

1



JUDY AND I
by
Shalom Brenner



Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Brenner Saga
- 3 Abstract Influence
- 4 Pirchachit
- 5 The farm Klippunt
- 6 The Double Con
- 7 The Hostel
- 8 Round and Round the Aliya Merry-Go-Round
- 9 Dance
- 10 Give me a _____ to Build a Dream On

Introduction

Two children sitting on a bench, a slender dark-skinned girl with pitch black hair chopped off just below the neck, sparkling blue eyes squinting towards her brother, a large plump boy sitting on most of the bench, lighter skin, chubby cheeks, blue eyes and golden blonde locks curling well down below his shoulders, thus the envious squint from his sister.

We were the children of simple country folk who attempted to move to the city but after a frustrating failure retreated with their tails between their legs to the farm and the wide-open spaces of the north western cape

Leaving Judy and I, at the respective ripe old age of twelve and eight, at a hostel for Jewish kids so that we could receive a solid Jewish education. Thus, our parents lost the pleasure of watching their children grow up and we lost the much-needed warmth of a home and an occasional parental hug. Resulting in that the only close family to turn to in the boarding school jungle fight for survival was “JUDY AND I”.

This book is a series of short stories written about various periods of our lives. Although we had our own families until Judy left us in 2004 it was always “JUDY AND I”.

Enjoy.

The Brenner Travel Saga

The small Latvian town Goldingen was the home of the Brenner clan for who knows how many generations.

Mommy Linzi is a petit lady weighs in at about 95 kilos, two meters wide and two meters tall (based on photographs). Daddy Yudell has a little goatee, is very short and docile looking. Sisters Ester, Celia, Paula and Ruche are all buxom looking ladies, just like mommy. Brothers Leo and Isaac are bigger than daddy but much smaller than mommy and sisters.

Why would this happy brood decide to leave the family home and head for the wilds of yet undeveloped South Africa?? Many stories and even more rationales to why this move was made were handed down by word of mouth. I'll relate the stories I would like to believe are true and factual (but I'm pretty sure that a lot of fiction has crept in over the years). So just bear with me and enjoy this "historic" epic of THE BRENNERS.

We enter our time machine and arrive back at the turn of the 20th century (1900 AD) to a very big house for a very big brood. Mommy Linzi spends her working days riding a one-horse cart, buying wheat from the farmers in the area with a bottle of vodka under her seat for company. And, as it turns out, for protection as proved one day when jogging along minding her own business, thinking of bushels of wheat when the little lady is attacked by a thief whom she promptly disposes of by breaking the vodka bottle over his head cursing the waste of good vodka and happily continuing on her way



Besides praying and being a very pious Jew, Daddy Yudell is a building contractor. Around 1902-1903, he and an associate win a contract to rebuild the village church steeple, very fitting for a pious Jewish gentleman, the job is completed efficiently and swiftly. One fine day, like the walls of Jericho, the efficiently built steeple comes tumbling down. Moral of the story: Jews should stick to synagogues and not meddle with churches. Thus, little Yudell and his associate are sued and await trial. Our associate promptly packs his bags and leaves town without as much as goodbye to little Yudell, who is now going to bear the brunt of the obvious outcome of the pending trial.

Big mommy promptly puts little Yudell under the seat of the one-horse Cadillac, (instead of the vodka) and trots him off to the nearest port where she deposits her illegal cargo on a ship heading for the southern tip of Africa. No associate, no Yudell, no trial. Simple logic,

no???

Yudell is now in Africa and like his petit wife, he too gets himself a one-horse cart fills it with products and starts making the rounds among the farmers selling his wares. Years go by, Yudell is prospering. 1914 arrives, World War I erupts and the Germans capture Latvia, move into Goldingen and make their headquarters in the big Brenner house sending the family to live in the cellar. All but mommy Linzi who spends her days playing poker with the German officers in order to support the family and keep the Germans in her debt. Germans don't speak Russian and need an interpreter. Who better than a young Jewish boy not eligible for the Russian army who speaks a fluent Russian and German? Brother Leo, of course. Leo struts around Goldingen escorted by two giant German guards translating for the enemy not a very pleasant situation. His mother's son, he does the expected and simply slips away to Germany (if your running from the Germans who is going to look for you in Germany?) where he stays until things quiet down and then joins Daddy in Africa. Over the years Yudell has prospered so the two men hire a farm from a cousin near Upington called Ekstienskuil.

Comes the revolution 1917 and mommy Linzy decides that Latvia is not a good place for young men and ships young Isaac to Africa to join the men. Interesting situation men in Africa women in Latvia. 1920 has arrived mommy Linzi never had much faith in the men folk so she sends sister Celia to Africa to spy and send her current reports of their activities.

Yudell no longer a "smose" travelling salesman but a gentleman farmer with two young sons and a daughter thing look good. 1925 the Orange river overflows its

banks and the farm is totally washed out everything lost
despondent disappointed the men decide to return to
the apron strings of tough mommy Linzy while they
debated trying to decide the best way to tell the boss
Celia the spy swiftly telegrams THE MEN ARE COMING
HOME before our gallant knights move their buttocks
Linzi and the girls all but Ester who is married have
boarding cards in their hands and are sailing full throttle
to the southern point of Africa
Result we were raised and educated in fascist South
Africa instead of being comrades of the communist
party.

