

Riva and Yehuda

Life Story of
Tancman, Mohel, Tracz and Ben-Eliezer Families

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סיפור חיים

מוהל, טנצמן, טרין, בן אליעזר

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*Of all the rabbinical injunctions, the most enduring and distinctive is **Zakhor!** - Remember!*

We acknowledge readily enough our duties to our contemporaries; but what of our obligations to those who came before us? We talk glibly of what we owe the future - but what of our debt to the past?

"The Memory Chalet"
Tony Judt

*We cannot draw the lines between too much and too little historical research, for we have no **halakhah** beyond ourselves. If this be the choice, I will take my stand on the side of "too much" rather than "too little", for my terror of forgetting is greater than my terror of having too much to remember. Let the accumulated facts about the past continue to multiply. Let the flood of books and monographs grow, even if they are only read by specialists. Let unread copies lie on the shelves of many libraries, so that if some be destroyed or removed others will remain. So that those who need can find that this person did live, that those events really took place.*

"ZAKHOR – Jewish History and Jewish Memory"
Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi

It all started in the early 1970s when my brother Vitek asked our father Yehuda if he could record his life story on audiotape. From then until his death, Yehuda recorded his memories on cassettes and sent them to Vitek. Sometimes, our mother Riva also joined in the recordings adding her own memories as well. At a later stage – after Yehuda died – Vitek also started to video conversations with Riva.

In this way, dozens of hours of conversations and memories were accumulated. Unfortunately, however, not everything has been saved.

After Riva died in April 2005, I decided to gather all the material, edit it and put it together in a book that would be intended for our children and grandchildren. I knew that as they got older they would want to read every detail about our family history, just as Vitek and I wanted to know every detail about our ancestors.

I was also suddenly aware that there was no longer anyone to ask. Sometimes I had very trivial questions which, in the past, I could find the answer to by simply asking Riva or Yehuda. And so I went on a journey of questions. I visited the archives at Kibbutz Gan Shmuel and Kibbutz Ein Shemer to learn details about the period when Riva and Yehuda lived there. I spent hundreds of hours doing research on the internet and I travelled to Poland several times, with Vitek occasionally joining me.

In this book I have integrated both maps and a selection of relevant photographs. It was not always easy to identify who was who in the old photographs.

In this story, of course, many questions still remain unanswered, and anyone who wants to continue asking questions or looking for answers can use this as a starting point for their own journey.

Riva often interviewed her relatives about their memories and wrote them down along with her own. Once she was asked "Why are you writing those memories? Who will need them?"

She answered:

"I am writing it so that it will remain in the family: for the children and grandchildren. Maybe one of them will be interested in the roots of the ancestry of Zeyde Eber and his family from Korotycze."

Now I know for whom she did it and why: she did it for us, so we can pass it forward to others.

Dani Tracz (Issachar Mohel)

March 2017

Chapter One

Yehuda's Memoirs

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Memories recorded by Yehuda, at the request of Vitek

Yehuda was born with the name Yehuda (Yudke) Mohel – the second child of seven – to Hanna-Leah (Hanna-Beile) née Kaszkiet and Eliezer Mohel. The exact date of his birth is uncertain. His birth certificate shows the date August 8, 1908, but he remembers that his family actually celebrated his birthday in winter.

He was born in a small town called Boremel in the district of Dubno, in the Rovno (Równe) region. Coincidentally, Vitek would later be born in Rovno – but Yehuda did not consider this to be his hometown. His family wandered around the Jewish towns and villages in the area, and he used to call another town in the same district – Mlinov (Młynów) – "his" town. The Dubno district was part of a broad area in the Ukraine on the border of Russia and Poland which was also known as the Pale (an area within the borders of Tsarist Russia where Jews were allowed to settle) and which in those days was part of Tsarist Russia. Despite having lived there for only a few years,

Yehuda remembered the town well and described it in detail in the memoirs that he recorded. They are presented here with minimal editing.



Map 1
Map of the Rovno region, Dubno district, showing (in red) the town of Boremol, where Yehuda was born (in 1908), and Mlinov, where he lived from age 16 to age 21.



Map 2
Where the borders between Poland, Belarus and the Ukraine meet, as of 2017 (the area described on map 1 is marked by a rectangle).



Map 3

The political division in Eastern Europe in 2017 (the area described on map 2 is marked by a rectangle).

Yehuda tells his story

Today is Sunday, December 6, 1970. I have been bedridden for several days because of an attack of the flu. But don't worry, today I feel better – the fever is down. Today and tomorrow I'll stay in bed, so I decided to try and comply with your request, Vitek, to record chapters of my life and Mother's life. The fact is, I was very surprised at your request. It proved to me, at any rate, that you are closer to us than I thought and it has given me considerable happiness. I am prepared to gladly respond to this request – in particular since I have also been thinking, for the past few years, that I should put my memories down on paper because our generation was a very unique generation: a generation of integration, a generation of social upheaval, illusions and disappointments. I think that in every detail it is possible to find the marks of this generation, just like a drop of water in the sea reflects all the features of the entire ocean.

Let's get started. I do not know the exact date of my birth. I

remember that in my home my birthday was celebrated in winter. I cannot recall if it was the 18th of Tevet 5668 – December 23, 1907 – or the 18th of Shevat 5668 – January 21, 1908. On my birth certificate my birthday is registered as August 8, 1908. Also, another characteristic phenomenon: I cannot say for certain which was my hometown. I mean, I know exactly which city I was born in, but I was only there for a few years; then I was in a different town, also for a few years; abroad for a certain period of time and later migrations. I am unable to say, as an ordinary person says: "Here, *this* is my city".

Boremel

So, I was born in the township of Boremel in western Ukraine. In 1908 this part of Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire, ruled by the Russian Tsar. I remember this town very well. It was a small town of about 2,000 or 3,000 people, most of whom were Jews, and they lived primarily in the centre of the little town. On the outskirts of the town lived the villagers, Ukrainian farmers who worked the fields on their farms. There were no roads in the town, except for a dirt road.

In spring and in autumn, mud covered the whole town and it was difficult to cross the street. There were no pavements. As the years passed, pavements were made out of wooden boards, which obviously used to wear away. The first road I can remember ("road" in inverted commas, of course) was built by the Russians with the help of Austrian prisoners of war during the First World War. The prisoners brought planks of wood from the forest and would lay them down, one next to the other. They would then connect the planks and, in this manner, they constructed a road through the town – a road that cannons and other instruments of war could cross.



Typical Jewish home in one of the villages in Volhynia.

There was a large square in the centre of the town, a big plot of land. In the middle of the square, there was an old building, which was actually made from several houses that had been connected in a long chain. This long house was called *ratusz* from the German word *rathaus*, which means Town Hall, where the Mayor had his offices. I imagine that this building was probably from the 17th or 18th century, when there was still a Council comprised of the town's elite; I don't know the history. Anyway, in my time there was no longer any Council, and it was a purely historical name.

This house, as I said, was very long. There were flats upstairs and flats downstairs. The downstairs flats were connected to the shops, which were at the front. You went down quite a few steps from the shop and there was a sort of half-basement where the flat was consisting of one room, or a room and-a-half, where the family of the shop owner congregated. There were also some more modern shops/apartments, already at ground level, more contemporary flats that were built at a more recent time around this market, around the square. In the centre of the square was the water pump, water drawn up by a *pompa*, a hand pump. Apparently there was no sanitary system of water in the

houses and people would all go to the pump with buckets, fill them with water, bring them home and fill a barrel. From this barrel they would draw water for cooking, baking and all sorts of other needs. There was a bathhouse in town and, especially on Fridays in preparation for the Sabbath, people would bathe there in warm water.

Life in Boremel (education, economy, culture)

Among the Jews the system of education consisted of varying degrees of religious schools, what they call *cheder*. The children went to *cheder*. There was *cheder* for beginners, *dardakim* (the youngest children). Then there was a higher level with a *melamed* who taught the Bible, some Gemara, Talmud. There was also a third level, even higher – a Rabbi with students aged 12, 13, 14, young men who delved deeper into studying the Talmud, with Talmudic commentaries and so forth. I don't remember, but I do not think that there was a school for the village children. Apparently these children, when they grew up, went to work on the farms, in the fields and the cities, and probably there was considerable illiteracy. That was the situation until 1914, until the First World War.



Jews from a town in
Volhynia.
Photograph from 1917.

The town's economy was made up of working the land – that much was clear. Among Jews – commerce, on a small scale. It was composed of tiny, poorly-stocked shops competing with each other. But as the Talmudic saying goes, "The Children of Israel make their *parnusa* (livelihood) from each other". And this was how they lived together, in very cramped quarters.

In the same shop it was possible to buy herring as well as haberdashery; usually there were no specialised shops for different goods. There were indeed special shops for fabrics and knitting materials, but all sorts of trifles were grouped together in one shop. That is to say, in every shop you could get all of the little things.

Cultural life mainly focused around the synagogues. Culture among the Jews in those days was mostly religious culture. There were three synagogues. One of the Hasidim of Otyka, a town not far away where there was an important rabbi, and our Hasidim built a synagogue. The second was the synagogue of Turiisk (Turzysk, *Турійськ*, in Yiddish – Trisk), in Volhynia (Wołyń), with an important rabbi. And in addition to that there was the so-called *Beit Midrash*, study house – which was "neutral", and that was where Jews who did not belong to these Hasidic sects would come.

My Father belonged to the Otyka Hasidim. I would go with him to the Otyka synagogue which stood next to the *Beit Midrash*. The synagogue of the Turiisk Hasidim was elsewhere, further away.

I remember very well the way of life, the customs and the atmosphere that prevailed then in the synagogues. The synagogue was active every day, from morning to night, during breaks from work. In the morning, for a few hours, there were several quorums praying the morning prayers. Jews would come with a *tallith* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries),

beginning at 5:00 or 5:30 on Sunday morning. These were the professionals who had to get up early – for example, butchers, who had to leave early to buy fresh meat, beef, veal. There were also the religious Jews who thought that it was a good deed to rise early to serve God. There were quorums praying in the synagogue until 10 or 11 o'clock. Then there was a break. There were some Jews who were lazy, or perhaps their wives were in the shop, or they had nothing special to do and they remained in the synagogue to engage in the Talmud and Gemara until noon. At noon they went home to eat lunch. At 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon they would come back for the *Mincha* (afternoon prayer). *Mincha* would continue until the *Ma'ariv* (evening prayer). Between the afternoon and evening prayers, groups of students would study a section of Gemara, engage in conversation. Boys were playing amongst themselves, and some of them were even playing cards in hidden corners behind the stove. When it got dark, they would recite *Ma'ariv*, and after *Ma'ariv* they would continue studying – not all of them, of course – and would go about their business.

Thus the synagogue was full of Torah almost all day. On the Sabbath, starting in the morning, maybe not as early as on weekdays because then they did not have to rush to businesses, at approximately 7 or 8 o'clock people gathered for morning prayers and *Mussaf* (the additional service). This continued until about 10 or 11 o'clock, and then they would go home for lunch. Before the prayer it was only permitted to drink a cup of tea or coffee. Usually on the Sabbath they would drink coffee with milk. Only after the prayers at 11 o'clock, would they come home, say the prayer for the wine, and sit down for lunch – a heavy meal of course, and then the Sabbath nap. Before going to sleep they would study a chapter, mostly from *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers). On the Sabbath it was normal to study *Pirkei Avot*. Father would go over *Pirkei Avot*, practices, morals

and culture. I suggest you read the Ethics of the Fathers, I think you will find it interesting. After an afternoon sleep, we got up and went to *Mincha*, *Ma'ariv*, came home to recite *Havdalah*, which distinguishes in a festive way between what is holy and what belongs to everyday. Then we would sing special hymns and songs at home, thus ending the Holy Days of the Sabbath.

As far as I remember, until the First World War – that is, until 1914 – there was no school in the town. There was no doctor in the town, only a medic. And even after the First World War, for many years there was no doctor. The medic was the son-in-law of the Russian Orthodox priest. He made a very strong impression on me. He was a tall, erect, blonde with a lovely forelock of hair. He had a very nice bedside manner. He would come and advise. He was a relatively young man... 30, 30-something. To this day I remember him in a very positive way. Such was life in the town until the First World War.

By the way, the great Zionist leader and head of the Jewish National Fund, Yosef Weitz, was also born in the town of Boremel. He emigrated to Israel in the year that I was born – 1908.

My parents' home – the Mohel family

What do I remember of my parents' home? My Father was a Jew of medium height who had a beautiful beard that was trimmed and not too long, and curly sidelocks (*payot*) on both sides. He was, of course, dressed in a *capote*, a long overcoat. He would wear a special hat with a small visor that Jews in the Russian Empire wore, not like in Galicia where they wore a *shtreimel*. In Central Poland they would wear such tiny hats. He was a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) by profession. Not only was he a *shochet*, but also a *mohel* (ritual circumciser), a scribe and a cantor, a prayer-leader. He would pass in front

of the Ark on the Sabbath and Holy Days. He would sit at the eastern wall of the synagogue, a place of honour, not far from the Ark, not far from the rabbi.

Incidentally, an interesting thing I'll mention right now so that I will not forget it: this town had three slaughterers, and a fourth who had retired no longer worked in his profession. He had been succeeded by his son-in-law who was also a ritual slaughterer. What was interesting was that the last name of the *shochet* who no longer worked was Chalaf which is the word for the knife used by the *shochet*; the son-in-law's family name was Reznick, which means "slaughterer". My Father's family name was Mohel. It seems to me that when last names were introduced into the Russian Empire during the 18th century, these were the names that the Jews took upon themselves in accordance with their professions. My Father was from another town, Kopachovka (Kopaczówka), near Torchin (Torczyn) in the District of Lutsk (Łuck). I never knew my Father's family – his father and grandfather. I have very little information about my Father's family. I am now waiting for a visit from my Father's younger brother who's coming from Argentina and who I believe is now 73 years old, and he will come to visit Israel in the spring. He has been in Argentina since 1925 and I want to get information from him, his memories of his home and of my Father. But he wrote and told me that he remembers very little because he was a very small child when his father (my grandfather) died. I know that he studied with a rabbi in another town, that he studied Torah and planned to get certification to be a *shochet*. Not everyone who wanted to could be a *shochet*; you needed to get a diploma first. The same went for a *dayan* (rabbinical judge). Later, as it happened, the son of that rabbi was a private tutor in our town, and I studied with him for two months. He lived in Israel and now is in America, a professor at the rabbinical seminary in New York, and also a rabbi, Rabbi Dr. Moshe Zucker. At the time he was a complete *apikoros*

(sceptic) – not even religious. But that is a separate matter.

Mother's father was a ritual slaughterer, and to get the job of *shochet* one had to have a "holding", the right to be a *shochet*. Sometimes it was necessary to purchase it with money. But if such a person would have married the daughter of a *shochet*, the daughter's father could pass on to him the right to be a *shochet*. That way, when my Father married my Mother, he received that right – to be a *shochet* in the town.

I later learned that my Father and Mother had rather a lot of problems during the initial period after their wedding. It seems that this detail is perhaps not important but it should be told anyway: Mother was my Father's second wife. The first marriage did not work out. He had married a very beautiful girl, gorgeous, but shortly after the wedding, within just a few months, she went crazy. So he got a *get* (divorce) from her after a very short time and then he married my Mother.

The competition between the ritual slaughterers was tough. They did not want to accept someone new because it endangered their livelihood. They persecuted Father, and I think there was a situation when my Father wanted to take his own life, to slaughter himself. I remember when I was still a child and heard about it, it gave me the chills. But after all these troubles things settled down, and eventually matters righted themselves.

Memoirs of Father

I remember that my parents were desperately poor all their lives. Both before and after the First World War there was rarely enough bread in the house. We did not have our own flat, but we lived in a rented flat. Anyone who did not have his own flat was of a lower status. I remember I was probably three or four years old at the time (according to what my parents told me, my first memories are from the age of three or four), we lived in the house of a shoemaker who could afford to build a new house

made of wood – a relatively large house, and they leased a flat in it. Our flat was up the stairs, six or eight stairs. It had a large room and next to it a small room, which was a bedroom.



Hanna-Leah (Hanna-Bielle) née Kaszkiet, mother of Yehuda. Photograph from c.1925 (no photographs remained of Eliezer Mohel, the father of Yehuda).

When I was about five years old, my Father began to teach me the alphabet. He taught me quite severely, with a rod in his hand, and any mild or severe mistake was immediately punished with the rod and in that way I learned the alphabet. I remember two incidents to this day when I was severely punished by Father and – even though Father was usually right when he punished me – in these two incidents I do not believe he was fair.

The first incident: As I mentioned at the beginning, the town was muddy in the spring and in the autumn. Everyone, almost everyone, wore galoshes, as did we. There were high galoshes and some not so high. I and my sister Batya, who was two and-a-half years older than I was, had two pairs of high galoshes bought for us. I used to play with a girl my age, the shoemaker's daughter. One day after the rain, I invited her to go out with me to play. She said she could not leave because she had no galoshes. I did not think much about it; I gave her Batya's galoshes, put on mine and we went out to play. We played for a while, an hour or two or three, and we came back. When I returned home – there was an outrage: Batya was looking for her galoshes and couldn't find them. Where were they? Were they stolen? When they found out that I had taken them and given them to the shoemaker's daughter without asking (most importantly – without asking permission) I received severe punishment from Father. I was beaten.

The second incident: Mother was weak and sickly. I remember that once when Mother was sick I was sitting with my sister on the steps of the house. It was a spring or summer day, sunny. I was speaking with her, and among other things I was talking about philosophy and I asked, "Why is Mother sick?" She said, "It is from God". I said, "No, God is a merciful God. What did Mother do to Him? She is so good. Why does He allow her to be sick? May His name and memory be cursed". That was how I expressed it, in anger at God that He let Mother

get sick. It was not her fault. She hadn't done anything bad to Him. Somehow, Father found out. Presumably my sister Batya told on me and said that I had cursed God. I got a heavy dose of smacks. Mother almost fainted and wanted to save me. The beating was to educate me that one must behave properly and respectfully towards God. Both of these incidents I remember to this day.

I used to go to the synagogue with my Father. It was customary to wear a brimmed hat and buy a new one for Passover. At Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) I had a new suit made and they bought me a brown hat. I was proud of this hat. I went with my Father to the synagogue where he sat at the Eastern wall, and the Jews who were sitting next to him would pinch me on the cheek, stand me up on the benches and ask me all kinds of questions. My Father was proud that I behaved nicely with them and answered all the questions.

The First World War

In 1913 or 1914, when I was six years old, I began to study at the *cheder*. Since I already knew the alphabet, I learned for a month or two with the *melamed dardakim* (the teacher of the smallest children) and immediately I moved to a rabbi at a higher level, who taught the Bible and a little Talmud. I studied in *cheder* for about six months until the First World War erupted. I remember when they started to recruit people into the Russian army, married Jews with families and children, homeowners, aged 30, 30-something, with beards. There was a real atmosphere of mourning in the city, when every day Jews were leaving for the war, leaving a wife at home and children, and not knowing what would happen, if they would return. It was feared that in the army they would shave the beards of the observant Jews, and the more serious problem was eating

non-kosher food. They couldn't keep kosher there. Also, the matter of their lives being in danger. It was really a tragedy for the town, and the entire town was thrown into a serious state of mourning. Until, in the end, the war approached our town, we heard the cannons roar and we hid in the cellars. I remember standing at the door to the basement and watching the cannons fire and damage the houses, especially the church, which was a tall building.



The church of Boremel, shelled during the First World War.

The shells, one after the other, hit the church and fires broke out. The Jews had gathered in the basements and were reading Psalms. In the end there had to be a complete evacuation of the town after several people died, including some from our own family. One friend was killed by a bomb. The house was demolished. We went on foot, with wagons. I remember we had a cart that we had made, with small wheels. We, Father and the children, pulled it as much as possible and then neighbours picked us up into their cart, and this way we managed to get to the nearest town, about 15-20 km away. Mother had not long before given birth to my sister Chaika (Chaya). At night we went out and the bombs passed over our heads. Afterwards we continued wandering and between 1914 and 1921 we travelled from village to village, a few months here, six months there, mostly in villages in the district of Lublin.

I remember how when I was eight or seven I would go with my Mother twice a week to the nearest town, which was now governed by the Austrians. There one got a portion of flour to live on. I would go with my Mother and would carry the flour on my back for a distance of 12 km. I remember going with my Father a distance of 18 km to a nearby town and we would buy bread for the week and bring it back. I would carry it in the cart and on my back. Of course it was not easy for someone of my age and it was very heavy for me. Life was very difficult during the war. There was a lack of vitamins in the foodstuffs. Of course it was impossible to think about one's studies and I really did not learn anything during that entire time, except for what I was able to pick up by myself. It still was something. I remember that when I was six years old, before the war started, I already knew how to read in Yiddish. I used to read the books that Jews brought, all kinds of small booklets, and novels and stories. These were distributed to houses for the Sabbath, and on Sunday they were given back. With Father's help I learned a little bit of Talmud and the Bible. I was very keen on reading. I even read scraps of newspapers that I found in the street, articles with no beginning or end.

The urge to read was so great that I read everything, even without understanding the connection between the sentences. Thanks to that I progressed reasonably well in reading, in knowledge and language. Also in Hebrew – the Hebrew then, of course, was the Hebrew of the Bible and of the ancient books. Ashkenazi pronunciation. I remember that I used to study in the *cheder* and I came home for lunch. Batya and her friend had a private tutor, Zucker, who taught them Hebrew, and I listened to what he taught them. He would give them lessons. The next day he would ask them for the explanation of the Hebrew words they had learned but they didn't always know. I knew, and I would remind them. The teacher warned me not to interfere and

not to remind them. He would tell me he had a little rod folded inside his pocket, so that no one could see it, and if I told them he would take it out and hit me. That was how he threatened me.

I remember one episode from my early childhood, when I was four or five. We had relatives in Minsk, the capital of the district, which was much larger than our town. My Father's brother and sister lived there. A second brother – this is the brother who is now in Argentina – lived with us, under Father's guardianship and in his keeping. Well, I remember when I was four or five years old I went there with Mother to visit the relatives. One day, I think it was on the Sabbath, Mother went out with Father's sister to walk in the city and I was with them. When we were on the main streets of the city, we passed a bike shop. The shiny bikes in the window fascinated me and I could not break away. My Mother and my aunt continued walking and suddenly they discovered that I was not with them. They went back to look for me and found me fascinated by the shiny bikes. Then my aunt, who worked and lived off her wages, promised to buy me a bike. Indeed, the very next day, Sunday, she bought me a beautiful shiny tricycle. But I did not have much time to enjoy it. Two or three days later, my Father's brother Simcha came, hoisted the bike up on his shoulder and left with it. I burst into tears. He explained that the bicycle was broken and he was taking it to be repaired and then he would return it to me. Of course, I did not believe him and I wept bitterly. I remember to this day the injustice that was done – that I was bought a gift, but I wasn't allowed to use it and it was taken from me a few days later.

We went back a little in time. Now I want to continue recounting some incidents from the war period, the time of wandering (1914-1921). My Father was engaged in his profession as a *shochet*. During the week, he would go from village to village, to the Jewish families who lived in these villages. Two

or three Jewish families lived in every village. They had shops, and two families, I remember, had a partnership in a flourmill with millstones. In another village there was an extended family, quite a lot of brothers who were really landowners! They had tenant farmers who worked for them, lots of horses and so on. Many hectares (one hectare is equal to 10,000 m²) of land – a rich family. Jewish families owning estates were rare in Poland. Well, Father wandered through the villages and among these families and whoever needed to slaughter a cow, calf, goose, etc., he would perform the ritual slaughter and receive his wages, and he came home only on Thursday nights, remained for Friday and the Sabbath, and again on Sunday he was out wandering in search of work.

First love and vegetarianism

From time to time, I would join Father in his travels and learn a little about the surroundings. Of course, we did not live in one place; sometimes in one village and sometimes in another, paying rent. I remember that in 1915-1916 or 1916-1917 we lived in one village with a farmer, a Jew with some land who would deal a bit in trade and also work on the land. We rented from him. On the Sabbath the quorum would gather in his home and on Holy Days the communal prayers were led by him. The Torah was kept in the Holy Ark inside the house. There was no synagogue. He had three daughters and one son – a boy my age with whom I became friends. The youngest daughter was a year older than me (I was then about eight or nine years old) and I fell in love with her – I was "head over heels" in love, as the saying goes. I was embarrassed to talk about it and did not know how to tell her. Once, when no one was at home (we lived in one room and they lived in the other), I wrote in Polish, in block letters, "Forever Yours", and

put this note on the table so that she would see it when she came home, and then I hid. In these homes, there were stoves with space above – you could even sleep there – and that was where I hid. When the people returned and found the note, they laughed and chuckled. They realized that this was my doing. I really was ashamed and did not dare venture out from my hiding place. Later that evening, I went out with my sister Batya and told her, in secret, that I was in love with this girl (I cannot even remember her name now). I remember that Batya said: "Who is she anyway? What do we have in common? She doesn't even know how to read and write; she's ignorant, the daughter of a farmer. What were you thinking?" For a long time, I suffered because of my love for that girl. She was the first love of my life.

Father, as you know, was a *shochet*. When I was a little boy that did not affect me, especially when he was a *shochet* in the villages and not at home; I would always see him at his work. When we lived in the village, we started raising chickens at home. I, my sister and even my Mother got used to them and we liked the chickens. I remember we had a speckled hen that we became very attached to, especially because Mother decided to sit her on the eggs to hatch them so that we would have chicks. And the chicks hatched, the hen cared for them, we all became very attached both to the hen and to the chicks – especially me. I knew every one of them – I could identify them even from a distance. When they grew, my Mother decided to slaughter one of these young chickens for the Sabbath. That was something that I could not bear. I started to cry and begged to let them live, these young ones who had not yet had a chance to live. Of course, this did not help me; everyone laughed at me and every Sabbath one of the chickens would be slaughtered. I did not eat that meat, both in protest and also because I just could not swallow it. I suffered a lot during this period. Finally, it was

the turn of the speckled mother hen. That was going too far. Slaughter both the children and the mother? I could not stand it. I cried terribly during the night; I walked around like crazy and could not sleep. I decided to stop eating meat altogether. That created an odd situation. I was the son of a *shochet*, slaughtering was his livelihood and his bread and butter. I lived in his home, I ate his food and that's what kept me alive. And yet, I was fighting against my Father and his profession. What could be done? How could I get out of this complicated situation? At first, I did not share my opinions, but then I came out publicly and said I did not want to eat meat. Of course, Mother did not agree and did not want to cook special food for me, and they would force me to eat. There were times when I ran away from home, and for several days and nights I would not return, and then they would look for me and finally find me with friends. At first, I made peace with them and returned, but then they would start insisting again, and again I would run away. The pressure on me was great and I could not continually avoid eating meat at home.

The First World War ends

I remember arguments I had with my sister Batya. We would play all sorts of games. The other children were smaller; Batya and I were the eldest. Father would be going around the villages, Mother would be out on errands and shopping, and often we were left at home alone. All of the chores in the house fell on Batya, the eldest daughter, and on me. I was the one who had to bring water, wood, etc., but that still left time for games and arguments. I remember one time when I was playing a game by myself where I was riding a horse and had a sword and was hitting and killing imaginary foes. Batya asked me who I was fighting. "What do you mean?" I said, "I am fighting with the

Arabs, in the Land of Israel. I am liberating the Land". "Why do you have to kill them?" she asked. "What do you mean? They conquered us, took our homeland". She lectured me that one does not kill, that one should live in peace, that there is room for us and for them. Even then, she expressed such liberal views – this was despite the fact that we had no idea about the peace treaty or the Zionist or political movements.



Wandering families during the war, in the Volhynia region. Photograph from 1916.

I would often wage wars with the *shaygetzim* (the gentile children in the village). We used to play together and fight together. Especially on *Lag B'Omer*, when I was out with the bow and arrows that I had made for myself. The other children would laugh at me. We would throw stones and fight. I remember once I threw a rock at a boy and he got hurt. All the *shaygetzim* laid siege to our house and I was afraid to go out. Mother closed the door. Later, she went out and somehow set things right, but it was a kind of a crisis, and when I went out of the house it was with fear in my heart.

It was a time of war and those places where we lived changed hands; first, they were part of Austria and then part of Russia and later held by the Germans. On the Sabbath and Holy Days, when we were praying, Jewish soldiers came to pray with us. I remember once, during the High Holy Days in 1917, shortly before the end of the war, a soldier came to pray with the quorum, and when we came to the prayer "From the

depths I called to you, O Lord" he covered himself with the *tallith*, according to the custom, and I covered myself together with him in his *tallith* and we read from the same *siddur* (prayer book). And while he prayed, his hot tears fell on to the *siddur*. Even now I get emotional remembering this event of the lone Jew in the Austrian army or the Russian army, it doesn't matter which as there was anti-Semitism in all the armies. Perhaps he was far from his home, leaving his wife and his children at home, not knowing when he would return, or even if he would return; and he poured out the bitterness in his heart with hot tears as he prayed "From the depths". I cried with him. This brought us to 1917, when the Revolution broke out in Russia.

The Soviet Revolution and the new Poland

I remember, I would read *Haynt* and *Der Moment*, Yiddish newspapers, and I remember Yitzeleh's political articles. He was the father of one of the editors of *Maariv*. His father was a famous journalist at *Haynt*, a well known political analyst and a great favourite with the readers. I remember how he wrote, in an oblique way, about the "red rooster" standing on the roof. Naturally, his readers understood the reference and his commentary. I can well remember the arguments my Father used to have with other Jews about the Soviet Revolution. But more important than the arguments was the awakening, the unrest that was occurring. The Bolsheviks were becoming militant, there was a civil war going on, and they also wanted to expand boundaries. I remember talk about how they were getting nearer, and the nearer they came, the more the unrest increased. I became aware of this, particularly when we came to a village where the family owned property, where the tenant farmers went on strike and did not want to go to work, and

there was fear that they would overpower the estate. There were many incidents in other places where landowners had been attacked (there were also pogroms against the Jews), and they were robbed and murdered. During this period, there was an escalation in the gangs of bandits who would attack the factories and the farmers, especially the rich ones, on the pretext that there was a war and revolution.



"Haynt" and "Der Moment", Yiddish newspapers.

In the meantime, the end of the First World War was declared and the new Poland "came to life". I remember Haller's Army. General Józef Haller, a far-right Polish general, was, I believe, in exile in France. There he established a unit, a division, and it was after General Haller that they were called Haller's Army. After announcing the resurrection of Poland, Haller's Army returned to Poland and started to mete out punishments – to the Jews, of course. They would attack Jews wherever they found them – in the cities, on the streets, on the train, in their homes, wherever. In a nearby village there was one Jew with a long white beard, a respected man, and he also had a son-in-law in his 30s or 40s with a well-groomed beard. One time after prayers, Haller's Polish soldiers cut off their beards with a knife causing a lot of pain. Sometimes they would set a beard on fire with a match and burn the man's face. Men's faces were getting burned and scarred. They also robbed the Jews and physically abused the girls and so forth. This was being compared with the deeds of Chmielnicki, the Evil Decree of

5408-5409 [1648], the infamous pogroms against Jews in the 17th century. My memories of the establishment of the "new Poland" are remembered through the acts of Haller's Army.



Józef Haller, commander of the Second Division of the Polish Legions. He lived in France where he established the "Blue Army", which he brought to the Ukrainian Front in 1919.

