

# Hillel Kempler

Country: Israel

Date of Interview: August 2010

Name of Interviewer: Tanja Eckstein

*Hillel Kempler is my friend Ilana's favorite uncle. Ilana is from Israel and has been living for a long time with her family in Vienna. Before I interview Hillel, she tells me a lot about her uncle. Finally it's possible! The taxi driver who takes me to my first visit to Hillel uses my cell phone four times to find the house. Hillel is already standing at the garden gate when I finally get there. We like each other from the first moment. Since he was seven years old, Hillel has been living in what is today Israel, and his German is made up of a lot of invented, but understandable, wonderful words, that have never been heard before. He tells his story chronologically, almost literarily, in order to make my job easier. His wife Ester sits nearby during the sessions. She speaks Yiddish and so can follow our conversation. Ester is an artist - her pictures, which she creates from the fibers of newspapers and magazines - hang all over the house and are terrific. Hillel, who speaks more familiarly with me after a half and hour, is very proud of Ester. Hillel's story is part of the story of Israel.*

Hillel Kempler passed away in April 2014

## My Childhood

We were five siblings, I was the youngest. My sister Fanny was born in 1914 and my sister Gusti in 1917 in Vyzhnytsia [*today Ukraine*], where my father, Nathan David Kempler, and my mother, Liebe Kempler, lived until 1918. Vyzhnytsia belonged to Galicia, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. After the end of the First World War and the fall of the Monarchy, my father saw no future for his family in Vyzhnytsia, and my parents relocated to Berlin. My brother Isi was born in 1919, my sister Miriam in 1923, and I on October 26th, 1925 in Berlin.

My father was born in Lviv [*today Ukraine*]. I never saw his family. At the age of 14 he was an apprentice in a pastry shop, and in 1906 he received his certification as an assistant in a gingerbread bakery. After that he did his mastership. In the First World War my father was a soldier with the Austrian military and was stationed in Albania. Sometimes he would tell us how horrible the war was. He got sick with malaria and so couldn't fight any more. Then he cooked for the officers.

I think my father's family was killed during the Second World War, but I don't know who they were. I never knew my grandparents' names. In 2000 something interesting happened. It had to do with the Berlin Jewish Museum. I was visiting Berlin with my wife Ester a year before the opening of the museum. Someone told me that there were tours through the unopened museum. The building was already finished but it was still empty. That sounded interesting to me and so we went on a tour. I then told the man leading us through the museum that I was born in Berlin. That really interested him and so we stayed in contact and I gave the museum some of my family photos and documents. My wife and I were invited by the city of Berlin to the opening of the museum. It was

very exciting for me; almost 70 years after my family fled from Berlin to Palestine I was a guest at the opening of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. There were people from all over the world there. And in one of the rooms hung a picture of my family as well.

Some years later a couple from Texas visited the museum. They were really interested in the photo of my family and went to the office to ask who it came from. The man from Texas was also called Kempler. The people in the office didn't give him any information, but they sent us his address and wrote that we could get in contact with him if we wanted, since they weren't allowed to give out any information. My daughter Giza, who is interested in our family's genealogy, took over immediately. She wrote to Texas and also spoke with Mr. Kempler on the phone. It was proved: yes, it is my family. They sent us pictures and so we saw that this Mr. Kempler looked very similar to my father. And since then we always send them our wishes on Rosh Hashanah. That's how it's been. Maybe we'll meet some day.

My mother's maiden name was Ettinger. This family lived in Vyzhnytsia, where my sisters, Fanny and Gusti, were also born. I believe my parents were married in Vyzhnytsia. I don't know how or where they met. But they both came from very religious families and in those days there was Schadchen [marriage-arranger], who connected the partners on behalf of the family.

Right after the First World War my parents immigrated to Germany with my sisters Fanny and Gusti, since the postwar situation in Vyzhnytsia and in the whole region was really tough. My father was a very ambitious person. He wanted to have something to show for his life. He had imagined, or else heard, I don't know, that there were more opportunities to advance professionally in Germany.

In Berlin he opened the kosher pastry shop "Krakauer Café and Konditorei" at Grenadier-strasse [today *Almstadt-strasse*] 20. In my father's pastry shop there were some baked goods – they would also be delivered from the shop – and you could eat breakfast and supper there. I own a photograph of the pastry shop that shows everything.

Grenadierstrasse was a Jewish street in the famous Berlin Scheunenviertel. The Scheunenviertel was located between Hackescher Markt and the current Rosa Luxemburg Platz. During the time that I lived there, Rosa Luxemburg Platz was called Bülowplatz. In those days in the Scheunenviertel there were a lot of very religious Jews with payot and shawls, modern Jews like my father and his friends, workers, and businesspeople. Initially my father rented the pastry shop, then later he bought it. It was a well-known pastry shop, it had a good reputation. In the shop there was coffee and a variety of cakes: cheesecake, apple cake, strudel, and such things, there was also ice cream and beer. The pastry shop was pretty small. From the street-level you would go down two or three steps, since the place was in the half-basement. There were two rooms with tables for guests, next to which were two more rooms, and in one was the bakery with the machines. My father had an employee, but my mother also worked sometimes when there were a lot of guests. I can still remember that, following the success of the pastry shop, my father, I don't know exactly what year that was, but it must have been around 1931, rented a large café across from the pastry shop. The café didn't exist for very long, however; it didn't work out. It was clearly too big for him. I know that it was there and then it was gone again.

A communist group met regularly in our pastry shop. There were approximately ten to fifteen people. They spent a lot of time in the pastry shop. I know that there were Jewish and non-Jewish communists. They exchanged information and played games – I can remember dominoes well. I really liked playing dominoes as well. They often called to me: come, Hillel, play with us! And I was always very proud that I was allowed to play with them. They drank beer and coffee and ate a lot of cheesecake. My father's cheesecake was pretty well known. They always paid for everything. My father was a devout Jew, he didn't understand politics, since politics didn't interest him at all. It was good for him that the communists came to him, since they consumed so much. That was his interest. Our street was very Jewish, but we co-existed nicely with the communists. Of course, at that time I didn't know what a communist was.

There were a lot of kosher shops and many synagogues in the Scheunenviertel. These synagogues were not stand-alone buildings. In those days you would rent only one or two rooms and open a synagogue there. I went to so many small shtiebelekh [*prayer rooms*] or shtiebel. Shtiebelekh means room in Yiddish. I can still remember some of this shtiebelekh very well.

My parents were religious. Every morning my father would put on tefillin, and Friday evenings and on Saturdays go to his shtiebel. All of his friends were at the shtiebel, and his community life revolved around the shtiebel. My father had a beard, but he was modern orthodox. You couldn't tell from his clothing that he was very devout, and as the Nazis came to power in 1933, he immediately shaved his beard.

We were kosher, of course, and weren't allowed to even think about pig. My brother Isi, he was six years older than me, took me by the hand one day and said: come, Hillel, we're going to buy sausages. There were small wagons on the street that sold sausages. Of course these were sausages made of pork. Isi brought me to one of these wagons and crept around it so that no one would see us. Then he positioned himself at a corner of the wagon and bought us each a pair of sausages. We quickly ran with the sausages to the next street and ate them in an entryway. Isi then made me swear: Hillel, you must never tell anyone. And for years I was afraid that someone would find out and tell that I had eaten pork sausages. But that was such a thrill, the forbidden! Isi needed to try it once. We thought, who knows what would happen to us after eating the sausages.

My parents spoke a mixture of German and Yiddish, but it was certainly more Yiddish than German. Sometimes they also went to a Yiddish theatre, of which there were many in Berlin. My sister, I guess, spoke High German, since she went to the Jewish High School in Berlin. I was always playing with lots of kids in the street. All the children were on the street in those days, and someone said to me when I arrived in Israel: I know your language, you're from Berlin. I had picked up a bit of Berlin slang from the kids on the street.

Our apartment was also on Grenadier-strasse, directly across from my father's pastry shop. The apartment had six rooms. It was on the second floor. There was a parlor, which was a large room. In the parlor there was a long table for twelve people that had been very expensive. I can recall it exactly. And there was a large bureau and a grandfather clock that needed to be wound once a week. Only my father was allowed to do that, no one else. My parents were very proud of everything that they had accomplished. My father often gave gifts to my mother, once he even bought her an Astrakhan coat. That was quite exceptional, of course. In 1933 she sent the Astrakhan coat with our moving boxes to Palestine, but she of course had no need for it here.

We had two maids that looked after us children. One was called Herta. She was a young girl.

Before I went to primary school I would go to a shtiebel in the afternoon. There was a Rabbi and a couple of other children there, and we learned religion and Hebrew. When my brother Isi was young, he was certainly also in a shtiebel. Later we were enrolled in a completely normal primary school.

My mother was a beautiful woman, and she was a loving mom. I was once very sick as a child; I had strange blue spots on my legs and needed to go to a convalescent home near Hamburg for a couple of months. I don't know what kind of illness that was. Because of my sickness I was very spoiled. But because I was the youngest, I was also very spoiled by my siblings. My sisters often looked after me; we were all very close.

On Friday, on Shabbat, we always ate at the large table in the parlor. We were all so proud of the fact that we only ate at the large table on Shabbat and the High Holidays. During the week everyone came home at a different times and we didn't eat together.

We often had guests, friends of my father and my mother's two sisters, who also lived with their families in Berlin. My mother had many siblings, there were ten kids in that family. The majority of them lived in Poland and one brother lived in Czechoslovakia. I don't know anything about this uncle, only that he lived there. My Aunt Loni in Berlin was married to Michael Striks. I don't know what his profession was any more. They had three children: Harry was two years younger than me, Edith – Ester in Israel – and Herta – Chaya in Israel. They all managed to flee to Palestine. Ester died in the 1990s of Parkinson's, and Chaya still lives in Tel Aviv. My Aunt Lene was a widow. She also lived on Grenadier-strasse. Aunt Lene also had three children, the daughter was called Loni, she died in the 1980s in Ramat Gan, and the two boys were Adolf and Jossel. The three children also made it to Palestine; only Aunt Lene stayed in Berlin and was murdered [*Helene Ettinger, neé Ettinger, born August 24th, 1886 in Wisnicz, deported March 1st, 1943 to Auschwitz, from Gedenkbuch der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus, Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1995*].

Before Passover the whole apartment would be cleaned, food would be cooked, and the Passover dishes would be taken out. The dishes that we used throughout the year were put away. The Seder was a very important evening. A large white tablecloth with religious symbols was laid out on our large table. On the table there was a plate with five sections – that was the Seder bowl. There were various things to eat in it, each with a symbolic character. There were three matzoth in a cushion with three levels. My father took out one matzo, broke it, and hid one half. That was the afikoman. We children had to look for and find the afikoman. My father wasn't allowed to end the meal until he got the afikoman back. Whoever found the piece of matzo was allowed to ask my father for something at the end of the meal in the evening, which lasted a few hours. It could be a book or a game. Then he, my mother, and my sisters would bite the afikoman into a round shape, a hole would be made in the middle, and there was a nail in the room the afikoman would be hung on. It would stay there until the next Passover. For the Seder my father wore a satin coat. He had to put the coat on over his head. The arms were embroidered with silver thread, and my father wore a flat cap on his head that was also embroidered with silver thread. He ate like a king. He wasn't permitted to sit on a chair, two armchairs were put together for him, and so he would be half sitting, half lying down. That was the tradition: if he's a king, he should also sit like a king. Today when we read the Haggadah at home, we always jump ahead because we want to eat. But my

father read the whole Haggadah, and that took hours. We loved our father; we respected him.