ABSTRACT INFLUENCE

Many moons ago a photograph of two little kids was taken. They are sitting on a wooden bench, a thin, dark blue-eyed girl with pitch black hair chopped off above the neck line. Next to her on ninety percent of the bench a juicy fat boy with blond hair flowing down below his shoulders (very sexy). Judy was extremely jealous of my golden locks, but what she lacked in brawn she made up in brain. At the age of four she was already reading the local newspaper and getting private tuition from Mrs. Augenbach, a neighbor and local teacher. Her husband also connected to education by being the local school bus driver, whose contribution to the farm kids' education was in the thin stick he carried to control the rowdy kids on the bus.

When Judy was of school age our parents decided that if she was going to be clever she could be clever at the local school in the neighboring village of Kalksluit (today Sesbrugge Six Bridges) so they registered her for the local school. Believe it or not our future brilliant scholar was not accepted. Dad got furious ANTISEMITISM and complained to the local education authorities who soon changed the decision. The Brenners, being of proud Latvian Jewish stock, would not allow their daughter to go to a school where she was not welcome. Within days they let the farm and shop to Mr. Kriel and the family moved to Cape Town. Registering Judy at the Jewish

school called Herzliya Day School (a short note). The headmaster of the local school, a Mr. Longlant, a very good friend of our father and certainly no anti-Semite, years later had the opportunity to explain his decision. He knew Judy personally and was dead scared to take the responsibility of having this bright beautiful Jewish girl in his school because he knew that the local (not too bright to be polite) Afrikaans kids would, to put it mildly, make her life an absolute misery.

So the family settled in Cape Town. The word “settled” is a bit optimistic because Dad being a country bumpkin mistook the tattersalls (horse betting parlor) for the bank and the poker table as the board room of a company as well as getting better acquainted with Mr. Jonnie Walker his constant liquid companion. Soon the family were in a desperate financial state. Mom managed to shorten the rental period of the farm and shipped dad back to his natural surroundings.

A year later she joined him leaving Judy, then eleven years of age and myself an experienced man of eight years old, in the loving hands of Mr. and Mrs. Bobrov, the manager and matron of Herzliya hostel (a local prison for Jewish kids from country towns) to get a good old Jewish education. Jewish maybe, Zionist yes, but



at these ripe old ages we learned the most important lesson: Survival in the city jungle. If Judy had been a normal average kid, we would have been educated locally, Judy would have gone to university at the age of seventeen an innocent quiet blue-eyed country girl agog with the wonders of the big city. Me, I might have matriculated and would have definitely stayed on the farm married a local and had a dozen little Afrikaans brats (no television).

So even in those long gone days Judy as a very young girl, due to her extra ordinary qualities influenced and changed the complete direction of our lives. For this you kids should be forever grateful because if it

did not happen the way it did then maybe no Morris Hill
no Batsheva no Eli no Naomi no Idan.
YOU SEE, LIFE IS FULL OF HAPPY MISTAKES.

Pirchachit (little tramp)

When people speak of Judy, they remember a very popular cultured intellectual educator. That is accurate and true, so allow me to introduce a Judy that has conveniently been forgotten: JUDY THE LITTLE TRAMP (PIRCHACHIT)

As I mentioned previously, at the hostel the name of the game was survival. So let me define the exact meaning of the term survival. Survival is to do something the right people think you are doing it, when in actual fact you are not doing it. Complicated??? Well here are a few examples.

Our lives at the hostel (known as "the bughouse") was ruled by bells. First bell, wake up and get out of bed, was translated by the inmates as turnover and grab another few minutes sleep. Second bell, finish dressing make bed start moving towards the dining room, was translated as jump out of bed and dress fast .Third bell, breakfast, translation: charge down the stairs, straightening your skirt and button your blouse, arrive in a fairly decent condition to the dining room before being locked out was Judy's specialty. I can still see her charging across the playground swiveling her skirt combing her hair with her fingers squeezing through the door at the last moment with a beaming smile across her face saying "wow, I made it again." This was just child's play, warming up to start the day. Now our breakfast, which was compulsory to eat, consisted of a grayish brown thick solution called

porridge which if you placed the bottom of your spoon on its surface and lifted the spoon it would stick to the spoon reaching the height of about five centimeters and then slide back into the plate like saliva oozing out of a babies mouth. Now eat that??

Six young teenage ladies trying to keep their figures are seated opposite six appetizing plates of compulsory porridge. But if one plate is emptied into five plates, we have one empty plate which is carefully placed on top of five full plates which by prior financial arrangement is swiftly carried off by the waitress and disposed of. Survival. Everyone is happy, the matron is sure the porridge

has been eaten, the waitress has a few more cents in her pocket and our young ladies have saved face and survived another culinary delight. Nobody is hurt, everyone has achieved their aim, everyone is smiling. Unfortunately our young ladies became over confident and forgot the basic rule in the survival manual: DON'T USE THE SAME CON JOB TOO OFTEN .