Returning to Boremel

We lived and wandered around these villages until 1921. It was then that we started to submit applications to offices and ministers in Poland to allow us to return to our town. We also needed help with the expense of moving us and our belongings, because we did not have the means to do so by ourselves. I remember that the local Catholic priest helped us a lot, wrote the requests and took an interest in our case. Thanks to that, we returned to the city of Boremel in 1921. Of course, many people – both from among our family and acquaintances – were no longer in the town. A large number had been killed or had died during the years we had been away. We did not find anything at all of our belongings – everything had been taken. We had to start building all over again from scratch, naked and penniless, as they say. And so we began to rebuild our lives there. I was 13 years old by then and was faced, as were so many other boys my age, with the problem of registration in school. Although I

could read and write, I had received no education, no systematic learning. There was now a Polish school in the town, with several classes... five or six classrooms, I cannot remember exactly how many. We started the process of enrolling me at the school. We went there, but the headmaster said he could not accept me because I had not finished even one class. That meant I needed to start from the first grade. How can you put a boy of 13 into first grade with children aged seven or eight? Putting me into a higher grade was impossible because I didn't have the required knowledge. We could find no solution. My parents had no money for private education and I could not ask them for any. Our financial situation was terrible. Then I decided – although I do not remember if it was my initiative or on the advice of my parents (my parents also helped me with all of the arrangements related to this solution) – that I would go out to the villages as a teacher, to teach Jewish children to read, write, learn the communal prayer services, and perhaps a little Bible, depending on their level. Apparently, I was able to do this (and even teach some mathematics), despite the fact that I had not studied in school.

I went to one village for the six winter months where I taught. I came home once every month or two. And over the winter, I earned hundreds of kilogrammes of grain, because that was how they paid me for my work. In the spring I took it all home. At home I sold the grain and decided that in exchange for this money I would study privately. I went to the Polish headmaster at the school and asked him to give me private lessons in the evenings. We came to an agreement on the price and I began to study with him. I studied with him for six months, during the entire summer. After studying with him for two months, a woman came to my Mother at home. She was from a family in the town – two sisters and a brother – who were very wealthy, relatively speaking of course. In this town they were the "lords"

– people who were considered to be the intelligentsia in the town. The brother was an elderly bachelor who ran the business, and he had two sisters, one who was older and the other around my age. The older sister came to my Mother to ask if her younger sister might study with me in the private lessons with the school headmaster. For Mother this was, on the one hand, a great honour that such a distinguished family would come to request that the girl would study with me but, on the other hand, she wondered why that was, and asked why the child could not study alone with the headmaster. The sister told her that when they had met the school headmaster, while playing card games and so on with him and with the owner of the pharmacy, they heard how well I studied and how talented I was, and she wanted her little sister to study with me so that I could help her generally and with her homework. Mother agreed. By the way, I then got a discount on the tuition fee. So for a few months, I studied with her and I also used to help her with her homework.

Studies, the Hashomer Hatzair movement, newspaper

I refreshed my knowledge of Polish during these six months, together with a bit of Polish literature, and became familiar with Adam Mickiewicz, the great Polish poet. I also read some of his books, some grammar, and then winter came. I wanted to continue studying, but had no money. I decided to repeat the same process. Once again I went out to the villages. I taught. Again I was paid in grain, and in the spring once again I sold it. This time I decided to learn Hebrew. In our town there was at that time a teacher named Zucker. He taught Hebrew to groups of pupils and my sister Batya studied with him. I joined one of these groups and for five months I learned Hebrew with him. I really enjoyed those studies. I also studied some Bible. One very enjoyable moment for me came during one of the lessons about

the Prophet Isaiah, when the teacher explained the verses. I did not like his explanation. I raised my hand and told the teacher that, in my opinion, the literal meaning, the explanation, was not that, but something else. He thought for a moment and said, "Yes, you're right". I was very proud of my ability – that I had been able to explain better than the teacher – but it was just one isolated incident. These lessons continued until 1924 which was the year when the teacher became a complete *apikoros* (sceptic). Suddenly, he decided to leave the town and go to Vienna to attend a rabbinical seminary. After that, I did not hear anything about him. When we arrived in Israel, I heard that he was in the United States. I found his address and I started to exchange letters with him. I even met him when he visited Israel, and he is now a Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University in New York.

During the period when we lived in Boremel, until 1924, when we moved to another town, and I will talk about that later, I associated with boys my own age. In 1922, a branch of Hashomer Hatzair was established – the Hashomer Hatzair Union. I, of course, joined and became part of the group. By the way, my group leader at that time is now in Israel and lives in Holon and has already retired. He also married a girl from Boremel who studied with him; she was from a liberal family. I was very enthusiastic about Hashomer Hatzair – the activities, the anthems, the marches, the trips, the conversations. I remember a very inspiring conversation about Tel Hai (a Jewish settlement in Palestine where there was a battle between Jews and Arabs in 1920). But this organisation ceased to exist after a short time; I don't know why. The Hashomer Hatzair continued to meet for about a year, a year and-a-half. The local youth had nothing to do, nothing to identify with. There was no school, although there was a library named in honour of Hochberg, where I worked for a while. Hochberg was a teacher at the

school, which was established immediately after the liberation of Poland and which closed after a short time. He was a young teacher of Hebrew who was killed by Ukrainian nationalists as he walked from town to town. I remember the square rubber stamp, "Library named in honour of the late S. Hochberg". This library had many books in Hebrew and Yiddish. I registered with the library at the beginning and took out books which I devoured. Every day a book or two. I came to know the people who managed the library which is how I became part of that social group, and soon we became very friendly and decided that we needed to do something. We didn't know exactly what to do, but eventually we decided to produce a newspaper. We got it started and circulated a few issues, all handwritten, with 30-35 large pages. We divided the work: each of us would write out a few copies, five or six each, so we managed to put out about 30 copies or so, maybe 35, that we distributed to people to read.

When I was 14, a year after returning to Boremel, even before I went to the villages to teach and the situation in our home was bad financially, I was looking for ways to earn some money, to be a bit more independent. I had a friend whose family were builders. The father and three sons built houses in villages nearby. In our town there was a Czech family named Kozak. By the way, when I was on a trip to Czechoslovakia after World War II, I happened to meet a guide on the bus named Kozak. After a conversation with her I learned that she was the daughter of that same Kozak family from Boremel who fled to Russia or to Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation. She was in the Czech unit in the Russian army. When she returned to Czechoslovakia, she must have climbed the political ladder and was a guide for a group of Polish officers. So this Kozak family was building a new roof made of concrete. When I asked for work, they took me on for a very

low wage. My first job was breaking bricks. Pieces of brick had to be smashed into small pieces and were then used to cast the roof. I would break these bricks and get injured, but still I was earning something now, and I felt a little better. Later, I worked for a few months doing carpentry. I wanted to learn a trade. After this, in 1923 or 1924, I went to another place to learn the trade of welding. I stayed with relatives and because I then felt slightly more in control of my own life, I decided it was time to stop eating meat. Indeed, in 1924 I stopped and started to live as a vegetarian. It was difficult, because of pressure from my family, but I did not give in to this pressure. I was a vegetarian until 1932, I think, when I went to prison for the first time in Palestine. Because of the conditions in prison, I was forced to stop being a vegetarian.

Returning to the newspaper that we published, as I said, it was 30-something pages long. I published a long article (about half of the entire newspaper) in which I presented an argument supporting vegetarianism. I fought against the opinions that say that animals do not feel, do not understand, they have no awareness, they are stupid. I said, why should we not eat people who are complete idiots and fools? Do not kill, and so forth. Adults would also read the paper – nearly all of them could read Hebrew (from knowing the prayers and from the Bible). The article was published in the town. When I came to the synagogue people would attack me and make fun of me, saying that I wanted to hurt my Father the *shochet*, and so on. By the way, I gave this article a motto from the Book of Isaiah "Sinful nation, people weighed down with guilt, race of wrongdoers, perverted children! They have abandoned the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away". When the former head of my group in Hashomer Hatzair (Pini Silver, the one who lived in Holon) read the article, he explained that one has to give a motto that

would be appropriate for the content of the article, and he suggested this verse to me. I was grateful. I thanked him for it again when I met him in Israel.

The move to Mlinov

In Boremel, there was not enough *parnusa* for three *shochets* and their families. These were difficult years after the war. There were negotiations between the *shochets* that one of them would move away. The other *shochets* were very well established and lived in flats that they owned. One of them had a very large flat and he rented part of it, bringing him additional income. The second family owned a shoe shop, and the *shochet's* wife and children worked in it, resulting in additional income for them. We did not own a house, nor did we have any additional income. Our financial situation was more severe than that of the others, and we were the ones who were least connected to the place, so it was my Father's fate to leave and he had to move elsewhere.



Jewish neighbourhood in Mlinov. A rare photograph, probably from 1916.

As it happened a position became vacant in a nearby town, Mlinov, which was about 40-50 km away. It was agreed that Father would receive compensation from both families for the holding that he had lost and, with this money, he would buy a holding there. It was a town similar to Boremel in terms of size and conditions. There was only one *shochet* there, Rabbi Pesach, and Father was supposed to be the second *shochet* – so there would be two *shochets* in both of the towns. The wages were similar, perhaps slightly less than in Boremel. Father even ended up with some money, the difference between the compensation received in Boremel and what he paid in Mlinov: about 400 zlotys. With this money he was able to purchase a flat of his own.

It wasn't a new flat and was rather dilapidated, but it had three rooms. One was quite large, the living room, then there were two tiny bedrooms and also a kitchen. It was in a communal building. I remember that after a few years, we had to replace the wooden planks of the foundations that were old and rotten and that was a major expense, but at least it was a flat of our own. The first time that our family had owned a flat!

We moved to Mlinov, having loaded our possessions onto carts. It was a rainy day with only a little sun breaking through. Slowly we moved with the carts. At first we lived in rented accommodation for a few months until the family who was leaving moved out and we had renovated the flat a bit, and then we were able to move into our new home. It was then 1924-1925. I was already about 16-17 years old and, because of the move, I had severed all of my ties with my friends and with the town where I knew all the streets and the houses and where we had many relatives. We had no relatives in the new place. We arrived in Mlinov in the autumn – at the beginning of winter. Conditions at this time of year in a small town are not exactly

ideal for socialising. There was a lot of mud, snow and frost and we did not have enough warm clothes so most of the time we did not go out but sat at home and for the first few months of our stay I was not able to make any social contacts. There was a guy my age in the house we lived in, maybe a year older than me, named Yona-Reuven. He was a relatively well educated fellow who had studied and was quite clever. I did become quite friendly with him. We talked, we debated and we also wrote together. Sometimes we wrote letters to each other, even though we lived next door to each other. These were my first social connections in Mlinov.



The Mohel family's small courtyard in Mlinov. In the photograph are Yehuda's three sisters: first on the right, Batya; in the centre (standing), Chaya; to her right, Dvorah. On the windowsill sits a different Batya, a family friend, who later became the wife of Yaakov Mohel, brother of Yehuda. The photograph was probably taken in the 1930s.

The first years in Mlinov, the town's economy

In those first months in that town, I remember an incident involving one of the inhabitants whose name was Shmuel Mendelkorn and who left the town with his wife Malka. That was in 1925. His wife was the sister of the poet Yitzchak Lamdan who also lived there. That same Shmuel and his wife went to the land of Israel. It was a very important event in my life. Even in Boremel occasionally someone would leave to go and live in Israel. Shmuel Mendelkorn was not really an acquaintance and he was also much older than me; he was the brother of a girlfriend of mine. He was the second person to leave Boremel and go to Israel. This was, of course, very close to my heart. There was a very large party before he left. Of course, I was not invited, but nonetheless, together with Yona-Reuven, we wrote a farewell poem, and the first letters of each line formed Shmuel's first name and surname. We sent this poem to him, with a messenger, to the party, but of course, we never received a response.

Regarding the town of Mlinov, you could say it was a substitute for Boremel. Usually these towns were similar to each other, with relatively small differences. Economically there were similarities, small shops which competed with each other. I especially want to emphasise the strong bond that existed between the town and the village. For example, the shopkeepers, especially the owners of fabric shops, haberdashery, were not satisfied with the trade in the shops, which in any case were empty most of the time, and only on Thursday and Friday there was rather more commerce. These shop owners and their families, therefore, went out to the villages, especially if there were several adults in the family. They would bundle their stock into satchels, baskets, and even wrap them in a large sheet. They would take the merchandise to the villages. The distances were not very great, five or six km, approximately. Sometimes they

would spend a day or two in a village. There were also instances when they went out for the whole week, leaving on Sunday and returning only on Friday. You could almost always find several townfolk in the village seeking their livelihood. Either they would buy eggs and poultry or meat, calves and cows for the butchers in town, or they would sell haberdashery and fabrics, or they were craftsmen like masons and carpenters, who went out to work and built houses for the peasants. You could say it was a "migration" from the town to the village. Migration from the countryside to the town was normal during the week; the peasants came there individually to run various errands. The main migration occurred on market days and days when there was a fair. There were fixed days once every week or fortnight, depending on the location, for market day. That was the day when the farmers from nearby villages would come to the town to sell their wares, and also to buy. And in general it was interesting to meet people. The market was arranged with stalls, a kind of long table on all sides, with walkways in-between. Every shop would take its merchandise out to the market and arrange it on the table for the villagers to see. People would also come with merchandise from the nearby towns and the large city – shoes, boots, all kinds of goods were for sale. Children's toys too. At the market you could find every conceivable thing and whatever your heart could desire. The relationship between the village and the town was very close.

Life in the towns, transportation, the people

I would like to talk about the means of transportation between the Jewish towns in those days in the Volhynia region. Generally, there were very few roads and they only ran between the main cities. Transport usually took the form of carts hitched to horses. Even for distances of 30-50 km to cities like Minsk

or Rovno, people travelled by horse and cart. Shorter distances were covered on foot. From Mlinov to Dubno the distance was 18 km, and many times I travelled that route on foot, there and back – sometimes in one day. I remember, when we were still in Boremel, in 1923 or 1924, there was a great commotion in the town because of some sensational news. A special delegation came to give a lecture in the synagogue and at public meetings, and I think they also took up a collection. The information spread that railway tracks were being laid and that there would be a station about 15-16 km from Boremel. The nearest station in the Mlinov region was in Dubno.



Market in one of the towns in Volhynia. Photograph from the beginning of the 20th century.

Not far from Mlinov, just three km from the town, was a crossroad where routes intersected. To the right was Dubno, to the left Minsk, and straight ahead, Rovno. The road from Rovno went through the intersection and turned in the direction of the town of Yanonovka, and I think that was where the road ended and became a dirt track. The first bus routes that linked the

towns of Rovno, Dubno and Mlinov were established around the years 1926-1927 by a retired Polish officer who lived there. A friend of mine, now living in Haifa, was the chief conductor on those buses.

I have mentioned that Mlinov was similar to Boremel, but still there were differences. Although in the town of Mlinov itself there was no road, not far away was the road from Rovno to Minsk. What distinguished Mlinov from Boremel was, firstly, that it had only one synagogue instead of three as in Boremel. There was a *Beit Midrash*, and next to the study house there was also a small *shtiebel* for craftsmen. Secondly, in Mlinov there was a famous doctor, a Pole, Dr. Zygmunt Wisłocki, and sick people from the entire area would come to him. His name was known throughout the region, perhaps because he was the only doctor, but generally he was praised as being very good. He had a lovely house with a large garden, and sometimes we would go for a walk near his estate. Later a street was named after him.

In Mlinov there was also a Jewish pharmacy owner, although he was an assimilated Jew, named Weinstein, who spoke Russian at home; I am not sure if he even knew Yiddish. Perhaps he did, but did not speak it. In Boremel, for example, the pharmacist was a Pole. Weinstein's son, who also spoke Polish, was in partnership with the Polish reserve officer who organised the bus system, and they managed a trading house together. There were other people whom I think I should describe, briefly.

The Rabbi. When we arrived in Mlinov there was no rabbi in the town. They sought a candidate and found a rabbi in Lublin, or from the surrounding area – a Polish Jew who spoke Yiddish with an accent from central Poland. His name was also Yehuda (Rabbi Yehuda Gordon – Gardin) and he came with his family. Of course, there were all kinds of problems until he got settled. There were some who were satisfied with him and others who

were not, but eventually he became part of the community. Later he was murdered by the Germans.



From left to right: Motel Litvak, Yehuda-Leib Lamdan, Rabbi Yehuda Gordon (Gardin), the last Rabbi of the city Mlinov.

There was an interesting family of a Jew named Yehuda-Leib Lamdan. He was the father of the poet Yitzchak Lamdan. His official place of employment was a hotel, an inn that was always empty. The family lived very modestly. He was a Jew who knew how to teach the Torah and he was very serious, very respected, quiet but dignified. The whole town admired and respected Yehuda-Leib. He had a son-in-law whose name was Motel Litvak. They had a fabric shop if I'm not mistaken. He was a shaved Jew, with only a moustache, and was known as one of the town's intellectuals with political, non-religious views, and it was interesting to discuss politics in general with him. He was knowledgeable and was considered to be an authority in the town. People consulted with him and it was pleasant to speak with him. His son, Yosef Litvak, now lives in Jerusalem, and is a clever fellow. Now [1970] he is an emissary to the United States.

An interesting character – folkloric – was Herschel Dziecina, aged 30-something, very tall, slim, slightly retarded, who lived with his wife in the *shtiebel* next to the synagogue and served

as the *shamash* (beadle). His job was to draw water. He would walk with a yoke across his back with two buckets, bringing water from the river or from the pump in the city centre and would fill the barrels in people's homes. And that's how he made his living. People used to say that because he was so tall with such long legs, when he would come to a fence he did not have to walk around it but just had to lift up his leg and he was already over it. There were all kinds of legends and stories about him. For example, when he was told of a *shidduch* (match) in Dubno, he went to Dubno to see the prospective bride. People advised him that it was proper for the man to invite the girl to the cinema. And so he did. He invited her to the cinema. They sat on one of the front benches and watched the film. Apparently, it was the first time in his life he had watched a film. Suddenly, on the screen, he saw a couple of horses hitched to a wagon running wild, and it seemed to him that any minute they would jump out of the screen. He stood up, raised his hand and shouted, "Prrrrrh!"



A typical Jewish water carrier.

Another story was that another time he went to the cinema and saw a pair of thieves hiding from the police, who were chasing them and could not find them. He got up and pointed at them and shouted, "There they are!" It was a story the whole town knew about him. He was the subject of jokes and legends and I think it is right that they should become part of this "history".

The Ukrainians, the Czechs and the Poles

So far I have described the actual towns of Mlinov and Boremel, but I have not described the surroundings. Between the towns there were scattered villages approximately three to five km apart. Some of the villages were densely populated with homes very near to each other, but there were villages where the distance between the houses would sometimes be as much as half a kilometre or even more. The population in the villages was usually Ukrainian. They lived in very poor conditions. The houses were small and built of wood and usually covered with a thatched roof which was, of course, the reason why fires frequently happened, particularly in the summer. It was enough for a spark to fall onto the thatch to cause a fire. In those circumstances whole sections of the village could burn down. The houses were also very low. The level of education and culture was also low, like the houses. Not all of the children went to school. Poverty was rampant. One family often had just one pair of shoes, and each day a different child went to school wearing that same pair of shoes. The financial income was small. Wheat was sold at low prices. There were years of crisis. Sometimes there was no money to buy oil for the lamps (there was no electricity) and people would sit in the dark during the long winter nights, despite the fact that oil was relatively inexpensive. Peasants would also cut matches into halves or quarters.



A typical rural Jewish home in one of the towns in Volhynia.

Among these villages there were some that were inhabited by Czechs. In the 19th century, during the period of the Tsar, Russian authorities encouraged Czechs to settle in Volhynia. There were quite a number of villages like that scattered around. Interestingly, the Czech villages stood out sharply in contrast to the Ukrainian ones both in outward appearance and in the lifestyle of the villagers. First of all, most houses in the Czech villages were built of brick, with one or two storeys. The yards were spacious. The stables, the barns were also built of brick. For agriculture and to work the land, the Czechs used more complex devices than the Ukrainians: harvesters and threshing machines. Their cultural life was also more developed and all of the children went to school. All of the Czech farmers would have a Czech newspaper in their home. They would read newspapers. Their cultural level was much higher than that of the Ukrainians in all respects.



A Czech village in Volhynia, richer and more organized than other villages.

Apart from the Czechs and Ukrainians, there were villages populated by Poles. Poles had inhabited this area from ancient times, but there were also many Poles who settled there after the

First World War ended in 1918. This part of Western Ukraine, which had previously been under Tsarist rule, was within the borders of Poland. The Polish authorities confiscated much of the Ukrainians' land, including that of owners of estates, and gave it as a gift or leased it, to Polish settlers (they were called "colonists"), mainly retired military personnel who had participated in wars, especially with Russia. The idea was to increase the percentage of the Polish population in that area. This eventually back-fired on them because in 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, when the Red Army conquered Western Ukraine as a result of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, they exiled the Polish colonists to Siberia.

Jewish Holidays in towns in Volhynia

Pesach (Passover): Preparations for Pesach went on for several weeks. Before the eve of Pesach, everyone cleaned and prepared their homes. It was a time for whitewashing the walls. A thorough cleaning would be made inside and all around the house. Pesach crockery, stored in boxes, would be kept in the attic all year long and would be brought down to be used during Pesach. The eve of Pesach was really special and has been etched into my memory for a lifetime. First of all, the day before the eve of Pesach we would have *biur chametz* (burning of the leavened bread). Father would take a slice of bread and cut it into small squares. He would scatter these pieces all through our home – on the corner of the table, on the corner of the cupboard, here and there in all the rooms – about twenty pieces. Then he would light a candle. He would take an empty matchbox and a chicken feather, and after saying certain blessings he would say the *biur chametz* blessing and go and collect all of the squares of bread that he had scattered previously, with one of the children

accompanying him, holding the candle. Obviously it was a symbolic act only, burning the *chametz*. The real removal of *chametz* was done with a thorough cleaning as it was forbidden to have any leavened foodstuffs such as flour, barley, etc. in the home during Pesach – but this was a ritual act which was marked by burning the *chametz*. The next day, we ate breakfast of *chametz* in a small corner because all of the other rooms were clean and, after our meal, this corner was also cleaned and koshered for Pesach. As for crockery, there were dishes that were used only during Pesach and not during the rest of the year. But even that was not enough: if it was necessary to use everyday utensils for Pesach, they had to be scalded. Water was boiled and then a stone that had been made white-hot in the fire was placed into it. The water was left to boil for a few minutes and then the utensils, which had been previously cleaned and carefully scrubbed, were put into it.

Lunch was not how it normally was. Usually we ate lunch at one or two o'clock, but on the eve of Pesach we went hungry and waited until it was possible to prepare a Pesach dish. I remember that every Pesach eve, the first dish was cooked potatoes. It was the easiest dish to make in a Pesach pot. We would eat them at about three o'clock, and they were amazingly delicious that day. It was not permitted to eat matzo yet, so as not to violate the sanctity of the day. It was permitted to start eating matzo only for Seder night and not before. There were, of course, incidents where we would transgress and taste a piece of matzo, but we usually tried to avoid that.

After a light lunch, we started preparations for the Seder. Father would make wine for Pesach (normally during the year Father would make wine from raisins and drink it for *Kiddush* on Friday). He would soak the raisins in water for a day or two and I think that they were also cooked. He would put these raisins into a clean towel and squeeze them, and the juice

from these raisins made the Sabbath wine, which was very tasty. It was permitted to say the blessing "creating the fruit of the vine" over this. For genuine wine, or an alcoholic drink, the blessing was "by whose word everything exists". For the Pesach Holy Day, too, Father prepared the wine for the four cups. Father also prepared the *charoset* himself. I remember that it was already a tradition that many respected families would come to get the *charoset* for Pesach from Father. He was probably the expert. I do not remember the recipe exactly – nuts, apples, etc., but he made wonderful *charoset*. After all of these preparations we would get ready to go to synagogue for the *Ma'ariv* Pesach prayers. The synagogue was lit with many candles and oil lamps. There is a story about a beadle in the synagogue in Boremel. There were some kerosene lamps hanging from the ceiling. Each lamp had glass panes and during the week, while they were in use, they would become smoky and sooty and the beadle would clean them prior to the Sabbath Eve services. We were told that he was an "expert" who knew how to clean the glass very beautifully, but that he would break the glass – as if by accident – so that he would not have to clean it again.

The synagogue was bright and festive; everyone was dressed in his best clothes and was clean from bathing. We prayed a special Pesach prayer after which everyone went home and began preparations for the Pesach Seder. It was a truly exceptional feast. Father would recline on a special couch surrounded by cushions and would lean his arm on them. He would be called the king. All the children were around. Mother was the queen beaming with delight at the sight of the boys and girls. The wine was in a sparkling bottle, the matzos were covered, and there was a bowl with the *charoset*, the egg, the celery, the sparkling dishes, decorated glasses and colourful glassware. Everything was special, festive, exceptional. Then came the *Kiddush*

for Pesach, and distributing the matzos and the *charošet*, the glasses of wine, the songs from the Haggadah. To this day, I still remember the four questions, the festive singing and so on. I would ask the questions and then my younger brother, Yaakov, would ask. Then the meal was served. After the meal we were full and tired and wanted to sleep, but we waited for the special experience – the *afikoman*. Father would hide the *afikoman* and we children had to look for it and find it, and whoever found it got a certain prize.



1. Synagogue in the town of Łutsk.
2. The interior of a synagogue in one of the cities of Volhynia.
3. Synagogue in the city of Przemyśl in Volhynia.
4. Wooden synagogue in one of the towns in Volhynia.

Then, we read the second part of the Haggadah. Although we were tired, we still waited for this part, because of the songs and the psalms, *chad gadya*, 'one' who knows There were clowns in town who performed all kinds of tricks, sneaking behind

the windows, trying to trick some of the people, but this was a respectful and very impressive family Holy Day. When the words "Pour out your wrath on the nations" were recited, there was a large silver cup on the table, the cup of Elijah the Prophet, and, according to tradition, it was said that he would come to drink with the family. While saying, "Pour out your wrath", the door would be opened for Elijah, so he could come in and drink from his cup. We children were looking at the door to try and see some movement. We would also check the cup, to see if any of the wine had vanished, and it always seemed that some of the wine really had gone from the cup, and that Elijah the Prophet had indeed tasted it. Later, I learned that the matter of opening the door for Elijah originated in the Middle Ages when there were blood libels blaming the Jews for using the blood of Christian children in order to prepare the matzo for Pesach. The door was opened to show that we have nothing to hide and we do not use the blood of Christian children. There are also other legends regarding the opening of the door, but as far as we were concerned, it was for Elijah the Prophet.

At Pesach, nuts were bought for the children and we would play with them, and there are a lot of songs about this. Pesach lasts for four to five days. The last day was the easiest day of the festival, as there were many Jews who would eat only *shemura* matzo for the whole of Pesach, matzo made under very strict conditions, with special flour that is well protected throughout the year so that the grains wouldn't rise. On the last day of Pesach it was permitted to eat regular matzo.

As well as being a religious feast, Pesach was also the Spring Festival. The sun began to dry up the marshes and the mood became more cheerful.

Shavuot (Pentacost): Shavuot came six weeks later in the month of Sivan when summer was at its height. It lasts only two

days and is usually called the "Harvest Festival" or the "Milk Festival", because then we would eat dairy foods. Milk, cream, *kreplach* (dumplings) with cheese and so on. Meat is hardly ever eaten on that festival. On the eve of Shavuot, people used to buy reeds – long stalks that grow on the banks of the river which Ukrainian peasants would bring them in carts to sell. The reeds would be scattered everywhere, in the *cheders*, in the synagogues and so on. There were prayers in the synagogue and festive meals, but it was a lighter Holy Day and less serious than Pesach and I am not now able to remember anything else that was special about it.

Between Shavuot and the High Holy Days, there was a period without any holidays. In fact, during this interim period these were the saddest days. In the month of Tammuz, there was a fast day on the 17th of Tammuz. During the month of Av, there were preparations for Tisha B'Av – the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. First of all, for three weeks before Tisha B'Av we would refrain from eating meat. The fast began the evening before Tisha B'Av and continued until the next evening. People would go to synagogue and sit on the floor, barefoot. In the synagogue they would turn over the benches and chairs. At the last meal before the fast, they used to eat an egg symbolising human life. The egg, being round, was rolled until death, until it broke. It was also a symbol of the destruction of the Temple. In fact the egg was supposed to be eaten dipped in ashes. People would sit near to the floor and read "How deserted lies the city" from the Book of Lamentations, especially the passage about the destruction of the Temple.

We, the children, who did not yet fast and who did not feel the hunger, brought some fun into this Holy Day: we collected thorns – small round fruit such as apples covered with thorns which grew in the fields around the city and the suburbs at that time. We would throw these at each other and the fruits would

cling to our clothes. This was especially dangerous for girls' hair because the thorns were hard to remove from their hair. Of course, the adults were not particularly happy with this game, but would nevertheless show tolerance.

Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana: After Tisha B'Av comes the month of Elul, when preparations would be made for the High Holy Days, and repentance and atonement for sins, especially those between one person and another. Tradition says that the sins between a person and a place are atoned for on Yom Kippur but for sins between one man and another, Yom Kippur does not atone unless people ask for forgiveness and forgive each other. *Slichot* (prayers of atonement) start as the High Holy Days draw near. At four in the morning, before dawn, the beadle would go from house to house and knock on shutters with a hammer and read, "Jews, holy flock, rise for the Creator's work". I would go with my Father, even though it was cold in the morning and we were sleepy. In the synagogue we lit candles and read the *Slichot*, with our *cantor* leading us. This went on until Rosh Hashana, and Rosh Hashana was the culmination of our feast. It was the start of the New Year holiday, and we would bless each other with blessings for the New Year, shaking hands. At home we would have a festive evening with meal, prayers, singing. The next day, the morning services were held, *Musaf* – blowing of the shofar – and once again a festive meal, though more serious. During this period, we would try to be good to each other, not to annoy each other. We tried to learn, to study the Bible. From Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur there were the ten days of repentance. On the eve of Yom Kippur, when the sun went down, we got ready to go to the synagogue for the *Kol Nidre* service, which started at four or five o'clock. The atmosphere in the house was one of expectation. The time was approaching for Mother to say the blessing over the candles. It was a remarkable event, unique and

very exciting. It was a huge experience for everyone when my Mother went to bless the candles. She would pray on the eve of *Shabbat* and the eve of each Holy Day.

In those days, people were stricter about doing *mitzvot*, praying with the congregation, keeping the big and the small commandments, going to synagogue. On the eve of Yom Kippur there were *kaparot*. Each person, young or old, was committed to find a *kapara*. These were usually white roosters or chickens that were used to make a pure and white atonement. They were swung above the head three times while we recited, "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my expiation".

As for me, I did not like this practice. I tended towards vegetarianism and I thought the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" should refer not only to people but also to animals, and they should have the right to live just as we do. This mass slaughter (all the birds were brought to our house for Father to slaughter) made me sick and I really suffered. The eve of Yom Kippur was a tragic day for me really. It was especially hard for me at a later period, before making Aliyah, when I had been a vegetarian for a few years and I was living independently in *hachshara*, prior to going to the *kibbutz*. At the same time, in 1928 to 1929, I published an article in the Hashomer Hatzair newspaper in Warsaw, against the killing and murder committed by a person in order to fill his stomach, advocating a more moral life.

Hashomer Hatzair in Mlinov

In the spring, I think it was in 1926, when the snow began to melt and the marshes dried up a bit and it was possible to go out and make contact with those around, I too began to go out and meet other young people. I learned that the Hashomer Hatzair organisation met in Mlinov. Although it didn't really "exist", it had not completely disappeared, and there were youths looking

for things to do. One of the leaders of this movement then was Aharon Berber (Harari), today [1970] living on Kibbutz Merhavia, as well as a few other people. Together with this group, we started to work for the revival of the movement's activities (the "nest"). Over time, I was elected as secretary of the nest, and Aharon was its head, and that's how we worked together during this period that I lived in Mlinov. I didn't live there continuously, but at long intervals. I was there in all from 1924 to 1929 although, in fact, it was a lot less than five years, because I was working in the surrounding villages.



Yehuda Mohel in Mlinov. Photograph from 1928 or 1929.