My mother often read from the Yiddish woman's bible – the bible was called Ze'enah and Re'enah. It is a very well-known bible for Jewish women [*In the Middle Ages a number of additions of the Jewish women's bible "Ze'enah and Re'enah" were printed in Poland*]. This bible was written in Yiddish. Often, once we were already in Tel Aviv, she would tell stories from the bible during Shabbat. I don't know where the book went. I would really like to have it, but it has disappeared.

It was a tradition in Jewish households to leave a section of wall in a room, not big, maybe a meter, unpainted. That was to commemorate the history of the Jews. We had that in Berlin, not in the parlor, but in one of the upper rooms.

We were a real Berlin family, and enjoyed ourselves. We often drove around and were always out and about. My father would come too, since the pastry shop was closed on Saturdays. For example we'd go to Wannsee or Grunewald. We'd go to Alexanderplatz, which was really close by. There were always markets at Alexanderplatz, and often circuses. I can also still remember a Zeppelin from New York that landed in Berlin. We were there for that; the whole city was there. The Babylon cinema was located near Grenadier-strasse, on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, across from the Berliner Volksbühne [*a famous Berlin theatre*]. I went often to the Babylon; I knew it well. I would see funny films there – they were still silent, pictures without talking – with my brother Isi or my sister Gusti, and in winter I would skate on the ice on the square in front of the Volksbühne with other children. We also had good relationships with gentiles. It was totally normal and didn't matter if someone was Jewish or not. You were accepted. I never heard "Jew" associated with anything negative from the people on our street. Maybe in school, but I was only there for half a year.

I could already read before I went to school. I always loved reading. I read whatever I could get my hands on. And when I went out in the streets I read the signs on the storefronts. Maybe it's because of my siblings, who were always giving me newspapers and periodicals. Then in Berlin I was only in school for a half a year, and even today I can still read German well, which is astounding.

In 1932 I was enrolled in the primary school on Gips-strasse. Of course I also got a candy cone for my first day of school, which was already customary back then. I have a photo of myself in a sailor suit with my candy cone. Both Jewish and gentile children received a candy cone. I don't know how many kids in my class were Jewish, I didn't care in those days. My siblings were all at different schools, all in the neighborhood. Once my wife Ester and I visited my school on Gips-strasse. We wanted to see everything. The first time I went looking for the street I didn't find it. We were then in Berlin again and I had the right address with me. We went into the school and I looked for various things there and tried to remember, but couldn't find anything.

I can't recall my brother Isi's Bar Mitzvah any more. It must have been in 1932 in Berlin.

If Hitler hadn't come we definitely would have stayed in Berlin.

## **Seizure of Power**

I want talk about the day when everything changed. After Hitler won the elections in January 1933, the Nazis immediately took through the streets, breaking windows. They wore brown uniforms and boots. I can still see it right before my eyes. The Süssapfel family lived below us. One night we

heard horrible noises coming from the Süssapfel's apartment. It woke us all up. My father was still in the pastry shop, preparing everything for the next day. Herta, our maid, quickly locked the front door. I think what I still know of it things that I both remember and things that were told to me. I can't differentiate between them. We were really anxious. Herta said that the family was being beaten downstairs, and that we weren't allowed to go out. Isi, my brother, positioned himself at our front door and wanted to hear exactly what was going on downstairs, but Herta kept chasing him away. There were horrible noises, and then all of a sudden, it was quiet. We waited a while longer, then Herta unlocked the door and went downstairs. As soon as she got back she told us that Nazi's had been in the Süssapfels' apartment and had beaten the husband and two sons: they had placed them at the wall and drove their heads into the wall. I don't know what they wanted. Herta told us the wall was red with blood. Once the Nazis left the family wanted to call a doctor for help, but no one wanted to come. Then they called an ambulance, which also didn't come. Then the father went with the two sons to a hospital by foot. They carried themselves there and were bandaged. Afterwards they came back home. No one knew at the time if the Nazis had been there officially, or if they could press charges with the police. They wanted to press charges, but were chased away. A couple of days later, I don't know who told us this, it said in the police log: Grenadier-strasse 36, 1 a.m., fight between father and two sons, sons were drunk, the people were warned that it should never happen again.

My life changed that night. I didn't know anything about politics yet, but that someone could just go into an apartment, beat the people there, and that there was blood in the apartment, is something that has stayed with me.

Everything was fine before that, and then all of a sudden something so awful happens.

The communists who lived in our neighborhood knew my father. There were also communists during this time that defected to the Nazis. Many thought my father was a communist. That's why one day in April, shortly after the horrible event with the Süssapfel's, my father was searched by the Nazis in the middle of the night. They pounded on the door. Mrs. Heinz, the doorman's wife, heard it. She immediately knew what was happening. Mrs. Heinz was Christian. We had a very good relationship with her. My father often gave her cake as a gift. My father often gave the communists cake as well. He wanted good relationships and was a very likeable man. Mrs. Heinz ran very quickly from the backdoor of the courtyard to my father's bakery and yelled: Mr. Kempler, Mr. Kempler, come quick! Then she put my father into her wood cellar and let the Nazis in.

She said: I don't know where Mr. Kempler is, I haven't seen him since midday. The Nazis stormed the bakery and cried: where is the Jew, where is the communist! They turned over all the tables and broke the machines and the furniture. Mrs. Heinz stood by and acted as though she didn't know where my father was. The Nazis left after slapping Mrs. Heinz twice across the face. My father stayed in the basement for the whole night.

Mr. Meier was a member of the Communist Party in Berlin and was among the group of Communists that would regularly visit my father. After two days we saw Mr. Meier on the street in a brown uniform. He went to the SA office and wanted to speak with the commander. He told them that the Communist Party had helped him and things were going poorly for him and his family. He was unemployed and the Communists had given him vouchers for food and coal for winter, his children got clothes and shoes and his wife a warm coat. That's the only reason he became a



member of the Communist Party. Every time he was in the Jewish café he'd get cake for his wife and children, and sometimes even tickets for the circus. He knew that Jewish capitalists were responsible for the inflation, but Mr. Kempler was not a Communist. At this point the Communists were ready to go underground. Maybe Mr. Meier one of those who didn't convert, but simply wanted to help by joining the SA and never actually abandoned his beliefs, since, for starters, he helped my father go into hiding.

There were a lot of villages in the area around Berlin. The farmers drove through the streets with horse-drawn carts and traded split wood for potato peels. Even my mother collected potato peels and traded them for wood. The farmers fed their pigs with the potato peels. All the people on our street did it.

A relative of Mr. Meier's was one of those farmers with a farm. The next day he rode his horse-drawn carriage in front of the bakery. He brought special clothes for my father. My father got into the cart and they left Berlin. My father paid him 500 Reichsmarks.

My sister Fanny was 19 at the time. She and my mother went to the English consulate, since Palestine was an English protectorate then, and procured a tourist visa for my father, which he could use to flee to Palestine. A lot of women were standing in front of the consulate, very few men, and also people from the SA. At this time the SA still had some respect for women. They would insult the few men who were standing there, but never hit them. My mother had to pay a lot of money for the tourist visa at the English consulate. That was the deposit to get my father back to Berlin. Fanny and Gusti were politically educated through the Zionist youth organization Tchelet Lavan [*Blue-White*] and immediately understood that my father needed to leave Germany quickly, because the Nazis would never stop looking for him.

My father stayed with the farmer in the village until he could take the train through Switzerland to Italy, and then take a ship from Italy to Palestine without facing any trouble with his travel papers. That was still possible at this time. The Nazis didn't have search lists for people like my father yet, that came later. Luckily, it was still crude.

My father was gone and my mother was alone with us children. I assume it was awful for her. But as a child I didn't take notice. My father's employee was still in the bakery. My mother discussed with the employee that he and she would continue baking. Customers were no longer coming into the pastry shop, but people still came into the shop, made their purchases and left again. I guess no one wanted to sit inside because it was dangerous. Because if someone sat inside, someone could have immediately said: you're also a communist.

At this time the Nazis began hunting communists and Jews. When they saw Jews on the street they would beat them. They broke windows on the streets where the Jewish businesses were. My father also took a few hits, but that was before they got really aggressive. Everything began relatively slow. It didn't start overnight – slowly, slowly!

## **Fleeing to Palestine**

My mother didn't know what was going to happen, but she understood that it wasn't going to be good. She said that either our father comes back and we go somewhere together, maybe to Poland, or my father will stay in Palestine and she'll go to him with the children. She went back to

the English consulate and asked if she could have a visa for Palestine. No, you can't have anything at all, because your husband went to Palestine on a tourist visa under the condition that he comes back, the official said. Unless he came back to Berlin my mother had no chance of getting us a visa for Palestine. She discussed it again with the official, but that didn't help. Then Fanny went to the English consulate. But even she couldn't convince the official there to give my mother a visa. So my mother decided, maybe she also consulted with friends and family, to cross Europe by train and bus, and then be smuggled into Palestine on a ferry. I was seven years old, Miriam was nine, and my brother Isi was fourteen.

My sisters stayed in Berlin. Fanny promised mother that she would look after Gusti, and that the chances to get to Palestine with the youth organization were very good.

My mother sold and gave away everything in the pastry shop. A mover helped us pack the crates for Palestine. We couldn't take furniture, of course, but other important things. The mover took everything and sent it to Palestine. My mother didn't take a lot of photos, that's why I only have a few. After our departure my sisters were looked after by the youth organization.

My mother had money for the trip. It wasn't difficult to get a visa for Czechoslovakia. Many Jews from Berlin would go regularly to Karlovy Vary for treatment at a health resort. My mother also went almost every year to Karlovy Vary.

We took the train from Berlin to Karlovy Vary. We didn't have many suitcases, two, I believe. My mother carried one, and my brother Isi the other. We arrived in Karlovy Vary without a problem. I had fun on the ride. I enjoyed it and didn't think about problems, I knew that we were going to my father.

The hotel that we went to in Karlovy Vary was rather empty since the German Jews weren't going there any more. We stayed there for about two days. I believe that my mother had an acquaintance at the hotel who helped us. We went to Prague from Karlovy Vary. My mother had connections with a Jewish organization there. We met a man in the Jewish Community office who showed us the Prague old city with the synagogues, he also showed us the Old New Synagogue and told us the story of the Golem. Many, many years later I went back to Prague, that beautiful city, a couple of times. After a few days my mother received a visa for Budapest, something that wasn't so easy. This visa was only valid for two days. We took the train to Budapest.

Budapest is a magnificent city. I also went back to Budapest a few times, and so I can't quite remember what I thought of it back then. We lived in a hotel again, and mother took care of everything. We wanted to go to Yugoslavia, and after two days my mother had the visa, which also wasn't easy. We were on the train again, this time to Belgrade.