A roar from the kitchen, the double kitchen doors fly open, Bobbess, the matron, storms into the dining room with five oozing porridge plates directly to the girls' table banging the plates down with such force that they crack and the grayish brown yak slithers over the white tablecloth followed by hysterical screams of UNGRATEFULL SLUTS. Our young ladies try to look embarrassed but have a hard time controlling their giggles as they are shuttled out of the room. The next time we see our six friends they were strutting around the playground with placards stuck to their backs on which is written I'M AN UNGRATEFULL SLUT. Well if you cannot eat in the dining room you have to

make contingency plans. Judy was a small light-weight and David was a tall, big fellow, so after dark if Judy would sit on David's shoulders she could slide her thin arms through the burglar bars of the kitchen window and deftly pull out a tasty roll of baloney. Walla nice fresh unhampered food. One night, while sitting on David's shoulders, he starts wriggling frantically almost toppling her from her high perch. She tells David to stop moving, I can't, he replies, and she looks down into the eyes of Mr. Bobrov, standing quietly with his hands behind his back watching the show.

Nu porridge theft Judy decides she needs a day's rest from school, so she plays sick. How is this done? Simple, don't go to breakfast, your roommate informs the matron that you are not feeling well. The matron promptly charges upstairs and sticks her trusty thermometer down your throat. Temperature normal, off you go to school. High temperature, you stay in bed and get room service. That's the sting, to get your temperature up. How??? No problem. The moment the busy matron turns her back take the thermometer out of your mouth and under the blankets and rub vigorously by hand or between your legs and you have a day in bed .Unfortunately, Judy was to enthusiastic and the high temperature she generated justified calling the doctor who just happened to be Dr I.M Hurwitz, known to us as uncle Isaac .When he appeared on the scene with a worried matron on his heels Judy winked at him. Uncle Isaac took the hint, ran his stereoscope all over her and then declared in a professional voice that the sick girl should stay in bed but should report to his office the next day after school. There he gave her a heart to heart before



giving her some pocket money.

Well, porridge baloney, faking sickness, all this eventually reached our parents and it was decided that the hostel was no place for young ladies and Judy was transferred to a prison for young ladies called Good Hope Seminary. There girls were taught to eat grapes with a fork. You don't just spit the pips onto your plate you roll them out of your mouth onto the fork and then deposit them gently onto your plate. Most ladylike I'd say

KLIPPUNT THE FARM

The train wriggled serpent like across the dry Karroo for two nights and a day till, with a great effort, it climbed onto the bridge spanning the orange river blasting out a long whistle as if shouting "wow I made it again" before slowly edging into the station .I could see my dad with his hat cheekily cocked to one side

A short car ride and I was home. HOME, the hot desert sun, the green alfalfa fields, the muddy river, open spaces free to charge around on my bicycle and drive the tractors. People? the only person I really wanted to see was my childhood friend Johannes. Unfortunately, he was on the wrong side of the apartheid line. Thus, at the age of 14 he was already part of my father's work force.

In this part of the world if you did not drive a car independently by the age of 12 you were a candidate for psychiatric treatment. So, my dad used to send me on all kinds of errands to the village and being the boss's son and white I needed to take a worker with me to fetch and carry. Inevitably I would take Johannes. It was the only time we could speak freely without Boss, small boss Mr. or Sir, words which were used when a dark person addressed his white superiors no matter what their age was. But here I was just Shalom. Two fourteen year-olds in a big black Plymouth off to the village. On the way back Johannes seemed fidgety, he

looked at me with a serious expression and said, “Shalom, we are good friends but I’m going to murder you.” This struck me as a bit odd but I replied in my usual friendly voice, “We’ve had many fights, some you won others I won, but before you murder me tell me why.” I could feel Johannes’s nervous tension and he replied, “Shalom, we are good friends but I’m black and you’re white.” I was driving 100 kilometers an hour, we were opposite a farm called Oukamp having just entered the big dip in the gravel road and the blood drained from my face. I then knew I would never be the proud owner of Klippunt because if I helped Johannes, I would cause my entire family irrevocable damage but if I did not my conscience would not allow me to live with it. So from that day on my young mind started spinning with thousands of queries who am I? What am I? Where do I belong? Must I look out for myself only? Am I a white South African of Jewish persuasion or do I belong to an ancient cultured people who after a long period of

suffering their land had been returned to them?



I chose the latter and at the first opportunity left Africa for the Middle East. I never became the proud owner of the farm on the southern tip of the Kalahari. Instead, I built my own Klippunt in the Negev, the desert on the southern tip of Israel.

THE DOUBLE CON

Herzliya was a very small school at the time so almost all the classes had the same teachers .This resulted in a unpredictable situation for me being the third Brenner to study there .My cousin Mercia a dark beautiful popular young lady the toast of all the teachers and students a great sportswoman loved by all .After that came my sister Judy no less beautiful no less popular but brilliant seems like the family brains were unevenly divided the most going to Judy to the point that they had to jump her two classes so that she did not get bored at school resulting in her entering university at the age of sixteen.