We started to plan the activities and set up groups and brigades. Our activities were successful and we established a large and broad movement. About 90% of the youth in Mlinov belonged to Hashomer Hatzair, from the age of seven or nine to the age of 18-19 years old. There were groups of different ages, and all the activities were conducted in Hebrew – lectures, discussions. Everyone knew the language. We also established a small Hebrew library and we were associated with a nearby nest in the city of Dubno which was larger. There the nest was older and more developed and we learned a lot from them. They would come to visit us and help us with our work. The head of the nest in Dubno was Moshe Margalit who now lives at Kibbutz Shaar HaGolan. The activities of the nest, which developed well as I said, caused some resentment among the religious community; not only in general, but also among individuals whose parents objected to it. Sometimes, in the synagogue for example, voices of protest would be raised against the anarchy of the nest members, their desecration of the Sabbath by going on trips, or teaching the children not to honour their parents. I remember it was a movement of rebellion, a movement which considered itself to be revolutionary. Secular and socialist. Then, there was a poem that was based on verses from *Mishlei* (originally: "Hearken, my son, to the discipline of your father"), which said: "Do not hearken to the discipline of your father..." and so on.

There were other clashes between the older generation and the younger generation. I remember one teacher in the school, a private tutor, who was a blatant atheist. He cooperated with us to a certain extent. He was very pronounced in his scepticism. Once he told us he would like to give a talk about atheism in the synagogue. This was, of course, chutzpah, and now I believe that it was not the proper thing to do. I still think that it is impossible to debate religion with religious people, because religion is not

a theory that it is possible to prove using logical arguments. It is based on faith that comes from the heart, and you cannot argue with faith. But then we were young, and we supported him and organised the lecture. All of the young people stood like a wall behind him surrounding him, because we knew that the religious people would start to attack him, perhaps even beat him. We even made "a deal" with our parents: if a fight began, my Father would beat his father, and they would not hit strangers...

8

מתוך שיחה

י' הודה משה

קורק במכת מסתם.

בחדר הקלן הרע הקים, ולא נקמו אצבע להלסו ולתחוור בתנוך. דורשים אצלו הרבה, וביוחד אצלו, אצל הנועה-הער המהמכת, על יופי צדק ומוסר, על שלילת המיסאס: כל דאליים גברי לטות הויה קיפת בכל שטחי החיים. רמטנו: מרר בקים השלילי. עלינו להקים את המפעל החובי, הנשגב. ואם מרד— אוי עלינו להשיבו בכל שטחי חינו.

אומרים: צמחונות! הרי זו נטיסנטליזם... חלום של המציאות... אולם האם הרחמים על חושי הרי בצער רובם כל, המלנו על האדם בכל-המוס, התתחמטו בצער העניים והגדחים, אין זה נטיסנטליזם. לא שנות מהמלה על בעלי-החיים הנחמים לשם תאות אכילתו של האדם! האם לא באמצעות הרגשות הנטיסנטליזם! שאנו מעוררים בנשנות צעירינו אנו רוצים לתת בהם את שלילת הקים ולהוסיף להם מרץ לשם שנוי סדרי-יודות והקפת עתיד צדק ומוהיר? ורלושן של המציאות— בשם אינו מציאות מדברים! אדם צריך להיות בריא, רענן, והרי ראינו ואנו רואים מדי יום-יומו צמחונים והם בריאים ורעננים לא שנות מאוכלי-בשר, וכל נכילי לקרא דואת, תליטות מן המציאות! אין ואז כי רק רוצים אנטים להתהלך למצא אינו שיהא השוכה מכוון שאין להם מוצא אחר ועל הרגלם הקיים לא ירצו לוהר, ברור לכן כי מתרבתו החדשה הנבנית על יסודות מוסר, צדק ושוויון אסור לנו להתיק על בעלי-חיים ולהחמיט בבשרים לשם העשוננו האנושי, יחד עם כל ערבינו המפורשים צריכה למצא לה מקום גם אדיאית זו, והנחמנות.

הרבה מאתנו אינם יכולים לעמוד ולהביט באקט זה של חשיטה, אולם אין זה מונע בעדם מלאכול בשר במיטת המונט לשלחן, והרבה מאלו גורלה מווי הייתי תוסת את האצעים בציניות ראשיות, מביט בחוקת המקום הרגרת, וגורר ע'ימים: הביטו נכחה, למען תוכלו לדון על מעשיכם בשעת ההטבה לשלחן.

ומה שנוגע להנך, אין לי אף על של

מקום בוה כי בכל ילד וצעיר מלטו מתעוררת לפעמים אשלה זו, היות ומר, מורגת המטירה שאין הרש המוסרי, המכני ובין החיים האומרים בניית וכבוד יחיד התמים אולם בשר מתוך הרגל, ואינו חושב על מנא, שם שואכל הוא את הלחם מפני שירד כי מוציאים אותו מדגן, אלא מכיון שזול צאת נרוד לו אחריו סוד, מכיון שנכנס עם לשאילו או לבית-השחיטה, וראת את החוזה האיום בהצביר אדם סובל גיור ונזק על צואר נפש היה, ורש דם איות, על דבר, פורץ מתוך הרגון, אחרי מחנה זה הרבה אינם יכולים שוב להניש בשר לפח.

ואז ועוד אחרת: בשוב הבטיר או האנקור מאספת קבוצתו, והוא עוד סלא התלחכות: ראש-קבוצתו כה יפה דבר על האבה רחמים ותנינה, על האבה לבב ולכל יצוריה, אסור להריז וכבוזו הבטיר היתר מוצא הוא על שלחן אביו עצמות מאתו התרגבל היפת שות און אהמול לקיף אותו וישק אתו, מרגיש אתו הילד מיתרה עצומה שבין האידיאל, שהיא העלה והמציאות הטמ, מרגיש הוא כאן את הגנאה דורש ולא נאה מקים, ולא כי אם לא אל ראש-קבוצתו ימנה בשלחה: היתכן! מדוע זה ככה? וכאן על ראש-קבוצתו לחיות והרי מרובו, שמא לא תהיה נכונה ואמיתה, כרגיל, שפטיה, עונים: כן מוכרה לחיות, כן צריך לחיות, חק הטבע, האדם צריך להיות בריא, וכדומה, ושאלת השאלה: האם אין אנו חוטאים בזה כלפי נפשתי הילד המטרה שאנו מכוונים אחרת! אלא אין אנו חוטאים כלפי המוסר, במונא לטעסז אידיאית אחת שמוכרתה לתעלות את הצעיר למדרגה מוסרית גבוהה:

על כל מנהל ומנהל מאתנו להשוב על פרובלמה זו, ולתורה, על כל ראש-קבוצתו מאתנו לחיות מוכן בכל יום ויום לשעט שאלה זו שם תניכין, ומכילי לדעת לשנות להם דברים מנונים מפני שטעסז את רעיון ההטבה, אלא לפתחו ולהעבירו לשעט כללי של כל קבוצתו.

The article which appeared in "The Alumni Newspaper of the Hashomer Hatzair Association", June 1, 1929. Issue No. 11, page 8.



Yehuda Mohel (standing, second from the right) and his friends in the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Mlinov, 1928–1929.

All of this reflected the desire of the young people to free themselves from the shackles of the past and to begin a new life. The reasons for this were very simple, especially for the Jewish youth. Poland was then under the regime of Piłsudski. There was a prevailing anti-Semitic sentiment, even though the Ukrainian peasants who came to the town generally lived in peace with the Jews. But even here, beneath the surface there was anti-Semitism, and the Polish authorities and institutions of the time tried to arouse it, to give it momentum and a practical expression like not buying from Jews, boycotting Jewish shops and so on. That was one side of it – the feeling of oppression throughout the country. On the other side was the poor economic situation, especially in the Jewish towns. If there was no work in the city for the Poles, it was felt all the more so in the small towns among the Jews. None of the young Jews who reached adulthood, from the age of 15 on, could see a future ahead of them and they had no possibility of learning a profession in the

educational institutions or of getting any job at all. The only option was, of course, emigration, and if emigration was the answer, then it would be to the land of Israel because of the oppression in Poland. And emigration came, first and foremost, from among the ranks of the Zionist movement.



Leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair nest in Mlinov, Shevat 1, 5688 (January 23, 1928). Yehuda sitting second from the right, holding a pen.

Towards emigration to the land of Israel

I was also in this situation then, despite my social activity in the Hashomer Hatzair movement. The economic situation at home was not great. I did not want to continue living supported by my Father; there were seven children at home and I decided to look for a place, to make some money, to be more independent. With Father's help, and his connections in nearby villages, I went to be a teacher for Jewish families there. I don't remember exactly how long this lasted, maybe a year-and-a-half (winter, summer and winter). I would come home only rarely. The separation from my friends and the movement upset me greatly. I missed

them. There was only one family in the village (perhaps called Greenberg?) on a level where I could find a common language and could converse with them, and I would frequently spend time with them. But it did not give me satisfaction and I wanted to return to activities in the movement and, especially, I thought that I must make Aliyah to Israel. This was in 1927 and I was 19, almost 20, and at this age in order to move to Israel through Hashomer Hatzair, one had to first undergo *hachshara* (training). I stopped teaching in the village. I returned home and decided I was going for *hachshara*. At the end of 1927 I left for kibbutz training which was located in a small settlement, Horyń, near Stolin. I was the first one from my town to do so.



Yehuda (standing on the far left) at the Horyń training kibbutz located near Stolin. He remained there for a year in 1927. It was there that he coincidentally met Riva during a Zionist event.

There, we worked in a sawmill. Twenty or so people were gathered there. We rented a place where we all lived. We all slept together in one room on the floor, on mattresses. In the morning, we all went out to work except for one person who would stay at home to cook the meals, tidy the house. The rest

of us would work, sometimes not just one shift but two or three. None of us was used to physical labour and until we became accustomed to it, we suffered. But we got used to it. I worked there like that for almost a year. Then we were moved to another training *garin* (core) in the city of Siemiatycze which is today in eastern Poland, near the border with Belarus.



Elul 16, 5688 (September 1, 1928). Hashomer Hatzair nest in the city of Mlinov, leave-taking for the first emigration to the Land of Israel, Yehuda Mohel (sitting in the centre, wearing a white shirt). To his right sits his sister Batya, his brother Yaakov (Yasha) standing third on the right with a white tie. In front of him, to his right, sitting second from the right, their sister Dvorah.

In Siemiatycze, we worked in a plywood factory. It was the winter of 1928-1929, one of the coldest winters. The temperature reached minus 30-40 degrees that winter, which is remembered in Poland as being particularly harsh. My job was primarily outdoors, even at night, and I suffered terribly from the cold. In addition, our diet was not balanced, especially mine, since I was a vegetarian and my body was quite feeble. But it did not affect my mood, which was ecstatic – here I was, realising kibbutz life, and working and preparing to travel to the land of

Israel. Indeed, in the summer of 1929 I learned that the British government had approved a certificate for me to emigrate to the land of Israel. So I went back home for a short while, to my parents, to prepare for my Aliyah to Israel.

A Brief History of the Mohel family

The **Mohel Family** (or, as it was known to many – the home of Rabbi Leizer Shochet) consisted of nine souls – parents and seven children:

Father: Eliezer, the son of Dov and Dvorah Mohel. Born in 1872 in the town of Kopachovka (Kopaczówka), near Torchin, in the district of Lutsk, Volhynia. Perished in the Holocaust in 1942.

Mother: Hanna-Leah (Hanna-Beile), daughter of Yaakov and Sarah Kaszkiet. Born in 1882 in the town of Boremel, Volhynia. Perished in the Holocaust in 1942.

Their daughter Batya: born in 1906 in Boremel. Perished in the Holocaust in 1942.

Their son Yehuda: also known as Waclaw Tracz and Yehuda Ben-Eliezer. Born in 1908 in Boremel. Died on May 16, 1989. Buried in the cemetery in Kiryat Shaul, Tel Aviv.

Their son Yaakov (Yasha): born in 1911 in Boremel. Died on July 4, 1974. Buried in the cemetery in Kiryat Shaul.

Their daughter Dvorah (Dora): born in 1914. Died on August 3, 1987. Buried in the cemetery in Holon.

Their daughter Chaya (Chaika): born in 1916. Died on August 12, 1985. Buried in the cemetery in Holon.

Their daughter Bracha (Bouzia): born in 1926 in Mlinov. Perished in the Holocaust in 1942.

Their daughter Yente: born in 1930 in Mlinov. Perished in the Holocaust in 1942.

Yehuda recalls his family in the booklet that was published in memory of his sister Dvorah in 1987:

Of all the children, the most outstanding personality was undoubtedly Batya. Clever, smart, intelligent, sensitive, wholeheartedly dedicated to our parents and to us. Everyone

who knew her admired and respected her. She was a good and loyal friend, an advisor and a comforter, always willing to help everyone.



From right to left: Batya, the eldest daughter of the Mohel family, and Bracha (Bouzia) Mohel.

Yaakov excelled in his talents. At the *yeshiva* where he studied he was one of the top students. He was full of religious fervour as a child and grew *payot* (sidelocks), which we cut off with scissors – against his will – when we returned to Boremel. He gathered up the hair, carried it around in his pocket and with tears confessed: "I carry the *payot* in my pocket and every day I hear how they are crying".

Dvorah had a natural intelligence and intellectual affinity (similar in that sense to Batya) and was less interested in things that were more domestic in nature. Dvorah excelled in her studies, in her behaviour and in her relationship with the immediate surroundings – family, friends, acquaintances. What characterised her was her gentleness of soul. Things in which she was interested were always, from the earliest age,

social problems, ethics and social justice. She was active in the Hashomer Hatzair movement (like almost all other members of our family) in Mlinov, and in Israel she tended towards Mapam in her social and political outlook. At the same time she had a tendency towards mysticism and religious tradition.

Chaya was a healthy, strong type, striving for a life of happiness and fun; she enjoyed housework, and she helped our sick and weak Mother a lot. She was an amazing homemaker, enjoyed the company of young men, was always full of optimism and inner joy.



The four siblings of the Mohel family who survived the Holocaust. Photographed in Israel in the 1960s. Standing (from the right): Dvorah, Chaya and Yaacov. Yehuda sits in the centre.

Bouzia was outstandingly beautiful and impressed everyone who saw her. In addition to her scholastic abilities and her

tendency to write poems, she was considered to be the prettiest girl in town and was much loved by her friends, teachers and acquaintances.

The youngest, Yenteleh, demonstrated remarkable brightness even as a child and was the family pet.

Chapter Two

Riva's Own Memoirs and Interviews with Family Members

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Riva was born on November 22, 1911, the 1st of Kislev 5672, in the town of Stolin on the border of Belarus and the Ukraine. Stolin was part of the Russian Empire until 1917 and from 1918-1939 was part of Poland. In September 1939, the town was seized by the Soviet Union in accordance with the agreement between Russia and Germany in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941 and liberated in 1944. After World War II it remained part of the Soviet Union, and has been part of Belarus since 1989.

Riva's Father, Issachar Tancman (1846-1923), died when she was about 12 years old. The house and the business, a clothing and fabric shop, were run by her Mother, Roshka (1869-1942), née Krikun. We know very little about Riva's Father. She did not mention him much, but when she spoke of him, she did so with admiration and respect.



Maps of the area of Stolín. International boundaries are correct as at the start of the 21st century.

Riva always talked about how beautiful her Mother was. In the photographs you can see a large and impressive woman, with a strong and confident presence. Roshka was a matriarch who raised her six children: Ziporah (1890), Yaakov (1892), Yosef (1894), Feigel (1898), Sarah (1901) and Riva (1911). She was a woman of many talents: she ran a home and a large shop, and when necessary she also helped her children. The two boys left

Stolin at an early age, settled in Warsaw and established their own successful fabric shops. Roshka travelled more than once to Warsaw to help her sons manage the shops, which allowed them to go on holiday. In 1934 she even went to Palestine to visit her daughters Sarah and Riva.

The family had a large stone house in the main square of Stolin, which still stands today, and also served as the clothing and fabric shop. The shop was on the ground floor and the bedrooms were on the first floor. The family's economic situation was good; there were maids and cooks and all the children received a proper education. They kept kosher, observed the Jewish Holy Days, and Roshka even wore a wig. But the children had already distanced themselves from religion, except for Yaakov who went on to marry a woman called Rachel who observed her religious customs. The house was warm and hospitable, full of the children's friends. They spoke Yiddish, Polish and Ukrainian, and the children also all spoke Hebrew because they had studied in Jewish-Zionist schools.



This was probably the Tancman family home in Stolin. In front of the house, on the right, is Ronit Pick, the granddaughter of Feigel Tuchman née Tancman. The picture was taken in 2001.

Riva still remembers her fear of the Ukrainian gangs from the Petlura army which wreaked havoc against Jews in the region in 1917-1918. Nonetheless, her childhood in Stolin always remained the happiest time of her life. She often reminisced about it as an adult and, in the last years of her life, it was her best memory. During those last years, her relationship with her Mother and her great love for her Mother were a very important part of her life, and she told us, on many occasions, that she would speak a lot with her late Mother in Yiddish and ask for her help with various things that worried her.



A family photograph taken on April 25, 1926: a farewell to Sarah (Riva's older sister) before her trip to the land of Israel. In the centre is a picture of the Father, Issachar Tancman, who had died three years earlier. Standing (from right to left): Genrich Tuchman (Feigel's husband), Sarah, Feigel (holding her eldest daughter Sima'leh). Sitting (from right to left): Aunt Yetel (Yentel - Roshka's sister), Roshka, Riva.

Memories

Here are a few of Riva's childhood memories, as recorded by her grandson Yaron Tracz during a 2003 conversation with his grandmother. Riva had already had a stroke by then, which explains her style of speech:

Pesach (Passover): My favorite Holy Days were Pesach and Rosh Hashana. I'm trying to remember how we celebrated Pesach at home. Father always brought a guest home from the synagogue for Seder night and would seat the guest next to him. The guest would always be the first to make the blessing over the wine. At home they always made sure that, God forbid, there would be no chametz. I remember my Mother being dressed very nicely for the Holy Day – in a shawl, a beautiful, long dress and a peruke (wig). She was very beautiful; she had lovely dresses and a gold chain. Before the Holy Day my sister Sarah would travel to Warsaw and bring Mother a new wig. On the table were beautiful dishes, everyone had a wine goblet, and in the centre stood the cup of Elijah the Prophet. All the goblets were made of silver and stood on a silver tray. The candlesticks were also made of silver. Mother lit candles according to the number of siblings: two brothers, four sisters – six candles.

I loved bringing out the special *Pesach* dishes, and opening the door for Elijah the Prophet to come in, and looking into his cup to check if he had drunk a little of the wine prepared for him. This was customary in all of the homes. I remember my sister Sarah, after she found the *afikoman*, asking for a bike, and they bought it for her. Once I found it and they gave me a lot of nuts.

At the festive dinner, we ate soup with *kneidlach* and *gefilte fish*, and then compote made from dried fruits. Also goose meat with horseradish. Father would make red and white horseradish, but it was too strong for me. Everyone would eat it but my Mother allowed me to leave it.



Riva's parents: Issachar and Roshka Tancman née Krikun.

Chanukkah: At Chanukkah we would play with spinning tops and cards. It was usual to play with both. I had three or four spinning tops. My sisters knew how to play cards and even played for money, but I did not know how to play. We would fry and eat *latkes* (pancakes). At Chanukkah we ate a lot of goose meat. Mother would buy *schmaltz* (goose fat). She would keep the *schmaltz* kosher and put it in the *kneidlach*, because goose fat is very tasty. In our house there were no doughnuts at Chanukkah, just *latkes*. It was customary to play all sorts of games. Whoever knew how – would play chess. I did not know how to play chess, but my brothers Yaakov and Yosef would play. We received gifts. I remember that once I was bought a pair of lacquered shoes. Another time they bought me a new outfit for school. We had to wear a pinafore over our clothes. And of course every night of Chanukkah we would light candles on the windowsill. So from every house the *Chanukkah* candles

were seen. It was very nice in the evening and we would gather at the school, where the choir would perform.

Purim: At Purim all the children would dress up. We would present a performance, *Purim Spiel*. The girls dressed up as Queen Esther and the boys as the wicked Haman and as Mordechai. I was never Queen Esther because I was not so pretty. Sarah was the most beautiful – tall, slim, she had a lovely figure, she would dress nicely. She loved the colour *lila* (a kind of purple lilac). My Mother did not dress up although some of the other adults did dress up. From the *Purim Spiel* I remember the song: "Do you know who I am? Mordechai the Jew". No one wanted to be the wicked Haman.

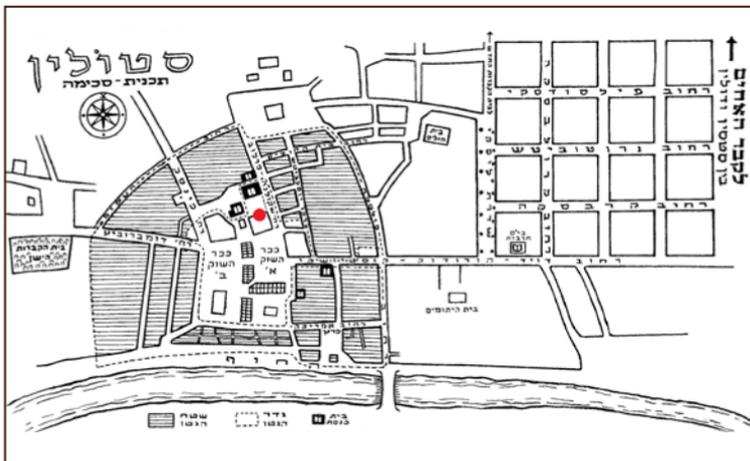


The Great Synagogue in Stolín.

Shavuot: The festival of giving of the Torah. It was a joyous celebration. We went to the synagogue. Our house was very close to the synagogue. The women would sit upstairs in *ezrat nashim* (the women's section). I remember that the children would hold flags, which had an apple fixed to the top with a small candle in the apple. I remember the *parochet* (the curtain that covered the Ark in the synagogue)... very beautiful, burgundy-coloured velvet, embroidered with silver and gold. The rabbi of the synagogue was an impressive man, tall and good looking. His name was Rabbi Asher Fialkov. I remember the wedding of the rabbi's daughter, Hanna'leh.

First an orchestra played, then came the bride and groom, and then their parents. Rebbe Perlov (the rebbe of the Hasidic sect in Stolin) would come to the synagogue and sit with the congregation. The rebbe had followers, the rabbi did not. People would come to the rebbe to ask questions. For example, about an egg, which sometimes had blood in it. They would come to ask if it was allowed to use an egg that has some blood in it. Or if they cut a chicken and it seemed that maybe something was not right — they would bring it to the rebbe and he would decide.

Rebbe Perlov had several hundred followers who would meet, eat, dance, sing. He had five sons and each of them would sing and play the violin at the weekends. We would go and stand underneath their windows to listen. He was the Chief Rabbi of Stolin and other small towns in the surrounding area. There was even a Perlov Street in Stolin. The Hasidim would wear a long *capote* and belt, and I think they wore a fur hat and white socks, but I'm not sure about that.



Map of the town of Stolin in 1918-1939. The Tanzman house is marked with a red dot.

At the end of the Sabbath, *havdalah* candles were lit and we would sing "Have a good week, a good week, a good and blessed week". My Father had a special device for the fragrances that we would smell during the *havdalah*, a very beautiful object. It made the house smell good.

Yom Kippur: When I was little, I wanted to fast, but Mother said, "The little ones are not allowed to fast". The evening before Yom Kippur a chicken would be slaughtered: "This is my *kaparot* (expiation)". There was a lot of food for the meal before the fast. I remember Yom Kippur when Father was still alive. When they would return from the synagogue, my sisters Saraleh and Feigeleh would prepare a very nice table with beautiful dishes and good things to eat: cakes and wine and also alcohol, and beautiful fruits... cherries. My Father would bring anyone from the synagogue who had nowhere to eat. He told us that a man would come to fast with us on Yom Kippur. My Father would have pockets full of cakes and he would give them to everyone, but only at the end of Yom Kippur. That is also a *mitzvah* (good deed). There was a poem, "Validation was given", after which it was permissible to eat. On Yom Kippur there were fewer people in the streets. There were no carts. Children would go out with their bikes. I did not know how to ride a bike. Bikes were not acceptable then for women; they were just for the boys.

We had a cook in our house called Lasha and Mother would give her instructions about what to cook. They would go shopping together so that she would see what the cook was buying. She was Jewish, and she lived with us. A very nice woman, young. We had a windowless room where she slept. She would serve at the table, wash dishes and so on. Occasionally Mother would buy her a gift, some fabric for a dress or shoes. She was pleased with her and loved and respected her. Next door to us lived the Frenkel family and she would cook for them, too.

Mother worked in the shop. We had a large shop below the house. We lived on the first floor, and the shop was on the ground floor. On the second floor were the bedrooms. The biggest room was Mother's and Father's. There were several bedrooms; each child had his own room. I slept in the same room as the cook. The toilet was outside. When I was little, I used a chamber pot. We had a room that was a succah – in other words, a room where the roof could be taken off and a thatch put in place for the succah during Succoth – that was also my bedroom. The entire building was ours. When we wanted Mother to come with us to Siberia before the Nazis came, she said: "What – will I leave this house? I built it with my own hands". So the house remained... and Mother died.

<p> Plaśniuk A., Rynek — ×Plaśniuk Ch., Rynkowa — Reźnik Ch., Rynek — Rozenberg Sz., Rynek — Rubinsztejn M., pl. Rynkowy — Słucka S., Rynek — Szwarcun M., Rynek — ×Tancman S., Szkolna — Turkiewicz D., Rynek — Wiernik Sz., Rynek — Winnik M., Rynek — Zyniuk G., Kościelna. Cyporyn Ch., Rynek — Drożdżiński M., Rynek — Fikangor A. — Garbiel M., Pińska — Jachniuk D., Rynek — Tuchman Ch. Budowlane przedsiębiorstwa (entreprises de constructions): Ruchocki </p>	<p> Manufaktura (pl. Rynkowy) Młyny (moulin (par.) — Geln i Frenkiel Owman M. (gaz ×Kolodny Owka—Piechotin ×Szklawer Zokańska. Murarze (maçon) Milman A. — Obuwie (chauss) Rynek — Mu Ruchocka M., </p>
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Scan from the "Book of Addresses" (business registration booklet), published in Poland in 1930. On the Stolin pages in the column for "Silk textiles" (Bławaty), it records: Tancman S. – Szkolna. "S" refers to Issachar's name written in Polish – "Sahar". Regarding the address, we know that the house and shop were located near the town square (rynek) and that Szkolna Street led from that square. Therefore it is almost certain that this is a corner house and it is also indicated on the map. The details were confirmed during Ronit Pick's journey to Stolin in 2001 and also by Riva herself.

Not far from Stolín, maybe four km from the city, was the resort we called Zaciszce which in Polish means "a place of serenity". It was rented out by the Polish owners and provided accommodation and had running water and so on. We would go there for picnics and during the holidays there were camps there for Jewish children.

In Stolín, I also fell in love for the first time. His name was Haim Tilczin and his father, Nahum, was a lawyer in the town. He studied with me in class and was a very good-looking boy. Every time he passed me on the street, my heart raced. He lived near the church.

My Mother Roshka was the eldest daughter of my grandfather, *Zeyde* Eber and grandmother Sima. She had another four sisters – Yetel (Yentel), Malka, Breindel and Hava, and one brother named Aharon. She would work all day at the shop selling but would also go with the cook to buy groceries, meat, fish. Lasha would turn on the stove and put in the *cholent*. Mother also knew how to cook. Every week they would bake *challah* for the Sabbath – sometimes the cook, sometimes Mother. Mother would do the fish. In those days we did not know about carp. They bought *hecht* (dentex, pike). Mother says *hecht* has white flesh. The *träger wasser* (water carrier) would bring water from a wellspring once a week. We would pay him a lot for that.

In front of the shop entrance, there was a laundry room where the laundress would do the laundry, hang it out and then iron it and put it away into the wardrobe. She did not come on Sundays since she was Catholic. We had very good relations with her. She wasn't a very tall woman and was rather fat. Mother was pleased with her and would occasionally give her gifts, fabric from the shop and so on. When the cook was cleaning, she would bring someone else to help her. I remember being surprised that in Yehuda's house in Mlinov his Mother did everything herself, and her daughters would help her.

Father died, I think it was in 1923, of pneumonia. I remember that he was a good man, generous, and he gave a lot of help to the poor and the sick. Father's father, Asher Tancman, was also renowned for his generosity. Father founded and ran a volunteer organisation called *Bikur Cholim* (visiting the sick), which took care of people in the town who were poor and ill. Later, he arranged for wood to be supplied for the poor people to burn in their stoves. When my Father was alive, every year we used to go with him and my Mother to Warsaw, I and my two brothers, Yosef and Yaakov. In my eyes, he was a very positive person. I remember that he would go to the synagogue and bring poor Jews – perhaps 20 of them – for dinner on Sabbath eve. Also after the Sabbath he would bring people from the synagogue to eat with us. Mother was very pleased because this was a *mitzvah*. Father respected my two brothers and the girls, but he was somewhat remote towards the children. Only at Chanukkah he would play dominoes and cards with the children. When our parents travelled to Warsaw they would sometimes bring back gifts. Once a ball with a net, another time shoes. For the older sisters they brought cloth to make dresses. That was customary then. Relationships were like that, not close like they are today. It was a different period. Then we had no problem with it. It seemed natural. No one talked about love, but the relationship was good. We kissed. I brought up my own sons, Dani and Vitek, under difficult conditions. I could not buy gifts and there was nothing to eat. I once asked Vitek and Dani: "What did you play with?" They said they played with anything there was, everything could be a game.

My Father, Issashar... a respectable man, a welcoming man. He also came from a respectable and rich family. Ephraim Lifshitz was his nephew, his sister's son. We still meet. Issachar inherited the building with the house and the shop from his parents. Mother and Father set up the shop together. Both were hard-working. Issachar's parents also owned fabric shops.



Pictures of Stolín (from the right): The town square on market day; a typical street with walkways made of wood; the building of the *Tarbut* school in Stolín. All of the photographs are from the 1920s.

Suddenly, Father became ill. He was ill for several months. Doctors came, but nothing helped. It was a small town. There was a *felczer*, who was not really a doctor, but a doctor's helper, a medic. I remember cupping-glasses were used. My Father died around Chanukkah. My brothers came straight away from Warsaw. It was the Sabbath. Mother said that on the Sabbath it is forbidden to cry. I remember a lot of people coming to the house. My sisters were at home, my brothers came from Warsaw to participate in the funeral. I think it was a very big funeral. The cortège left from our house, and my Father was buried in the cemetery in Stolín.

After he died, things were hard. Suddenly we were without money. Mother worked in the shop, and my sisters, Sarah and Feigeleh, worked and I also helped. They asked me to make sure that no one was stealing from the shop. There were a lot of people, especially on Sundays, because on Sundays the Polish shops were closed and the Jewish shops were open. I didn't really like it, but I had to work there.

At home we spoke in Yiddish, sometimes Polish, sometimes in Ukrainian. In the shop, only in Ukrainian. I learned Hebrew at the *Tarbut* (Culture) Zionist school and the *Tarbut* high school and also at the seminar for teachers and kindergarten teachers. In Stolín there was also a *Tarbut* kindergarten. If we didn't want someone to understand what we were saying, my sisters and I

would talk in Hebrew. The farmers did not know Yiddish either. Mother knew some Hebrew, less than my sisters.

Of all the languages I liked Yiddish the most. This is my mother tongue. In school everyone spoke Hebrew but not everyone spoke Yiddish. Yehuda and I would speak mostly in Hebrew and sometimes in Polish. Yehuda did not like Polish. Maybe because he suffered more in Poland, sat in prisons there and so forth.

The best period in my life was my childhood in Stolin. Whenever I was sick, Mother would sit with me constantly. "*Riva'leh kleinika, zeih guta* (Little Riva, be good), I'll bring you gifts", she'd say. Indeed she brought me gifts. I remember a ball with a net.