My mother had already made a connection in Berlin with the director of the Jewish Committee in Belgrade. His name was Spitzer, I don't know what his first name was, he was Mr. Spitzer to me. He was on the managing board at the Phillips company in Belgrade, and was seemingly well-off – not rich, but well-off. He worked in a large store. Mr. Spitzer sent someone to the train station and had already rented a room for us, and everything at the cost of the Jewish Community. He said: You're our guests here! He understood how difficult our circumstances were. My mother still had money, but didn't know, of course, how much she was going to need. We were in Belgrade for three weeks



because wasn't able to get a visa for Bulgaria, despite Mr. Spitzer's help. During this time my mother and Mr. Spitzer's wife became very good friends; it was a beautiful connection. We were always invited to their place on Friday night for Shabbat dinner. After three weeks my mother succeeded in getting us a transit visa for Bulgaria.

Then something awful happened. On the Bulgarian border the Bulgarians didn't let us in, since my mother had one passport, which my sister Miriam and I were registered on. But she had nothing for my brother Isi. Isi was 14 years old at the time. He needed a passport, without a passport they wouldn't let him into the country. As I learned much later, the Bulgarians at that time were really afraid of communists and communist youth who wanted to turn Bulgaria into a communist country. And they didn't actually know if Isi was a Komsomol or if he was Mrs. Kempler's son, as he said he was. To acquire a passport for Isi, my mother would have had to go to Poland. The officials said, we're sorry, you can't come into the country if the boy doesn't have a passport. Oh God, that was horrible! The train left without us and we had to go back to Belgrade. My mother immediately called Mr. Spitzer in Belgrade. Luckily we had him! On this occasion he even sent a chauffeur to the train station. The room that we lived in was still free, and we moved back in. I guess Mr. Spitzer had sought counsel. After a few days he came by and said to my mother: there is only one solution, the boy is fourteen years old, at that age he can stay here as an apprentice. It's very normal in Europe to have fourteen-year-old boys begin an apprenticeship. I know a woodworker; he'll live there and learn woodworking. When he has a profession, he can work in Palestine on a kibbutz. He won't be alone, we'll take good care of him. Take the two children and leave the boy here. My mother began to cry, but after a couple of days she saw that there was no other solution. So she decided to leave my brother in Belgrade and go on with my sister Miriam and me. We all cried a lot.

We took the train to Sofia. Until Sofia, all the cities we'd been to had had the air of a European city. In Sofia the train station was next to a farmers' market, right in the street. There were horses and donkeys there, and the farmers sat in the street. Everything was very dirty. I had never seen anything like it. It was a whole different world, and it fascinated me. I became the leader of the family there. My mother wanted to call a taxi, which wasn't possible because all they had were horse droshkies. My mother couldn't even make herself understood. I said: wait, I'll bring you a droshky! I went to the droshky driver and led him by the hand to our suitcases.

We were only in Sofia for a short time, since there was problem getting a visa for Turkey. Our next stop was Istanbul.

Istanbul was also dirty, our hotel as well. The food was oriental and very strange. I had no problems, sometimes it tasted good, sometimes it was even delicious, and sometimes we had to laugh when we got food in the hotel. The streets in Istanbul were completely different than what I knew - narrow and curvy. And then there were the mosque roofs and minarets - all of that fascinated me. In Istanbul I was also fascinated by the Turkish bloomers the men wore. My mother had to explain it to me; I found it very intriguing. I marveled at the beautiful oriental synagogues, and there was something else there that I can remember: there was a bridge over the Bosphorus that they'd lift a couple times a day, twice maybe, so that the ships could get through. I saw it from afar and needed to get there so I could understand how it functioned. Since we had enough time, my mother went with us to the bridge the next day. That image will stay with me forever.

I was a very active child, I moved around a lot, asked a lot of questions. My sister Miriam was more of a nervous child, always clinging to our mother's apron, as they say. I ran through the streets of Istanbul and would find my way back. I was never afraid and never got lost. I really enjoyed the whole journey. We didn't know anyone in Istanbul, but I think in Belgrade or Sofia my mother got the addresses of a man in Istanbul, and she got in contact with this man. We needed to go with a smuggler from Istanbul to Syria, and then cross the sea illegally with fishermen. But we needed to get to Syria first. After a few days in the hotel in Istanbul a man showed up who promised to help us as soon as it was possible for him. But he would have to deny every having met us. A short time later a truck with boxes of fruit came, since Turkey shipped fruit to Syria. Said, the driver, wore bloomers that almost reached the ground, and I laughed a lot. First we needed to put on Arab clothing. Miriam and I were placed between the fruit boxes, and our mother sat next to the driver so that it would look as though we were a family – husband, wife, children. The uncomfortable trip lasted a number of days. The driver had friends on the Syrian border, so there was no problem – we could proceed. The man brought us to Haleb, a large city in the north of Syria. He left us at a boarding house, and then was gone. Our suitcases were also gone. We couldn't communicate – the people in the boarding house spoke Arabic and French, and my mother spoke German and Polish. The man from the boarding house didn't know how he should talk to us, and then he had a good idea. He went into the city and brought back a man, Mr. Chakim, who was from a rich Jewish family. This man and my mother were able to speak with one another, I don't know anymore whether it was German or Polish. My mother told him everything and he invited us to his house. We were given a room, and his wife gave us and our mother clothing. We had to immediately change out of the Arab things since we didn't want people to notice that something wasn't right. If someone had asked us something in Arabic, we wouldn't have understood and been able to answer. Then the police might have noticed us. After two days, I can't remember much more, I also don't know what the house looked like, the man brought us new suitcases filled with new, beautiful clothes, and he gave my mother the address of a Jewish restaurant in Beirut [*today Lebanon*]. At that time Syria and Lebanon were under French control. The restaurant owner was supposed to help us get to Palestine. He wrote a few words for him on a piece of paper, then he brought us to an Arab bus that looked like a truck. He spoke with the driver; he did everything to make sure we made it to Beirut alright. He told the bus driver exactly where he was to bring us in Beirut, and gave him food and baskets of fruit. We sat behind the driver during the trip, I watched the Arab women in their burqas – I had never seen anything like that before and was fascinated by it.

In Beirut my mother gave the note to the restaurant owner and he brought us in his car to a house in a village. The house had a heavy gate and there was a fountain in the courtyard. The restaurant owner could speak a bit of Yiddish and told us to stay there, that he would take care of everything. He came every other day and each time brought one or more Jews with him. A family from Cologne arrived, a couple with two children in our age group. We played with the children. I remember that the husband was the headwaiter in a large café in Cologne. He spoke good French, and later really helped us out.

The plan was that we would be taken to Palestine on an Arab fishing boat and the fishermen would bring us to shore.

We were in the village for two weeks. My mothers had less and less money since the restaurant owner needed more and more money for the smuggler.

Before we had left Berlin and during our travels, my mother sent letters to our father in Palestine but she didn't know if he got the letters.

We kept asking when we would be leaving and they always answered us: wait, wait, wait. Then there were about twenty of us waiting in the house in the small village. They would tell us that we'd be leaving some evening this week, and then it would be pushed back again, because of the stormy sea, for example. Until one day they said: we're leaving today! Two small busses came into the courtyard, our suitcases were tied to the roofs and then we were really off. We were to meet the Arab fishermen who were bringing us to Palestine somewhere along the cliffs by the sea.

The bus driver was afraid that we would be stopped by the police and inspected, and so they took routes over sand and stone. All of a sudden we saw headlights in the distance. The bus driver knew that it could only be the police. There was a plan for this occasion to be used now: we were a group of tourists on their way to Egypt who had deviated from the road. There were arguments between the tourists and the bus drivers about the payment. One of the bus drivers began throwing the suitcases and boxes from the roof of the bus. He screamed to the supposed tourists: we're not going any further, you can stay here! In the meantime the police had gotten out of their car and didn't know what they should make of this. First they wanted the buses to follow their car to Beirut, and explain the situation from there. The bus driver explained that the bus' motors were not in good shape. Because the police had no interest in driving behind two broken buses, they said: take the people back in the cars, and go with them to Beirut. It's not our problem that you haven't received enough money from them, but we want all of their passports. You can pick up the passports tomorrow at the police station in Beirut, then everything will be cleared up. The police collected all the passports. They counted the people and the number of passports. Once they were gone the bus drivers said: quick, quick, we'll go on without the passports! On account of the names in the passports, the police would figure out immediately that we wanted to go to Palestine illegally. The bus drivers quickly threw the suitcases from the buses again, and we drove to the sea. An Arab was waiting there and showed us the path with a flashlight. And then we were on the sea. Arab fishermen carried us through the water to the ship. Miriam and I were carried together by one Arab, he took us under his arms, Miriam under the right one, me under the left one. Even the adults were carried on the backs of the Arab fisherman. Everything needed to go very quickly. We got on the boat and were immediately underway. The aim was to bring us to Palestine as quickly as possible.

We slept on sacks in the belly of the ship. Everything smelled like fish. Many people had to throw up because of the rocky sea. No one was allowed on deck to get fresh air. It would have been too dangerous since we couldn't be seen. As we got closer to Haifa the fishermen saw searchlights that were sweeping the sea for illegal ships. They turned back to the sea. The following next night the ship was somewhere south of Haifa and the fishermen saw even more searchlights. That's how they knew exactly where the harbor in Haifa was. We needed to wait a few more days. All we had to eat was pita and olives. I didn't like the olives, they were so oily, and so I only ate the pita. That I can remember.

Someone told us later that the English really were looking for us because they knew we were coming when we didn't go to Beirut to pick up our passports. The French had understood immediately and relayed to the English that we were on our way to Palestine. On the fourth night

their search efforts had subsided a bit and our ship went closer to the beach. We were brought to the beach in a small boat. This is Palestine, the rest is your problem! They left and a couple of suitcases were also gone.

It was September. We stood on the beach, our clothes were wet. Our skin began to itch. We got undressed, laid the clothing out on the brush so that they would dry a little. It began to get dark. I was very thirsty and wanted to drink, but there was no water. We began to cry. But no one could help. The next morning the adults deliberated on what they could do. They decided that we should head south, because the Arabs had said that that is where Haifa was, and we knew that Tel Aviv lay to the south of Haifa. We didn't know how far it was to Tel Aviv. Along the sea there was a path for horses and donkeys, and we walked along it. At first we encountered no people, then we saw Arabs. They were carrying vessels. We knew that there was water in the vessels, but we were certain that they wouldn't give us any water because they were going to work and the water needed to last the entire day. We wanted to speak with them, but we only knew the word *maim*, which is water in Arabic.

They understood us and one or two of them gave us children a little water. I don't know if the adults drank, but we children drank. Then the Arabs kept going. We schlepped slowly ahead; we were tired and sad. It was awful! We kept going until we saw a tree. It was the first tree we saw – finally a little shade. And the adults decided that we'd sit under the tree and wait until someone came by, since none of us could keep going.