Then I arrived fat slovenly dribbling nose and male not much chance to compete but had to survive an art which I was specializing in. So my English teacher one of Mercia's greatest admirers would be returning our compositions we were obliged to write as homework not one of my favorite pastime's would pause and then say Brenner come here ,as I walked up to his desk I could see the dark red line drawn across the page and he would say"Mercia a lovely girl Judy"at this point I would lean across the desk grab my piece of art and say very politely "excuse me sir my name is Shalom" then walk back to my desk with a tough looking smirk on my face

But a very sour feeling in my guts. The years past and somehow, I managed to climb into the next grade.

In the sixth grade the Principal called me into his office and told me that if I liked I could go home for a very long holiday because no matter what happened in the

end of the year exams I would have to redo the year which to me meant another year at the Herzliya prison sorry hostel. Suddenly the teachers acted as if I did not exist never ask to answer questions homework returned unmarked this was a cozy situation but the thought of another year at the hostel was discomforting resulting in me paying slightly more attention to my school work with this fear of another year driving me on. Came the end of the year exams I excelled much to my surprise no reaction from the powers to be no one said anything and I advanced to the following grade. This was strange and being suspicious of everything (basic survival law) I started fishing around until I realized that I had been beaten at my own game I was conned by the ones I thought I was conning. This whole scheme had been planned by the principal the teachers and my parents thinking that if I could see getting high grades was possible I would continue to excel very clever but this effort to survive only convinced me that my attitude towards the school system was less of an effort and had same results so I returned to my theory which was simple and logical "a pass is a pass be it 100%" or be it 51% if 50% was needed to pass both ways you move up a grade .So again everyone was happy they proved their point I did not lose a year and went back to my preferred way of life and slowly crawled up to my final matriculation year.





The matriculation year was drawing to an end everyone was gearing up for the final thrust and once again I was summoned to the principal's office to be informed in a rather unpolite way that my presents at the school for another year was most distasteful thus they were allowing me to write the external matriculation exams even though my final marks did not justify my participation .Well at least the principal and I at last agreed on one thing neither of us wanted to suffer our association for another year .So on returning to the hostel I approached the matron and asked in a meek voice "Madam would you like me here for another year" ?Without taking a breath she blurted GOD FORBID as expected okay says I here is the deal I inform you I

am sick you give me a letter to the school that I was sick .A bit taken aback I could hear the cogs of her brain grinding around trying to figure out my opening gambit then she smiled and said but you come down for breakfast no room service.

Thus the field was set for the final thrust I appeared at school on enough occasions so that my presents was felt the rest of the time much to the matrons amazement I actually sat and studied .The highest marks I ever received in my school career in fact I missed a first class pass by 2 percent average marks well above average everyone was surprised including myself .Whenever the matron was asked about matriculation she would smile and say "IF SHALOM CAN PASS MATRIC ANYONE CAN"

THE HOSTEL

This home away from home, called fondly by its long-term inmates THE BUGHOUSE was an institute run by the Cape Town Jewish community for children of Jewish families from small villages throughout South Africa, to ensure that they get a good Jewish education.

I was interned at the age of eight on an unforgotten date with a feeling of being abandoned by my parents. We entered the small green gate under a long high red wall to be welcomed by the matron. Mrs. B greeted us with a great big smile on her face and assured my parents I would be well looked after. Looking across the playground I could see and feel the other kids who had stopped playing and were sizing up the new kid. I was doing the same. Like two dogs circling each other before the attack. My mother's last tearful goodbye whereas I could not allow the tears to flow keeping. I kept a tight-lipped tough face fully aware of the other kids following my every move. Then I was led by Mrs. B with a fond but firm arm round my shoulder to my room and to meet my roommate Harry.

The room, a cell sized space with two iron beds, a wardrobe and Harry looking very uneasy. This was my welcome to my new "home." A few fist fights with my equals and several beatings by the older boys, including having my head stuck down the toilet and the water flushed, all because I had refused to be a "fag." A fag is a young new boy who is obliged to serve his peers, make their beds, clean their shoes and serve them hand and foot. By refusing and standing up to those brutes

and showing my ability with my fists I established my position in the jungle hierarchy.

It's strange when reminiscing about a long important part of your life which was difficult and full of hardships trails and errors you remember fondly the good and humorous parts and tend to forget the ugly side. So, join me for a glimpse of hostel life seen through the eyes of a long-term inmate.

As I said, the hostel was run by the Jewish community but not integrated in it. A few of our classmates' parents were aware of us and used to send extra sandwiches for us with their children so that we wouldn't have to stomach the brown paper bag holding a piece of brown bread and a slither of jam that was to cover their conscience. One day a friend from school invited me home after school.

We arrived at his house, he marched into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator door to display a fantastic variety of food we had lunch. For him lunch, for me a feast. Then into to his private room (no roommate) with a comfortable bed, bookshelves, a radio, a desk and pictures on the wall. I glared at this and thought, "wow this is some cell." If I wanted decent food, instead of throwing open the refrigerator I had to sneak into the kitchen and steal some baloney. Then mommy came home gave me a bright smile which soon disappeared when she discovered who I was and where I lived. The moment I departed my friend was scolded for associating with riffraff. I was never invited to that house again.