Later, my sister went to Warsaw and brought me a mandolin. They even hired a teacher for me, but I didn't manage to learn to play it. I liked to hear songs. We had a radio, and that was important. Later, in Warsaw, there was a period when I used to go to the opera... beautiful music. I remember that there was a choir in school. My sister, Sarah, would sing beautifully in the choir. I also sang in the choir. Now I don't have a voice at all, I have difficulty breathing. The choir was made up of several hundred people. If there was a celebration the choir would be invited. The choirmaster would be paid and he traveled to Warsaw and selected great songs in Yiddish and songs from the Bible in Hebrew. Once Bialik [Chaim Nachman Bialik, a Hebrew poet] came to us in Stolin, and then the choir sang in his honour. Stolin was known as a town where people knew and liked Hebrew. In Mlinov, too, they knew Hebrew. Yehuda studied there. Usually in the small towns they knew Hebrew. There were elementary schools everywhere, but there were few high schools. There was one in Pinsk where I studied.

The choirmaster, who would look for songs from the Bible, was short and rather chubby. The choir was made up of both men

and women. We practiced in the Tarbut elementary school. We would meet about once a week. There were also performances about once a week. People would buy tickets and they would come to the school where we performed. There were benches. My girlfriends and I really liked to sing in the choir and we never missed a performance. I also had girlfriends who did not participate because they did not have good voices. Today people are chasing after money; then, less so. There was nowhere to go, there was no cinema, so this was our entertainment and we did it for free and for pleasure. There were people who played guitar, and I remember I was angry at myself that I could not learn to play the mandolin.

When I was a child, I loved to eat corn. There was a woman who brought a lot of very tasty corn to our house in a white towel with a little salt. All the members of our family loved it.

In the streets there were wooden walkways placed on top of bricks. When it rained it was a problem as the ground turned to wet mud. And between the walkways, there was sand – there were no tarmacked roads. Perhaps in Warsaw and Pinsk there were proper roads, but here, the carts would drive on the sand. It was a problem travelling in the carts if it was raining as sometimes they'd get stuck in the mud, and cart drivers would help each other. The train did not come right in to Stolin, and one had to take a cart to the train station. There were many carts on the roads. Mother would not let me travel on them because it was dangerous.

I would go to Aunt Yentel, Father's sister – Yentel Lifshitz. She lived nearby. There were a lot of children there, cousins, and we would play hide and seek. We would draw human figures on the floor... on the floor of the house in colours.

We had a jump rope and we had a ball with a net. I also had a doll that I got from Warsaw and everyone came to see the doll that closes and opens its eyes. That was an attraction. No



Zeyde Eber Krikun from Korotycze.

one had anything like that. I called her "my beautiful doll".

I remember that in 1917 we heard that the Russian Revolution had broken out. I was six. We started walking in the street with red flags and shouting: "People, arise. Until now you were taken advantage of! Wake up people, you were used until now, do not allow yourselves to be taken advantage of anymore!"

Thanks to the fact that *Zeyde Eber* would send us dried fish, meat and flour, we got along. He would send this from Korotycze, a small town quite close to Stolin. There was a river there. He had a flourmill powered by water. He was the town's miller. He would also catch fish and Mother would prepare soup from them – It was very tasty. He had a beautiful garden with cherry, pear and apple trees and he sent us fruit. This was my Mother's father. We used to visit him and I loved him very much. He was a very religious person, and very much accepted among the Hasidim. He would also sometimes travel to Rebbe Perlov.

Zeyde Eber was a tall man. He liked to drink tea in a samovar. His wife, Grandmother Sima, was a good woman. She would wear a long skirt and hide sweets and biscuits for the children in her pockets. We would run after her in order to find them.

Their house was simple, one floor. A large room, a guest room, behind which was the Grandparents' bedroom. We would

come — me, my sister Saraleh, my sister Feigeleh with her husband. We would all sleep in the guest rooms (there were two). They had a Jewish servant, whom they had brought from the nearest town. *Zeyde* had five daughters and one son, Aharon.

My Mother was the eldest daughter. *Zeyde* Eber and my Father's father, Asher Tancman, met via Rebbe Perlov and decided on the wedding. It was a match. They did not know each other and my Father did not see her before the wedding. Mother told me that after the wedding, when they went to the room and he removed her veil, he said: "Lots of freckles", because my Mother was freckled on her face and hands and all over her body. She did not take offense. She quickly fell in love with my Father, and he fell in love with her. My Mother was a beautiful woman and he was tall.

This concludes Riva's childhood memories, as recorded by her grandson Yaron Tracz in 2003.

The following is reconstruction of events based on the collective memories of our family:

Studies and the journey to Palestine

After completing the *Tarbut* elementary school, where the languages of instruction were Polish and Hebrew, Riva went to the nearby city of Pinsk to continue her studies at the *Tarbut* high school. In Pinsk, she lived with her older sister Ziporah who was older than her by 12 years and married to Shlomo Gershonovitz.

After completing high school she was accepted at the seminar for kindergarten teachers (once again, *Tarbut*) in Warsaw, where her two brothers Yosef and Yaakov also lived. The seminar diploma was very helpful to her during her life and

thanks to it she found employment during and after World War II. The certificate got lost and we could not find it. Riva had a few girlfriends from the time when she was studying at the seminar, and later they made *aliyah* to Palestine. Among them were Dvorah Einstein, the mother of singer Arik Einstein, Rivka Berman of Degania Alef and the mother of Michal Bat-Adam.

In 1930, after four years of study, Riva started to work as a kindergarten teacher in Warsaw. She was an active member of Hashomer Hatzair and in 1932 received a certificate through her sister Sarah (who had been living in Palestine since 1926) and emigrated to Palestine.



Tarbut Teachers Seminar in Warsaw. Riva is sitting in the front row, third from the right. Photograph from 1930.

Riva Interviews Family Members

After the publication of this book in Hebrew in the summer of 2015, I found a pile of pages written in Yiddish in Riva's handwriting. I sent them for translation into Hebrew. The material required heavy editing since the handwriting was

unclear and many names and places were transliterated poorly. Starting in the 80s, Riva began to interview family members in order to record their personal memories of her grandfather, Zeyde Eber from Korotycze, and it turned out to be very interesting material.

Zeyde Eber and his wife Sima Krikun were Hasidim of the famous Karlin-Stolin dynasty. Zeyde Eber was probably born around 1840 and lived until 1931. Roshka (Riva's mother) was their eldest daughter. The other children born after her were: Hava (who married Mordechai Shechtman), Breindel (who married Yaakov Czapsman), Malka (who married Herschel Golman, mother of Hantzik), Aharon (who married Hanna) and Yetel (Yetel, who married David Lelchuk). Yetel, Aharon and Breindel perished in the Holocaust.

Korotycze (Korotichi) was a small village northeast of Stolin, where Zeyde Eber had a flourmill. The Krikun, Tancman and Golman families all lived in places near each other in the Pinsk district. The towns and villages in which they lived are marked on the maps below:



Map showing towns mentioned in this text. Previously Poland (until 1939), later (until 1991) the USSR, now on the border of Ukraine and Belarus.



Zoom-in of the areas Davyd-Haradok and Korotycze, showing smaller villages.

This is the Interview with Hantzik (Hanna) Schumann of the Golman family who is the daughter of Malka and Herschel Golman, granddaughter of Zeyde Eber and his wife Sima.

Interview with Hantzik Golman (Schumann)

Today – Friday, June 3, 1984 – my cousin Hantzik, from the Golman-Schumann family, came to visit me. She came from America to visit us for a few months. I sit and listen to what she has to tell me about the years of her childhood and those times. I hear and don't want to believe how much she remembers from the past. People, names, events.

I will let Hantzik talk and I will write.

"Who are you actually writing this for?" Hantzik asks me.

And I answer: "I am writing it so that it will remain in the family: for the children and grandchildren. Maybe one of them will be interested in the roots of the ancestry of Zeyde Eber and his family from Korotycze."

Zeyde, Father, Mother

Zeyde Eber from Korotycze was the only son in the family. He had sisters: Esther, Riva and Yocheved. Aunt Yocheved

was in Toriv [?] with her family, and the soldiers of General Balachowicz [who were in command of the Polish army in this area in the years 1917-1920 and were known for their pogroms against the Jews] killed my Father Herschel and his father, Zeyde Moshe. They tied Father to a horse and dragged him to Toriv where they killed him. Aunt Yocheved was supposed to bring money to free him. By the time she managed to come with the money they had shot him.

Grandfather - Zeyde Eber

When Zeyde Eber was sleeping all of the children needed to make sure they were quiet. He was known as a stern person, but in spite of that, I myself would do everything possible so that he would wake up, and then I would be able to go in and see him. I loved that a lot. When he would hug me and kiss me, that was everything for me. I liked to feel his beard and moustache when he kissed me. He had long eyebrows, thick and wide. He was clean, aesthetic and smelled good. When I was studying at the school in Stolin he came to see me. His first question was: "Do you already know how to write an address?" When I told him I run the school store which sells all sorts of things for children, he was very proud, he kissed me and said: "That's good, my child, you study, you study."

The Rebbe's visit

Rebbe Malche'ke [Rabbi Avraham Elimelech Perlov, who was the Rebbe after the death of his father, Rabbi Israel Perlov, in 1923] visited Zeyde in Korotycze in the summer of 1928 or 1929. The Rebbe was brought by steamboat from Pinsk to Davyd-Haradok. Many Hasidim went to meet him there, and then he went to Korotycze, accompanied by the Hasidim who

came on horse-drawn carts, and lots of wagons on the road from Davyd-Haradok through Talmachava [Tolmaczow].



Rabbis of the Karlin-Stolin Hasidic dynasty: on the left - Rebbe Malche'ke (Rabbi Avraham Elimelech Perlov), and on the right his father, Rabbi Israel Perlov.

There were two routes from Davyd-Haradok to Korotycze: through Azdamichy, and through Alhomiel. The road through Azdamichy didn't reach Talmachava where we lived, but the other route did pass through our village. My Mother was sure that the Rebbe would go through Azdamichy because it was a shorter route and the road was better. But the Malche'ke Rebbe actually went by the other, more complicated route, in order to pay his respects to Mother and to stop at her house to collect her and take her to Zeyde, who was already in Korotycze.

On the way, in villages, both non-Jews and Jews came out with salt, bread and honey. They paid their respects to the Rabbi. The Rebbe wanted to honour Zeyde's house and visit him at his home. I remember the noise and commotion. They had been baking and cooking for weeks in advance and the house was filled with good things. Before the arrival of the

Rebbe, his Hasidim came on horseback to bring the news that the important visitor was about to arrive. All of the Jews from the area gathered and Zeyde Eber was the celebrant.

It was a very great celebration. Everyone ate and drank. The Hasidim danced excitedly, the whole of Korotycze wore festive clothing. I remember sleeping with the neighbours. They sang and danced non-stop, like the Hasidim do. The Rebbe with his entourage stayed in Korotycze for a few days and then they travelled back to Pinsk.

Zeyde Eber was ill

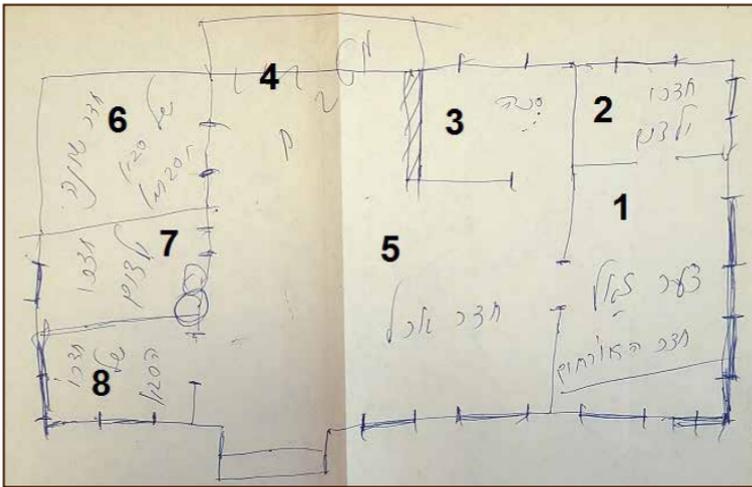
The last time I saw my Zeyde Eber was at the end of 1931. We were all in the house for the summer holidays and Zeyde suddenly became very ill. They took him to Stolin through Davyd-Haradok. Before he got onto the wagon they supported him on either side. Zeyde blessed all the little children and the grandchildren. He placed a hand on the head of each of them, and said a blessing. Zeyde didn't recover from this illness. He suffered greatly, he was hospitalized in Stolin, and there he died. Hundreds of people attended the funeral, perhaps thousands. They buried him in the old cemetery [unfortunately I couldn't find exactly where, in Stolin or Korotycze].

Zeyde Eber's house

Of Korotycze I remember the beautiful and spacious house with a garden and a water mill; a flourmill with a big round wheel which turned with the help of the water flowing from the river. I remember that our maid would beat the bed linen behind the house. In winter we would eat dried fish, cooked barley soup with the fish. I can still taste it. I remember the "Succah", a wonderful room in the house, the patio at the

entrance. In summer a table was always set on the patio, with a white tablecloth, a "samovar" [a traditional Russian kettle] standing on a platter to welcome Zeyde with a cup of hot tea, with cherry jam made from the cherries from our cherry trees. We lived in Talmachava, two km from Korotycze.

I'm trying to draw a map of what the house in Korotycze looked like [Riva drew the map according to Hantzik's instructions].



A sketch drawn by Riva showing the plan of Zeyde Eber's house:

- 1 - Der Zal - guest room
- 2 - Children's room
- 3 - Succah - Open patio used during the Jewish festival of Succoth, then covered with branches and decorated.
- 4 - Kitchen
- 5 - Dining room
- 6 - Grandmother and Grandfather's Bedroom
- 7 - Children's room
- 8 - Grandfather's study

By pure chance I came across an article on the Internet, in Polish, dealing with wooden buildings in the region of Wołyń-Polesie. The title of the article (published in 1935 in Poland): ZE STUDIÓW NAD POLESKIM BUDOWNICTWEM DRZEWNYM (Studies on wooden buildings in Polesie).

In this article I came across a few pages dealing with two installations in the village of Korotycze that belonged to A. Krikun. Apparently Zeyde Eber had two separate businesses: a proper water mill and (this was new for us) another water driven machine named "folusz" in Polish - for cloth and wool cleansing ("fulling" or "tucking" in English). Here are scans of those pages:



Ryc. 134. Korotycze, pow. Stołin. Młyn wodny A. Krikuna.

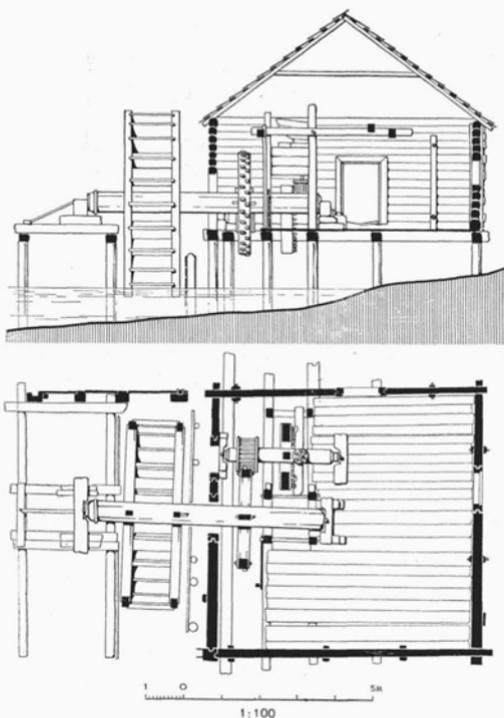
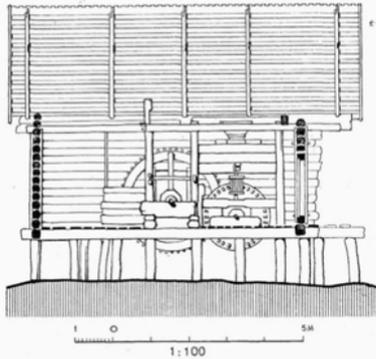


Рис. 135. Коротыце, пов. Столін. Млын воднай А. Кіркна.



Ryc. 136. Korotyżce, pow. Stożn. Młyn wodny A. Krikana.

Ryc. 134, 135, 136 przedstawiają młyn wodny ze wsi Korotyżce. Podsiębierne koło wodne obraca poziomy wał, na którym wewnątrz budynku osadzono koło zębate. Koło to za pośrednictwem trybu drewnianego porusza wtórny, równoległy wał poziomy i drugie koło zębate; ono dopiero nadaje ruch obrotowy pionowej «szęścierni», sprzęgniętej żelazną osią z kamieniem młyńskim.

Bardzo zbliżony do opisanego jest mechanizm folusza (walusza), młyńna wodnego do bicia sukna (Ryc. 137 i 138). W jego wtórnym wale poziomym osadzono spiralnie szereg mocnych kołków, które przy obrotach wału podrzucają kolejno do góry szesć bab-bijaków drewnianych, poruszających się w prowadnicach. Bijaki te tłuką sukno, które wkłada się do otworów stępy i zalewa ukropem.

Wiatrak ze wsi Moczul (Ryc. 139) jest typu powszechnie spotykanego na terenie powiatów stołińskiego i lunieckiego. Zależnie od kierunku wiatru, obraca się cały wiatrak na osi, którą jest słup (a) o dużym przekroju. Słup zaczopowano w masywnym stolcu-krzyżaku i usztywniono

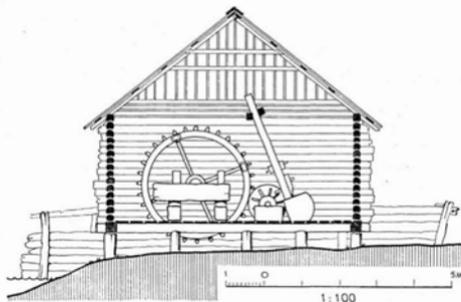


Fig. 137. Korotyczne, pow. Stolin. Folusz A. Rikuna.

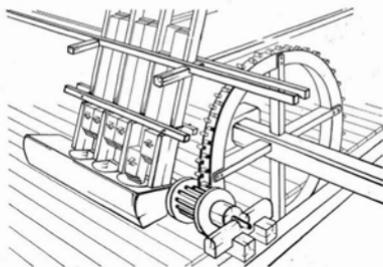


Fig. 138. Korotyczne, pow. Stolin. Folusz A. Rikuna.

Grandmother Sima, the wife of Zeyde Eber

Our grandmother, Sima, was a "Jewish grandmother", clean and tidy, neat, goodness emanating from her. she was very beautiful. I remember how she would greet us when we came from Talmachava for Shabbat. She called us into her room and pulled good and delicious things out of the pocket of her skirt: biscuits and beautiful apples she had kept for us, and she offered them to us. One thing I will never ever forget – I remember it like it was today. She was a sick and weak woman and it was not possible to take her to the wedding of her only son, which was in Davyd-Haradok. she was feeling poorly and she had to remain at home. Everyone went to the wedding. They left just me, only me, with Grandmother. I followed her everywhere that day. If she went to the kitchen I followed her, step by step. I remember how she baked the pie. She put in poppy seeds and afterwards, the next evening, how she welcomed the bride and groom with the pie. They seated my grandmother in the hall, and her daughter-in-law next to her, with a silk kerchief on her head, which was a gift. The kerchief was colourful, floral. I remember how they prepared the room for the young couple. A bed with eiderdowns, and the non-Jewish maid threw me playfully, laughing, onto the blankets and I rolled into a ball. The next day the bride and groom returned to Davyd-Haradok, along with Zeyde and all the others.

Grandmother Sima died. It was at twilight. She fell in her room next to the chest of drawers when she wanted to get something. They tried to save her. Everyone was screaming and crying all around. They started splashing water on her. They put her to bed. She was all wet, but she was still alive and talking. Mother offered to change her clothes for a dry nightgown, but she refused. "Later"... and to my sorrow "later" didn't come. I was standing next to my Mother when Grandmother took her last breath.



Malka and her children (from left to right): Sonia, Yitzele, Hantzik and Hava. On the background – their house in Talmachava.

Our home in the village of Talmachava

I want to talk a bit about the house where we lived in Talmachava, the big and beautiful house of my mother and father. We would go up seven or eight steps because the house stood on a hill in the middle of the village. The only house that had the roof covered in clay tiles and not with straw. When the roof tiles broke and the rain came in, we could never afford to repair the roof. We would put buckets in the middle of the house so that the rain would collect in them. Behind the house was a large garden. We would plant potatoes in it and cucumbers, and this was the source of our livelihood. We had a lot of cucumbers. Mother sold them in the surrounding villages. At the end of the garden there was a barn and a cowshed. In the barn was straw, and in the cowshed was our only cow. I remember the barn well. Every time that I came home for the summer holiday, I would take the picture from Yetel's wedding on which was the only picture of my father. I hid it in the barn. I wept bitterly and I talked to him. I poured my heart out to him. Every day, every day of the eight weeks I was there, I kept having that conversation. I hid in the barn with a postcard of my father and I didn't know that my mother saw me crying.



The only remaining photograph of Herschel Golman – a portrait that was cut from the family picture shown later.

They killed my father

My mother was 35 when the soldiers of General Balachowicz killed my father and she was left with four small children. There was no limit to her kindness. She cried all her life and that was what she left me for an inheritance.

I also knew about Father's death from a certain event that occurred. It was during the summer when I came home for the holidays. As usual, I ran to Korotycze. The first stop was the home of Aunt Breindel. Once, when I was with them, a non-Jew from Korotycze came to buy something at the store. He looked at me, saw a new face and asked, "Breindel, is she yours?" "No, she is my sister Malka's." "Oh, Herschel's," he said and began to recount that he was present when they shot my father. Then I heard details about how Father asked them to wait until Grandma would bring the money, but it didn't help, they didn't want to wait.



General Balachowicz and his troops (photograph from 1921).

After my father died, when I was about four or five, I lay in my bed at night with my eyes open and I saw him in the room. I held my breath so that, heaven forbid, he would not suddenly leave. I was in the bed with my two sisters, Hava and Sonia, and

so I didn't move. He was in the room until dawn, then in the morning I fell asleep and that was how it was, night after night. I've never told this to anyone. That was my big secret. I didn't want to be laughed at or have them not believe me. I really wanted this to be reality. The last time I was in Talmachava was in 1937. A year after that my Mother sold the house and they moved to Davyd-Haradok. When I think now about Talmachava, I don't remember that we had a happy childhood or youth. Those were hard years with a lot of pain, difficulties and tears. I was three and-a-half when that tragic, terrible thing happened, my father's end. I don't remember much of it, but there is one moment I will never forget and it is the only moment that I remember him alive.

It was on the Sabbath. From inside the house, through the window, I was watching and waiting for him. And then I saw him with a suitcase in his hand approaching the house. He was coming back from Koisneticz [?] from prayers, because there they had a *minyan*. My father went with his father, Zeyde Moshe. I remember this as if it was now. Now I always keep and always remember the picture in my bedroom, a picture of my father, the only sign I have of him, a postcard that Father wrote in 1914 from Russia to his brother, to America. The writing shows that the man had talent. Letters like pearls. The writing begins, as it was customary then, with *Parashat Hashavua* [Weekly Torah Portion] and greetings in Hebrew: "To my dear brother-in-law". After my father died, my mother tried to hold the family together and support us. It was not easy. In addition to all of these difficulties, she employed a teacher for us – especially for Hava and Sonia, but I was the little one – I also listened so that I would hear words of the Torah and I learned from it.

From those times I remember Aunt Malka (Father's sister) who came to us from Vysotsk [Wysock – a small town nearby]. She wanted to wish us luck, because one of us would come to

her and she would take care of him and send him to study. This was something serious, which of the three of us to send? Yitzele was still very small. The teacher advised them to send me, I was a good student and he understood that I needed a framework of school. Mother brought me to Davyd-Haradok and from there, through Stolin, one went through Vysotsk. It was not easy to leave Mother. This was the first time I went alone out into the world. In my heart I was angry at Mother. I didn't understand why she sent me away from her, but it didn't help – the wagon left. The next day I got to Stolin and the wagon driver brought me to Aunt Roshka [Riva's mother]. From there they had to send me onwards, that is, to Vysotsk, but plans changed. Instead of going to Vysotsk I found myself in Stolin, in the orphanage. And that started a new chapter of my life. My years in an orphanage.

The Orphanage

I was in the orphanage for seven years, from first grade until the end of seventh grade. The first children I met at the orphanage that day, when Aunt Roshka brought me there, were Ashka, whom they called "the mute", and a boy from Davyd-Haradok. The boy shouted at her "mute" and she had to lash back at him and called him "Toif" [?]. I looked at them with curiosity, if she was mute, how was she shouting at him, and this terrible nickname "Toif"? In Davyd-Haradok they make "Toif". I inquired and found out that Ashka was indeed mute and the only word she was able to utter was "Toif". Over time I learned to talk to her with my hands, we understood each other with sign language. The headmistress of the orphanage welcomed me. Her name was Malka Rabinovich. She was warm and was interested in me. Because she was named Malka, like my Mother, I felt close to her and I was not so scared.

Tarbut School in Stolin



Hantzik's class in Tarbut school in Stolin in 1932-1933. Hantzik sits in the second row, behind the girl in the white shirt.

I was accepted right away at the "Tarbut" School [a Hebrew school, the name translates as "Culture"], to the first grade. I adjusted quickly to my new "home" – which does not mean that I didn't really miss my home in Talmachava, my mother. In the first grade, I started to write letters home to everyone. On Passover I came home for the first time. After Passover I came back with my brother Yitzle, and he also became one of the children in the orphanage. He took it very hard and next to him I also cried. A few years later Sonia also came and we were all three of us together. Of course it was easier for all of us when we were together. In winter it was cold in our room. I remember a friend in my room, Hava'le, who knew how to wrap herself expertly inside the blanket, without leaving space for the air to penetrate. I learned it from her, so I could be warm and sleep through the night. They held the Seder [Passover ceremonial

dinner] for the children at the orphanage with a great deal of festivity. The teachers organized it. The teacher Wolreich [?] with his wife and son, the teacher Shapiro and others. But the greatest joy for us was when Mother came to visit. The eight days that she came to visit in Stolin were not enough for us. Those good days went so fast and the separation was very difficult. I remember once, when my mother came to the orphanage to say goodbye to us, it was during a class, and they called us into the corridor. We started to say our goodbyes and we (Yitzele and I) cried so much that the teachers came out of the classrooms in a panic and wanted to know why we were crying. When they saw what was happening they asked my mother to stay another day because we could not say goodbye to her, and she stayed.



Tarbut school in Stolin.

My Youth in Stolin

After a while, the headmistress of the orphanage, Malka, had to leave us and go to Palestine. It was not so easy to get used to a new headmistress and several were replaced during a short

period of time. It was difficult to find another Malka. I felt good in school. I had friends and very good teachers, especially the teacher Shapiro. I acted as a sort of secretary for him. I ran to the post office to send letters, telegrams, and to welcome the children at his home on the Sabbath. The students would often come to visit him when he was ill at home. Despite my short time in Stolin, a total of seven years, I knew and I remember to this day 90 percent of the residents of the orphanage. I see Stolin as it was, as if I left yesterday. It is especially impossible to forget the Yontef ["good days" – High Holy Days], and in particular tashlich. The Hasidim would go with the Rebbe, to the river, singing Hasidic melodies and dancing. The children would take advantage of the opportunity to run around, to hit and throw chestnuts at each other. Once I got hit in the eye, I was happy that my eye remained whole. On the eve of Tisha B'Av [9th of Av, a fast day], when they would throw berelach [snails], the girls had to put scarves on their heads because for the boys it was a mitzvah to throw berelach into the girls' hair.

The family of Aunt Roshka Tancman

For everything that I lived through in Stolin, I must to a large extent thank Aunt Roshka's family, and especially Feigel and Hinech [Hanoch Tuchman – the husband of Feige Tancman, Riva's sister]. I hardly knew Saraleh [Sarah, the oldest sister of Feige and Riva] because she went to Palestine shortly after I arrived in Stolin. But I remember the separation from her very well. I will never forget the moment that Saraleh took leave of her father's picture. I also participated in this scene and I cried. While I was there you, Riva'leh, also came to Stolin. When she came home for a visit, it was a great holiday for me. There are moments I will never forget. For example, the incident with the black alpaca apron [alpaca is a smooth shiny fabric]. These

were part of the school uniform, but my orphanage could not afford to buy such good things. Of course, I was also one of those who did not have this apron. On Friday evening, a few minutes before they were closing the shops, I was playing with all the children downstairs, next to my uncle's house. Riva'leh suddenly came and took me by the hand and said, "Come with me." I didn't ask any questions and I went with her. She brought me to Kantorowicz's shop, I remember as if it was today. It was almost dark, soon the shop would be closed. "You have to give me an apron for Hanna'leh," said Riva, and she would not budge. It all happened so fast I could not imagine it was real. It did not take long and I returned to play with the girls in a black alpaca apron, like them.

Another time, I got sick at the orphanage. At night they brought me some coffee from supper, but I could not touch it and so it went cold on the window sill next to the bed. Aunt Roshka came at six in the morning to see how I was feeling. When she saw the coffee it made a bad impression on her and she immediately spilled it out. I remember the face she made when she saw it. She brought me a fresh roll with butter and milk. I was proud to have such relatives as Aunt Roshka and when people were introduced to me and asked who I am, I always said "Roshka Tancman is my mother's sister."

The family on my Father's side

On my Father's side I had relatives in Stolin and in Minkowice [maybe Minkowice near Lublin], of whom I was also proud. It strengthened my confidence and my status in Stolin. The relatives were: Baruch Golman with his family and his mother, and Yona from Minkowice with his family. I learned about them after I had been in Stolin for years, because they were very well-born, so when they welcomed me, it was a nice feeling to be part of this family.

Leah Kostelanetz and her daughter Pnina Salzman

In the summer of 1932, when I had finished school (this was during the holidays), Leah Kostelanetz arrived from Palestine with her ten year old daughter, Pnina Salzman, who was already a famous pianist. They organized a concert for her, with the revenue being intended for the orphanage. I remember like it was today. Hinech gave me 50 grush [cents] to buy a ticket (children got tickets at a reduced price). I went to the box office. The cashier was one of the administrators of the orphanage who knew me, and he told me that I could go in for free and I should keep the 50 grush. But I insisted that the goal was important and said that the money was for the children's home and not for me. I remember to this day the children's enjoyment. Since then I have never again heard Pnina Salzman play. Already in America I read that Pnina Salzman had performed in England. I was hoping that maybe she would come to America to give a concert, and I decided that I would not miss this concert, but unfortunately so far she has not come to America. I told all of my acquaintances that her parents were from Stolin and I was very proud. [Pnina Salzman was a professor of music and the most famous pianist in Israel. She was awarded the Israel Prize and considered to be "The first lady of the piano in Israel". She died in 2006.]

Completing school in Stolin and travelling to Pinsk

Once I'd finished school and the holidays started, I never returned to the orphanage. I went to Aunt Roshka. I helped a bit in the shop – I sold kerchiefs (the kerchiefs' section was on the left side of the entrance to the shop). The time passed very quickly. Eight weeks of freedom passed and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I was sad to know that after being in such a good school I'd have to return to Talmachava, with

no future. But one day, in the afternoon, as we sat and waited in the shop for a buyer, Avraham Rabinovitz came in. He said: "Gather yourself together." I got up and I thought he wanted to sit in my place, but Avraham came back and said, "Gather yourself together, you are going to Pinsk to study." I almost fainted. I looked at him and could not believe such a miracle could happen. I ran into the room to deliver the news to Aunt Roshka. A few days later I packed my things and went to Pinsk to study at a trade school. I don't know what negotiations went on behind the scenes, but I was the last pupil accepted at the school. The school year had already begun. They asked me for my birth certificate. I assured them that I would get it soon. This "soon" lasted two and-a-half years. I was already in the third class, the last, when the headmaster, the teacher Frainett [?], came into the classroom to wish us mazaltov. All the girls and I looked at him and did not understand why he said mazaltov. Then he gave us a sermon. "Hanna Golman has been born. In other words, we've got her birth certificate."



Pinsk. The Polish title: "The Central bursa for Jewish girls in Pinsk 1934-1935". Hantzik is sitting in the third row, third from the left (between two teachers).