After some time a large, black taxi came from the direction of Haifa. We signaled. We thought that if the taxi was driving in the direction on Tel Aviv it could take one or two of us. But the taxi didn't stop. After an hour we saw another taxi, but it was heading in the other direction. We didn't lift our hands as it wasn't our direction and it drove past us. But then the car came back and stopped under the tree. Luckily for us, the father of the other two children, the waiter from Cologne, could speak French. The driver of the car understood immediately that we were illegal emigrants and drove us to Atlit – first the women and children, and then the men. In those days Atlit was a small Jewish fishing village with a few small houses. He said to us: there are Jews here. Once they saw us, the families in the houses also understood right away what was going on. They brought us into their houses, and each person immediately began recounting what happened. They spoke Yiddish, and so we were able to communicate. They were probably Russian Jews that had already been living in Palestine for a long time. They brought us food, we showered, and then it became a bit easier. We also told them that they had been lookin for us with searchlights and they said: they're looking for you, and they want you! And if they find you, who know what will happen! It's dangerous to stay here, but you want to go south anyway. Today is Shabbat, there are no more trains today, but tomorrow morning there is a train. Spread yourselves out in different compartments so that you're not conspicuous. A member of each of our families will go with you on the train; they'll help you if something happens. Luckily nothing happened. That's how we got to Tel Aviv by train.

We stood there in Tel Aviv and knew no one. You must know that at that time Tel Aviv was a small city. There was a lot of sand, but on the other hand it was also European. The houses were small and had red roofs. There were already two-story houses here and there, but they were few. And there were very few paved roads, two, three main streets, otherwise there was sand everywhere.

For example Ben Yehuda Street was only about one hundred meters long, maybe even less. The train station was on Allenby Street, and there were sidewalks to the left and right made of wooden planks so that the people didn't get stuck in the sand. That was Tel Aviv in 1933, you got stuck in sand.

There were few cars on the road, there were camels and horse-drawn droshkies. The horse-drawn droshkies had two large and two small wheels. The Arabs mainly drove the horse- and camel-drawn wagons.

My mother had tied money and a piece of paper to her body with the address of a Jewish family in Tel Aviv. We took a droshky, she gave the driver the address, but as we were riding through Nachlat Benjamin, a woman suddenly yelled "Mrs. Kempler, Mrs. Kempler, welcome, welcome to Eretz Israel!" It was Mrs. Rabinovich from Berlin. Her face was beaming. Mrs. Rabinovich and her husband had already been living in Palestine for a few years.

There weren't many droshkies at this time, and if a droshky went through the street everyone watched it. A droshky was an attraction. Other than that, droshkies always had bells, everyone heard that a droshky was coming. And that's how Mrs. Rabinovich saw our mother. We got out of the droshky, they kissed each other, and she brought us to her apartment cooked for us.

The next day they discussed, with her husband as well, who was already very much a part of the community, how they could find my father. We wanted to get to him as quickly as possible, of course. My mother actually had an address, but it was no longer correct. Mr. Rabinovich had gone there straight away, but my father wasn't there anymore. No one knew where my father was. In those days you didn't work in one place as a pastry chef, but rather one day here, another there, since no one sought cakes back then. There were bakeries, but no pastry shops. So my father worked in a different bakery every day. He had an address, but very few people knew it.

## **Tel Aviv**

I want talk a little about Tel Aviv at this time: in those days no one locked their doors, since there was no crime. Groups of people were always standing together on the streets and discussing everything. You could see people dancing at night on some of the streets, for example on Allenby Street. People from various European countries danced the Horah and similar dances. It was a wonderful atmosphere, everyone was content, despite the fact that life wasn't easy. There wasn't much food. Arabs brought bread, eggs, milk, cheese, and vegetables to Tel Aviv on camels or donkeys. The Arabs lived on a very low level. They had even less than the Jews. The relationship between the Arabs and Jews was normal at that time. Tel Aviv was a construction site, things were being built throughout the city. The Jewish construction workers made good money. They worked together with the Arabs, and learned a lot about building from the Arabs.

There were a few offices and banks, but shops were the first to develop once Jews came to the country in 1933, since up until 1933 only poor or idealistic Jews had been coming over. They hadn't brought much money and so couldn't enrich the community. But they had brought along dances and songs. After 1933 a lot of middle-class Jews with ties and better professions arrived from Germany. They had to look after themselves, and it was certainly difficult for these people. But they opened stores – groceries, clothing, shoes – the basics. A lot of Poles also came to the country at that time,

because they were afraid of what could still develop. There were two groups of Poles: a large group, the Chalutzim, and a small group, the middle class. The middle class people already had small stores in Poland. They had some money and also opened shops in Palestine. The whole atmosphere was easy. I think the atmosphere was so good, that it was stronger than everyone's worries. Of course we heard about what happened in Germany, but maybe the adults worried. I didn't notice it as a child, anyway.

Mr. Rabinovich kept looking for my father. He knew the ropes in Tel Aviv, and so the search was easier for him than it would have been for my mother. A few days later he found a bakery in the south of Tel Aviv that was already a half Arab area, and there they told him where my father was living. That was a few days after we had arrived in Tel Aviv. He came and said: I found him! My mother wanted to go to him immediately, but Mr. Rabinovich said: it's better if you go to him tomorrow.

The next morning we went there, and if Tel Aviv was poor, it was much, much poorer there. There was only sand and orange groves.

We had an address. It was a small house, but my father didn't live in the house, rather in a shack in the courtyard. We went in and we saw him. He was sleeping. He worked during the night and we arrived in the daytime. And my mother looked at him, I don't know what she was feeling and thinking. She hadn't seen him for months. At home we knew my father in a beautiful apartment, and there he was lying on an iron bed and sleeping. Good, we waited until he turned over a little, opened his eyes, and then he had an enormous surprise. We kissed and sat together and my parents talked about everything that happened in the meantime. My father wasn't in a good state: he didn't have any more money. They began to discuss what they were going to do. There were a few places in Tel Aviv for new arrivals. They were wooden shacks and the Zionist organizations gave all new emigrants a bed in these camps. They weren't rooms, they were large halls, and they distributed beds among the new arrivals so they could sleep. These people were in a much better state than my father in his room. Maybe he didn't know how to get a place. I don't know why he lived in this hole, but that's how it was.

We didn't know how things would progress. My father went to this office and asked: Can I get a place here with my family? They could accommodate all of us, but not together. In the camp there were rooms for men and rooms for women. There weren't rooms for couples. Children were housed in a village in an area near Tel Aviv until their parents had found something. It was difficult, but that's how we had to do it. Our father got a spot, our mother got a spot, and they'd meet up every morning. My father got information from Mr. Rabinovich about work possibilities, as my father had new situation since our meeting in Tel Aviv. Until that point he had only himself to worry about, and now that we found him he needed to worry about the family. He hadn't yet given that any concrete thought.

Then my father decided that we would open a restaurant – not a pastry shop, but a restaurant. A restaurant still involved food. Mr. Rabinovich continued to help him. He looked with my parents for a place for the restaurant. They found a single-story house south of Tel Aviv, in Shrunat Shapira. That was where the old bus station was. Shrunat Shapira was still under construction, and Mr. Rabinovich helped my father get credit with the bank. The building was still under construction, and my father had to fill it with chairs, tables, and appliances for the kitchen, and he began



cooking. The lower floor was made up of five rooms and a closed terrace. That was our apartment, and that's also where the restaurant was supposed to go. Two rooms were for the guests, one room was the kitchen, and we lived in one and a half rooms. Other people lived on the second floor.

At this time many farmers or people from the villages volunteered to take in children from new immigrants so that their parents could settle in. Miriam and I went to the Moshav in Nes Ziona to the Feller family. The Fellers were very, very nice to us. They were originally from Russia, but had already been in Palestine for many years. They had a large orange grove and wine, and were doing economically well there. One of their sons went to a high school in Tel Aviv. Not every one could go to high school. Most of the children at this time went to school for six or seven years, and then began to work. The Fellers' son went into Tel Aviv every day. That's how you knew that they were pretty rich.

Their family spoke Hebrew and Yiddish, but we couldn't speak Hebrew yet and the Yiddish that they spoke was a Russian Yiddish. We didn't understand it. So communication was very difficult.

We spent the whole day in the yard. There were chickens there that ran freely around the yard and the wife fed them bread and things. There were also donkeys in the yard. I wanted to get on the donkey, but would keep falling off. We were also really interested in the round oven that they baked bread in. It wasn't a European oven, the Arabs also had ovens like that, which looked like igloos. Inside was a fire, and on top of the thing they didn't bake bread, but rather a flat bread. That was the bread. Sometimes they also threw bread in, but then it was pretty thick. In those days all farmers had these ovens in their yard. They learned that from the Arabs. Miriam and I were really interested in how these ovens worked, how it functioned.

There were also various instruments for cutting vegetables. There was a lot for us to see, anyway.

Then the Fellers wanted us to go to school. Good, we went to school for one, two days. We sat there and didn't understand anything. And the children called after us "Yekkes, Yekkes" [*colloquial term in Yiddish for German-speaking Jewish immigrants to Palestine in the 1930s, and their descendants in contemporary Israel*]. The children are always rude. "Yekkes, Yekkes, Yekkes," so we didn't want to go there anymore.

Despite the fact that the whole family was good to us, it was very difficult for Miriam and me. We were there for over a month. Then Miriam and I decided that we'd go to Tel Aviv and look for our parents. But we knew that we needed money. We knew you got there with the bus, and that the trip was long, three times longer than today since there weren't any streets yet. We knew that we couldn't walk the whole way. We also knew how we could get some money. We went into a store, I can still remember exactly, and we asked the shopkeeper if he could give us money for the bus to Tel Aviv, we wanted to go to our parents. The people in the area knew everyone, and that there were two children from Germany staying with the Fellers. Everyone knew everything back then. If something happened somewhere, everyone knew. They knew us, since we walked around the village. The shopkeeper immediately knew what was going on. He said: no, I can't give you money, but stay here for a little while. Then he gave us candy. We understood that wouldn't be getting any money from him, so we said to ourselves: good, then we'll go like the Arabs.

Jews and Arabs walked along the main street in the village. We saw that the Arabs went with a stick on their backs, and hanging from the stick was a sack with their things and a water jug.

Miriam and I consulted with each other and decided to do the same. There were a lot of water jugs in the yard where we were living, and we broke a stick off from a shrub. There was a small mountain near the house with garden on it. One day after lunch, during the time when no one was there, we brought a water jug up there and hid it. We also carried up a stick, and so we were prepared.

We got up early the next day and went off in the direction of Tel Aviv. We didn't get very far. It was during the grape harvest. There were a lot of wagons that were brining grapes to the wine cellars. We left; we didn't care about that. But a farmer sitting atop a wagon stopped us. He knew immediately what we were up to. It was very obvious: two children are walking with a stick carrying water and provisions. Where are you going? He asked us. We said we going for a walk. He knew that that wasn't true, but his wagon was full of grapes. He unloaded the grapes in his cellar and then followed us. He asked us again: you're going for a walk? Yes, yes, we're going for a walk we said. You know what, I'll take you on my wagon and bring you home. It will be more comfortable for you and you won't have to walk here in the sun. Of course we didn't want to get on the wagon because we knew that it would go back. He lifted us onto the wagon and brought us home. We cried, it didn't help. From that day forward they kept a more watchful eye on us. About two weeks later our parents came and told us that they had an apartment and the restaurant would soon be open. It wouldn't be much longer before we were together again. We were very excited, and not long after our parents came and collected us. We got new clothes from the farmers and then went with our parents to Tel Aviv.

