits to Ramat Gan..

The kibbutz did have a guest-house in Natanya a resort on the Mediterranean, or they rented rooms. After one year of work one was entitled to spend a few days at the guest- house and given some cash to spend. I do not remember what I did on that mini-vacation except I acquired a taste for Arak, an alcoholic drink made from Anis. It is similar to the Greek Ouzo, which I still enjoy to this day.

On reflection, life in Israel was very difficult. This 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 had been only a few years ago, and there was constant harassment from Fedayeen (Terrorists from Gaza and Egypt). On the other hand it was also a time of idealism. There was hope of building a better society in the world, and hope that eventually there would be peace with the Arabs. The socialist party of Ben Gurion dominated the country and gave it direction. It was a Socialist economy and the labor union, the Histradut, played a large role in everything.

I was not religious nor was anyone else in the kibbutz or in our group. I am always being asked about this subject, and in general we did not practice any religion in the kibbutz. Most of us were atheists. The kibbutz was not kosher and there was no synagogue. Our aim was to restore 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. We were too naïve about human nature. There was a nucleus of religious Jews, but they appeared to be a minority and lived mostly in Jerusalem. To us these reflected the diaspora, a culture we were escaping from.

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 more attractive because of the age of the group, in their early 20's and it had a true Israeli (sabra) atmosphere. There were also a surplus of young women. Hachoshlim had been founded by native Israeli's, and was

later joined by groups from Holland and Romania. It was a well-established and economically flourishing kibbutz, at least compared to Gonen. It appeared at that time to be economically better than Gal Ed. Its economy was based on agriculture and fruit grown on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, including large areas of bananas. 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 later under constant bombardment 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 individuals from our group was getting married, and there was a shortage of available women. We were quite dependent on visitors for sex. 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, Z.F, (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. My sex life had to wait until the next move to Hachoshlim (Amiad) .