The best years of my youth were those three years when I studied at the trade school, and at the bursa [the dormitory for the girl students]. I remember how that same teacher, Frainett, would come and say, "Golman, start with the Sabbath concert," because I always sang, especially when we sewed.

Selling the house in Talmachava and moving to Davyd-Haradok

Mother decided to sell the house and to move. It was not easy to sell because buyers in the village did not need such a big house. Most of the houses had only a single room. But it was already dangerous for Hava and Mother to remain in Talmachava. Later I found out that Hava decided to do something in order to leave the village. Mother always made sure to pay the insurance on time, so Hava and her friend Ola Mechoter made a plan to burn the house down in a way that will not arouse anyone's suspicion. Next to our house was a small storage room where Mother kept wood. In the evening they lit the dry logs that were there, hoping that the fire will burn down the house right away, as it was very close. But as always, bad luck persisted, and instead of going towards our home, the wind was blowing in the opposite direction. Half of the village was burned, but our house, unfortunately, remained standing intact among the burned houses. Even the house of the Soltys [head of the village, in Polish], his name was Danilov. In the end he bought our house. Not for the sum that we would have received from the insurance, but it is good that we sold it and moved to Davyd-Haradok. At least we were among Jews. That was in 1938. As you realise, it was for a short time.

Short memories about family members

Great Aunt Riva Globerman - the sister of Zeyde Eber Krikun:

Aunt Riva's children: Eliyahu Globerman; his brother who was in Moscow [we don't know his name]; and another brother, Aharon Globerman, who perished under Hitler in Łódź. [In the 1960s Father, Yehuda Tancman, traveled to Moscow and found Eliyahu Globerman, who had spent some years in the Gulag and eventually moved to Israel.] Aharon had a factory that made handkerchiefs. I remember that they crossed the border from Russia to Poland [probably after the Soviet revolution in the early 1920s], he and his children. One of their daughters was handicapped, she had a hump, and it affected me very badly as a child. I remember her walking in the yard.

Great Aunt Esther - another sister of Zeyde Eber Krikun:

She was infinitely good-hearted. We were small children, and she looked after us and cried. I remember her last moments – she could no longer speak, but she was still stroking us with her hands. She had two boys and two girls: the girls are Feigel and Pesel and the boys are Herschel and Yitzchak.

The children of Zeyde Eber:

The eldest daughter, my aunt and your mother, was Roshka. After her was Aunt Hava, then Breindel, then my mother Malka, the only son Aharon, and the last one was Vital (Yentel).

[Incidentally, Sonia Krugman of the Shechtman family, Hava Shechtman's daughter, gives a different order: Roshka, Breindel, Hava, Malka, Vital (Yentel), and Aharon.]

Aunt Roshka Tancman:

The eldest daughter of Zeyde Eber, Aunt Roshka, perished in the Stolin ghetto. Roshka never came to the Land of Israel, even

though she had the "Certificate" ready [certificate - the British permit to come to Palestine, rarely given and with difficulties obtained. Roshka visited Palestine in 1934, when her daughter Riva was in prison, but then she returned to Poland]. The war broke out and she was among those murdered by Hitler in Stolin. Aunt Roshka got married very young. She used to say that she was still playing with dolls when her grandfather told her that she was to be the bride of Issachar Tancman, the son of a Hasid from Stolin, who was much older than her [apparently by 23 years]. Aunt Roshka's children are Ziporah – the beautiful eldest daughter, Yaakov and Yosef, two fine sons, and Feigel, Sarah and you [Riva].

Aunt Hava Shechtman:

I believe that her husband, Mordechai Shechtman, came from Russia. She had three children, Sonia, Herschel [Zvi] and Yitzele [Yitzchak]. Aunt Hava died very young (she choked on a bone, that is what I was told), so the children were brought up by Zeyde Eber. Once the children were free, in their twenties, they travelled to the Land of Israel, and they are still here today.

Aunt Breindel Czapsman:

Her husband was Yaakov Czapsman. She had a boy, Yitzele (all of the Yitzele's in the family were named after the father of Zeyde Eber). Her children who survived were Hava (Havka) and Rachel. Both of them are here in Israel.

Uncle David Aharon Krikun:

The only son of Zeyde Eber. He married Hanna from Davyd-Haradok, a very beautiful woman, and they had three children. The boy was named Asher, after him was Sime'le and the beautiful little one was Lulik (Lulinka). They all perished. We do not even know where and how.

Aunt Vital (Yentel) Lelchuck:

Aunt Vital and her husband David Lelchuck. He was like a real father for us. The children are: Yitzele, Toivele and Simcha (this name was given for Grandmother Sima). Nothing remained of them. Little Vital, a woman who laboured all her life, had a big heart and a lot of emotion and understanding for others. I remember one moment from the wedding of Vital in Korotycze. When they woke me up to be photographed, while I was getting dressed, I did not even have time to put my hands into the sleeves of the dress and my grandfather wrapped me in his coat and that is how I came out in the picture.



This is probably the photograph in question. The only photograph that has been preserved of Zeyde Eber's family and his wife Sima Krikun, taken probably on Yentel's wedding. Here they sit on the extreme right. In front of Zeyde Eber stands their granddaughter Hantzik, the daughter of Malka and the mother of Sima Crifasi – who is today in Tel Aviv. According to this picture it seems that Hantzik really was wrapped in Zeyde Eber's coat. Next to Sima sits Hantzik's mother Hava Golman with her smallest child Yitzele, and next to her Herschel Golman, Hava's husband. In front of him standing his two daughters (Hantzik's sisters), Sonia and Hava. Behind them, in a white dress, is another daughter of Eber and Sima – Yentel (Vital). The man standing behind Zeyde Eber is probably his only son Aharon, and the man standing next to Vital is probably her husband David Lelchuck.

Other members of my family

My family on my father's side:

My grandfather (my father's father) was Moshe Golman from Minkowice, and my grandmother was Esther. These are the parents of my father, Herschel Golman, and his sisters (he was the only son), who were: Aunt Malka Golman who lived in Vysotsk, Aunt Breindel Scheinman who lived in America, Aunt Shaindoch, who died in Russia in 1965, Aunt Feigel, who died very young, and the youngest, Bat-Sheva, perished in Germany. My mother, Malka, the daughter of Zeyde Eber, married my father – they were first cousins.

My sister Hava:

My older sister Hava was a successful girl. She lived alone in Talmachava, a village without Jews. After they moved to Davyd-Haradok and a new life would have been possible, Hitler came and their lives ended tragically. She had a very talented fiancé. I even sent her wedding clothes from Pinsk. The war broke out and she didn't get married.

My sister Sonia:

Sonia learned to make corsets. All thanks to Rachel Tancman [wife of Yaakov Tancman – Riva's brother]. Rachel came to Stolin and, taking her advice, Sonia opened a sewing workshop and made corsets in Baranovichi. Sonia married Yosef Alpiner. They had a son, Herschel, named after Father. During the war they were hiding, but the Germans found them and killed them, and celebrated around them.

My brother Yitzele:

My brother was very small and thin, my Mother always cried that Yitzele is so tiny. At the age of 17-18 he grew tall, he was a

tall, good-looking boy. At the age of 21 he perished, like all of the men from Davyd-Haradok.



Four children of Golman Family (from left to right): Yitzele, Sonia, Hava and Hantzik.

Other Jewish families in Korotycze

Herschel Koropatkin – a shoemaker, with his wife and a house full of children, poor people.

Blaum the blacksmith – I don't remember his first name – with 12 children. I remember a few of his children's names. There were Oshra, Rishel-Rachel, Nachumke. And among the boys there was also Moshe. The difference between us and them was so big you could actually feel it. We would sometimes go to them, but they did not even have a floor in their home. Only black earth, hard. Some of the girls remained spinsters because they were so poor. Perhaps two or three of them were married.

There was another family, Motel the "crooked", that's what they called him. He had a shop with all sorts of things.

Korotycze was not a big village. The villagers respected Grandfather. When there were non-Jewish holidays Grandfather would welcome them with wine and pastries. The non-Jews would thank him. All the children stood around him. He had good friends among the older non-Jews. The young people were already different, more suspicious, with more hatred towards the Jews.

This is the end of the interview with Hantzik (Hanna) Schumann.

Interview with Sonia Shechtman (Krigman)

This is the Interview with Sonia Shechtman, another granddaughter of Zeyde Eber and his wife Sima. Sonia was the oldest daughter of Hava Krikun, Eber's daughter who married Mordechai Shechtman.

The conversations were held in Yiddish. This is an English translation of the translation into Hebrew:

The eve of Succoth 1981. I am speaking with Sonia Shechtman. The eldest daughter of Aunt Hava née Krikun and Mordechai Shechtman. Sonia told me who was the firstborn of our Zeyde Eber and grandmother Sima. The eldest daughter was Roshka (who married Issachar Tancman), then Breindel (who married Yaakov Czapsman), mother of Hava and Rachel, then Hava (who married Mordechai Shechtman), mother of Sonia, Zvi and Yitzchak. Afterwards Malka (who married Herschel Golman), mother of Hava, Sonia, Hantzik and Yitzele. Afterwards Vital (Yentel, who married David Lelchuk), mother of Yitzele, Toivele and Simcha. And the youngest, the only male, Aharon Krikun (who married Hava), father of Asher, Sima and Lulik.

[By the way, Hantzik, the daughter of Malka Golman, gives a different order: Roshka, Hava, Breindel, Malka, Aharon, Yentel.]

We were born – myself, Zvi and Yitzchak – in Piotrikov, Russia. My Father was a timber merchant. Our circumstances were very good. We had a good home, we lived with my paternal grandmother. From Piotrikov we moved to Dnepropetrovsk and Yekaterinoslav, which were places associated with Father's work. Mother suffered from heart disease, she was very beautiful, "krasawica" (beautiful, in Russian), one can even see it in the picture. How beautiful and clean my parents appear. I remember: when Father would return from his travels, he would always bring beautiful and precious gifts, for us, the children, and for Mother. We stood next to his suitcase, waiting impatiently for our gifts. Our Father was a very good and devoted man. Always, when he had free time he would go with us for a walk. Mother died of heart disease, very young. Yitzchak was then about two years old. Of course, we remained lonely. Vital would travel with my Mother when she went for treatments, and we children were then in Korotycze. When my Mother died, after some time Father remarried. His wife

was not young, but she was a spinster. I remember, she was devoted to us. She took care of us and we respected her. We were on very good terms with her. This was while we lived In Piotrikov. During the Revolution, when there were Petlura soldiers [Ukrainian army known for their hatred of Jews] and Balachowicz troops, we fled.

The situation was catastrophic. I remember when the Petlura soldiers arrived, and we lived in great fear (Father's second wife was also no longer with us as she had died). We hid in the yards and ran from one yard to another. I remember how we, three small children, were left alone at home. I awoke to screams. I was standing and trembling with fear. My two brothers slept, they slept.

I remember as if it was today – when my mother died they had put her gold earrings on me. When the Petluras came into our home, they first said, "Girl, take off the earrings," and I remember how I took them off and I gave them. The boys slept. Luckily, they didn't touch the children. They took the silver candlesticks and all the rest of the silverware, like silver cups and other things. They left (I was about ten or 12 years old). Then I woke the boys up and we went to the neighbours, where I knew there were still Jews. At night we lay in the yard, all of the Jews together. Out of fear we didn't go into the houses. We ran from yard to yard.



Symon Petlura (in the middle with both hands in pockets) and his troops.

So, in those times, many Jews were killed by patrols. Groups of bandits and other anti-Semites. In 1925 we went to Zeyde, to Korotycze. It was not easy getting there, we had to steal across the border between the Soviet Union and Poland.

That was the year our father died, it was at Passover. Zeyde Eber sent people, paid a lot of money so that they would get us through the border to him. The route was not easy. We stayed alone in the forest. We suffered a lot before we got to Zeyde, without clothes, without anything, but at least we got to Korotycze alive and uninjured. We stayed for a while in Korotycze and then we separated. At the end of 1925, I came to Palestine, after me – my brother Zvi, and the last brother to come was Yitzchak. That is how all of us, the three of us, met in Palestine.

I think a lot about my grandparents. They didn't know what to do with us, how to help us. They bought things and clothes, the nicest and the most beautiful they gave to us. I remember many moments and I start to cry, because it is a very precious thing for me. I remember their good heartedness. Zeyde could sing Hasidic melodies very well. For example, Erev Shabbat, he would sing very beautiful melodies and we lay in our beds. I am under the blanket and he is putting me to sleep with the melodies. Zeyde had a huge personality, his face would glow.

He had, Zeyde, a good reputation amongst people, he was well known in the area. It was enough for me to say that I was the granddaughter of Eber from Korotycze – that was enough. I spoke with my Zeyde about my trip to Palestine. He did not agree and primarily that was because the girls were together with the boys.

On Rosh Hashana, we would go to Azdamichy, because there was no *minyán* in Korotycze. I remember all the children would sit in the wagon and Grandmother Simka baked us a lot of the holiday pastries, and as we travelled we feasted on the goodies. There they would prepare apartments and the children were full of joy.

A lot can be said about Grandmother's kindness. She would call me and the boys, and she would give us milk, warm and fresh from their cow. She devoted herself entirely to us.

On Erev Pesach Zeyde sent us with matzot to the landowner. He would tell us to kiss the hands of the landowner's wife. I did it, but the boys, Zvi and Yitzchak, did not agree. The landowner's wife would give us sweets. I am remembering these things all over again.

In 1925, I travelled from Korotycze, through Stolin, to a kibbutz in Klesów [?]. I didn't have anything to travel with, I had no money. Aunt Feigel and Aunt Roshka helped me with money. I was in Klesów for only a very short time, perhaps a month, and I received a certificate to travel to Palestine.

Here, in Palestine, when I was in Kfar Saba, I made friends with a family from Gródek, the Ziporin family. Through someone in their family who came to Palestine, I learned that our Zeyde had passed, was no longer among the living. I do not remember what year it was. My life was not easy, but because of Zeyde I had many good family moments in my life.

The aunts Vital, Breindel and Malka sent packages to Palestine. Dried fish, berries, mushrooms. They did not forget me. Also, my "goyim" friends gave me a beautiful gift before I left: home-made linen cloth, dried apples and other gifts.



The children of Hava Shechtman (née Krikun) and Mordechai Shechtman. From left to right: Yitzchak Shechtman, Zvi Shochet (Shechtman) and Sonia (Sarah) Krigman (née Shechtman).

After about a year, Zvi came to Palestine and then Yitzhak. Here they were all on kibbutzim. When there was hunger at the kibbutzim, I moved to Tel Aviv and worked for the Hankin family.

This is the end of the interview with Sonia Shechtman (Krigman).

Chapter three

Yehudah's Memoirs 1929-1933

Continuation of the memories recorded by Yehuda, at the request of Vitek

Immigration to Israel – Jaffa Port

The first chapter ended with my *aliyah* to Israel in 1929. In general, I must say that at the time I made *aliyah* I was full of dreams which were based primarily around three main ideals. The first was Zionism, the second was socialism, and the third – perhaps unique to me – was vegetarianism. These were the three causes to which I gave my soul. I have to say that in those days I was very enthusiastic, but very naïve. Only later, after I had left my town to go out into the world, when I met with members in the kibbutz and with other people, was I able to make assessments and reach my conclusions. After all, I had been educated, brought up and had developed within the confines of a small town with narrow horizons, and so my own horizons were also extremely limited. My faith and ideals were emotionally profound, but I was still very innocent. The world I lived in formed a very narrow circle, and I settled into this circle. I must say that later on, when I compared myself with youths

from other more developed cities, to say nothing of Warsaw – youths who had encountered different ideas and different directions in school, and later different shades of Zionism both to the left and to the right – their horizons were much broader than mine. Those who came from small towns and perceived only the Hashomer Hatzair ideology without any other ideologies lacked my conviction, but nonetheless, our faith was intense.

We sailed from Trieste by ship in late October 1929, a group of members of Hashomer Hatzair. It was really a big part of the *garin* [seed, core] which was needed to build a kibbutz in the land of Israel. They were people with whom I had undergone the training period, but other members of Hashomer Hatzair went to other kibbutzim. We left the shores of Trieste in rough seas and in the dead of night heading for Israel. During one of the coldest mornings in November 1929 we approached the coast of Jaffa, but because Jaffa was not yet a suitable port, larger ships had to remain outside the area of the port in deep seas, because the water in the port was shallow. We were also delayed so we spent the morning off the Jaffa coast until rowboats came out to bring us to the shore. We arrived a few days after the dust had settled on the events of 1929 – although they were not settled entirely since the strike by the Arab dockworkers on the Jaffa coast still continued.



On the right: Jaffa port in the 1920s. Dockworkers transferring goods from the ship to the shore. On the left: The old Jaffa port. Colour photograph taken in 1930.

We disembarked on the Jaffa coast in groups. After the usual procedures at that time – checking passports and registration – our bags were loaded onto trucks and we were taken in cars to *Beit Ha'Olim* (Immigrants' House) in Tel Aviv. By the way, there was a piquant incident at this point: I approached the Jew who was loading our belongings on to the truck, "Where are we going, sir?" He looked at me angrily and said: "I am not 'sir' to you, I am a comrade". That's what they were like in those days, the Zionists, the pioneers.



Beit Ha'Olim on Aliyah Street in Tel Aviv.

On the way to *Beit Ha'Olim* I looked out of the car with curiosity. We went through Jaffa. I saw people riding on small horses and I wondered how these little horses survived. Of course these were donkeys, something I had not seen in Europe. The first impression was brief. We entered *Beit Ha'Olim* which was on Aliyah Street in Tel Aviv. By the way, just six months ago [in 1970] it was destroyed. Without knowing that

the building was going to be demolished, I was able to take a picture of it as a souvenir. A month later, I went and saw that the demolition was proceeding. It was composed of a collection of Arab buildings on a high knoll, accessed by many steps. The rooms were quite primitive, with iron beds. That was where we lodged until it became clear where we were to go.

Note from 2012: The Rogozin regional school was built on the plot of *Beit Ha'Olim*, which later became the Bialik-Rogozin Campus, with educational institutes from kindergarten to high school. The school is also a centre for children of foreign workers in Tel Aviv.



The central dormitory in *Beit Ha'Olim* – a photograph from the early 1930s.

It should be mentioned, by the way, that while we were still in training and at the kibbutz abroad, we would talk and argue about our outlook and our approach to life, about the place of the individual in society. Naturally, during these conversations, our differences came to light and over time these matured and

became deeper. This had continued on the ship, and at *Beit Ha'Olim* they reached crisis proportions. In order to reconcile these differences (which I do not presently recall – probably not serious issues) someone from the leadership had to come to talk to us. A member of Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek came, but was unable to resolve the matter. Eventually most people went to Rishon Lezion to found a new kibbutz there, and a small group, including myself, chose to go to Kibbutz Binyamina. It was a functioning kibbutz and there was already a group of people who were members of Hashomer Hatzair there, older than us by two or three years, who had come to Israel six months to a year before us.

Kibbutz Binyamina – a new world

We were laden down with baggage when we went off to Binyamina. In addition to things we had brought with us from abroad, we received tents from the Jewish Agency. For every three people – one tent, and for each tent, one mosquito net. We arrived at the kibbutz and set up the tents. The entire kibbutz lived in tents. I remembered then the quote "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob" (Bamidbar 24:5). There were no huts yet in which to live, not even one. It should be said that in those days, when our kibbutz was founded, it was established at first as a group of paid workers. It would have to exist like that for a long time – three, five or even ten years, until its turn came for "colonisation" and it received land from the Jewish National Fund.

[Note from 2012: The kibbutz was not, in the end, established on its own land. Here is a quote from the Kibbutz Gan Shmuel website: "In 1933 the Kibbutz Gan Shmuel group united with Kibbutz Binyamina (members of Hashomer Hatzair, who had settled at that time in Hadera), and in 1935 the kibbutz became part of the *Kibbutz Artzi* network".]

The *moshava* (colony) of Binyamina and other communities around it were built not on land belonging to the Jewish National Fund, but on PJCA (Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association) land – land purchased from the Baron Rothschild Fund, made available for colonisation by farmers. The kibbutz "planted" its tents at the outskirts of the *moshava*. The kibbutz members were hired to work for the farmers on the colony, and also on PJCA land that had not yet been handed over to the farmers for colonisation. The PJCA was in charge of these areas.

Members of Kibbutz Binyamina doing outdoor work on the *moshava* (from a booklet about Kibbutz Binyamina from the Archive of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel).



As I said, no residential huts had yet been erected and the only hut there contained the dining room and kitchen. The kitchen took up a fifth of the space inside the hut and the rest was made into the dining room. There were tables with benches and in the middle hung a lamp, because there was no electricity yet on the kibbutz. There was only a "luxé" oil lamp that provided quite a strong light. In the tents these lamps were hung on the central columns. Apart from the dining room hut there was another small hut for a shower, and in some distance from the camp – a toilet. Later, when we purchased work mules, we also built a stable. I remember that in 1930 or 1931 we had already started building the first residential hut. It was intended primarily for new families in the kibbutz. Another bed had to be added to the family rooms in the huts – this was for sick people (especially those suffering from malaria). That was the way of life in the kibbutz.

Labour: As I said, we lived as hired labourers, divided into two categories: work indoors and work outdoors. The arrangement was this: in the evening a representative of the kibbutz would go to the employment office and remain there for several hours. That was where orders for labourers were received from the farmers. These would be divided proportionally between individual workers and kibbutz workers. Our representative would get the portion he needed and, together with other kibbutz members, he would sit and prepare the work schedule for the next day. This work schedule was according to departments. The number of workers for work indoors always depended on the number of orders for outdoor work, because these formed the base of our economy. If there were more orders for outdoor work, fewer people remained to do the other jobs, and if the situation was reversed, we could allow ourselves more workers for indoor jobs.

Indoor jobs: First of all – the kitchen. Work in the kitchen went on from four or five o'clock in the morning until nine or ten o'clock in the evening. Of course, there had to be at least two shifts. The number of workers was between six and eight. That means about 15 kibbutz members. In all, there were about 80 people on the kibbutz.

Laundry: It should be said, while on the subject of the indoor work like laundry, etc., that cooperation on the kibbutz then was much more complete than it is today. Everything that the members had brought with them from abroad, like clothes, etc., went into the general storeroom. Girls who were professional seamstresses or could make repairs were primarily sent to work in the storeroom. They would prepare the clothes on Friday afternoon and when members came back from work, they found clean clothes sitting in a neat pile on their bed, folded and ironed. The dirty work clothes were thrown into a general box that was then taken to the laundry. Several people also worked in the laundry, according to the work schedules.

Night watchman: The role of the night watchman was not only to keep watch, but also to wake up everyone who had to go to work, light the primus stoves in the kitchen and all of the other preparatory work that could be done at night. For a while we rented a vineyard and there, too, we needed to keep watch at night. I was on guard duty in the vineyard for a fortnight and I remember that there was a problem: one morning after guard duty, I went to bed and I was woken after about an hour and asked whether I had fired a shot in the night, because they had found a wounded Arab nearby. Actually, I had fired into the air to scare away snakes or thieves, but the Arab could not have been injured by my shots which I shot into the air, only as a warning. They thought there would be problems, but nothing happened.

There were two other types of indoor work which were considered to be lucrative: in the carpentry shop (there were four or five carpenters) and in the cobbler's shop, where, as a revolutionary expression of Hashomer Hatzair, two girls were employed – Elisheva and Malka. The carpentry and the cobbler shops carried out work both for the kibbutz and for outside jobs.



A group of builders from Kibbutz Binyamina (from the booklet about Kibbutz Binyamina from the Archive of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel).

One of the outside jobs was picking fruit. Girls were sent to do that, or men who were convalescing after an illness if they were still weak, because it was easier work.

Digging trenches was very heavy work because the earth in Binyamina was marshland, which dried up in the summer and

became hard as rock. It was very hard to dig the 40 cm of the hard top crust. Below this the ground was sticky and viscous like rubber. The trenches had to be cleaned occasionally because the water would sweep mud through and create blockages. One had to stand in the trench with the water and the mud coming halfway up your body, and shovel out the slime. The workers who did this job were constantly covered in mud.

These were the main outside jobs. Usually members did not go to bed before the work schedule was finished so that they would know where they were working the next day and what time they needed to get up in the morning. Early in the morning the night watchman would wake them each at his proper time. Sometimes it was necessary to get up particularly early if one needed to go to a distant PJCA field or a distant *moshava* like Pardes Hanna, and it took about an hour to get there. The members got up, washed and dressed. They went into the dining room where they had their breakfast. The kitchen staff prepared some provisions for each of them, according to what was required, according to the list they were given.

Most of the food was a kind of thin soup with a few slices of bread, some olives, sometimes fried eggplant or meat patties. Although the situation in the country was poor in general, our food was very poor compared with what other workers brought with them, and we would compare that when we worked with them and ate our breakfast together. On the kibbutz itself, after work, at lunch or dinner, the food was really of the lowest sort. Naturally it affected our physical condition. Members who had strong bodies held up, but the weak ones weakened even further and were prone to disease, especially malaria.

As for me, because I was vegetarian and didn't eat the meat patties, my food rations were even more meagre. No wonder that after a while not only did I get really sick with malaria but, later, it developed into chronic malaria which was hard

to get rid of and I suffered a lot. There was a period of a few months when I couldn't go out to work at all because the attacks came every three weeks on a regular basis – I did not manage to recover from one attack before I was already suffering from a new attack, and so on. In collaboration with another kibbutz, our kibbutz arranged a convalescent home on the coast for chronic malaria patients, where I stayed. Then I was sent to a convalescent home at Motza, where I spent a few weeks. Later I made a long journey through Israel, but that's another story and was to do with work and food on the kibbutz.

Economically, life on the kibbutz was poor and a kibbutz member was selected to act as the economic administrator. Since everything was shared, all of the income from our wages would come to him and he would manage the books. He would buy everything that was necessary for the kibbutz, such as food and clothing, wholesale, and he was in charge of all of the economic matters. Any issues which were particularly important would be brought before the entire kibbutz, but the economic administrator was the one with executive rights. If a kibbutz member needed a sum of money for a particular journey, he would have to apply for it to the economic administrator. For small amounts, the economic administrator would decide at his own discretion, but when it came to large amounts he was inclined to refuse, and then the kibbutz member could bring the matter before the entire kibbutz.

As for the cultural life on the kibbutz – we had quite a large library and with a variety of books in various languages including German, French, English and Polish. The books were mainly on science, economics and social issues. I learned German then because I wanted to read science books in that language. I studied with the help of a dictionary and I worked on it a lot. As for theatre and cinema, even in the large cities the choice wasn't as varied as it is today, but still there were

a few theatres like Habima, HaOhel, Ha'Mattate. You could go to the theatre during a visit to the city, if you had money. The theatre didn't usually come to the kibbutz. We saw theatre performances or films very rarely. If a film was brought to the *moshava* we would also sometimes enjoy it.

What we were rich in was music. We had a record player that we received as a gift from someone, a philanthropist. And we had a lot of records, and members had total freedom to listen to as much music as they desired. I especially remember one tall and good-looking fellow, Sasha Finkel, brother of the stage actor Shimon Finkel, who was an avid music enthusiast and used the record player a lot. Other members would also listen frequently.

Another "cultural" element were the conversations and the meetings we had. During these conversations there were arguments and discussions. Current affairs were discussed as well as ideological and fundamental issues. You could say that it was part of our cultural life at that time.

Female members of Kibbutz Binyamina doing laundry (from the booklet about Kibbutz Binyamina from the Archive of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel).



We dressed very simply. While we were at work, of course, we wore work clothes, and after work and a shower we would wear – and usually all of us would wear the same – a blue shirt and khaki shorts, and we walked around barefoot.

Ideological questions: Zionism and Marxism

And so I found myself in a completely different reality: from the reality of a small town, where I had spent most of my time, to the reality of the kibbutz – which was very different from what I was used to. In these new living and working conditions, I started to look around and get to know the reality of the kibbutz which was not what we had learned about in the Diaspora. I need to introduce this by saying that the Hashomer Hatzair movement educated its members in Marxist-Leninist ideology as well as in Zionism. Compared to the leaders of the movement, my familiarity with Marxist-Leninism complemented theirs except for the Jewish national problem. Here we disagreed although in every other respect everything was fine. I also believed that we needed to establish our own national state and homeland in Israel, but Marxist-Leninism means solidarity with the international proletariat. In Israel however, I encountered (and I say "I", although there were many like me) new slogans and concepts that were strange and not entirely comprehensible as, for example, "conquest of labour" or "occupation of land". We knew that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) was collecting money throughout the Diaspora and that this money was used to buy land in Israel. We understood that for various reasons the JNF had to pay high prices for these lands, beyond market prices, but we did not understand the meaning of "occupation of land" and the difference between this and the purchase of land.

The "conquest of labour" related to the need for a joint organisation of Jewish workers, and there was a slogan, "pure Jewish labour". They demanded that the peasants in the colonies employ only Jewish workers. This contradicted Marxist-Leninist principles. What would be our position on this matter? Arguments started in the kibbutzim, including on our kibbutz, about how we should realise these slogans in accordance with the principles that we had learned abroad.

I remember once, a few months after I arrived at the kibbutz, we had a gong, an iron bell that summoned people for meals and meetings and so on. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, we heard the gong. We all jumped out of bed and ran outside. It turned out there was danger of an Arab attack on the kibbutz. Where did this information come from? Guards who were members of the *Haganah* noticed lights from afar and heard Arabs shouting. Really, if the Arabs were preparing to attack the Jewish community would they have come *en masse* and shouting, and with their flashlights on? Sometimes they would arrive on animals, camels, and you could hear their voices. There were plans for such instances, as well as weapons. Observation posts were set up here and there, waiting for the attack. Finally, it became clear that the Arabs were looking in the swamps for a camel, or camels, that had strayed; they had no aggressive intentions and nothing happened.

But after this incident, I thought a lot: why would the Arabs attack the kibbutz? Probably not with the intention of robbing and looting. So there must be a more serious reason behind it. It seems they perceive kibbutzim to be competitors who take the work and the land from them. Doubts arose regarding matching the reality with the slogans not only in me, but also in many other members who firmly believed in the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninism and in international proletarian solidarity. Then it turned out there were reasons for this. The purchase of land was not always conducted in such a manner that the vendor sold of his own free will, as we had believed.

We found out that during the Ottoman reign, there was no record at all of land ownership in Israel. After the arrival of the British in 1917, the need to record all the land owners was declared. During the period of Turkish rule, the ownership of land was not official. Feudalism meant the peasants were bonded (through loans, and so forth), and eventually all of the

effendis owned land while the farmers, the fellahin, were their tenants. They worked the land but had to pay their effendi the value of a quarter of their crop in exchange. The standard of agriculture was low and the crop was poor, but the effendis became rich since they collected the quarter portion from many farmers. Arab families suffered from shortages, especially if they were large and had to borrow more from the effendi, and so their dependence on him grew greater. They had to look for jobs outside agriculture. When the British government announced the registration of land, government institutions were in the big cities: Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Afula and so on. In the distant Arab villages there were, of course, no government institutions. It was necessary to go to the town in order to register the lands. The landowners, the effendis, registered as much land as they wanted to in their own names, and the Arab fellahin knew nothing about it, because they had no connection with the city and did not approach government offices willingly as they were afraid. In this way, the law made the fellahin the legal tenants.

When the JNF began to buy lands, they purchased these from the rightful landowners in whose name the land was registered, and who were entitled to sell it. They lived in Israel, although there were some who lived abroad (for example, in Beirut). When the JNF came to realise the purchase, it turned out that these lands were not vacant but that there were tenants living there with their families who made their livelihoods from the land. Based on the purchase contracts, the JNF demanded that they leave the land. The Arab farmers refused, claiming that they had cultivated the land for generations and had also paid the effendis, and had nowhere to go. The British police was called in to assist the legal owner to evict the tenants, and that led to bloody conflicts when the Arab farmers lay down under the wheels of cars. Eventually, a lot of families were forcibly evicted and the JNF acquired ownership of the land. That was

the "occupation of land". This was far from the image we had in the Diaspora of the nature of selling the lands, and of course this was not in accordance with the principles of Marxist-Leninism.