Miriam and I were happy to be back with our parents. In Tel Aviv we moved into the newly built house. Our parents bought tables and chairs, the first things for the kitchen, iron beds and mattresses. The mattresses weren't like they are today, they were just sacks filled with straw that you had to pound into shape. Since there wasn't gas or electricity, you cooked with petroleum. The petroleum always smelled really bad, but no one ever complained about it. My parents cooked German food. Our guests were the workers building the houses there. There were about twenty guests spread out over the course of a day. The people who lived nearby also came for supper. My mother always filled the plates to the brim, and everyone was so grateful to my parents. They felt very at ease and always ate well, and for so much food, didn't pay that much. But my father always said to my mother: Liebe, if you keep filling up the plates like that we're going to go broke. The workers earned money, but they couldn't afford much. And if one of them was out of work, which happened a lot, he wouldn't have the money to pay anymore and have to put it on credit. Each shop had a book where they'd write what each customer owed. Our parents filled an entire book, but many could never pay. In Israel in those days there were other ways of paying.

There were piasters and pounds. One hundred piasters were a pound. But because a lot of things were cheaper than a piaster, each shop printed or wrote their own money: a half piaster, a quarter piaster, and so in each grocery store you paid with the money that the store had produced – if you could pay. There was even a half piaster of metal. I still own a half metal piaster. This money wasn't recognized by the government. Either you would exchange a piaster for small money in the particular shop, or if you had no money at all, you'd pay on credit. We went broke after two years.

The neighborhood we lived in and where our restaurant was located was, for tax purposes, part of Jaffa. Jaffa was an Arab city and Tel Aviv was a Jewish city. The English didn't have schools for Jews; there were schools for Arabs. They said to the Jews: take care of your schools yourselves. The children from Tel Aviv could go to school for free. The city financed it through taxes and money from Europe. Since we didn't live in Tel Aviv but were part of Jaffa, my parents had to pay tuition. And that was not cheap!

It took a few weeks before everything could be cleared up bureaucratically. Then Miriam and I could finally go to school.

They built a couple of school buildings in Tel Aviv. But there weren't enough schools because a lot of people from all over the world were immigrating to Palestine. So apartment buildings were rented as from the city school buildings. For the first two years we went to the Bialik School, which was located in an apartment building between Berech Salame and Rechov Lewinsky. There was no schoolyard, so during breaks we would walk around the street. Because there weren't enough classrooms, they rented another house. That's how the schools were in those days. Miriam and I learned Hebrew very quickly. There were always around twenty children in a class together. I went to this school for two years.

The classroom language was Hebrew. The teachers came from everywhere. We had lessons in Hebrew, arithmetic, writing, reading, and biology. Biology was a very important subject. We began learning English later, but we didn't have any religion lessons. After my father learned that we weren't learning anything religious there, he said that he wanted me going to a school where you could also study religion. He found the Beit Sefer Tachkemoni school on Lilienblum Street, and I studied a lot of religion there. I went to school for eight years; for six of those years I had a lot of religion classes. But the lessons were modern, not like in a Cheder.

The kids I went to school with were from different European countries. There were also children from Germany. But at school I never spoke in German with them. I knew where these children were from, but we always spoke in Hebrew with one another.

My parents never learned Hebrew. They knew some words in Hebrew, but they conversed in Yiddish. There were a lot of people in our neighborhood who spoke Yiddish. That means that the conversational language was Yiddish. The majority of residents were from Poland and Russia. And the ones from Germany picked up Yiddish quickly, since German and Yiddish are so similar. Yiddish literature was brought over from abroad, so that was also no problem.

The general atmosphere back then was determined by the chalutzim. There was a saying: Yehudi daber evrit! [Jew speak Hebrew!] The chalutzim's goal was to have all Jews in the country speaking Hebrew. I can remember that when people spoke in Yiddish with each other on the street, the chalutzim would go up to them and say: "Learn Hebrew!" To them, Yiddish wasn't a rich language, but Yiddish stayed strong since many people couldn't learn Hebrew. The children all quickly learned and spoke Hebrew. They became real Israelis very fast. But even today there are circles where people still speak Yiddish because it's their mother tongue.

Things went well for me. There were always a lot of kids on the street and I had a lot of friends.

There were two things that had very negative economic impacts on the area. They were, firstly, the Arab Resistance [April 1936 until 1939] and, secondly, the war in Abyssinian [1937].

The Arabs wanted the Jews to disappear. In those days the Arabs didn't have heavy munitions yet, but cleavers, swords, and sticks, which they'd use on the Jews. Where they saw a Jew, they killed him. That was a difficult time. You had to guard everything: the kibbutzim and the cities. Our house was fairly close to the fence for an Arab orange grove. There were mostly stone houses in the neighborhood we were living in, but next to us was a quarter where Jews who didn't have money for an apartment lived in wooden shacks. Anyone could put up a shack there. Every night the Arabs came from the orange grove and lit bottles with petroleum and threw them at the wooden shacks. They did this for weeks, and they managed to set fire to wooden shacks. During that time the Haganah very quickly organized, and the Chaverim [*friends*] of the Haganah went into the orange groves at night and captured the Arabs before they could set fire to any more wooden shacks. Then that stopped. And then the members of the Haganah, who were armed only with canes in those days, also guarded the streets.

At this time, 1936, my parents went broke with the restaurant. We had to sell the restaurant and leave our apartment, since we couldn't pay for it any more. 1936 to 1939 was the most difficult time in Palestine. There was a lot of unemployment at this time and even young people were on the streets and starving. Many went back to Europe.

We had to move out and our family lived in one room. There was no bath, no shower, and the toilet was in the courtyard. But I didn't suffer. It was difficult back then, but it was difficult for everyone. You didn't have the sense that one person was rich and the other poor. There was only a very small class who had it better. But it was really very small. The majority was poor. Even my father couldn't get any work and we needed to count every penny. My father then set up a lift on the street – it was a big crate in which personal effects from Germany and Austria were sent to Palestine, and which often served as a first residence in Palestine – and opened a small pastry shop. He still owned a few appliances from the restaurant that he could still use. He built a table and began baking cakes. Then he sold the cakes to stores, and that's how we lived.

I'd often bring cakes to the stores with my father when I came home from school. We had two suitcases, and I can remember exactly how he and I would walk the streets to the stores. But not all the stores could buy, since they also didn't have any money.

Unfortunately it was exactly at this time that the nice Mr. Spitzer from Belgrade visited us. He came to Palestine without his family in order to take a look around. He sent greetings from Isi and told us all about my brother. Mr. Spitzer had sensed that Europe was beginning to burn and wanted to see how you could live in Palestine. He was a guest in our "hole," and that must have certainly shocked him. He went back to Yugoslavia.

Isi, our brother, came to Palestine at the beginning of 1939. We hadn't seen him for six years. During that time he had become a young man, but I recognized him immediately. We were lucky that he could still get out of there. A group was put together, and he went with this group to Palestine.

After the war we tried to find out about the Spitzer family. It was important, especially for Isi, since he felt very connected with the family and thankful for everything they had done for him. But we found no trace of the Spitzer family.

Now I want to talk about my sisters who stayed in Berlin when my mother, Isi, Miriam, and I were travelling: Fanny, my eldest sister, went to France with Hakhshara after we had left Berlin. She went to Palestine with this group, one year after us, I think. She got married in France. But it wasn't a real wedding. The English were giving out certificates for entry to Palestine, and if someone got a certificate they could also bring their spouse. So all the men and women in the group were married.

Fanny's husband, Nathan Treuherz, in Israel Nathan Tohar, was also a Berliner.

They lived with us for a short time. I remember that Nathan and I slept in the kitchen of our restaurant, and Fanny slept in the room with my parents. In Tel Aviv they got properly married by the Rabbinate. Then they relocated to a tent camp.

In Be'er Tuvia, which is a wealthy town today, tents were set up for them and they went there to work for the farmers. I spent two of my summer vacations with my sister Fanny and her husband in Be'er Tuvia. Then the whole group decided that they would found a new form of cohabitation – a mix between a kibbutz and a Moshav. Everyone could own their own house. At the beginning they continued to eat in the dining hall like on a kibbutz, and the machines belonged to everyone like on a kibbutz, everyone got the same wages and the children slept at home. They pulled it off over a considerable length of time. In 1938 they established the Moledet settlement near En Harod, which isn't far from Emeg Israel. Moledet means homeland.

Nathan was from a well-to-do family. He had a strong personality, and was the Madrich – the leader of the group – on Hakhshara in France. He had a number of important positions in Moledet as well.

The Arab Revolt was still going on when they established the settlement. The Arabs didn't want places to be settled. Already on the first night the settlers were attacked. They developed a system: Choma u Migdal, which means wall and tower. Before the settlers began building the settlement, everything was prepared accurately. Parts of wooden shacks were loaded onto a truck. That always happened early in the morning. Kibbutzniks [*the inhabitants of a Kibbutz*] and members of Haganah were mobilized for this day in order to protect the settlers from attacks.

The settlers arrived with two trucks carrying the tower, wooden walls for the wall, and the parts for the barracks. Wooden walls were put up all around to protect the settlement. Two wooden walls were erected parallel to one another with a distance of around a half meter around the whole settlement, which came to about fifty meters. The space between the walls was filled with rocks, and cement was poured in-between the rocks. While one group of settlers – maybe ten to fifteen young people – put up the walls, the other set up the barracks between the walls, as well as the watchtower, which was placed in the middle and was about five or six meters high. The tower was brought as a whole piece. That's how settlements were back then – maybe two, three wooden barracks, the tower, and the surrounding wall.

Not just the Arabs, but also the English, wanted to prevent the settlements, but there were so many of these places. The English police came in the evening, but they couldn't do anything: the official laws in Palestine were still the old Turkish laws. That means the English followed the Turkish

laws. There was one law that stated that, if someone illegally builds a house and if the house already has a roof, then it can no longer be torn down. The roof had to be put on very quickly. So people built many, many wooden houses. You couldn't build a stone house like that, but you could build wooden houses pretty quickly. When the English heard what was happening during the day, there were already roofs on the wooden houses by the time they got there and they couldn't say anything anymore. On the first night the Arabs attacked and fired at these settlements, but they couldn't get in because the settlement was guarded. The settlers weren't allowed to have weapons. The highest Jewish organization and the English government spoke, and the Jews said: you know that the Arabs are attacking Jews and that many Jews are being murdered. That doesn't look good for you. You have to give us the possibility to defend ourselves. Otherwise the world will look down upon you. They found a compromise: a troop was formed, the ghaffirs. These were auxiliary police officers trained by the English. They also received weapons but weren't allowed to shoot them. Each settlement received around six ghaffirs, but they were limited in what they could do. On every tower there was a large searchlight powered by a generator, and each night they swept the area. There were also Morse code devices. It was possible to establish light contact between the settlements and the kibbutzim. That means that every night the guards exchanged information using searchlights and Morse code. There were courses back then to teach the younger people how to do it. There still weren't any children in the settlements, but there were in the older kibbutzim and the older ones were familiar with the communication. It worked well.