The Bs, fondly called Bobby and Bobes, ran a tight ship: prayer before meals, prayers after meals. After breakfast we would cover our heads with our hands or school cap if we had it with us. Now our breakfast was a gluey inedible porridge, which if not eaten reappeared at lunch time. Leo had a system, he would fill his cap with the yuk then throw it away, wash his cap and off to school with a damp cap. One morning, in the middle of after meal pray, Bobby stops in the middle and says, "Leo you have a cap so why are you covering your head with your hand put on your cap. Dead silence in the dining room and Leo says, "No sir." Bobby shouts, "PUT ON YOUR CAP." Leo meekly replies, "Yes sir," and places his cap on his head and the gluey grey yak comes waterfalling all over his face and dribbling down his school tie. Well we thought we were con artists but apparently Bobby was also trained in one up Manship.

The Bs eventually retired and principals and matrons came and went over the years. The first replacement was shipped in from England, a frustrated opera singer, tall and elegant looking in tweed stovepipe pants and an extremely beautiful wife. Whenever she walked past all games would stop and we would just stare. Mr. H's contributions to our lives were very liberating. For example, if we bought tickets for the movies on Friday, we could go to the movies on Saturday. He was referring to Saturday afternoon, our interpretation was slightly different. Thus, on the way to Synagogue the line would split into two: those who went to pray and those who went to play.

Because we were outsiders in the community, we had to be better than our homely friends in order to be

equal to them. Thus whatever competition we entered, we had to win at all costs. That year there was an arts and crafts competition which we decided to enter. The project was emblems of the twelve tribes of Israel painted on tiles. Sounds good but tiles cost money we did not have. If we removed tiles from our bathrooms it would be clear who took them. So, our artistic as always group effort started by acquiring the needed materials. Paint and paint brushes no problem that's why we attended art classes at school; tiles, by sneaking into the kitchen and "borrowing" a tile from here and a tile from there would be less conspicuous; nightly visits to the kitchen got the project on the way and we started hearing murmurs from the kitchen staff about missing and broken tiles. Came the day of the exhibition and lo and behold one of the judges is our arty Mr. H. When the judges came to see our project, he blurted out loudly "now I know where the tiles disappeared to." I don't remember but we received between first and third prize, and to Mr. H's credit no one got punished. If we are already talking art, another project we did was for the Habonim art competition. This was a scaled model of kibbutz Tzora made from balsawood supplied by Habonim. No other group dared take on this project, which was about 2sqm in size up-man-ship, we can do what you cannot. The base was chicken wire and papier mache. We had all the young kids collecting paper and all baths in the hostel were so full of wet paper that nobody could have a bath for at least a month. We won the competition hands down.

So much for art. When the 1956 war started in the Middle East, all the groups in youth movements and others started doing all kinds of things to collect money

to send to Israel. All the groups apart from us took money from daddy and did whatever they thought would bring in the most cash. Well we had no daddy but were determent to do our share, so we decided to have a barbeque. We invested a few cents in tickets, took the younger kids after school to Jewish suburbs and they went from door to door. When Mrs. Cohen or Mrs. Hurwitz opened their front doors and were confronted by 2 little hostel boys selling tickets for a barbeque to raise money for Israel how could they refuse? We raised about seventy pounds sterling knowing that the ticket purchasers would not attend the party. We were reluctant to waste our hard-earned money on meat. The solution was to visit all the Jewish butchers and ask them to donate meat stressing who we were in such a diplomatic way that our generous butchers understood that if they refused, they might accidently have a broken display window. Within days we had enough meat to feed an army, more money than any of the other groups to donate, had a great barbeque with friends from the movement and school and did not even bother to sell tickets at the gate that night.

As expected, Mr. H did not last long and we long-term inmates watched principals come and go until the right Reverent Blok with his gruff Scottish accent arrived on the scene. A great educator whose idea of punishment was withholding our mail from home and withholding our pocket money and seemed to delight in insulting us as well as our parents. We could live with that. To us hardened inmates it was like water off a duck's back. But when Guy Fawkes festival arrived, and all the younger kids had spent their last cents on crackers, by this time we were spending our money on cigarettes,

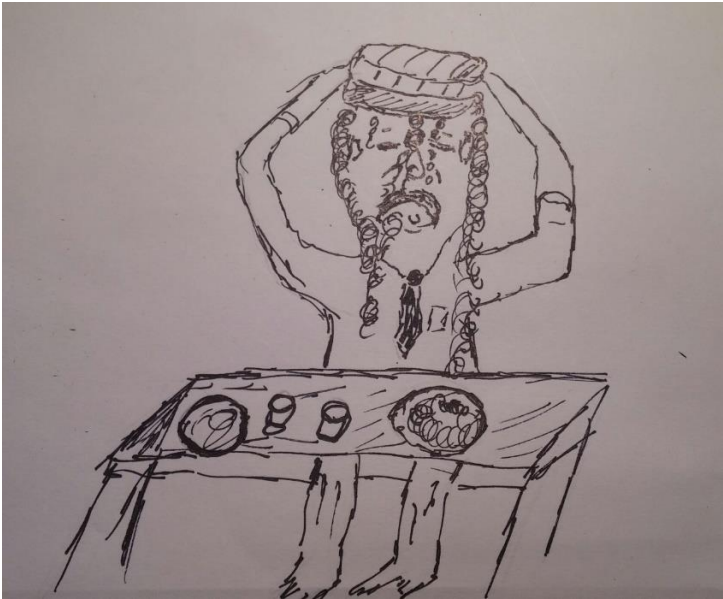
Blok announced that the kids could play with their crackers until seven o'clock and then to bed. It only got dark at eight o'clock.