After the Arabs were evicted from their lands they still did not hand them over immediately. Especially in frontier locations, in places bordering with Arab villages, where the kibbutzim had been established. Unlike individuals, the kibbutzim were able to arrange an organised defence against attacks from the local Arabs as well as the Arabs who had been evicted from their land and would perhaps attempt to recapture it. This is what made us realise what "occupation of land" really meant.



"Coexistence in Binyamina, Rachel Cohen on the donkey and Bolek to the left" (from the booklet about Kibbutz Binyamina from the Archive of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel).

As for the "conquest of work" – there was a difference between the city and the *moshav*. Usually in the city the Histadrut (Israel's organisation of labour union) dominated the labour market. The unemployed would come every morning to the Histadrut office looking for work. There was a lack of

work at that time and they would be told that there was no work. One of the reasons for this was that Arab workers were being employed, leaving no work for the Jewish workers. The Secretary suggested that the Jewish workers drive the Arab workers back to their villages and take over their jobs. "Jewish country – Jewish labour". And indeed groups would travel to the outskirts and when they found an Arab worker they demanded that he leave. When he refused, he suffered. There was violence. That was probably the case in all cities. In this way, the Histadrut fought for work for its Jewish members. It was no longer possible to find Arabs in the city centres.

In the *moshavim* and the villages the situation was different. Veteran growers, especially in the older settlements such as Petach Tikva, preferred to employ Arab workers who received less than half of what the Jewish workers received. The Arab workers were Jordanian, Arabs from the villages and small farm owners who were forced to work at other jobs in order to make a living. There were also skilled workers amongst them. Harsh propaganda was conducted against these growers, firstly in the press and at lectures. Attempts were made to apply pressure on them to employ a Jewish workforce. There were also factories which tried to hire Arab workers.

This was the actual situation when I arrived in Israel – "conquest of labour" and "occupation of land". By the way, a strike broke out in Binyamina, in the orchards. The strikers were a few of the workers in the *moshava*. Kibbutz members who belonged to the Marxist-Leninist movement joined them, and there was solidarity with the striking Jewish workers. But in Binyamina there was also a small number of Arab workers, and the Arab workers also went on strike. We, Hashomer Hatzair – because we were in favour of a common organisation of Arab and Jewish workers – tried to make contact with the Arab workers. Since I was the only person who was able to speak

a little bit of Arabic, I was the kibbutz representative with the Arab workers. I was in touch with them regarding everything that was happening. We assured them that we would strike with them and that at the end of the strike, we would try to obtain permission to work together, provided they would strike with us. They believed us. It was necessary to also keep watch, to make sure that strike-breakers would not go into the orchards to work. Sometimes the growers would bring them in.



The 1st of May celebrations at Kibbutz Binyamina (from the booklet about Kibbutz Binyamina from the Archive of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel).

During this strike, which lasted for several days, there was a gathering of workers on a hill near Binyamina. The majority was in favour of ending the strike and returning to work. It was decided to go back to work the next day. During the evening meal I was told that someone was waiting for me outside. I went out and found three or four Arabs from the group I was in contact with. They wanted to know what the results of the workers' meeting had been. I told them that it had been decided to return to work. What about them, they asked. Since this had

not been discussed during the meeting, I asked them to wait for a while so that I could go to consult with the members. No solution was found for their problem and that was what I had to tell them. They understood the matter and left.

I want to add one more incident that made a strong impression on me at the time. Near Binyamina, on PJCA land, there stood an Arab peasant's hut. An old man lived there who adamantly refused to sell his piece of land, despite the pressure exerted on him and the price that he had been offered. He claimed that this land had been in his family for generations and he wanted to die there, like his father and his father's father before him. One of the tactics used to exert pressure on him was the removal of the source of water for the irrigation of his fields. Everything was done to harass him and to make it hard for him, so that he would sell. But he was stubborn and did not want to sell. When I heard about this, I felt a sense of admiration for this *fellah* that he did not want to part with his land, to say nothing about the fact that he had nowhere else to go. That was also one of my arguments on the kibbutz regarding the fulfilment of Marxist-Leninist principles by Hashomer Hatzair.

The slogans about "conquest of labour" or "occupation of land", the strike in the orchards of Binyamina and the case of the Arab fellah – all of these combined to prove to me more and more that the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim in Israel were not fulfilling the principles of Marxist-Leninism that we had been taught. A similar process was probably experienced by a lot of other members on Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim. It started in the Galician kibbutzim of Hashomer Hatzair and moved to the Polish kibbutzim. A group was established which constituted about one-third or 35% of the members, who had leftist tendencies and outlook. On the *moshava* there was a small group of communists, individuals, members of the PKP at that time; you could count them on the fingers of one hand.

They had made contact with a number of our members, and a period of unrest began.

PCP: The Palestine Communist Party in the Land of Israel was founded in 1919, two years after the Russian Revolution, as the "Socialist Workers Party" – MPS, and participated in the founding convention of the Histadrut (1920). In 1922 it changed its name to the PKP (in Yiddish – "Palestinische Komunistische Partei"). The choice of language was not accidental – it derived from the denial of Zionism, the revival of the Hebrew language being one of its principles. Since its inception, the Party perceived Zionism to be a reactionary movement and not a liberation movement.

PCP activity on Kibbutz Binyamina

Every now and then, we found leaflets scattered throughout the kibbutz. Ideological unrest, which at first was expressed in debates, gradually consolidated and became organised. Some of the members of the kibbutz already associated with the Communist Party and worked in collaboration with it. I did not know about that. I still had my ideological beliefs. I argued a lot. Of course that counted against me. Everyone knew my views, "I showed them my cards". One of the members of the kibbutz whom I very much admired, called Goldberg, and who came from the city of Białystok in Poland, approached me and asked if I was prepared to become a member of the Party committee in Binyamina. I was prepared to do so, which is how I joined the Party committee in Binyamina without being an official member of the Party. Goldberg was also a member of the committee with another member of the kibbutz and another

two from the *moshava*, and together we were a committee of five people. Occasionally, we gathered for secret meetings, we organised activities, distributed leaflets. Rather lively activities started.

Meanwhile, when the kibbutz realised what was happening, they could not overlook it and began to counteract our activities. At first this was expressed in discussions and an exchange of ideological opinions. Afterwards, a decision was made to conduct ideological investigations. For that purpose some of the "top guns" of the leadership – like Yaakov Chazan – would come to the kibbutz to hold discussions and arguments. We asked a lot of questions and we got answers to some of our uncertainties. We used to sit arguing all night. During the days we worked and at night we argued, and the entire kibbutz was in ferment. During one of these conversations there was talk of forming a united labour organisation. We asked a member of the leadership of Hashomer Hatzair what was the position of the movement regarding the common organisation of Jewish and Arab workers. He said that of course they are in favour of it, but that was only a theoretical argument because control was in the hands of the Histadrut and Hapoel Hatzair and so on, and not in the hands of Hashomer Hatzair, which did not have a foothold in the cities but only in the kibbutzim. With regard to the Arab workers, obviously it would be impossible to form a labour organization with them as they did not work regularly and they had other income or work. But with the full-time workers who were dependent on this work for their livelihoods naturally we had to establish a common organisation with them. We forced the leadership to define exactly what constitutes a permanent worker. Is it a labourer who works on an agricultural farm? In our opinion an Arab worker who had worked for nine years in one place should be considered as a permanent labourer. I do not know why in particular nine years. One could see a sort of

duplicity in determining the period of time, since it would have been possible, perhaps, to find only five or ten labourers in the entire country who had worked for nine years in one place.

Regarding our membership in the kibbutz – that was a problem that could be solved very simply. If someone did not agree with the kibbutz ideology for whatever reason they could leave; there was nothing to stop them from going. So, if our group was disappointed with Zionist ideology and the Hashomer Hatzair ideology, we could just leave and the matter was over. But we were an organised group. Some of us were already members of the PKP and others were associated with the PKP. We received instructions from the Party, and the instructions were to remain in place, staying on the kibbutz for as long as possible to achieve the maximum influence over members. Therefore, we started to behave differently. We stopped the arguments and avoided coming out openly with our communist and anti-Zionist positions so as not to give the leadership of the movement and the kibbutz any excuse to remove us. We said that we had our doubts and that we were considering various options, but we did not declare that we were anti-Zionists. In order to end this matter, to shorten it, the kibbutz took another step. Because the collective talks failed to produce the desired results, the kibbutz decided to hold a referendum among all the members of the kibbutz. They would ask questions and the answers would show whether the member was in favour of the principles of the kibbutz or not. For example: are you in favour of purchasing land? In favour of *aliyah*? In favour of settlement? The Jewish National Fund? And so on. Each member of the kibbutz needed, within a certain period of time, to answer "yes" or "no". The results would show who needed to leave the kibbutz, thus putting an end to the opposition.

At the meeting during which the matter of the referendum was raised we proposed to add another option to "yes" and

"no" and that was "undecided". Our assertion was that our position on these matters was undecided and that not everyone had made a final decision. People needed to be given time to decide. This proposal was accepted. Our group decided that all those whose position was open and known would write "no"; this was a group of about five people. Everyone else would write "undecided" and would remain on the kibbutz in order to continue the operation. Thus the referendum ended providing the kibbutz with the expected results, thanks to our trick. After the referendum some members left and we continued our action. I continued to be a member of the Board of PCP in Binyamina.

One Shabbat, when I was on kitchen duty, a meeting was called in which a representative of the Party from Haifa, who came specifically for this, was going to attend. We had to gather in a designated place, a ruin on the road to Zichron Yaakov, that same day at two o'clock. I rushed to finish my duties, bathe and eat something, and hurried to the meeting. I was with another member of the committee from the kibbutz. On our way we met two members of the kibbutz, a man and a woman, who were walking in the mountains. They looked at us and moved on. We realised that this was not a random walk, but rather surveillance – and we knew that would mean the end for us. After the meeting ended, we talked about this. We knew that evening there would be a gathering during which it would be decided to expel us from the kibbutz, because they knew we had attended a meeting of the communist committee. We could not approach all of the kibbutz members because they were watching us, but we used a particular tactic to let our friends know what had happened to us, and that probably they would expel us from the kibbutz and the rest should remain on the kibbutz and not give in. That evening there was a meeting, but our other meeting was not discussed. Rather

they demanded that we give a clear answer to the referendum because a long time had passed and we had to decide. We knew that there was no reason for us to play "hide and seek", and we decided to give a propaganda lecture presenting the Party's position on the issue. I was supposed to be the second one to speak about this investigation. The first member was not allowed to speak at all; they had picked up on our trick. A quick vote was taken in his matter and he was expelled from the kibbutz. It was my turn and I wanted to speak but they did not let me. I objected that this was not democratic. At the end I left the meeting and went out, slamming the door. I knew that they would vote and that they would expel me from the kibbutz. That was how I was expelled from the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz and here begins a new era.

But before I go on to the new period I want to say that any member who left the kibbutz was supposed to receive clothes from the storeroom; not necessarily those that he brought with him, but some basic items of clothing for his first period outside the kibbutz. And indeed they gave us an outfit, but the clothes had been used and were faded and torn and in a condition that is indescribable. This was so that the best clothes remained on the kibbutz. At first they intended to take those who were leaving to Tel Aviv by car. We opposed to that on the grounds that if they did this they could hand us over to the police. This was the only interpretation that could be given for the concentrated expulsion of a communist group. The kibbutz agreed and it was decided that each of us would say what his destination was and would receive a sum of money for a ticket to that same location, Haifa or Tel Aviv and so on. A train ticket to Haifa cost 13 *grush* (pennies) and the train to Tel Aviv cost 18 *grush*. I said I was going to Tel Aviv although I actually went to Haifa and thus "earned" five *grush* for my first few days. With this money and the items I received from the storeroom I arrived in Haifa.

Haifa

Here begins a new period in my life, both from a financial aspect – I'm no longer on the kibbutz and now I have to worry about supporting myself and satisfying my needs – and also in terms of my Party activity.

In Haifa I found some acquaintances from amongst those people who had left the kibbutz. One of them agreed that I could live in his rented room until I found work and an apartment. It was hard to get a job then. The situation in the country was not good in this respect. It was suggested that I go to Haifa port as it was now the season for loading oranges for export. I went to the port every day at seven o'clock in the morning and waited for someone to hire me for a day's work. There was a contracting group which had the right to all of the loading jobs and they themselves worked only part-time and used outside labourers. At the gates of the port (we were not allowed to go into the port itself) was a large group of between 30 and 80 people who were waiting for a day's work. If necessary, the contracting group would re-inforce their own workers with labourers who were standing outside. These were people who knew them, had worked with them already, had *protektzia* (favoritism), families – I don't really know. At any rate, in the morning ten or 15 people would be chosen to work from this group. Only in rare cases, when more labourers were needed, would they take another few. Since I had no *protektzia*, and did not stand out particularly among the workers, I did not get work right away.

For about two-and-a-half weeks, I would come to the port every day and then return home without having been given any work. With my five remaining *grush* I bought a loaf of stale bread in the bakery every other day and some oranges which were cheap then. My food consisted of two meals a day. In the morning a piece of dry bread and an orange and in the evening a piece of dry bread and an orange. Such a diet, especially after

I had been sick on the kibbutz, was not enough for a porter who does hard physical labour. I was happy when after two-and-a-half weeks someone finally picked me to work for them. I was over the moon and tried to work well, so that they would take me back the next day. To earn my first days' wages made me very happy. After that I would work every few days. Of course, I could not think of renting an apartment and so on.

Meanwhile Party activity began. I would be invited to Party meetings held in different places in the mountains, especially in caves. I became acquainted with people and with problems. Once I was also invited to a meeting attended by the Party Secretary in Haifa. He was a messenger at the Comintern [the International Union of Communist Parties: the Communist International or the Third International, established in 1919 and dismantled by Stalin in 1943] in Israel, and his job was to direct the Party. His name was Shimon. He was later killed in the Soviet Union by Stalin. Later, I came across his relatives in Poland. But all of these were actually passive activities. I had not undertaken any real activity, but I was given a job.

On May 1 1932, if I'm not mistaken, I was given an active role: to hang a red flag. Needless to say, the Party was an underground organisation and operations were clandestine. Members were pursued by the British police. On May 1 and November 7 red flags would be hung in the streets, not only in Israel but also in Poland and other countries. The flag was hung using a special technique that had to be learned. First, there was a mechanism called *zabka* (frog). It was made of a bent wire attached to electricity or telephone poles so that when you pulled on it, the flag would be hoisted. The red flag and slogans were attached to one side of this mechanism, and on the other side was a long wire. One had to take the end of the wire, tie it to a stone and throw it so that the wire would go over the telephone wires and then you had to pull until the flag hung

properly. Then the wire had to be cut so that the flag could not be pulled down, and then you had to run. My job was to hang a flag like that in Shchunat Harakevet in the railway district in downtown Haifa. It was a mixed working-class neighbourhood. I had to get the flag from a certain place the night before the operation. I found a suitable spot to hang the flag, hung it, while some people stood and watched, but nothing happened. I walked away silently through the alleys and disappeared. Success! I went up to Mount Carmel and walked past a police station. Several policemen were sitting on the balcony drinking coffee. I walked by feeling happy, ridiculing them. They were drinking coffee and did not know that I had just hung a red flag. My victory over them! This was my first revolutionary activity in the Party.

The second concrete action was in the spring, before the summer, at the Shavuot Holy Day. Shavuot would be celebrated in the country each time in a different city. Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa. On this occasion it was being held in Haifa. They would bring the "first fruit" from the surrounding communities. Everything was gathered in one place and then taken to the offices of the JNF. The General Assembly was to take place in the courtyard of the Technion, and Menachem Ussishkin was supposed to be there in person. My job was to distribute leaflets during this General Assembly. Distributing leaflets at such a patriotic assembly, especially in the courtyard of the Technion, which was closed on each side, involved considerable risk. If someone got caught distributing leaflets at such an event, the attendees at the assembly could lynch him. But the greater the risk, the greater the challenge! I was really proud that I was chosen for this job. Later, I learned that I was not the only one; I was introduced to another person who had also been chosen to distribute leaflets, each of us on either side of the assembly. Even the distribution of leaflets required that we learn a special

technique. Each leaflet was folded in four. The leaflets were then made into a package and held by one corner of the package. So that people in the assembly would not be able to tell who was distributing the leaflets, we needed to learn to throw them only with our hands without moving our arm at all. If we created a strong enough momentum with our hand, the leaflets then scattered in the air like an umbrella. I practiced throwing like this for a few weeks until I had perfected the technique. The time for the assembly arrived. Despite the fact that it was hot I was wearing a coat over my shoulders to hide the flyers. I participated in the celebrations until we arrived in the courtyard of the Technion and the assembly started. Ussishkin began to speak. I found a position where I was part of the audience but also in a place where it would be easy for me to escape. I arranged with the other fellow that he would find a place at the other end of the audience. At a certain moment I would start to count up to 50 and then, together, we would scatter the leaflets. To this day I am not convinced that he really did it. I think that perhaps he was frightened. I counted to 50 and threw the leaflets. They scattered all around.

Together with the crowd, I bent down and picked one up. I read it and said, "Oh, it's from the communists", and I tore up the flyer. I started to make my way out. One of the Maccabi sportsmen who was standing next to the ushers looked at me and said, "I think it's you". I looked at him and I said, with chutzpah, "And I think it's you". Then I left the courtyard of the Technion without any problems.

I went to the other members to tell them about my great success. While I was with them, we received the information that about an hour or more after the leaflet distribution, the economic administrator of Kibbutz Binyamina was arrested by the police and charged with distributing leaflets. This news came from Shaike Gold, a member of Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek. How did

this happen? Someone said they saw the person throwing the leaflets in the courtyard of the Technion, wearing a blue shirt, shorts and sandals. That was how all members of the kibbutz were dressed, and I was still dressed like that because these were the only clothes I had since I left the kibbutz. Yankel (Yaakov) Braun, the economic administrator who had come as a guest from the kibbutz for the celebrations in Haifa, was also dressed like that and had been present in the courtyard of the Technion. Suspicion immediately fell on him, he was seized and they tried to beat him. He really got a thorough beating, and who knows how it would have ended if not for the police saving him from the mob and arresting him. I know that he was in custody with the police for several weeks, and efforts on the part of the kibbutz members who testified that he was a loyal Zionist did not help. The police claimed that the kibbutz does not know who is among its ranks, since the Party worked underground. Only after intervention by several respectable people was he released. This was how we got our revenge on Yankel Braun, who had abused us when we were on the kibbutz.

It was the second operation that I was proud of. Immediately after this, it was decided that I would move on to activities in the Arab streets. For this purpose, I needed to be among them. I was interested in learning Arabic and wanted to become familiar with their customs and so on. If I were to work on the streets with Arab communists, I must get to know them close up. So I decided to look for a job at the municipality, in Public Works, because the workers there were almost exclusively Arabs, since the wages were very low. Seven *grush* a day per person, while in the city, in a factory, an Arab worker earned 13 *grush*. The fixed wages for a Jewish worker were 20 *grush*. Therefore, Jewish workers did not work in Public Works and even among the Arabs, only the unskilled worked there. Because of the low pay it was not hard to find such work. I was accepted and

began working at repairing roads, alongside Arab labourers. I believe that I was the only Jewish labourer who worked there. I worked with them and ate with them and learned about the Arab proletariat. I lectured to Arab cells from the Party. I worked in the Haifa port alongside Arab labourers and with labourers who worked on the oil line from Saudi Arabia which passed through Israel on the way to Syria or Lebanon. I ran a very extensive and active operation. Work on the road was quite difficult and tiring and the nutrition was relatively poor, but I was still young and I could afford to invest in intensive activities. That is, until I was detained for the first time.

The first time in custody

Once, we decided to organise a demonstration of unemployed people in the courtyard of the British Governor's residence to demand "bread and work". We decided that the participants in the demonstration should be recruited from among dockworkers and those who were looking for work near the oil line offices. News of the demonstration was transmitted between all of the cells, and each cell had to contribute something to the cause. Preparation for this took a week or two. The day before the demonstration I had a meeting with a cell of Arab members and there, too, I talked about it and assigned roles. When I went to the meeting I wrote the agenda on a cardboard cigarette box (I remember there were four phrases, including, "Demonstration by the unemployed outside the Governor's residence"). The next day, early in the morning, I rushed to the port where I met with the members. We arranged to meet at a certain time in the courtyard of the British Governor's residence, in the lower part of Haifa, and to demand that he receives a delegation of the unemployed. I continued to the office of the oil line and from there to the assembly venue in the British Governor's

courtyard, where there were between 80 to 100 people. There was another Jewish Party representative who dealt with this matter, Ephraim Wuzek who today [1971] is in Israel, perhaps Vitek remembers him? He used to visit us in Warsaw. And there was another member with us, an Arab. The three of us were the committee responsible for the demonstration. Wuzek and I spoke. We incited the "masses". We told them about the Soviet Union and activities in capitalist countries. We gave them examples of exploitation. We told them that we must demand that the Governor provides them with work because it was his responsibility as Governor of the country to do so. The assembly went well. There were also labourers who got up and spoke. After that we went out into the street to demonstrate and we approached the Governor's residence with slogans, and demanded that he comes out to us. He came out onto the balcony and agreed to accept a delegation. We sent an Arab Party member with two other Arab labourers. They went up to him. He reassured them and promised he would try to find work for them; naturally there was no possibility of that happening.

Then we dispersed. I went home with another member (Weinstein), who had been with us. About half a kilometre from the Governor's residence, a senior police detective – a Jew called Kleinman who was in charge of the Secret Police – came towards us and stopped us. He sent Weinstein home as he was well known to the police. I was stopped. When I was asked for my name I said, "Yehuda Adler". I instinctively did not give my real name. "Address?" "No fixed address; I'm unemployed and am living here and there".

I should add here that the Palestinian police had a tactic regarding immigrants from Poland and Russia, which is where most of the members of the PCP came from, in respect of Palestinian citizenship. Not many tried to get citizenship, but if someone did apply, it took a very long time to process, about

eight to ten years, with a lot of investigations. Most members of the Communist Party who were captured were still foreign nationals and the police, after catching them repeatedly and being convinced that they really were communists, deported them to their home countries. These countries e.g. Poland, France, had to take them back. So our tactic was not to give the police our passports or our details, so as to make deportation harder. Another tactic that was customary among us was not to give an address, so they could not detain Party members who still did not know that the police were lying in wait for them there.

So I gave a false name and provided no documents. Kleinman passed me over to another policeman who took me into custody. On the way, I met a friend. The officer was in civilian clothes. The friend started talking to me and to ask me how things were going and so on, and I immediately told him that I was under arrest in order to stop him talking. I asked him to collect a pair of shoes for me that I had given to a certain shoemaker.

At the police station, they put me in a room for a while. I was asked to empty my pockets and wait. The content of my pockets was examined. Then I was called. They started to write a protocol. While they were writing the protocol someone came in wearing Arab clothing. He started to remove his clothes and was laughing. He seemed familiar from somewhere. He asked me if I recognised him. Finally, he was just wearing western clothes. It turned out that he was a policeman disguised as an Arab who had been sent by the police to join in the demonstration. He testified against me that he had heard my speech at the demonstration. The protocol was completed and I was asked to sign it. I read it and found it contained distortions. I refused to sign and was threatened with beatings and so on, but they had to change some of the details in the protocol. Nonetheless,

I did not sign the document which still contained false details. They put me into a detention cell down in Haifa, close to the market which no longer exists today. A few hours later, they brought in Wuzek, too. We were kept there for a few weeks, under quite difficult conditions, with no beds. We slept on the floor, on a mat, with very little food and in absolute squalor. It was depressing, but we were strong in our ideals, and that kept us going.

We knew that a case was being prepared against us and we decided that if there were a lot of Arabs in the courtroom, we would conduct our defence in Arabic, without a lawyer. It was the formal right of every Palestinian citizen then, to choose to have his trial conducted in Arabic or English. The trial was held a few weeks later. The judge was a Jew, Arkadi (I cannot remember his last name), and we presumed that this Zionist would convict us and would impose a prison sentence. Imprisonment for communists was not long then, a few months. The hall was filled with Arabs. We conducted our defence in Arabic. To our surprise, this Zionist judge conducted the trial in a fashion that was much fairer than we could have imagined. The police brought the incriminating evidence of the cigarette box that was found in my pockets, on which was written "demonstration by the unemployed outside the Governor's residence". I argued, of course, that it was not my handwriting. After an examination they proved that this was indeed my handwriting. The judge accepted the fact that it was my handwriting and that I had participated in the demonstration, but said that people should not be punished for participating in a demonstration; everyone has the right to demonstrate. He asked the police to prove that I was one of the organisers, since then there would be a reason to impose punishment. Another thing – the police claimed I did not want to give my address, and they knew that it was the custom of the communists not to provide an address. The judge

said that there was no law in the country that required a citizen to give his address. The role of the police was to discover the address. The policeman who had been disguised as an Arab and had infiltrated the demonstration did not come to testify, for reasons of security. The testimony was given by another Jewish policeman. He said he heard how I had spoken in praise of the Soviet Union and had engaged in propaganda among the masses against the government. The judge asked the witness where he had been, had he been present at the assembly and had he heard it there. He said he had not been there, but had been standing behind a house. How far away? About 100 metres. The judge found it hard to believe that the witness had heard all this from a distance of 100 metres.

To our amazement the judge released us. After our release, I went back to Public Works at the municipality and to my previous activities, but I became sick with malaria and I lay in my room with fever – by then I had a room – and a friend who worked with me came to me and told me that the day before, three policemen holding a list had asked about me. The contractor said that I was not feeling well and that I had left the job. So it was clear that the police were looking for me again. I did not know whether or not they had reason to arrest me. When I recovered from the disease and consulted with members of the Party, it was decided that I should not return to Public Works, and that I should leave Haifa altogether, at least for a while, because the police were watching me. I left Haifa and moved to Tel Aviv.

The move to Tel Aviv

Naturally, in a new place the worries started again – work, housing and so on. I did not have an exact address for the Party. I arrived with a suitcase, and that was all.

Here, I would like to tell a story that digresses somewhat. While I was still on the kibbutz, during a trip around Palestine, I took an interest in vegetarianism. I was at Degania and there I found the AD Gordon Centre of Vegetarianism, and I also went to other places. Even before that, I had an exchange of letters with Professor Hugo Bergman in Jerusalem, who I knew was a vegetarian. Then I visited Bergman and also other places. In Tel Aviv I had one acquaintance who was a vegetarian and lived near the beach, near Geula Street. He lived in an old shack in the yard of a house. The shack was quite miserable. He was a plumber by trade, not very tall, thin and with a pale face. Once we walked around the whole of Tel Aviv together. He had a very large library inside his shack. I was able to go there freely every time I came to Tel Aviv. If he was not at home, I waited until he arrived. This time when I arrived and had no address, I thought I could stay with him for a few days until I found somewhere to live. I went to his house and waited. When he arrived, I had a surprise waiting for me. Instead of being happy to see me, he greeted me with a frown and was angry – why had I come to him? He had found out that I was a communist, and in his opinion communism and vegetarianism did not mix. Apart from that, I had the impression that he was afraid to provide accommodation for a communist. Therefore he did not want to have any more contact with me. I apologised and left. I do not remember how I solved the problem; I think I met an acquaintance on the street and stayed with him. In any case, the first encounter that I had in Tel Aviv was very unpleasant for me.

But later I made contact with Party members... with the Party. I started looking for work. I remember during my first days in Tel Aviv someone suggested that I go to work in a factory that made curved chairs in one of the streets near Kikar Hamoshavot. The problem was that in this factory there were

only a few dozen people working, and they were not organised by the Histadrut. The factory owner would not allow any professional organisation of workers. Wages were very low, 13 *grush* per day. My job was to start working in this factory, organise the labourers into a professional union and, in effect, to work for the Party. I got the job and started working, but I did not manage to last there for very long. After ten days or two weeks, I was fired. Looking back, it seems that my lack of patience was the reason for that. Instead of getting to know the workers, the conditions and so on, I was impatient and immediately began to operate. The owner of the factory apparently had his own people among the workers.

Unemployed again, I started looking for other work. I was interested in construction. At the time concrete buildings were in fashion. I would find a day's work here and there. I rented a small room on the outskirts of Jaffa-Tel Aviv, because it had been decided in the Party that I would go back into action in the Arab streets: 3 Galil Street [today Mapu street], near the mosque, right next to the beach. I made myself furniture from orange crates, tins, etc. I would work once or twice a week. During that period, I met someone in the street that I once knew from the kibbutz with some girls who had nowhere to sleep, and they were sitting in the street very late in the evening. I took them to my little room. They told me the following day they were going to visit a friend who had only just arrived in Israel, a new immigrant. It was Riva Tancman, my future partner. I remembered that I had once stayed in their house in Stolin, and in the morning I saw her. I asked the girls if I could come with them on their visit. I met her at a friend's house, Anka Straubbaum, on Montefiore Street.

I began to work on the Arab streets. Party activity came first in my life. With regard to work, things were not so good. At that time a friend of mine, Weisrot, told me he had a job

at a packing-house and that one could get along there. I went with him and was actually accepted, and worked there for several weeks. It was a fairly good place to work, but it was a considerable distance from where I was living. We would walk from Manshiya to Jaffa, but I was pleased that I had work every day. Once, on a Friday, when I returned from work with Weisrot, I suggested that on the way we go to a friend who had bought a new booklet of Achdut HaAvoda. There were then differences of opinion between Achdut HaAvoda and Hapoel Hatzair, ideological differences. Achdut HaAvoda was a little more left-wing. I was interested to know what Achdut HaAvoda was expressing in this booklet. So I suggested that we go to that friend so that I could borrow the booklet from him for Shabbat. We did not have enough money to buy literature. As we approached the house, we saw the police leading our friend away in chains. He had been arrested. I must say that I was not then known to the Tel Aviv police, but they knew Weisrot well. The police saw us, and because they knew Weisrot we thought they would arrest us too. I suggested that we just try to pretend that we had no connection – he would stand next to a column and read advertisements and I would continue walking. It didn't work. We were stopped and we were made to walk to the police station, which was at that time on Rothschild Boulevard. We were walking a few metres in front of the policemen. On the way, Weisrot remembered that he had a Party report in the pocket of his shirt and, if they found it on him, he would be lost. I told him not to worry about it, we would find some way out.

At the police station, they sat us down to wait and went in search of the Commander of the Secret Police of the Tel Aviv District, whose name was Steinberg, so that he could question us. We stayed under the supervision of a Sephardi police officer, of Oriental background. He sat at the table and watched us and

we sat on a bench. I told Weisrot to pass the piece of paper to me from behind. I held the paper in my clenched fist and then I opened the window and I was able to throw it out. I did not know where it fell. We were on the third floor. I pretended I was not familiar with Tel Aviv and asked the officer what the buildings around us were. It was an excuse to open the window. That way I destroyed the document which, if they had found it on Weisrot, would have led to a court case and he would have received appropriate punishment. Then I closed the window, went back to sit on the bench and we talked in whispers. After ten or 15 minutes Steinberg arrived. He began to question us. First, he told us to remove everything from our pockets. The policeman who had been watching us told Steinberg that he had noticed that we had some sort of letter in our hand, but Steinberg didn't really pay attention to that. Then he released Weisrot, since he had nothing on him. Also, they knew him and knew his address. But I was new to them and the interrogation started – who was I, what was I doing here, how did I know this communist, and so on. I told them my version, that I was in Tel Aviv for the first time, I'd lived in Haifa but had recently become unemployed and that I had no money to pay rent, I decided to come to Tel Aviv to look for work here. I got a lift in a truck, got off in Jaffa and went into a restaurant to eat breakfast. That's where I met Weisrot who was also eating there. I asked him the way to Tel Aviv and he volunteered to go with me since he was also going there. Apart from that I do not know him and did not know who he was.