For the first night there was no protection in Moledet. But on the second day six settlers registered as ghaffirs with the English. They were given uniforms with tall caps [*Heb. kolpak*] and weapons. They quickly completed a course, but since they were already members of the Haganah, they knew everything even without the course. But they acted as though they didn't know anything. These six were then the police for the settlement, and my brother-in-law Nathan was corporal. The ghaffirs weren't allowed to work in the settlement, since they were being paid by the English. The English would often drive around and check on the ghaffirs. But the ghaffirs were needed in the settlement as workers. The tower was also occupied during the day and whenever the person in the tower saw the English police in the distance, he would whistle and the six would quickly run to their rooms.

Nathan came from a family that had lived for many, many years in Germany and thus felt German. Nathan's father had been an officer in the German Army during the First World War and was killed. And Nathan's mother was very proud that her husband had fallen for Germany. That was the atmosphere in Germany back then! Nathan had studied law and was supposed to have become a judge. But he became a Zionist and fought a lot with his mother. His younger brother, Zwi, who had studied mechanical engineering, also became a Zionist and fled to Palestine in 1939. Their mother stayed in Berlin because she felt German. Nathan read to my sister Gusti some of the letters his mother wrote to him from Berlin. In every letter there was one subject: leave the Jews in Palestine, come back, your country is Germany. I don't know whether or what he responded. His mother couldn't flee anymore; she was killed.

Nathan's brother – he was also called Tohar in Israel – also came to Moledet. He had only been there for a short time when the war began. He signed up for the English Army, and because he was a mechanical engineer, the English, who were looking for those kinds of people, sent him to South Africa. He became a pilot there. At the start of the War of Liberation, Israel didn't have an airport, just small airplanes and hardly any pilots. He was the only one who had already had many hours of



flying and could then be appointed as a flier. EL AL was founded after the War of Liberation and he was one of the first pilots. I am very proud of him, because when Mossad [*Israeli intelligence service*] brought Eichmann from Argentina to Israel, Zvi was the pilot of the airplane. That was the first plane to fly directly from Argentina to Israel. It was dangerous because of the length of the flight. But he did it!

My sister Gusti came to Palestine in 1934 with the youth Aliyah. Gusti came with the first group from Berlin, which was organized by Henrietta Szold. Gusti and her group – they had already been together in Berlin – went directly to En Harod. From there she wrote to our parents: I am in En Harod and feel very good here, come visit. Back then it took a whole day to travel from Tel Aviv to En Harod. Today it takes an hour and a half. There was no road from Tel Aviv to Haifa. There was only one possibility: you had to go from Tel Aviv to Jenin, which is in the mountains in Palestine, and then to Nablus, and then by car from Nablus to Haifa, from Haifa to Afula, and then from Afula to En Harod. It was also possible to go by train, but that was even more complicated. Our mother then went to the kibbutz and you can imagine how that was for her. She finally had her child in her arms again. She stayed for two days and didn't like it. She was appalled with the life she saw there. The food was strange for her and she found the life the youth there had together off-putting. And the dirt she saw was not for her. Then she also heard that everything belonged to everyone, that no one owned anything for themselves, not even clothes. You were given clean laundry, shirts and pants once a week – that's how life was. Gusti was very enthusiastic, but my mother didn't understand it at all. How can you have no linens, no clothes? And my mother then started taking charge of Gusti again and told her she was to come to Tel Aviv. But Gusti wouldn't hear of it, she was 17 and wanted to stay with her friends and work and the evenings where they sat together and sang. Gusti stayed for a while in the kibbutz until she noticed that life there wasn't only nice. Then she listened to our mother and came to Tel Aviv a few months later. Our mother went and picked her up. She came to Tel Aviv with nothing. She didn't have a dress; she had nothing. She lived with us, of course. She took a position as an assistant in an office. One day Gusti visited our sister Fanny in Be'er Tuvia. There she met a boy who then became my second brother-in-law. Friedel Bär, everyone called him Bobby, was also from Germany, from Leipzig. He was an attractive man, he had even been a boxer. He, like my brother-in-law Nathan, also came from a well-to-do family. His father and his father's older brother had run a fur trade. They even exported fur to America. The father and uncle often went to Poland and Russia and bought furs there. Bobby had one or two brothers in Palestine, and one sister, but she didn't want to stay here. She went to America. Things went well for her in America. I don't think any of them are still alive. My sister became pregnant straight away and went to Bertuvia. Fanny and Gusti were then living with their husbands in Bertuvia.

As Fanny, Nathan, and their friends wanted to set up the settlement in Moledet, Friedel wanted something of his own. He was more of a capitalist; he wanted to own something. He stayed with Gusti in Be'er Tuvia and rented a house. He worked on a farm and earned good money. He had a lot of initiative and worked well and frequently as a tractor driver. As soon as Friedel had the money he bought his own house, two cows, and chickens, and then operated his own farm in Sha'ar Hefer. Sha'ar Hefer is close to Netanya. When the Second World War began, all men in Israel were called to the English military or the Haganah. At that time the English already had interest in the Haganah, not officially, but they weren't fighting anymore. They were even able to mobilize

Friedel, my brother-in-law. Though he stayed in Israel and guarded the country, since the German General Rommel and his troops got very close to Israel. My sister was then alone with all the work and it was very hard for her, since she was sick. She had a type of malaria with constant fever attacks. One day, I was 14 and was in the last grade, my mother went to the director of the school. She asked him to let me take some time off to help my sister with work. Since I was a very good student, the director and teachers agreed. So for the last three months I wasn't at school, but still received my diploma. I went to Be'er Tuvia and helped my sister on the farm.

Gusti's son Jakov was born in Bee'r Tuvia. He was very sick, he had a severe muscular disorder and died at the age of 21. Gusti's daughter Miriam was born in Sha'ar Hefer. Miriam had a bad kidney disease. She died in Sha'ar Hefer in 1996. Friedel died in 2005 and Gusti died in 2008.

Fanny had three daughters. Ester was born in Moledet in 1939. She became a nurse and lives today in Kfar Yehoshua. Edna was born in 1945. She was a nursery school teacher in Moledet and still lives there today. Daphna was born in Moledet in 1950. She worked in Moledet and is still living there. Fanny died in the 1990s; Nathan had already passed in the 1980s.

I was a member of the youth organization Noar Oved. That's where I met my wife, Ester. Ester had been born in Palestine. Her father was a baker. His name was Elisha and had come to Palestine in 1920, two years after the First World War, with a Zionist group from Poland. He was the only Zionist in his family. His parents were very orthodox and cast him out. I already talked about that. His father was called Shaul Chernebroda and his mother was called Tamar. Chernebroda is Polish and means black beard. In Palestine Ester's father took the name Yechezkel. Yechezkel is one of the prophets. Ester's father had eight siblings. His parents and all his siblings were murdered in the Holocaust. Ester's mother came to Palestine shortly after him; her father died in Poland. Ester's parents had already known each other in Poland and were married. They had decided that Ester's father was to go first to Palestine, and that Ester's mother would come shortly thereafter. Ester's Uncle Shimon, her Aunt Rosza, and her grandmother Ahuva also came to Palestine. Three of her mother's siblings stayed in Poland and were murdered.

The members [*Heb. Chaverim – friends*] of our organization would always go the very poor places, gather the small children and play with them, since back then there were no official institutions for young children yet. We were fourteen years old at the time. Ester was one of the leaders. Since that time we've stayed together – over sixty years. I liked her, but fourteen-year-olds are still too young. That developed later.

At the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, that was 1944, we heard news about the events in Europe. One day, information came from the Warsaw Ghetto from the Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum. He was known around the world. He was with his wife and son in the Warsaw Ghetto and managed to smuggle information about the Ghetto – he has set up an archive in the underground – to London. The news came to Israel from London. The Jewish politicians, the officers of Va'ad Leumi [*the Jewish National Council (JNC), or council of Jewish people, was the national authority of the Jewish community during the time of the British Mandate*] and the Sochnut [*Jewish Agency (Zionist Organization with government function in Jewish Palestine before 1948)*] didn't want too much fuss in Palestine, and so they didn't want these crimes to become known. Those were political reasons. The leader of our left-leaning organization had been good friends with Ringelblum in Poland, who was hunted out of his hiding place with his wife, son, and others in

hiding, and shot. He said: We need to “stir things up” a bit in Tel Aviv, it can’t be that no one here knows what’s happening in Europe. He sent off all the young people from our organization. We took to the streets, went to all the cinemas and theaters, gatecrashed the theater performances. We interrupted the films and performances, went up to the front and talked about what was happening in Warsaw. That was the first time that we understood what had happened to the Jews. That all happened in one evening. The reaction was very strong, it created a great stir. And then, bit by bit, slowly, slowly, we learned more.

## **After the War**

After the war there were a lot of Jewish soldiers that had been in the English military during the war and had gone through Europe with military vehicles. And everywhere they met Jews they found them physically and mentally shattered. They brought many of these Jews, many of whom were survivors of the concentration camps in Poland, to DP camps in Germany. From Israel they organized mapilim [*illegal transports/illegal ships*] to bring the people to Palestine. That means that the Jews in Palestine did everything they could from this position. They wanted to bring all Jews to Israel. People were afraid that what happened could happen again. After the murder of the European Jews, there was no longer a safe place for Jews in Europe. All of them should come to Israel. That was the right attitude! But the English, the occupying power, were against it. They tried to intercept the ships at sea. There was a battle between the English and us. It was a hard fight, but the English couldn’t prevent these poor people from going to the only country in the world to offer them security.

Many that came didn’t talk about what they experienced. They didn’t want to burden their families. There are thousands of families in which the parents were married here, built a new life, and didn’t talk about what happened to them. Those are private things. The government and schools did everything to ensure that everyone in Israel knows what happened. Every year many schoolchildren travel to Auschwitz; it’s been like that for a while, not just in recent years. I have gone with students to Auschwitz a few times myself. I was also with Israeli students at the first “March of the Living,” since back then I was the director of all vocational schools in Tel Aviv. We traveled through many camps in Poland and the students were very distressed. A boy wrote a whole page of curse words in the guestbook in Auschwitz, he was so distressed. A whole page of curse words, the poor boy! I saw it and asked him: what are you doing there? He said: I have to bring it all out.

When my brother-in-law returned to Be’er Tuvia I went back to Tel Aviv. We didn’t have any money for the high school, it was very expensive. So my father and I decided that I would attend a vocational school. But there weren’t any real vocational schools. I wanted to be an electrical mechanic, and so we decided I would become an apprentice in a workshop. We found a placement for me. There were two German brothers, I think they were called Illenberg. One brother was an electrical technician or engineer. He had studied at the AEG in Berlin. These brothers were able to teach me a lot through German efficiency and trained me in precision. That enabled me to advance very quickly. I don’t want to boast, but I do have a talent for electrical engineering. We mostly repaired generators. That was still during the war and there were no raw materials. We took parts from old machines, but there was no copper and we needed a lot of copper wires. It was very educational for me to replace these copper wires through various combinations. I worked and was

otherwise very active in the Zionist party Poale Zion Smol; I was always busy! Ester and I were always together in the party, then we fell in love.