The kid's faces dropped almost like one sad face about to burst out in tears. For us this was the limit. Push had come to shove. We immediately collected money and two guys sneaked out of the hostel and bought crackers. Mainly a cracker called "big bang" which is exactly what it did. The dark silent night was suddenly disturbed by loud bangs from our crackers. As expected, Blok came charging out shouting I SAID NO CRACKERS AFTER SEVEN this was answered by another barrage accompanied by the shouts, BLOK GO HOME BLOK GO BACK TO SCOTLAND. Our brave Reverent sent one of the prep masters (students who lived in the hostel to help us with our homework). He approached us in a commanding voice and told us to break it up and go to bed. Raymond, a plump smiling boy politely said to him "after you sir" with a cheek to cheek smile across his face. The prep master lifted his hand to wipe the smile off Raymond's face. We closed in on him. Luckily, he got the message and went to bed. We ended our defiant display by throwing the remaining crackers into Blok's apartment and returned to our quarters realizing that we had crossed the red line and had to prepare for the worst. But we were experienced survival artists and decided that attack was the best defense. Sid sat down and composed a letter explaining in very specific detail why this person (to be polite) was unsuitable for the post he held, we all signed the letter in a round robin with the intention of sending it to the hostel committee. Somehow it landed up with the Jewish

board of education and all hell broke loose; to be more specific “the shit hit the roof.”

The hostel committee met every Tuesday, and in order to know what they were discussing one of us was always sick on Tuesdays to hide behind the door connecting our quarters to the hall where the committee met. They were sure we had taken legal aid to compile the letter. Dr. Isaac Morris Hurwitz, my uncle, who was not only our medical doctor but also chairman of the hostel committee summoned me to his office and demanded to know what was going on. I could feel my knees knocking with fear and boldly told him we had a committee and any negotiations had to be with them and that I was not on that committee.





My uncle glared at me as if to say “you bloody liar” but respected my stand. He gave me pocket money and sent me on my way. He was right there was no such committee. A while later at a family gathering, he told me that the right Reverend’s contract would not be renewed. WE had fired the principal of the hostel “UP THE REVOLUTION/”

Years rolled by, principals came and went, the light at the end of the tunnel grew brighter and eventually I walked out of that little green door under the high red wall. Yep, we really got a very very good Jewish education!!!

Round and Round the Aliyah Roundabout

The roulette wheel spins, the ball hops from one number to the next, the tension rises as does the smoke curling towards the ceiling. The wheel slows down, silence just the click click of the iron ball is heard teasingly licking each number as the wheel grinds to a halt. Another second silence broken by a shriek of joy. Vladik's lucky number had enticed the ball into its clutches. "One visa to Israel goes to number twenty-three," the table master announces. Vodka is thrown back giving an extra glow of delight as it slides down the well-wisher's gullets. "Welcome aboard the Aliyah run around," shouts Mr. Sochnut with a sly smile on his face.

Vladek's joy soon turns into a headache. Got a visa, what about air tickets, date of departure. Buy, sell, pack. Where do you start? Run here, run there, round this office, round that office, hell I'm already getting dizzy. Not to fear, us overnight Zionists will overcome. Think who do I know in Israel, contact them, phone, telegram. Like it or not Israel, here I come.

Out of the grip of the Russian bear, bounced to Budapest, bounced to Ben- Gurion, bumped from one clerk to the next, smile, stand, sit, sign, take, give, wow, fresh air, into bus, last bumpy bounce and welcome to Beersheba. Vladek's brain is spinning, cannot remember anything the tens of clerks and advisers told him, only one sentence is spinning around his brain "direct absorption." Lying exhausted on his hotel bed trying to figure out how? What where? Direct absorption? Well let's help and translate it into Russian for friend Vladek. "Direct absorption" means YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

MATE AND GOOD LUCK TO YOU.

So, what thinks Vladék: "I'm a big boy, I'll rest up for a day or two; after all, got money from the Zionists and then I'm sure my Israeli brethren will only be to glad to help an Oley Hadash. Take a leisurely stroll through the streets everyone is so friendly 'Shalom" they greet me with a broad smile, interesting, especially the hotel proprietor every time he smiles dollar signs appear in his eyes, I wonder why?" A few days later, Vladék suddenly realizes that his bank roll is dwindling, and the hotel proprietors' eyes now show a dollar sign with a question mark whenever he smiles. Time to reorganize, no problem, noticed dozens of real estate agents, let's pop into one chick chack, get an apartment and settle down.