Since it was Friday afternoon and there was nothing more that they could find out, it was decided to keep me in custody until Sunday and then clarify in Haifa if I was known, and so on. It was a bad deal, because Haifa would tell Tel Aviv that they knew Yehuda Adler and that he was being looked for there. So I pretended to be offended. What is this? I've never been

locked up in prison, and why are they doing this to me and detaining me? How will I be able to look my friends in the face after this? And I demanded that the policeman telephone Aba Houshi at home. Aba Houshi was then very popular. Steinberg was apparently eventually convinced by my arguments and released me, asking me to please come to him on Tuesday to continue the inquiries. Of course I promised him that I would. I left happy that I had evaded this trap.

I continued to work in the packing-house until the work was finished and once again I was unemployed. In the meantime, I was told that it might be possible to get a job at a hotel. Not far from the Dan Hotel there had once been a hotel called Kate-Dan which was, at that time, very elegant and large. The owner of the hotel was a Jewish widow from Germany, who eventually sold the hotel to the company which built the Dan Hotel (the Federman family) and they kept the name. Some of our friends worked at this hotel as chambermaids. Weisrot's first wife worked there as a chambermaid, and she told me that I could get a job there as a telephonist or a messenger. At any rate, I went and was given a job there; I worked there for a few months. The work was quite good and not very difficult, and the salary was fairly light, but I was pleased that I had a steady job and enough to pay for food and to rent an apartment.



Hotel Kate-Dan in Tel Aviv – photograph from the 1930s.
The view towards the sea, from the coffee-shop of the Kate-Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv – photograph from the 1930s.

Political activity, acquaintanceship with Riva and detention again

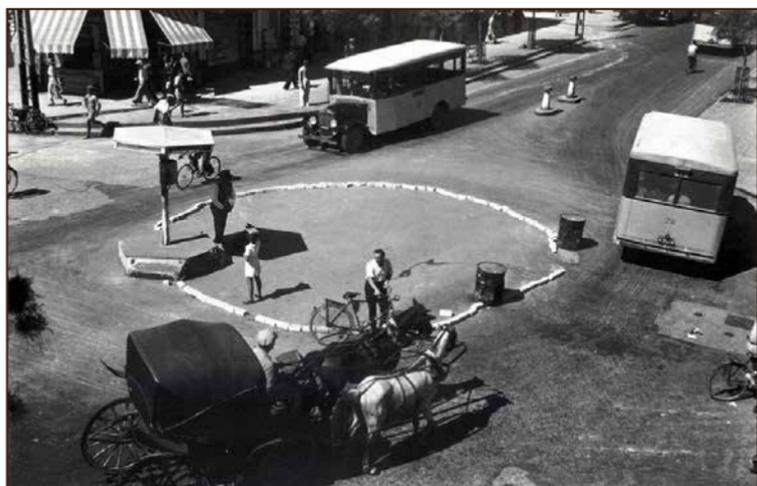
During the time when I was working at the Kate-Dan Hotel, I learned that a labourer from Binyamina whom I knew well but whose name I can't remember at the moment, although I do recall that he had ginger hair, was now working for the Secret Police and was in Tel Aviv. I didn't like that. He knew my real surname and the circumstances of my departure from the kibbutz as a communist. I knew that if he would meet me here, all was lost. And indeed, it did not take long. Once, as I was leaving the hotel after work and was on my way home, I saw this guy. I pretended I knew nothing, and asked him what he was doing in Tel Aviv. He was working. And what about me? I told him that I was working in construction. I did not want to tell him that I was working at a hotel. We exchanged a few words and went our separate ways, but I knew he had already taken note of the details and would probably do something about this. I think he was also in the special Anti-Communist Department of the British police. Meanwhile, life went on smoothly. After work, I was very active in the Party in the Arab area. I had a few cells, contacts, meetings, organising activities and so on. From a social aspect, too, I had a group of friends. Anka Straubbaum lived in Tel Aviv then with another friend, and also Riva often came to see her; she was a friend of Anka's from abroad.

In this way, we would often meet there, and the bond between me and Riva became closer as time passed. It continued that way until about 1933. One evening, I returned from a meeting with an Arab friend on the beach in Jaffa. I went back through Tel Aviv and came to Kikar Magen David [on the corner of Sheinkin and Allenby] where the unemployed gathered. This was called the "black Stock Exchange"; I wrote an article about it. They would come in

the evening and whoever was looking for labourers would select the strongest. Sometimes they would even test their muscles. It was always crowded there. Well, I was going through the black Stock Exchange when the ginger guy caught me on one side and a uniformed cop caught me on the other. They put me into a taxi and took me straight to the police station on Rothschild Boulevard.

We got to the police station at about eight o'clock in the evening. Steinberg immediately appeared, there was an interrogation and I was remanded in custody. Later they took me to the prison in Jaffa without any charges having been brought against me. I then called a lawyer, Mordechai Stein. He died a year or two ago [he died in 1969]. He was the official editor of the weekly *Ha'Or (The Light)*, the legal newspaper that our Party issued in Hebrew, and I also contributed to this newspaper from time to time. This was how I met Stein. He was a strange man, an idealist all his life. It was said later that he was a Trotskyist, but in fact he did not agree with communism. Until the end he dreamed of a "third force", and also created a kind of Party along those lines, which failed, of course. It was halfway between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. But, the actual editor of *Ha'Or* was Yaakov Zvi Kolton with whom I was very friendly and often went to his house. While I was still in Israel, in 1933 or 1934, he travelled to the Soviet Union and I was told that he worked there on a Yiddish newspaper, which existed until the destruction of the Jewish intelligentsia by Stalin. He was killed along with all the Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union.

Well, I called Stein and asked him to work for my release and for the charges against me to be very general. I demanded that they either put me on trial or release me. Indeed, Stein came to me several times while I was in custody. The matter dragged on and I sat in detention in Jaffa for two months.



Kikar Hamoshavot (on top) and Kikar Magen David (below) in Tel Aviv – photographs from the 1930s.

During my custody in prison, something happened that shook the entire country: the murder of Arlosoroff [June 16, 1933]. He was a member of Hapoel Hatzair, one of the pillars

of the Party, one of the veterans of the country, the old guard of Berl Katznelson and Ben-Gurion, and others. He also had a lot of foreign connections; he travelled a lot and represented the interests of the Jewish people abroad. He was murdered, shot dead one evening not far from the Kate-Dan Hotel when he was with his wife, Sima. We found that out fairly quickly in prison, because already that same evening and the next day several members of the Party were arrested and brought to prison in Jaffa. The initial suspicion fell on the communists. Of course that was wrong, because it was known that the communists were against individual terrorism and did not use such measures, such as murdering individuals, except in cases of traitors when members were handed over to the police. In such cases, they would destroy the person concerned with weapons in hand. But there were no individual murders for political reasons. The next suspects were the Arabs, and the third in line were the revisionists, who were sworn enemies of Hapoel Hatzair and the socialists. Suspicion even fell on us. At the same time in the same prison in Jaffa, along with members of the Party, two Arabs who were suspected of this murder were arrested, and Stavski [Avraham], who was an overt revisionist, maybe not so much an ideologue, but active in many areas such as procuring vehicles, weapons, organising riots and so on. He had a strange gait, like a duck, and witnesses to the murder on the beach said they had seen someone with a gait like a duck. So suspicion fell on him. Aba Achimeir, one of the ideological leaders, was also arrested and detained.

Of course, I could not be a suspect since I had been arrested before the murder. But I later learned that Yochanan Ben-Zakkai, my brother-in-law [the husband of Riva's sister, Sarah], knew that Riva was seeing a communist who worked at the Kate-Dan Hotel, and because the murder happened in the vicinity of the hotel, he reached the conclusion that the murderer might be the

same fellow that Riva was seeing and who worked at the hotel. He did not know, of course, that I had been detained before the murder. I only learned all this after I came to Israel, after 1961, when he wrote a letter saying that he felt it was his duty to inform Moshe Sharett that he knew about a certain fellow, and so on and so forth. Sharett replied that he received the letter and did not think it was possible to cast suspicion in that direction.

I sat in jail for two months in Jaffa and was finally released. The first thing I did was to look for work. I had not yet had time to find work when the Party Secretary came to me and told me that there had been wide-scale arrests in Jerusalem, apparently due to some specific provocation. All of the members of the Jerusalem committee had been banished from the city, and so I immediately had to travel to Jerusalem as the new Secretary of the Jerusalem branch in order to establish the branch and update its operations.

Those days not a word was spoken about these matters, and on the day of receiving...

[The text was interrupted here and we were unable to find any continuation. As far as we know, Yehuda was arrested again shortly afterwards. This time he was imprisoned in Akko, and around 1936 he was deported to the country from which he had come – Poland.]



The entrance to the prison in Jaffa (photograph from 2006, when the building was serving as a police station. Today, it is a boutique hotel).

Chapter Four

Riva's Memoirs 1932-1936

The documentary material relating to this chapter is very sparse and it has been reconstructed only partially and inaccurately. The introduction tries to briefly tell Riva's story in Palestine during the years 1932-1936, and immediately after – her memories, as she recalled them. Things were recounted and written down after Riva's first stroke, which explains certain internal inconsistencies and contradictions when compared with Yehuda's memoirs. We decided to leave things as they were, with minimal editing.

Introduction

Riva came to Israel in 1932 on the ship *Constanza*. She had a "certificate" which the Ben-Zakkai family had arranged for her. Sarah, her older sister, married Yochanan Globerman from Stolin and had already emigrated to Israel in 1926. Here they changed their name to Ben-Zakkai. The ship arrived in Haifa and Riva took the bus to Jerusalem where her sister was living with her husband and their two daughters, Bracha and Talila, in labourers' dormitories.

Riva had been a member of Hashomer Hatzair while in Stolin and, at the recommendation of one of the members, she went to Kibbutz Ein Shemer. On the kibbutz, she worked in the kindergarten and in the orange packing-house. Years later, she would boast on occasion about the skill and dexterity she acquired doing this work and even demonstrated it, which gave her great pleasure.



The Ben-Zakkai family with Riva on the beach in Tel Aviv, 1935-1936. Riva is sitting on the extreme right. Her sister Sarah is sitting on the far left, and next to her Yochanan, her husband. Her eldest daughter, Bracha, is resting on Sarah's lap. Her young daughter, Talila, is in the centre, sitting on the sand.

Yehuda had said that he met Riva at the home of a mutual friend, Anka Straubbaum, who lived in Tel Aviv and was an active communist. Riva says she actually first met him at Kibbutz Ein Shemer, when he lived at Kibbutz Binyamina. Like him, she remembered the short visit he had paid her family in Stolin.

At one stage Riva was ill with malaria, and her condition was severe. She was saved by the devoted care of her sister Sarah. She was expelled from Ein Shemer (probably because of her

political views) and moved to Haifa. There she lived in a rented room with Simcha Tzabari (a Yemenite Jew), an activist in the Communist Party and the girlfriend of the General Secretary of the Communist Party at that time, Radwan al Hilou who was called "Musa", an Arab. Then, she moved to Tel Aviv and rented a room on Derech Hayam Street (today, Allenby). Riva participated in meetings of a secret communist cell at the home of Anka Straubbaum, and there she met Yehuda again.



Simcha Tzabari and Radwan al Hilou (Musa) – photographs from early 1930's.



Simcha with Riva – still close friends – photographs from 1995.

At one point, she was arrested by the British and thrown into a prison for women in Bethlehem. She was incarcerated along with Ruth Lubitsch (a leader of the Communist Party), Simcha Tzabari and Sally Margolis (Almi). She was interrogated regarding her connections with the Communist Party (which was then an illegal organisation), but she refused to cooperate. Riva did not often talk about the period she was in prison. Vitek says that when he met Ziporah Gutnick, her friend from those days, she told him about the severe torture that Riva underwent: after the interrogation Riva was brought back to the cell unconscious and bleeding. Her fellow inmates did not allow the police to take her for further interrogation and started a hunger strike, thanks to which the torture stopped



From left to right: Ruth Lubitsch in her youth (1930), in 2005, cover of her book *Chose to Live in the Struggle*

In the book *I Chose to Live in the Struggle*, written by Ruth Lubitsch, the following paragraph appears:

They did not normally hit the girls. Only in special cases, such as, for example, that of Riva. Riva operated within the underground system. It was a particularly secret area: clandestine press and contact with the Party leadership. These members were interrogated harshly and were tortured. Riva was stripped naked, hung by her

hands and threatened with rape. They burned the soles of her feet. Riva bravely withstood all of this and told them nothing. The matter was brought before the British Parliament – W Gallacher, the communist envoy did that – and the torture of girls ceased.

Riva remained in prison for a few months after which she was deported back to Poland.



The women's prison in Bethlehem. A photograph from the 1930s.

At Haifa port, before she went on to the ship, her sister Sarah put a letter into Riva's hand. On the ship she read it. Sarah asked in anger, why did her beloved sister become a communist?

She arrived at the Polish port of Gdańsk in mid-winter, wearing a summer dress and sandals, and continued by train to Warsaw. There her Mother was waiting for her with warm clothes and took her to Stolin.

Palestine-Eretz Israel

Memories recorded by Riva:

In 1932, I came to Israel for the first time, on the ship *Constanza*. There were a lot of new immigrants on the ship. First, we arrived at the port of Haifa and were brought to *Beit Ha'Olim* in the German Colony. I was very impressed by the beautiful

street and large courtyard where we were able to walk. I took the bus to Jerusalem to visit my sister Sarah who lived in the labourers' dormitories. She came to Israel because of her lover, Yochanan Ben-Zakkai. They met in Stolin and he decided to move to Israel because his family had moved to Israel. I came to visit her after several years of separation. She had a daughter named Bracha [who died later, in the 1950s] and a younger daughter named Talila.

After a brief stay with Sarah, I went to Kibbutz Ein Shemer. In Stolin, I belonged to the Hashomer Hatzair movement and this was a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz. I knew a young man from Ein Shemer who came to Stolin. He suggested that I come to this kibbutz, which was very pretty. Quite quickly I started working in the children's house.



Riva in Palestine, probably in Nahal Hadera, near Kibbutz Ein Shemer. Photographs from the years 1932-1935.

I became friends with a girl named Sela Reikhel, a Polish girl from Łódź. There were Poles, Hungarians, Czechs. Each group kept to itself because of the language. Yehuda was then at Kibbutz Binyamina, which was close to Ein Shemer. He came to visit and we stood in a corner and talked. It was the first time we had met in Israel.

I had seen him before in Stolin when he stayed with us once

and even slept in our house, but at that time, there had been nothing between us. I remember he brought me chocolate. I thought he looked quite nice. He was tall and handsome, and when I spoke with him, I got the impression that he was clever. He told me about his family.



Riva (far left) working with friends in the orchard at Ein Shemer. Next to her is her friend, Sela Reikhel.

The best period for me and for Yehuda was at the beginning, in Israel, in the kibbutzim. We fell in love. There was nothing to eat. There was a watermelon field near Kibbutz Ein Shemer. We would take the watermelon and eat it. We would eat bread pudding. Often there was not enough bread. There was not

enough work in the kibbutzim. I was sent to an orchard to wrap the oranges and paste on Jaffa labels, and we had to do it really fast to get it done. Afterwards they sent me to Hadera where there were swamps and mosquitoes from which I caught malaria. I went to my sister Sarah in Jerusalem. Only she helped me. She would always help me. I was shaking terribly so she covered me with blankets but nothing helped. She called for a doctor who gave me quinine which did help me. We knew Yochanan from childhood. I remember how he wrote, quite exceptionally. He and Sarah were very much in love. He died before she did. He was a very good person, always ready to help. He got me the certificate. You could not make *aliyah* without a certificate, and he got me one, twice. A good-natured man, never angry.

Yehuda was already a communist and influenced me to also become a communist. He told me that someone who possessed a great deal will lose what he has, and instead everyone will share. I thought the idea was not that realistic: easy to say, but difficult to actually do. Yehuda influenced me, he had a strong character, and eventually I believed him. We had not yet been intimate, but we would meet, would kiss. We would go to the dining room and sit together. He slept in the guest room. We would visit each other. I would go to Binyamina and he came to Ein Shemer. After a while, the two of us were expelled once the kibbutzim decided that they did not want communists.

We had a mutual acquaintance named Anka Straubbaum. When I arrived in Tel Aviv, I went to Anka whom I had known in Warsaw, and lived with her on Derech Hayam Street in Tel Aviv. Yehuda came to Anka's flat to see me. He knew her through me, from Ein Shemer. We were happy, we would embrace and kiss. Yehuda came to live with us, the three of us in one room. After a while Yehuda and I looked for a room just for ourselves and we found one which we rented. That was also on Derech Hayam. We would go to eat hummus in Jaffa and in Arab restaurants.



Riva (at the far left) and her communist friends at Anka Straubbaum's in Tel Aviv. Anka is sitting in the centre (another friend, Paula, is resting on her knees).

I started working as a kindergarten teacher in an Arab-Jewish kindergarten in Jaffa. Yehuda worked at a supermarket. We would meet with other communists at meetings, where I also met my friend Simcha. We would gather, about ten communists, in our room. We would go with the Arabs to demonstrations against the British. Yehuda could speak Arabic. Then there were the riots. I think that the Arab communists who were our friends did not participate in these riots. There were many Jordanian Arab communists. My friend Simcha Tzabari had a serious romance with a Jordanian communist. To this day, she regrets that she did not have a child with him. She never married and never had children. At the demonstrations we would shout, "Down with the bourgeoisie!" We would demonstrate at the border of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. It was very dangerous. When my sister found out, she would not let me go. About 100 people or more would demonstrate. The police came to disperse the demonstrators, round up a few people and take them to prison. Once, a lot of communists were sitting in the room of one of the members and all of a sudden the police came and arrested us all.

The member who was supposed to give a lecture on the same day wrote the captions in small handwriting on a matchbox. The police found the box and based on this they knew that we were really communists. Someone had informed on us.

They deported me because I was a communist. The British did not want communists. There were always *shpitzlim* (informers). They came and took me from Jerusalem and Sarah cried terribly; she was angry at me for allowing myself to be drawn into the Communist Party. She wrote this letter, and I had the letter with me during my deportation and it was hurtful. They knocked on the door of Sarah's home and the British police entered. They took me in the car only allowing me to say goodbye to Sarah. Later they beat me. The same day or the next day, I was put on a ship to Poland along with other communists.

Riva arrives in Poland where a surprise awaits her

The sea journey lasted several months. We did not have anything to eat. The sailors took pity on us and gave us food. We had very small cells, very difficult conditions. After the hardships and harsh transitions – the prison, deportation and separation from Sarah – I arrived in Warsaw [the ship probably docked in Gdańsk and Riva continued by train to Warsaw]. I do not know how they knew when I would arrive, maybe Sarah told them. I thought I was returning all alone, that no one would want me and that the family would be angry with me. It was winter and it was snowing in Poland; I was wearing summer clothes and sandals.

A woman descended, a young girl, she was cold, didn't have enough time to turn around and then she saw Mother and Dora. To this day I cry because it was such a big surprise, so pleasant. Dora was my sister-in-law, the wife of Yosef, and Mother was

staying with her, she had come to Warsaw especially. Mother was waiting for me with shoes and socks. They kissed and hugged me and absolutely did not ask anything, just afterwards, "Where is your coat? You don't have a coat?" (laughing), and then they ordered a taxi and we travelled home, to Yosef's house. After that my Mother took me to Stolin. There they shouted at me, *Arab'e yent* (Arab woman), because I was a communist – shouted because it was shameful that I had been deported. Mother was embarrassed. It was a small town. There were very few communists so they did not look favourably on me. I think that Mother suffered a lot because of me, but she did not say anything. Later, I travelled to Warsaw where both of my brothers, Yaakov and Yosef, lived.



In 1934, Roshka Tancman decided to visit her two daughters in Israel. She joined a delegation of rabbis and public figures from Stolin (as the only woman) leaving for a visit to the Holy Land. When she arrived in Palestine she learned that her younger daughter, Riva, was in prison. They did not manage to see each other during this short visit. The photograph shows the delegation at Haifa port after their arrival. Roshka is standing on the far right.

These are all of Riva's memories from that period that we have managed to reconstruct. Upon her return to Israel in 1961, Riva renewed ties with many of her acquaintances and friends from that period, and remained in close and warm relations with them until the end.

Chapter Five

Riva and Yehuda in Poland

1 9 3 5 - 1 9 3 9

We know very little about this period because we have not found any of Yehuda's memoirs from these years. All we know is that soon after arriving in Poland, he was arrested again for his activities in the Communist Party. He was in prison in the city of Ravitch (Rawicz) and released in the middle of August 1939, thanks to a general amnesty declared on the eve of the coming war.

After being deported from Palestine, Riva settled in Warsaw. Her two brothers, Yaakov and Yosef Tancman, lived in the city with their families and managed two large and prosperous fabric shops. The two competing shops were located on the same street just a few doors away from each other, but the brothers got along extremely well.

2 67 28	Tamres Jankiel, m., Elektoralna 43
5 18 32	Tan Feliks, ks., pl. Grzybowski 3-5
11 04 11	Tananiewicz Zygmunt, m., Freta 12
3 47 14	Tancman Jakub, Nowy Świat 62
11 18 92	Tancman Jankiel, skt. manufakt., Gęsia 14
12 17 83	Tancman Josif, sprz. tow. manuf., Gęsia 6
11 32 95	Tancman Józef, m., Nowolipki 6
11 63 39	Tänenbaum Izydor, pralnia chem. i farbiarnia, Długa 5
11 69 86	„Tani Owoc“, Ickowicz Benjamin, owocarnia, Długa 27

From the 1938 Warsaw Telephone Directory: the addresses of the two brothers. Yaakov (Jakub, Jankiel) – shop address: ul. Gęsia 14, home address: Nowy Świat 62; Yosef (Józef, Josif) – shop address: ul. Gęsia 6, home address: Nowolipki 6.

Initially Riva lived with Yosef and his wife Dora (Dvorah). They had a large house in which they gave Riva her own room. Later, she looked for work and independent accommodation. Here are some excerpts from her memoirs recorded in the 1990s:

I looked for a room. I decided that I would start earning so I could afford to pay rent. I found a job in a zipper factory. Work started at 6:30 in the morning while it was still dark and very cold. I did not know how to dress, I did not take food with me, I was so new. There were tables with women and young girls standing next to them, and they attached the zippers in a very primitive way. The main thing was to do the work really quickly, and I want to tell you, I felt from the very first day that I was not really suited to be part of working society in the way that I wanted to be, to really be a "proletarian". I worked there for a few months.

Although I practised and succeeded in working very fast (it reminded me a bit of the fast work I did when I was on the kibbutz in Israel, in the orange-packers group), I did not feel right there, and my employer apparently felt the same as after

two months, I received a letter of dismissal. I was not really sorry because I did not like the job. I already had my own little room. Then my brothers suddenly realised that I could help them in two areas – both brothers realised it together – that I could be helpful to them in the shop, to be at the cash register, and also to help as a kindergarten teacher, as a nanny for their children.



Yaakov Tanzman, Riva's brother, and Rachel Tanzman, née Bregman, Yaakov's wife, Warsaw 1937-1939.

Riva began to work at the fabric shops and to help with the families' children. Yaakov and his wife Rachel had one daughter, Leah (Lilka), and Yosef and his wife Dvorah had two sons, Meir and Issachar; their daughter Yonah was born later.

I remember the time with the children as a happy time. Lilka, Issachar and Meir. It was very pleasant for me to be with them. They loved me to tell them stories, to go out with them, because they knew that Riva is a communist and that is something which it is forbidden to talk about. This put some sort of "glory" on my image in the eyes of the children. I remember travelling with the children to all kinds of sanatoriums in the summer. I was with

Lilka at very expensive boarding houses two or three times. It was very comfortable, very good. I was not exactly a nanny, she was already a big girl, I was just her aunt, but I also took care of her, and would travel with Yosef's boy, too.



Yosef Tancman, Riva's brother, and Dvorah (Dora) Tancman, née Manzon, Yosef's wife, Warsaw 1937-1939.

In 1994, Leah Tancman (Lilka) wrote a song dedicated to Riva which reveals something about the relationship between the two. The song talks about separation, which apparently occurred when Riva went to Palestine in 1932.

At the age of three

"And you remember Riva..."

*And you had such pigtails
Small, like braids over your ears
And one evening you lay me down
To sleep*

*And the next day, as it was
It should be – but it is not clear how*

*In the morning
You simply were not there
And I did not understand then what it meant to travel
More than sad
It was not even sad
Kind of difficult force major
A different period in life*



Leah (Lilka) Tancman,
daughter of Yaakov and
Rachel, Warsaw 1937.

About her brothers, Riva said the following:

Yaakov was softer and more gentle, more sensitive, and Yosef was more charismatic. I think Yosef was richer and tougher, he decided about things quickly, he was younger and he had strength. Apart from that, his wife Dora encouraged him, and Yaakov's wife, Rachel, actually said, "Do not rush, do not run,

your heart". Yaakov was also religious, very Hasidic, whereas Yosef was not particularly Hasidic. He used to go to the synagogue occasionally or give money to the rebbe, but he was much more liberal.



Riva's brother, Yaakov Tancman ,with his wife Rachel, née Bregman, in Krynica (Krynice), a holiday resort in southern Poland, 1935.

Between 1936 and 1939 Riva continued her social and political activities with a group of friends in Warsaw:

The Communist Party was dispersed, but there were still members and there were meetings and discussions. On the one

hand, I had a family, work and the children, and on the other, my friends. Some of them were deported from here [Palestine], Rachel'ka and her husband, Anka Straubbaum, and there were some members who were expelled from Spain, who had been in the Spanish Civil War and returned. We would speak primarily in Polish. Perhaps a little Hebrew at the meetings. I remember



Riva (sitting) and Lilka in Krynica, 1937-1938.

that Zośka brought me a large part of a printing press, wrapped in rags. It was a machine that printed all kinds of things that were forbidden and they had dismantled the machine and asked me to hide this one part. I said alright and put it under my bed. At that time I had a friend, his name was Shibak. He worked in the Party centre and sometimes he would come and hide at my place. One day I told him what I had under the bed. He said, "First of all, call Zośka" – I do not think that there were that many phones – "tell her that she should get it out of here quickly! Until she takes it, I must not come here". When she came, when she took it, it was all right. He was not actually my boyfriend, he tried to be my boyfriend, but I wanted to be faithful to Yehuda.

Yehuda, who was deported from Palestine before Riva was deported, was arrested for his activities in the Communist Party and sent to prison. Throughout the years that Riva lived in Warsaw, she stayed in regular contact with him – he sent her long letters and she sent him money and packages to the prison. She also recruited her brothers and they hired a solicitor to represent Yehuda, and managed to reduce his sentence.

Riva continued:

Yehuda remained in prison. And I think it was Yaakov, but perhaps both of them [Yosef and Yaakov], who gave me money to pay for a solicitor to appeal against the verdict that Yehuda had received. He had been sentenced to eight or ten years. We hired a solicitor. After the war we would meet with him in Warsaw; his wife worked at the Ministry of Education and he was a very likeable man. Anyway, my brothers contributed a lot of money to this. They said, "If he is your boyfriend, and he will be your husband, we will do everything, because you are our sister". It was very good to hear that. At that time Yankele, Yehuda's brother, also arrived in Warsaw, and that was where I

met him. Then the solicitor said they had reduced the sentence by four years for Yehuda. He would remain in prison for another year and then it would be over. That was a very good thought.



Roshka on one of her visits in Warsaw together with Rachel, the wife of her son Yaakov.

In August 1939, two weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War, Yehuda was released from prison because of the amnesty that was declared at that time. Immediately after his release, he rushed to meet Riva in Warsaw, and she followed him to Mlinov, where their life together began.



Riva and Yehuda in 1939.

Chapter Six

Memoirs of Riva and Yehuda

Poland and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941

Based on the transcript of the recording of a conversation with the participation of Yehuda, Riva and Vitek made in the 1980s and 1990s.

Introduction to war

On August 13 1939, about two weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War, Yehuda was released from prison in the city of Rawicz after serving four years of his sentence. Prisoners who remained in prison after war broke out on September 1 had difficulties and were not always released on time.

Yehuda said he and his friends, who were also political prisoners, had decided they would not save money against the day of their release from prison. They could have purchased food and cigarettes with money received from their relatives, but they preferred to buy medicines and nutritional supplements (iron) for elderly and sickly prisoners whose health had declined due to the conditions in prison. Another reason not to save – which was half-joke and half-truth – was the fact that the

management of the prison was obliged to pay to every released prisoner the fare to his home in the event that he had no money of his own.

If the prisoner had no money, said Yehuda, the administration was obliged to give him a travel ticket, so why not take advantage of this hostile administration which was our enemy?



Rawicz prison, central corridor. Photograph from the 1930s.

So Yehuda found himself outside the prison with a train ticket to his parents' home in Mlinov and two packets of cigarettes in his pocket. Although he was forced to sign a pledge to report to the Mlinov police the next day, he decided to go to Warsaw, to Riva:

Therefore, I decided to forego all that, to ignore all of this. It was not a crime, what could they do to me? Perhaps they would pursue me – perhaps, but they could not do anything serious, so I decided to go. But I had no money, not a penny in my pocket! So, I had a pack of cigarettes, or two packs, slightly better quality ones because with the pennies I had when I came out of prison, I'd got some good ones. I smoked a few of them, and the rest, one whole packet, I think, I had in my pocket. I

went from one carriage to another asking, "Who wants to buy cigarettes from me?" And I sold the cigarettes. People bought them, but I still didn't have enough money to get to Warsaw; I could only get as far as Łódź.

When Yehuda arrived in Łódź the time was four or five in the morning. He waited at the train station until eight o'clock and then ran all the way from the station to the city, looking for a Lombard pawnshop, where he could pawn his watch for the money for the train fare to Warsaw:

I had a good Cyma watch and I wanted to pawn it and get a few zlotys to travel to Warsaw. I knew that once I arrived in Warsaw, I would manage somehow. First of all Riva was there, and I knew that she had two brothers and that I could take a loan of a few zlotys.

But then Yehuda encountered an unexpected problem:

I ran to town and asked someone along the way where there was a Lombard. He told me that it was still far, this way and that, this street and that, "But why do you want it?" I told him that I had to pawn a watch. So what did he say? "Today is Sunday, everything is closed". I did not know, I did not remember what day it was. Sunday.



"Cyma" watch from the 1930s.

Yehuda returned to the train station and asked the cashier for a loan of five zlotys. He offered his watch as collateral. The cashier refused. He had no personal money and could not take money from the station cashbox, but he wanted to help and suggested that Yehuda wait. There were taxi drivers who came to the station and maybe one of them would be interested in the watch. The cashier talked to one of the drivers, and he gave Yehuda five zlotys and took the watch to hold for him. Yehuda was happy, he was on the way to Warsaw.



Geşia Street in the 1930s (on top), and after the war, in 1945.

At the same time Riva left for work at the fabric shops. She knew that Yehuda was supposed to be released but was not sure if he would come that day. When Yehuda arrived in Warsaw he did not know where to find Riva. He turned to their mutual friend, Anka Straubbaum, who in the meantime has also been deported from Palestine because of her underground activities, and she set off to look for Riva, but without success. They went looking again and finally arrived at the shop on Geşia Street, one of the main streets in the Jewish Quarter. Geşia Street was completely destroyed during the war and is now rebuilt and named after Mordechai Anielewicz, commander of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. That was where Riva and Yehuda met.

Riva recalls the meeting:

I remember that I was excited and I would look at him all the time although I didn't really "sense" him. I mean, he looked different to me. We had not seen each other for seven years, he had matured, and was quite weak. I invited him to my room, I made good food and we went to sleep together. I remember when I saw the toenails on his foot growing one over the other, at first I didn't see it and now it really bothered me, I was afraid. Never mind, I did not say anything to him, heaven forbid, why would I? We were not able... to connect. He was excited and... never mind...

Indeed, Yehuda's feet were twisted and not very nice to look at. He explained that as a child he wore shoes that were too small and they twisted his feet. Over time, this made it hard for him to walk. In the 1970s, in Israel, he underwent orthopaedic surgery which straightened his feet and made walking easier.