For years my mother made noodles. Father helped her make the dough, since that was the most physically arduous work. Then she rolled the dough out on plates on our beds, cut it with scissors, and dried it out in the sun on blankets in the courtyard. She packed the noodles in bags made of newspaper and sold them in shops or to neighbors. That was the family's source of income. My parents wanted to move out of the quarter where we were living. It wasn't easy for them there, but there wasn't enough money for another apartment. Isi, who came to Tel Aviv in 1939, first went to Moledet where my sisters had been living. But when the Second World War began in September 1939, he went immediately to the military, since he really wanted to fight the Germans. Isi was in Egypt for the whole war. After the war Isi returned to Tel Aviv and received aid from the state. Back then everyone got points for specific groceries, since there was so little. Isi, as liberator, had a privileged position. He could officially buy more food. At the time my father had been renting a shop again and my brother could provide him with the items he needed for the baked goods, like sugar and flour. My father was able to begin baking and selling cakes again, and that was very good for his self-confidence. My parents could then buy a small apartment, not far from the former central bus station in Tel Aviv.

After the war Isi was a carpenter, he had trained in Belgrade, and owned a workshop in Ramat Gan, where he lived with his family. He was married to Desi, a survivor of Auschwitz. That was a Shidduch [*system of matchmaking in Orthodox Jewish communities*]. They had two children: David was born in 1960 and Shaul in 1963. They lived in Ramat Gan, on Rehov Bialik. Desi only survived the concentration camp because the warden of the camp thought she was dead when they were in their barrack. So she remained lying down. She was a Greek Jew from Theassaloniki. She was a nurse. It was a difficult relationship because Desi, after everything she experienced in the concentration camp, was very difficult. The apartment was always underwater when you visited her. She felt compelled to constantly keep everything clean, but that was the least of it.

Isi died in the early 1990s and Desi died in 2008. Today David is living in Ganei Tikva and Saul lives in Ramat Fan.

In 1944 my sister Miriam married the Polish Jew David Vinograd, in Israel he was called David Anavi. When Miriam was 21 my mother found out that Polish soldiers had arrived in Tel Aviv. My mother looked for a husband for my sister among these soldiers. She liked David the most.

David was born in Lodz in 1915. He had three sibling, Aron, Hadassa, and Dvora. His father, Elieser, was a bookkeeper. His mother, Chava, was a housewife. David was trained as a textile engineer. When the Russians arrived in Poland following the Hitler-Stalin Pact in which Hitler and Stalin divided Poland, David was already a soldier in the Polish Army in the areas occupied by the Red Army. At first the Russians locked him up, but released him shortly thereafter. He fled to the Soviet Union. First he worked in a children's village. There was famine in the Soviet Union, but people tried to protect the children at least. There my brother-in-law found out that his father and older siblings had also fled to the Soviet Union from Poland. His father managed to get to David in the children's village. His siblings found work in a town 40 kilometers from the children's village. His father told him that their mother and Dvora, the youngest sister, had stayed in Lodz. His mother didn't want to go into the unknown and Dvora didn't want to leave her mother alone. A German

neighbor looked after them until they were deported to Auschwitz and murdered. He found out about that much later. His father was very sick, and as the Germans were approaching he fled with David. But he didn't have any more strength and said farewell to his son in order to return to the village. That broke David's heart forever; he never saw his father again. His siblings Aron and Hadassa never saw him again either.

He became a soldier with the Polish armed forces in the Soviet Union. This army fought together with Allied forces. They went as far as Persia, Iraq, and Gaza. In Gaza many Jewish soldiers deserted to Palestine – David too. For the first year David was in the kibbutz Sarid. That was a very, very left-wing kibbutz. There were many fanatical Stalinists there who didn't believe David when he said anything about the Soviet Union and would attack him. That's why he left the kibbutz and when to Tel Aviv where he eked out a living with occasional jobs, mostly on construction sites. The hard labor made him sick. Then he met Miriam.

Miriam had two daughters. Chava, named after David's mother, was born in Tel Aviv in 1946, and Ilana was born in Beersheba in 1950. In 1962 David and Miriam moved with their family to Kiryat Ono and David worked as a city administrator. Chava lives with her family on the kibbutz Dvir in the Negev, and Ilana lives with her family in Vienna. Miriam died in 2001 and David died in 2004.

Family and friends came to our wedding. It had a wonderful atmosphere. We danced and it was very fun. Of course my father, as a pastry chef, baked the cake –beautifully decorated cakes. One of these cakes had two or three layers; that was the main cake. One of our friends decided that this cake belonged to him and, during the wedding, snatched the cake away and ate it. We were so proud of this cake and then it was just gone. We photographed the cake. We still have the photos. We've been married now for 62 years. On the evening of our 62nd wedding anniversary my son brought us to a small hall and we were surprised to find the whole family and good friends gathered there. As we arrived, everyone began clapping. Our children organized it. That was really very lovely! But the next surprise was that, during the celebration, my grandson and granddaughter arrived with a giant cake designed to look like the stolen cake from our wedding.

After the wedding I continued to work and was also very active in the Haganah. All the young people were organized there. Then the War of Liberation began in 1947, overnight, when the UN decided that the state of Palestine was to be divided into two states. People say the war began in May of 1948, following the call for the state of Israel, but there was already war. It's true that the war began the night from the 29th to the 30th of November, 1947. I was immediately mobilized. It had been bubbling up constantly, but there was war on the night of the decision. The Arabs shot at all the highways in the country, at Jewish cars. We already had munitions and were prepared. The military didn't just need soldiers who could shoot, but specialists. I was a specialist for motors and generators. There were very few materials and we had to keep trying to piece things together. I had various kinds of motors and generators that were broken, and had to put parts from various machines together in order to make a generator. The generators were important for lots of things, like camps and hospitals. It was our luck that the English military, and other smaller military troops that were here during the Second World War and withdrew between 1945 and 1947, had been well-equipped and left their camps here. They had taken the good equipment with them, but they left all the broken equipment here. It was my task to put the machines together. My friends in the military would always laugh, they would say, you've crossed a cow with a sheep. I had a knack for



being able to see fairly quickly how you could build a machine out of other machines.

In 1948 Jerusalem was divided between Jews and Arabs. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been on Mount Scopus since 1925, and back then there was also the large Hadassah Hospital. Until 1967 the mountain was an Israeli enclave in the Arab/Jordanian territory in eastern Jerusalem. On April 13th, 1948, one month before the founding of the State of Israel, an Israeli logistics convoy was attacked by the Arabs en route to the hospital. The British Army only intervened after six hours. 77 Jewish doctors, nurses, and patients were killed in the ambush. Afterwards the hospital was relocated to Ein Karem in western Jerusalem. The original hospital on Mount Scopus was first re-opened in 1967. Mount Scopus was surrounded by Arabs. When the war came to end in mid-July 1949, the UN had intervened and decided that the Jews were to stay on Mount Scopus. There were university buildings there and it was difficult to guard them. You had to go through the Arab territory in order bring supplies to the people there, which was only possible with UN vehicles. There were Israeli soldiers on the mountain to guard the residents. The Arabs demanded there be no soldiers up there. That's why we called them police officers - but of course they were soldiers. Every two weeks UN trucks drove up and brought all the things the people up there needed to live. The soldiers on Mount Scopus were regularly replaced. To better protect the people, it was decided that the mountain was to be fenced in with barbed wire. Of course the Arabs didn't allow barbed wire to be brought up to Mount Scopus.

One day - I was working as a teacher in a vocational school then - an officer came who had been my superior in the military and said: Hillel, I need you urgently. You have to take leave from the school. There was such an idealistic atmosphere back then, and of course I wanted to help when needed. So they brought me up one day when the soldiers were being replaced on Mount Scopus. There was a giant library up there at the university, and people in civilian clothes also went to this library. We drove up Mount Scopus in a UN truck. As we got to the top the officer, who was also wearing plainclothes, called to me: come Hillel, we need electricity, you have to help us. There was a large square with burned out and broken cars, broken motors and such things. A metalworker and mechanic were also there. I found various parts and crossed "cows with sheep," and built a generator. The mechanic found a gas motor among the broken cars and we fit them together. It turned and in the evening we had electricity. The Arabs and UN were surprised. The officer called me again in the evening and said: Hillel, what you did was very good. But we want something better. And he said that an engineer from a barbed wire factory would be coming, he would bring a very small machine to produce barbed wire. The engineer had taken apart the machine and smuggled the parts onto the bus we rode in. An engineer in Tel Aviv had invented this machine. These strange machines were in the basement. How do you produce wire? You pull a course wire through a machine with a diamond, the hardest material there is, and the wire becomes thinner, you keep at it, and the wire gets thinner and thinner. There was also another very small machine that looked like a sewing machine. You pulled the wire through this machine with two thinner ones on the side. For that we needed another motor I built, and everything worked. It rotated and we could see the barbed wire coming out of the machine. We were very impressed! I was then renowned and received a wonderful thank-you letter from the chief of military engineering. I was very pleased! I could only do it because I had so much experience with generators.

The war lasted a total of one and half years. There were also breaks - there was war for a few months, then several weeks of rest, and then it started up again.



Our son Yigal was born on November 3rd, 1949. At that time I was still in the military, but the war was almost over. I could come always come home in the meantime. Our son was a great joy for the whole family, and I was very happy. We didn't have an apartment yet. We rented a room until I was discharged from the army. There was no kitchen. A man and a woman had a three-room apartment and rented out one room. That was very normal in Tel Aviv in those days. That's where our son was born. We bought our house in 1950. But it didn't look like it does today. You can't imagine how it looked. The house had 30 square meters and was a quarter of what it is today. We added a lot to it.

My son Yigal was married in 1973. Sarah's parents came to Israel from Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. They came on a ship that the English sent back, but they returned. That was between 1945 and 1947. At that time many ships were arriving to the country with Jews. They, just like us, arrived to the country illegally, but many Jews could help them at that time. When they came from the ships they were immediately distributed to various places. Sarah's parents went to a kibbutz. They stayed there; they liked it there.

My son works as a manager for an organization that looks after seniors. Sarah works for the health insurance agency. Their children are called Omri and Dganit. Omri is 36 and Dganit is 33. She is a manager at Tnuva, the oldest and largest dairy firm in Israel.

Once I was discharged from the military I first went back to my old job. I was an officer in the military, I gave orders. And when I was discharged from the military I didn't feel good anymore in the workshop. I worked there for a few months and then someone I knew from the military offered me the opportunity to manage a small factory where new motors were being built. I was supposed to organize the work there. I was an expert, I wanted to do something proper, and he wanted to make money. So I became independent. There was a room through my father's bakery where I set up a small workshop. I was a good worker but a bad businessman. I knew that it wasn't for me. A friend told me that an electricity course was being set up in the Shevach technical vocational school on HaMasger Street in Tel Aviv. That was just the thing for my disposition. I liked it there and worked as a teacher there from 1952 to 1977.