So, the hunt is on which agent, that one has a sign saying, "speak Russian" and the next and the next. Ah, one that has no sign, let's try him. Vladék has by now learned the key sentence in Hebrew. "Furnished apartment, best suburb, very very cheap I'm an oley hadash." And the hunt is on, into the car, off to see apartments. Too small, too big, too expensive, not enough beds. Oh, hell thinks Vladék try again tomorrow, no rush. Back to agent, "Sorry sir, I've showed you all the apartments I have. What! Thinks Vladék I'm entitled to an apartment, what does he think, I'm a sucker he wants to dump any old apartment on me to hell with him, I'll try another agent. So, our Vladék remembering advice received from all the "Eitzergebers" before leaving Moscow strides determinedly across the road to an agent who speaks Russian. After half an hour's talk in the mother tongue, into the car and Vladék is confident that his new-found Russian friend will get him what he

wants. Too big, too small, too expensive, too few beds. And lo and behold the same apartments he saw yesterday! What, thinks Vladek, because he speaks Russian, he thinks he can convince me that I cannot get an apartment that I want? No apartments, he says that he is not the only fish in the sea, I'll try another agent. And the roundabout goes around, and around Vladek is crossing and re-crossing the road, one agent, next agent and so the days pass, and the bankroll gets smaller and smaller while the dollar signs in the hotel proprietors eyes get brighter and brighter. The agents must be hiding the apartments for protectioners just like Russia. Vladek runs over to Moshe in the Sochnut. Moshe help they won't give me an apartment and the money's running out. Moshe, an old veteran, phones his friend an estate agent. I've got a family on the street get him an apartment his name is Vladek. Yes, says Mr. agent, he has been here, explain to him that he must compromise or pay more or a cheaper area or a smaller flat. Moshe patiently explains the facts of life to Vladek, not enough apartments he cannot afford what he wants.



Vladek slinks out of Moshe's office thinking, capitalism, it was so much easier when big brother was watching. So Vladek, sheepishly, many shekels lighter, shyly return to my office and takes the first apartment available. Ulpan starts, Vladek's bought a bicycle and has learned the secret to life in Israel.

"Hi Vladek how are you?" Vladek gives a broad smile and says, "Yehia baseider"(it'll be okay). And so yet another Oley has withered the first dizzy spell of the Aliyah roundabout. Goodluck in round two Vladek!

Dance

The Sabbath-silent road crawled out of Beersheba past the quiet settlements and small villages, whose lights broke the darkness like glowing serene Sabbath candles. The only noise the steady swishing of car tires on the black tarmac moving towards the sea, the hot desert summer gives way to a cooling breeze enhancing the peace of the night.

Turning a corner sudden bright lights and rhythmic music echo through the silence, cutting the serenity. A large circus-like tent throwing bright colorful lights into the darkness drawing to it entertainment-seeking people wanting to throw off the tension of the working week in dance, drink and pleasant company. On entering the white tent, supported by impressive varnished poles surrounded by bright colored tables with light snacks splattered onto them. The entertainment seekers sit and mumble sweet nothings to each other and eye one and another casually; all are dressed younger than their age. The music, till now a soothing backdrop rhythm, changes suddenly to loud rock music from the sixties. The dance floor fills with jumping twisting jean short and showy skirts letting the rhythm take over, forgetting their potbellies, gray balding heads, falling breasts and giving themselves to the blasting music, imitating Zulu war dancers but less rhythmic and very much less impressive.

Swirling and turning between the wild jumpers is a small elderly couple, he is bending lovingly over her long curly hair, holding each other in the classical dance grip slide across the floor with classical dance steps. In perfect rhythm, oblivious of the uncouth unnatural bending and jogging mass of people sharing the dance floor with them. A middle-aged bald ear-ringed male commandeers a large portion of the dance floor moving every limb in his body in the most peculiar unnatural forms while his eyes swivel around the tent to see what impression his performance is having on the opposite sex. This was his day, clearly every move has been practiced in front of a mirror throughout the week. Sweat bristling from his bald head, throwing off his

leather waistcoat he struts to the bar, swigs a beer followed by an exaggerated flip of his lighter, ending up in a cowboy stance that allows him to survey the impression he is making. The music slows down, couples snuggle up to each other with a look of togetherness in their eyes, an unnecessary squeeze, a hand running over forbidden areas, and the white trousers and black shirt of our elderly couple move sedately lovingly round and round the dance floor.

After the dancers leave the floor arm in arm, slowly disentangling from their tight holds the pleasurable smiles slowly leave their faces as the warmth from their partners bodies cools off a sad look of reality crosses their faces, reminding them that they are still lonely souls seeking with longing a permanent togetherness which in reality is sorely missing and the elderly couple,

still arm in arm, wait patiently for the music to start again.

An unnoticed hustle for seats, as the women compete for the seat next to the most eligible and clearly the most popular gent in the group a stocky constantly smiling graying man pleasantly accommodating all this attention even choosing his dance partners so as not to give preference to anyone.