My father died in 1954, he was 67. He never owned a pastry shop again, but he had a bakery and worked as a pastry chef almost until the very end. His bakery was located near the old bus depot. It was a great relief for him, since he didn't have to walk through the streets with his suitcase. He even had employees who brought and sold everything. Life in Israel at that time was a bit easier; you could buy more.

My daughter Diza was born in 1955. For 25 years Diza has been living with her husband, Chaim. They aren't married and have no children. Both are doctors – she in geophysics and he in astrophysics. Ester says he looks to the heavens and she to the earth. Neither of them works in their professions. Besides Australia, she's been everywhere you can as an Israeli. Currently my daughter is in Peru. When he's not abroad, Chaim works in a planetarium in Mitzpe Ramon, a town in the Negev desert. Both my daughter and son-in-law like reading and have a large library. My daughter is also interested in family history.

## **Post-War Events**

The Communist Party was illegal under the English, but during the time of the Second World War they were no longer persecuted. At that time we were inspired by the Russians, the Russian military, and the Russian battles against the Germans. We also knew a lot of Russian songs. With the founding of the State of Israel, the Communist Party was legal. Ester and I weren't actually in the Communist Party, but the Zionist party Poale Zion Smol was a left-wing party. Our opinions and those of our party changed when we learned about what happened and what was still happening in Russia from Khrushchev's speech during the 20th CPSU party convention in 1956. Everything we had believed in was a lie. Communism was a nice dream, nothing more.

On October 29th, 1956, the Suez War with Egypt began. I was on the border to Sinai; they needed me, but they didn't need my skills as an electrical engineer any longer, since they already had motors and generators. After the Suez War with Egypt, my work as a teacher became somewhat boring. I wanted new task, a bit of variety. There was the possibility to go to Eliat for a large construction company. Back then Eliat was a rock desert on the Red Sea, and they wanted to build a city there. They therefore needed to establish an electricity department for the construction company. They came to me and said I was the right man for the job. I don't know who from the construction company went to the director of my school and convinced him to let me go. In any case, I was released, since the work in Eliat was important for the whole country, more important than my work as a teacher in a school. I was very pleased. They said: leave your family here in Tel Aviv and work there. But I said: We're going together. I packed our furniture onto a truck and we drove down. That was 1957. In Eliat there was only desert and a few houses. We lived in one of these little houses. We were on the sea in the middle of the desert. We had a wonderful life there, like a return to the spirit of beginnings.

It is very hot in Eliat. For example you would attach a thick layer of grain in the window frame with a wire, then water would be sprayed down from above - and that was the cooling. Around a thousand people lived there at this time and they began building a city in the desert. We were a commune; we sat together, ate together, the children slept at their friends' houses. We went to the sea every evening. It was a wonderful life; very primitive and very beautiful. Everyone was happy there. After a year and a half we returned to Tel Aviv and I went back to teach at my school

On May 31st, 1962, Adolf Eichmann was hanged in Israel. His body was burned and his ashes were scattered in the sea. The whole country was stirred up during the Eichmann trial. People were talking about it for a long time, but now it's gone. Israel is still looking for Nazis today, but people don't talk about Eichmann anymore. I don't know what students at school know about Eichmann. Since 1951 there has been a memorial day in Israel to commemorate victims of the Shoah on 27 Nissan, Yom HaShoah. I hope that people talk about Eichmann then.

The Six-Day-War was in 1967. That was a short war, only six days long. I was in Beersheba then. I was with a troop of older people. Officially we were soldiers, but we didn't need to fight on the front line. We helped younger soldiers, who could then fight. I was with the military for two, three months. They didn't want to discharge me, since a lot was damaged by the war and they needed my expertise to repair large machines.

One day the city of Tel Aviv was seeking a director for all technical colleges. I was an autodidact, had read a lot of books, but I didn't have an official education, no papers. As a director you needed a certificate from the university, and I didn't even have my high school certificate. Despite all that,

I was the right man for the position. I knew that if I wanted to get ahead, I needed to study. While I was still a teacher at the school I began studying at home and completed the university entrance qualification. Then I went to university. Luckily I could arrange that. I drove back and forth between work at the school, back then I only had courses a few days a week, and the university. There was also the summer semester, and so I studied the whole summer. Then I completed university and, starting in 1977, was able to take over the direction of all technical colleges. That was, again, the right work for me at that moment in time. I joyfully performed the job until my retirement in 1990.

Ester also worked. She was a teacher and for twenty years she taught courses in artistic handicrafts and drawing for adults at a club twice a week. The rest of the time she looked after our children.

The Yom Kippur War began on October 6th, 1973. That was a hard war. They were many dead on both sides. I was already 48 and was exempt from the military service due to sickness, my heart was no longer so healthy, and age. But I wasn't totally exempt. There were also civilians in the military. You were there for ten more years. That's changed somewhat now. You live perfectly normally as a civilian, but if an order comes, you are immediately mobilized. Every quarter has civic people, even women are part of it, who have many duties. In this area I was supreme commander of a group of older civil soldiers. During these times of war the schools are always the centers. If anything happens, we are the first aid. We need to be in all places in order to organize help, with calling the fire department or ambulances, for example. We needed to do everything for the civil population so that the military is free from these duties. We were like the police, but in war. Some of us were also chauffeurs for the military commanders or ambulance drivers.

The Yom Kippur War was also my son's first war. It wasn't nice that my son was in the war. But that's how it is, you have to live with, and you live with it.

1973 to 1975 was a difficult time, but there was no official war. That was primarily in the region of Sinai. Both sides were firing at each other. Arab murderers snuck into Israel at night, usually into villages, where they murdered people and set houses on fire. Then our counter-strikes began. We snuck into Arab camps and attacked Arab officers. It was a silent war, but many people were murdered.

My mother died in 1974. She was 86 years old.

In 1982 there was the fifth Arab-Israeli War; that was the first Lebanon War. The terrorists came at night over the borders into Israel from Lebanon and Jordan. I wasn't in this war, but my son was a parachutist. Even my daughter was in the military. She is an officer and was given a fairly high rank. She was already in the military during the war in Lebanon, but she wasn't in the war. She was voluntarily in the military for a few years.

We should not have fought the last Lebanon War. That just made us bad in the world. Firstly, we lost, and secondly, the Arabs, since they won, were completely ecstatic and therefore believe that they are now the strongest. And that is not good, because now they have more courage and venture to do things they wouldn't have done before.

We Israelis had a lot of dreams. For the first years I was here, all the radicals were not religious. Back then the belief was in having our own country, that all Jews would live in this country – the

dream. There were very few religious Jews at first. Devout Jews I characterize as the Jews with black suits who are constantly fighting to have people observe all God's laws. But slowly there are more and more of them. For example: most of these devout Jews lived in Poland before the war. They were always against the young people going to Palestine. They always said we had to wait until the Messiah comes, and then we will all go to Israel. But as long as he doesn't come, it's not possible. It was so bad in Poland that families split up. When a daughter or son from a family said that they were going to Israel, they were thrown out. Ester's father was from a family like that. They were very, very religious. And once he was gone, they broke all contact. That's why we only have relatives from Ester's mother's side of the family. There are none from her father's side. After the war more and more devout Jews came to the country from the East. Some of these very devout Jews even refuse to speak Hebrew. They only speak Yiddish with each other – until the Messiah comes. There aren't many, but they create quite a stir. Many people in Israel, around 80 percent, say: I am not religious, but I believe in something. It's good that way.

On average, the Knesset says this as well, roughly 20 percent are religious. But that includes all levels of religious. That means, that when someone goes to the synagogue on Shabbat, or at least on the High Holidays, and doesn't lead a religious life but knows that you don't eat bread over Passover and never goes to a restaurant that doesn't serve kosher meat, they are partly devout, and I count them among the devout.

And then there are many that aren't devout but tell themselves it can't hurt to go to synagogue on Yom Kippur or if I don't smoke on Saturday and only go to kosher restaurants. And these give the devout their strength. It's by saying, I'm not like that, but I don't have anything against it, that they become more widespread. And there will be more and more. They have very religious schools [ *Heb. Jeshiva, pl. Jeshivot* ], and they have a lot of money, since they get money from the state and support from America. That's how they can study and don't have to work. They do everything to get students from all over the world. They offer a lot of things free of charge, like food and clothing; that's how they attract people. And because they have so many children, they get a lot of money and are becoming stronger and stronger. The anti-religious are maybe about ten percent. They fight against these devout Jews, but the force sent out by this ten percent is too weak. They can't prevent very much. Various religious laws have been made, like, for example, that we don't have buses on Saturday, on Shabbat. They enacted these. Everything has to be closed on Yom Kippur. Legally! Not just through faith, but it has to be like that by law. All life has to be kosher. They have to affix their stamps. We can't do anything. We have to live with it.

A few weeks ago the police found a book in which a few Rabbis wrote about how to kill the Arabs. They took various laws from Judaism and read into them that there is an order from God to kill the Arabs. You're even supposed to murder Arab children; that would be an order from God. They are extremists. And I fear they're increasing. The Rabbis are to be put on trial. The police ordered them, but they don't want to come. I heard that on the radio today.

The Workers' Party and the Likud Party need the religious to govern, since the religious tip the scales. The very religious believe that God gave us Israel. We are more or less the half – the right with the devout and the left with the rest of the population, who are somewhat more intellectual. The intellectuals are somewhat fearful that the right is getting stronger.

I don't want the devout to go into politics. I am for them living as they want, but they should leave the others alone and not be in charge of them. Around 80 percent think as I do. Marx and Lenin wrote in their papers that religion was opium for the people. You can still tell fairytales to the people coming from the eastern countries, they still believe in all sorts of things. Even they are giving the devout their voice, and with it their power. I am afraid that Israel will become even more religious. I am also afraid that the religious, if we want to live with the Arabs now, will become the problem on the Israeli side. But what can you do, they live in their own world.

I think that Sharon should have perhaps only given back a part of the Gaza Strip. We got out and didn't get anything for it. How it happened is not good. The Golan Heights, for example: it's obvious that we will give back a part. There are various plans. One plan would be: Jews, who want to, will stay there and live with the Arabs. I think that's realistic. I think that when there is peace, but real peace, they can live together. If there is that kind of peace, then the countries can develop. But the main thing is, is that we have to stay here, the headquarters must be here in Israel. That means that Jerusalem remains our undivided capital, since we have so many historic sites in Jerusalem. Even the Arabs have historic sites there, they should also be able to be there. But they don't agree. That is the problem. I think they would have agreed, since we agreed on a lot of points before the Lebanon War. For example there is a large Arab village next to Jerusalem, and in this village they built a giant building on the border to Jerusalem. The building is supposed to be a seat of government for the Arabs. They've even built an industrial center for Arabs and Jews, where they can work and invest together. Arab industrialists also want the industry to develop, and they know that it will be more successful with the Jews.

For a time we lived well together. The problem is that, around the world, the radicals among the religious are becoming more radical and stronger. If Iran succeeds in implementing what Ahmadinejad wants, it will be a catastrophe. I don't know who will win, but there are only two possibilities: peace or the atomic bomb.

Peace must come, I firmly believe that. How much longer will that take?