The DJ announces the start of folk dancing. Most dancers stay in their seats, those that fill the floor dance in two large circles and seem to stand more upright

with more feeling and pride, their bodies shouting, "you see at the end of the day we are Israelis and proud of it." Only our bald-headed beatnik makes his own circle around the center pole of the tent, seemingly undecided if he is a red Indian dancing around a totem pole or performing an Israeli folk dance with gusto. Our elderly couple glide elegantly round the floor in their circle of two, oblivious to the rest of the dancers. The folk dancing is but a short prelude just to remind us who we are but does not and cannot supply the demand of the entertainment seekers for a much-needed warm hug and close smell of the opposite sex so lacking in their daily lives. Hence the slow sixties music takes over. The dance floor is immediately packed with couples drinking in lack closed eyes, roaming hands, a squeezed breast against a manly chest, a fantasy prelude to reality. Our elderly couple unwind and hand in hand leave the tent oblivious of the silent envy they leave behind.

GIVE ME A TO BUILD A DREAM OF

"Do you sell flats in Neve Efrat?" Opening gambit. The fact that it's advertised in big bold letters in all local newspapers is not enough assurance that we do. "I'd like information about these flats." "Sure, please sit down." Why else would he come into the office? One glance at the young gent and his lady shows that they have made a survey of all new projects in town and now consider themselves specialists in the building field. Mr. Chauvinist sits down and wifey slightly behind. Not a word, just hand him the catalogue. Pulling a serious face, he studies the pretty picture with wifey peeking elegantly over his shoulder. "But this is the same picture we saw in the newspaper with that same information," says Mr. Specialist (what did he expect?). "Sure," says I, "that's what we're selling." Suspicion shows all over Mr. Specialist's face, "But that's not enough information to decide whether to buy a flat," he says with great authority, making wifey absolutely swoon with confidence about the know-how of her partner. But just to help, the swoon is followed with a warm smile and an extravagant bend in my direction ensuring a bird's eye view of her belly button (anything to help hubby make a good deal).

"Well, ask away" says I. This takes hubby by surprise because at this stage he expects me to start drooling out all the advantages and beauty laid out in this piece of paper, which will be (we hope) an apartment by 31/3/91. And tearing to pieces all the other projects he has checked out. Well, the ball is now back in hubby's court and with big breasted wifey doing her show to help, he has got to prove his know-all of the building

trade. So he blurts out, "This building is prefabricated," he says with professional disgust. "No," I say with a big smile ensuring that I'm also a professional builder. "it's not prefab it's industrial, the latest building method like Ofer Tower" (which is considered the most aristocratic apartment block in Beersheba). "Don't you know?" I add with great authority, "all the buildings in Jerusalem are built like this. Do you know what the industrial system is?" I say, taking out a pencil and paper to explain. Well poor hubby can't admit that he doesn't know, after all, he is the family expert on building. "Of-course I know," he says with great assurance in his voice (I breathe a sigh of relief) putting away the pencil and paper and giving wifey a winning smile and a complimentary examination of her lungs (reminding myself that it's about time someone explain to me what this bloody industrial is). Hubby is so relieved that I didn't call his bluff and wifey is very flattered by my complimentary glances, the stage is set for the kill'.



"Let me show you the apartment plan ," (this is just to remind hubby that he is buying an apartment and not the whole building). "Let wifey come a bit closer after all," I say,, "this is her department. You just sign the cheques." Mr. Chauvinist puffs up with pride and feels ten feet tall, wifey is pleased to get into the act without undermining her hero's authority. I explain the layout, she bends over the desk to take in every detail and I catch up on the details I missed without my specs. By this time our loving couple have transformed this crummy piece of paper into Buckingham Palace, discussing where this could stand and that could be, plenty of space to the point they almost convince me to buy a crummy piece of paper as well. Now the ultimate challenge: terms of payment and which floor are there available apartments. While I put on my specs and study the plan of apartments still available Moshe shouts "Don't sell the apartment on the second floor, I've promised my client to keep it for him till 12 o'clock." "Hell," I say "it's the last apartment on the second floor. 'Sorry,'" I say to my dear couple who are by now my bosom buddies, "Only third floor left". My know-all hubby says with disgust, "Top floor, no way I want the second floor, it's the best floor" (I only buy the best act). "Moshe," I say, "you can't do that, we don't reserve apartment for anyone, and my friends here want to sign immediately." Moshe shrinks slightly and says in a meek voice "You're right, but it's the builder's second cousin from his stepmother's first marriage, what can I do?" My hubby becomes Sherlock Holmes and shouts, "but it's 11:45, he won't come before 12 o'clock." Wifey

almost swoons over me and my desk at this great deduction by her Romeo, and Moshe sways under such a violent attack by hubby backed by me. "Okay," he says, "let's have a cup of coffee and if he isn't here by twelve, I'll take the responsibility on myself and personally sign you on the apartment."

A tense ten minutes slowly pass by. Wifey's lungs are pumping up to her chin. Hubby is adamant to have his victory. Justice must prevail. He has convinced us of his rightful claim to the last apartment on the second floor. Then an ecstatic wifey squeals "It's twelve o'clock!" and Moshe says "okay. let's sign."

And yet another couple has bought a crumbled/crummy piece of paper with their dream fantasy of a home which might be a flat in nine months' time. Where will this palace be? Somewhere in yod alef, about 200 meters from there, close to here, facing northwest or maybe southeast, who knows? Maybe the builder, certainly not us mortals.

We only sell dreams on crummy pieces of paper