Riva took Yehuda to the house of her brother Yaakov and his wife Rachel. The meeting between him and Yaakov was particularly moving. Yaakov was Orthodox and Yehuda was

surprised by the warm welcome he received, both because of his political opinions and because he had been in prison, as well as the unofficial relationship he had with Riva:

Then her brother came, he was Orthodox, dressed so elegantly, with such a short beard... and he knew that I was returning from prison, a communist, but he welcomed me with open arms, and he kissed me, and embraced me, "Welcome", he said, and he invited me to eat with him.

Even decades later Riva recalls how Yaakov hugged Yehuda and was moved. After the meal, Riva and Yehuda went for a walk. They did not have much time because Yehuda wanted to catch the night train to Mlinov. After all, he had to report to the local police station:

I did not want to be too late so that the police would not harass me. The main thing was to see her, to make the first connection.

They sat in the Saski Garden [Ogród Saski] in the Jewish Quarter and had a conversation, which will later be remembered quite differently by each of them.

Yehuda: Yes, and I remember that I told her then, "Look, from my experience, I see that there are young families, and people get married, and then after one year, two, five years, there are serious problems, because people grow apart, and there are already children and it is hard, it has a negative effect, and I've been thinking – why is it so?" I remember to this day my explanation to her, "Why does this happen and so frequently? What causes this? I came to the conclusion that the reason is actually that love between two people, between a husband and a wife, between a man and a woman, comes in many instances from physical attraction, and the physical attraction gives the impression of

love, and if a person does not examine himself well and relies only on the impression and the physical attraction, if it is not based on a deeper foundation, it leads, eventually when the woman becomes a bit uglier, especially after childbirth, that the man sees another woman, who is younger, more beautiful, and that is when the crisis comes".

Vitek: Or vice versa.

Yehuda: Or vice versa, the man gets uglier [laughing] – that happens, too, but in most cases the woman is at home, especially in the conditions of that time. The woman was tied to the children, the home; she was not out working.

Vitek: This has not changed much. So?

Yehuda: Well, what derives from this? What derives in such cases is that apart from physical attraction one must look for other connections, the spiritual, the outlook and approach to all sorts of problems and mutual understanding, and this should be even more crucial than the physical attraction because this is what remains for years. This is something that does not pass. On the contrary, it increases. Or... and this is my approach. Of course she agreed with this, and she did not contradict me, not a word against what I'd said [laughing]. How did Dzigán say it? He said he came as a tourist and at Customs they took his things, so he went to the Minister, to the Minister of Finance, and tried to complain. He said: "I sat and complained and told him about everything, in Yiddish, of course, but I did not understand what the Minister replied, because he nodded his head in Hebrew". She also shook her head in Hebrew and everything was fine, she agreed. Good. After that there were practical problems.

Vitek: Was it like that, *Ima'leh?*

Riva: I want to tell you, nothing remains of this long conversation that your Father is now describing. What I remember is a lake and swans on the lake, and it was quite romantic. He had been in prison for many years, and I was here and afterwards there, and he was talking about all kinds of things and it might be that I cannot remember exactly at the moment.



Saskia Garden now restored. Lake with swans.

I do remember that it was a terrible shame that he had to leave. We thought about how to organise his journey, and I remember I went to see him off, and along the way I bought him – because it was the Eve of the Holy Days – so I bought his parents an *arbuzek*. It is, you know, a kind of watermelon.

Yehuda: Yes, watermelon.

Riva: It was a watermelon, you remember that?

Yehuda: It is probably because a watermelon is red inside and we were communists, so it was for the colour red.

Riva: No, but you remember that?

Yehuda: I remember, I remember that watermelon. But what *Ima* says now proves the flightiness of women. For me it was a fundamental conversation, critical. I am here talking about the foundation, the platform of our marriage. So she cannot remember it, she remembers only the watermelon.

Yehuda and Riva parted at the train station, but not before Yehuda gave Yaakov Tancman the address of the taxi driver to whom he had entrusted the Cyma watch – Yaakov often travelled to Łódź on business and offered his help, although he did not have time to redeem the watch; war broke out and the trail of the watch was lost. Yehuda travelled to Mlinov after an absence of more than ten years during which he had not seen his parents or his family, and Riva remained in Warsaw for a few more days to organise herself before joining him.

The welcome in Mlinov was very moving. Many people came to meet the young man who had become a legend in the town: a youth leader, the first to go to *hachshara*, the first to emigrate to Israel, an active communist who had even spent time in prison... Yehuda's revolutionary aura attracted many young people who came to congratulate him on his return.

Yehuda's parents were naturally happy to see him after the long years during which they had not seen him. Yehuda tells of his Father:

How did they receive me? With great joy that I had returned home! My Father, peace be upon him, would always say, "Look children, whatever your political outlooks, I do not care, or I do care, but – be socialists, be Zionists, be communists, be whatever you want, just one thing I would like you to be – Jewish". Yes? Communists, communists, but be Jewish.

Vitek: He didn't mean by that Orthodox?

Yehuda: No, no. My Father was Orthodox, but he did not force it on us, he had broader horizons than other people. He would read good literature which Orthodox people were not allowed to read. These were "forbidden books", and my Father would read at night, so no one would see. In Hebrew, in Yiddish, he would read Sholem Aleichem and Mendele. He would read a lot and he was not fanatic. For example, the Hasidim do not look at a woman, they lower their eyes. He would look them straight in the eye, would shake hands with women who came to visit our friends. And he was a Zionist, a real Zionist. Yes, he was a Zionist like this, strong. And *Ima* [Riva], they welcomed her very nicely, later, after a while.

Meanwhile, in Warsaw, Riva was preparing for the journey. Her two brothers asked her to reconsider her decision:

Riva: My brothers always thought, "Who are you going with, and do you know what you are doing?" and they trembled at the idea of the choice I'd made. They thought, a communist, he's just out of prison, he has nothing, no job... they looked at the whole thing with suspicion, because I was from a house such as this and there were all sorts of boys who really wanted me, and suddenly I say "no". So the whole thing was quite complicated.

Riva, in love, did not hesitate. She purchased a fancy new brimmed hat, wore her loveliest clothes and went to Mlinov. There she was cordially and warmly welcomed by Yehuda's family:

Riva: Ah, I think that at first I aroused a lot of laughter in

them, because I came from another world. Also a communist, but from another world. I came with such a stylish hat, they did not know about such things there, and with such a light brown coat. I was very elegant. Batya, Yehuda's sister, would occasionally remind me how I used to dress.

She felt at home in the Mohel family's little flat, so different from her childhood home and the homes of her brothers in Warsaw. Yehuda's sisters made friends with her, and also his brother, Yaakov, whom she had already met during the period of Yehuda's trial in Warsaw.

Riva: When I went into their house I was rather shocked, it was different from all the large houses I knew – the house where we lived in Stolin and my brothers' houses, the luxurious flats. Their home was so small, a low house. But I really liked the sisters, and I also already knew Yankele. I felt a great liking for Yehuda's Father, great from the very first day, and he liked me. The Mother was different: How could a girl come along and sleep with her son when they were not married?

Vitek: You slept together?

Riva: Sure, sure! I got pregnant with you there.

Two or three days after Riva's arrival in Mlinov, police officers came to the family home to conduct a search. It is not clear whether they heard about the unknown people who were living in the flat, or because the house was known as a "communist house". But since Riva was not registered (at that time every individual who remained for more than 24 hours in the town was obliged to register at the police station), she was suspected

of being a communist and was arrested together with Yoske Friedman (later a member of Kibbutz Mesilot), who was a close friend of the family and who was in their house at that time. Yehuda, who was not at home at the time of the arrest, rushed to the police station.

Yehuda: So I immediately went to the police station, to the commandant, and I said to him, "Listen, sir, I've come about my wife who was arrested". He said, "Who is your wife? What about your wife?" I said, "OK, that's my girl whom I want to marry, she is like my wife. I want you to release her". "What do you mean release her? She was not registered". "OK, it is just something official; she did not have time to register. Perhaps she neglected it, but that's no reason for you to arrest her". So he said, "We have to get information about who she is, what she is doing here, why she has come here". I said, "You presume that she's a communist, right? Isn't that the reason you have arrested her? Let's presume. Let's presume that she is a communist. So what? Is now the time to fight the communists? You know that Hitler is standing at the door, you know there is a plan to occupy Poland. So rather than fight the fascists who are helping Hitler you want to fight the communists? You know very well that the communists are the sworn enemies of Hitler and Nazism. And you know that if the time comes, the communists will head the war against Hitler".

Riva: He had a political argument with the police then.

Yehuda: I said, "Look, I've got out of prison, where we collected money from the pennies we received in order to help the army, and our girls in the prisons volunteered in tailor shops to sew uniforms for the army, because

they are going to war with Hitler. So now you want to fight the communists?" So he said, "I know all that. I understand that. But we are in the Ukraine. These communists in the Ukrainian villages – they do not understand what you understand and what I understand, they are simple people, without education and without political recognition, they desire different things. Therefore, if an individual communist comes to influence them, it can be damaging to the country. In any case, we are not doing anything special with her, not a trial or anything; we'll detain her until we clarify in Stolin if they know her". OK, I left him, I went straight to the post office, I booked a telephone call with her brother-in-law, with Genrich, her sister Feigel's husband.



Genrich (Hanoach) Tuchman from Stolin, the husband of Riva's sister Feigel.

Riva: With Feigel.

Vitek: Who was where? In Stolin?

Yehuda: He was still in Stolin, yes. It was before the war broke out, a week before. Genrich had good relations with the police. You know how it is in a small town – a shop, they come, one is familiar, one gives. He had good relations there. I told him, "Look, they've

arrested Riva and said they will ask in Stolin what the situation is, so it is best for you to go to the police station and corroborate with the commandant there what they need to say, that they will know what to say". So, that's it.

Riva: Can you imagine what suddenly happened in our home? When my Mother found out about this...

Yehuda: So it was arranged.

Vitek: And did your Mother even know that you were in Mlinov?

Riva: Yes. That was no secret.

Vitek: So what did they do to you? They caught you, they took you and you were sitting there?

Riva: I was locked up in the prison, alone in one cell.

Yehuda: It was not a prison, it was detention.

Riva: Detention. Yehuda's Mother sent me hot food three times a day!

Vitek: How many days were you there?

Riva: They would send me potato pancakes, *latkes*, which was my favourite dish. So his Mother would make it and they brought it to me hot.

Vitek: But for how many days, how long was it?

Yehuda: About two days, or three days. After that they released her.

Vitek: They received the information.

Yehuda: Yes, yes, they received it and released her.

Vitek: The friend too?

Yehuda: Yes, the friend too.

After Riva was released from detention, Yehuda's Father started putting pressure on them to get married.

Yehuda: After they were released, Father's assault began.

Father told me ever so gently, "Look, I know you are a communist and anti-Orthodox, but I want you to have a wedding. You are a communist, you have your perspective and your principles, so let us try for a compromise. We will do it in a quiet way so that no one will know. The rebbe will come, two witnesses will come, and we will write the *ketuba* (marriage license), we will sign, we will make a *chupah* (bridal canopy) – and that's it. We will do it quietly so no one will know". I said, "So why do you need it? If people do not know, why do you need it?" He said, "Because when I come to the synagogue people talk about it, that my son is living with a woman without a *chupah* and without wedding vows, and the children will be bastards, and it is not right, that the son of the town's *shochet*... It doesn't matter whatever he does, but without the *chupah* and wedding vows? It is unheard of in a Jewish town, this is the first time it's happened! They cannot comprehend how all this is possible". "Well", I said, "but if you say it will be quiet and no one will know, what will it give you?" "Look, I'll explain: when they come and ask me, has your son been under a *chupah* with his wife? I can do one of two things – either I need to tell the truth, that you have not, and this is very hard for me and very unpleasant for me, or I have to lie and say 'yes', and I do not want to lie. So that way they will not know; I will say yes. Either they will believe or they will not believe – I do not care so much about public opinion, but I would be at peace with my conscience, that I was not lying, and they, they will think whatever they think". I told him, "Look Father, you do not want to lie, right? Now imagine this. I will have a *chupah*

and wedding vows that no one knows about and my friends will not know, then members of my Party will come and they will ask me, you had a *chupah* and wedding vows with your wife? Orthodox? So either one of two things – either I will tell them the truth, and that will be very unpleasant for me because this is contrary to my principles, and if I tell them ‘no’ I would be lying. I also do not want to lie”.

Vitek: In short, just like him.

Yehuda: Yes, so that the opinions were considered. The situation was equal. And since I was the one who had to do it, I would rather not do it. We would both just say the truth as it is. Yes, well, he tried again and again and again, but I stood my ground, and in the meantime the matter passed. Somehow they made peace with the situation.

Vitek: Did you not care at all?

Riva: I’ll tell you, I did not care, but my Mother had the same request. But what happened? What I think solved this thing was this: that it was right before the war, that is, the general situation overshadowed all of these things.

Yehuda: Well, Riva’s Mother was not there.

Riva: She was in Stolin, but she wrote letters endlessly.

A few years after the recording Riva again recalled that same period:

Yehuda’s Father spoke with each of us individually, and he spoke with both of us together. I remained quiet because I thought that he was right, but Yehuda was extraordinarily insistent. I did not imagine that he would give his Mother and Father such pain. His Father was a *shochet* and a *mohel* and a scribe, I do not know, all kinds of such Orthodox functions. His Mother, such a lovely woman. Yehuda did not want to hear

about a wedding, nothing! He was so stubborn. These were my most difficult moments.

The Germans invade

Riva and Yehuda decided to go on "honeymoon", to be together and to get away from the pressures of the family. Riva had some money saved from her time working in Warsaw, and they rented a holiday room in a boarding house. It was a quiet area of pine forests near the city of Rovno, and they enjoyed their new intimacy. But history did not leave them in peace.

Riva: We went there for a fortnight. There were hardly any summer vacationers because it was the eve of war, and I remember we rented a room in a boarding house where we had to go up some stairs. We had a room, and a bathroom, remember? We both sat at the table, there were no other guests. They would serve us food, all kinds of good food, and we would go walking in the woods. We walked, we embraced and kissed all the time. It was very, very pleasant. And I had such flowery summer dresses. But when you went into the city there were large posters calling people to join the army, and there was already an atmosphere heralding the outbreak of war.

Yehuda: Yes. Then, because of this atmosphere, we cut short our honeymoon and went home early, around the 25th of August. We returned home after five days. And the war was already like this, on the verge of breaking out...

The young couple had planned to return to Warsaw after the holiday. Their personal belongings had remained there and they wanted to settle there, in

the city, and continue their political activity, but the coming war changed all of their plans. All of the trains to Warsaw were commandeered to transport soldiers and military equipment. Riva and Yehuda remain in Mlinov against their will and, on September 1, five days after their return, they woke up to the sounds of the "bambioshka", the bombing. The German invasion had started.



September 1, 1939. The Germans cross the border between Germany and Poland, and the Second World War begins.

Yehuda: The Germans were advancing, and I went to the police and asked them what to do. They knew more than anyone else, because there was no army representation in Mlinov. "What should I do? What do you advise me to do?" So they said, "Tell everyone, the young people, to get out, to escape".

Riva: To escape, to flee the city.

Yehuda: To flee, because the Germans were recruiting young people, taking them to work and to join the army. Young people should escape and adults, too, those who could – should flee, whoever wanted to – would

stay. Perhaps the danger was not so severe here. And they did not talk about Jews/non-Jews, but about everyone. Well, I got out of there, and told all of this to the young people. We gathered, a group – the two of us, and Yaakov and Batya, and Dvorah. We all escaped on foot, to the east, towards the border. This led us to the village of Misha's parents (Yehuda's brother-in-law, the husband of his sister Dvorah). It was September, Rosh Hashana. Father was also there, he came for the prayers, he was a *hazan* (cantor), the *hazan* for the High Holy Days. We were with them for about half a day or a day, I do not remember how long. Then it was clear to everyone, they joined us to escape to the east.

Vitek: Your Father too?

Yehuda: Father no, Father no. People did not imagine. Older people did not run away, "We remember the Germans from the First World War, it was not that bad".

Vitek: No, so really it would be fine.

Yehuda: They ignored it, they did not understand that it was Hitler, it was Nazis and that this was something else.

Vitek: And you understood?

Yehuda: I knew it was fascism, it was clearly anti-Jewish, I knew *Mein Kampf* and I knew what they were doing on Kristallnacht. I knew it all. Anyone who was involved in political affairs realised. The others did not.

The young people who had decided to continue to escape reached a nearby village where Misha's sister, Bat-Sheva, lived and Yehuda's brother-in-law. Their relatively well-to-do family had a cart and horses and they wanted to travel with them towards the border with the Soviet Union. They already felt the

Germans at their rear and knew that progress on foot would be slow and difficult. Bat-Sheva's family agreed to the proposal, but asked them to wait another night so that they could bake bread and provisions for the road.

Yehuda: Well, we stayed one night. The next day we had to go, but then I got sick. I developed a high fever, I could not move. When I could not move, the others could not move either. They would not leave me. And what should we do? Yaakov ran to the nearest town, Varkoviza (Workowicze), where they found a doctor from our town who had also fled, a Jewish doctor, Fink was his name, with grey hair. He came, examined me, I do not know what he said.

Riva: Yehuda had a high fever, the doctor came and did not know what to give him. Usually Father, when he had a fever, just slept, and then he was really unconscious.

Yehuda: I never lost consciousness, but maybe I was sleeping.

Riva: The doctor said he thought it might be typhus.

Yehuda: Maybe I was a little blurry.

Riva: And he had such a high fever I stayed by him all the time and kept putting cold water on his head.

Yehuda: Did he give any kind of medicine?

Riva: He gave all kinds of prescriptions and we had nowhere to get the medicines, so basically we had no medicine, just what was there.

Yehuda: After a few days we heard that the Red Army had entered Varkoviza, the nearby town. That was on September 17.

Riva: It was on the border. It was on the border! And they said that the Red Army crossed the border and was approaching the town. And I will never forget how we, all of us, ran. I left him, Yehuda – he was already

feeling better – and we ran and we saw soldiers of the Red Army on a tank. I'll never forget that tank.

Yehuda: Wait a minute, wait a minute! Slowly, slowly. I was sick, but I remember. It was in the morning, in the morning my temperature was generally lower. And I had less fever, and I heard it, I did not believe. No, I did not imagine. Some people said they knew, they predicted, they thought, I never imagined it. So I called Yaakov, "Take more water, and run to this town and find out what is the truth of these rumours". Then Yaakov went on a bike.

Riva: We were saved!

Yehuda: We were saved from the Germans. Yaakov returned, saying, "Yes, I saw a Soviet tank, and there was an armoured soldier on the tank speaking to the crowd! And everyone gathered around and wanted to kiss him!" I cried.

Riva: We cried with joy.

Yehuda: With joy because my dream had come true: the Soviet army, the Soviet regime had come to us! And also the immediate danger that was the Germans had been averted. And on the same day or the next day I recovered.

Riva and Yehuda returned to Mlinov, which was under Russian control, and Riva's relationship with the Mohel family strengthened. Riva remembered Yehuda's parents with emotion and warmth:

Riva: They were both wonderful people. I like to say that I had a deep love for her, and especially for him. This is your Grandfather. In my opinion he was an extraordinary man, sensitive, a gentle soul! I

remember that when I was pregnant with Vitek, I was sick at the start of my pregnancy. I was in dreadful pain. I lay in the girls' small room and I cried in pain. Yehuda's Father paced around in the big room and cried. I'll never forget it. He wept. Because I lost my own Father at an early age, I really loved this man. And I remember how he went crying through the house back and forth, back and forth, until my pain passed a few days later. It was a very difficult time.



September 17, 1939, the Soviet Army meets the German army on Polish soil; A Soviet tank enters Poland.

And the Mother, how she cooked! Chaika, Yehuda's sister, was her chief assistant, and they would bring these meats to the table, the *gefilte kishka* (stuffed intestines) and the *cholent* which she would make, and I really have never forgotten those tastes and those aromas! It was something wonderful! *Oy, kinder kinder*, she spent a long time in the kitchen. A beautiful woman. Upright, and tough. *Oy*. And the Father, I think, was a bit afraid of her. And she was everything, in a big way. They were not a rich family, an ordinary family, but their Father was a *shochet* and also travelled to different towns. During the High Holy Days he would go for a month to be a *hazan*. To make more money.

And again in Mlinov

After a certain period Yehuda and Riva rented a small flat in Mlinov:

Riva: We rented the flat in the winter. We had to burn wood in the stove and I did not know how to light it. I tried with wood and paper – and nothing. It was full of coal and I could not light the stove. In our house, there was a gentile man who would come and light our stove so which of us knew how to do it? In Warsaw it was not necessary. I did not know! And the only one who helped me was Chaika. I will never forget her for this! How she came, and quietly said, "Look, this is how I prepare it", and she prepared it, and I watched. "I prepared all the little things and I took the paper and I lit it here and there – look". Little by little, for a week, she taught me. She came in the morning and lit it. I was really ashamed at being so helpless. With my communism and all that, nothing – I did not know what to do when I needed to light a simple stove! And she was the woman who taught me, quietly, and perhaps she did not even tell anyone that Riva did not know how to light the stove.

I would also like to say something about Batya. She was the first-born, and I think she was the most intelligent of them all. She was in charge of the house and everyone respected her greatly and listened to her. She made sure that no one teased Mother and disturbed Father. Many of Yaakov and of Yehuda's men friends would come to their house, and to the three girls who were already of marriageable age, and the parents accepted this. But Batya kept watch; she was very, very smart. She was also a beautiful girl

– short hair, nicely dressed, with a barely noticeable limp. For some reason she did not have a boyfriend, a *beau*, she had no one.

Riva's Mother, Roshka Tancman, came for a short visit during this period:

Riva: My Mother visited us for the first time shortly after the Russians arrived, and brought with her a package with very expensive fabrics, that I hid. Precious fabrics, beautiful, special, and I put the package in a box. When my Mother came a second time, Vitek had already been born, and Mother came to take back the fabrics because Feigel had already been deported and Mother needed money to send Feigel packages. Then, Batya wanted to buy one fabric because she thought of making a dress from it, but my Mother demanded so much money that Batya could not afford it. I asked Mother to give her a discount because I really wanted her, Batya, to have a dress. But Mother told me she needed every penny because Feigel had three small children. I was sad because I wanted to do something and I could not. Mother explained to me why. She said, "It is not out of spite, but you have to understand what is happening there".

Vitek: What language did you speak with your Mother?

Riva: Yiddish, what's wrong with you? Only in Yiddish. My Mother spoke beautiful Yiddish. And I talked to her in Yiddish because I love Yiddish and that is my mother tongue. Yehuda's parents also spoke Yiddish with my Mother and, in fact, they got along very well together, the parents.

During their stay in Mlinov, Yehuda was elected to the role of Head of the Local Council of the town. His active communist

past and the connections that were established between him and the Russian government officials made him a particularly suitable candidate. At the same time that Riva set up a kindergarten on behalf of the Council and managed it, Vitek was born.



Some of the local population on Polish lands which were occupied by the Soviets welcome the conquerors as liberators.

Riva: That was something! A kindergarten. There was one kindergarten teacher from the Ukraine, who took over the kindergarten afterwards, after I had Vitek. There were not many rooms but it was very nice. I was the headmistress and I taught there, too, and it was very pleasant there in the kindergarten. It was the first and only kindergarten in that region.

Yehuda immersed himself in his public work, but very soon encountered difficulties. Riva says:

Yehuda was very disappointed with several things. With the army, the military leaders. They would take him, go with him to the shops, choosing all sorts of fabrics for suits, and leave without paying. They said, "We will pay. He (Yehuda) is here, and he knows we will pay". And Yehuda felt that it was daylight robbery, he felt that he was being taken advantage of in a way that was not nice. He also could not see any morality among the communists Red Army. He saw how they started to drink and got drunk, and it affected him badly. He was not enthusiastic

about everything. He was not at all keen to head this Council, because they exploited him in a humiliating way, and it was not nice for him or for the Jewish owners of the shops.

The situation became more tense after the Russians started to expel Poles and former communists. Stalin suspected that there were many spies among the Polish Communist Party members, and started pursuing them. Riva recalls:

They selected all kinds of people and accused them of wanting to bring in "Polandisation". They came in the night, put them onto cattle trucks and sent them to Siberia! It's over! Without any tricks! Without talking. Without a trial. There was a state of anger, and of fear. We had expected that the Russians would come and it would be better, and suddenly we started to look at the Russians in a different way! There was no longer any glorification of the Russians. They saw them coming into shops and taking without paying, getting terribly drunk, assaulting the girls – all kinds of terrible things. I remember telling Yehuda after I heard that the Russians put his communist friends in prison in Dubno, even those who were in prison like him, I said that we needed to leave.

At the same time an additional consideration, more personal, urged Yehuda and Riva to leave Mlinov. On May 31, 1940 Vitek was born in the hospital in Rovno (family legend says that he was born after midnight, actually on June 1, but Riva insisted that it be considered the month of May. She was hoping for a girl and wanted to call her Maya. Later, Vitek called his eldest daughter Maya). Of course, the birth of a son raised the question of *brit mila* (circumcision).

Yehuda: Yes, I remember when I came back from Lvov I found out that Riva had given birth. I went to the hospital, but it was impossible to go in because the Russians weren't allowing anyone to enter for reasons of

hygiene. I looked through the window and she showed me the child, this mouse, without hair.

Riva: He was actually born with hair, he had long hair, beautiful, black. Yehuda was not there during the first days. Yehuda's Father, I do not know how, came to Rovno. He came from Mlinov. He must have walked a great distance. He must have walked around and searched until he found me. He stood there, a man with a very good face but pale, he stood there although we could not talk because he was far away, on the other side of the window. When I saw your Father's Father through the window, I imagined what difficulties he had gone through to get there, yet he had arrived, he was there. I was very weak and could not get up during the first days.

Yehuda: Those were the first days with the baby, and I just wondered what would happen, how would we get back home now. We returned home on the bus with a pram, I do not remember. I imagined that Father also travelled by bus or on a cart, because a bus was too expensive for him. There were carts with drivers who were bringing grain to the city to sell. So they would travel a few hours, it was 50-60 km, and it must have been hard for him to travel and get there. The effort he'd made was obvious. And so, I returned. First I went home alone. They asked me, "So what, what's up?" I said, "We had a daughter". They looked at me, unsure if I was telling the truth or not. I thought maybe it would pass somehow. Then I went back to Rovno and brought Riva and the child with me and we no longer lived in my parents' home; we had a separate flat, but after a while they knew that it was a son, it was a boy.

Riva: Seven days passed and it was a great tragedy.

Yehuda: It was a great tragedy. I said that I would not do a "*brit*" (*brit mila*), and Mother and Father were in a very, very difficult situation. I was in a terrible mood, because I pitied my parents, and I went to get advice from two people, a judge and someone from NKVD [the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs], thinking them to be relatively decent people. I went to them so that they would encourage me, I went to them so they would say to me, "Yes, you're doing well, carry on". I went to one and consulted with him, and he told me, "Oh so what, then do it". "That's what you tell me? You, a long-time Bolshevik?" I came to the second, he said, "Well, if that is the case then do it". So I did not find the moral support from them that would encourage me. I was convinced that I had to act according to Marxist principles and I decided not to do the *brit*, but the situation was getting harder and harder. Mother was having heart attacks almost every day. The doctor came, the town doctor, that same Fink who also came to check me, and he said, "Look, her condition is very bad, you should do it". And Father was crying, Father was crying! And so, I decided, the only right thing to do was to leave the city, because I was determined not to give in to pressure.

Riva also recalled those days:

They found out it was a boy, then came the problem of the *brit mila*. They understood and I realised that Yehuda would insist [on defying his family's wishes]. This was the greatest tragedy for them. It was, for them, terrible pain. I remember that Batya came. I told her, "Batya, you do not have to convince me, I am convinced. You have to convince your brother". And she

tried. She tried with all her might. She was the elder sister, she was several years older than Yehuda. And everyone came, even his friends. But he did not want to hear! Batya was not Orthodox, she was in Hashomer Hatzair. None of them was really Orthodox. No one. For the grandparents, it was their first grandchild and they expected it and they wanted it. I think that is one of the hardest things that children can do to their parents. That's what I think. Vitek was a very beautiful baby, and I so much wanted them to see him. They did not see him, they could not forget what their eldest son did to them. This conflict between the parents and the children, it was the most powerful conflict! I stood aside and I was helpless. It is a conflict about life and death. What was the conflict for these people? First the wedding and then the *brit*. And I had prayed to G-d to give birth to a girl. But a son was born! I think that later Yehuda regretted the whole situation, but much later, perhaps at the end of his life. He really regretted the situation. He stopped being a communist and then I think he had regrets.

Riva's Mother came for a second visit shortly after the birth. She took some of the fabrics she had left with Riva to send to her daughter, Feigel, who had fled with her three children to Siberia after her husband Genrich was arrested. Years later Riva read a letter written by her Mother at the time:

An interesting thing I found out later was in one of the letters Mother sent then, a letter that Yehonatan showed me when we had already come to this country [Israel]. She wrote that she was going to Mlinov for Vitek's *brit*. That meant she was ashamed. She was with us, brought all sorts of things. She was with us for a week or two.

The atmosphere in Mlinov remained tense. Yehuda and Riva heard rumours of arrests, deportations and executions of communists suspected of espionage and treason, and they decided to leave.

Riva: To this day I remember a *shpitzl* (informer) who was hanging around the flat we lived in. Yehuda and I and baby Vitek in one room at the home of the local dentist, a Jew, and his wife. The daughter of this *shpitzl* worked in the same house. I think they put her in the house to work there. And I was really frightened. We decided to move.

A few months after Vitek was born, the town Council was replaced by Soviet and Ukrainian officials and the young family moved to live on a remote beef farm quite a distance from the town (probably near Dubno). The farm was run by Gedaliah Mandelkern, who had also been a former member of the town Council.

Riva: Gedaliah helped us a lot. He was the manager of the Scutt Farm, *Zavod Scutt* (Scutt factory), and he said to Yehuda, "Come to me, there is work".

Vitek: What is *scutt*?

Riva: *Scutt* is beef. They would bring cows and bulls which they would buy and sell. He said that there was room there for Yehuda, and there was a place for me to work there too. So he rented a room for us and we left Mlinov, and that was our miracle. Otherwise they would have imprisoned Yehuda.

Yehuda: I worked as an accountant. They bought and sold and there was a dairy farm, but mostly they would slaughter the cows, and every farmer had to hand over some of the meat for free. That was the job. Gedaliah came from a family of butchers; he worked with his father and knew how to buy and how to evaluate. So he got this job, and I went to work with him there.

Riva: I got a job as a cashier. I worked in the secretariat and at the cash desk. Gedaliah would say, "Riva, you are very successful at your work!" That's it. Vitek was a toddler and there was a girl who took care of him.

Then Gedaliah started harassing her.

Vitek: Gedaliah began harassing her, trying to start up with the girl who took care of me?

Riva: Yes. Nice young girl, Man'ka. But that's by the way. We had good work, there was a lot of meat you could buy, and she cooked for us and Gedaliah also cooked. I brought all of my things to Zavod Scutt when we moved. My sister Ziporah, she was later killed together with Mother and all of her family. A very close family, three sons and her husband Shlomo. Nobody was left. Ziporah had a large shop in Pinsk of *manufactura* (textiles), and when the Russians came, and I was Stolin, she gave me a real *nedunya* (dowry). She gave me a *nedunya* in a large wicker basket – sheets and linens and cutlery and a fur coat! – "This is a *nedunya* for you!" And I brought it to Zavod Scutt. A package with precious fabrics, all kinds of things.

Yehuda: Yes. Well, with the outbreak of the war we were not far from the farm. A few kilometres away there was a small town, Demidovka (Demidówka), where my aunt, my Mother's sister, lived with her husband. She married a fellow from this town, a carpenter. His name was Avraham. I knew him even before I made *aliyah* to Israel. He was a decent fellow and I think he was chairman of the committee there.

Riva: It was some sort of a Holy Day, and Yehuda and I and baby Vitek travelled there. We came to visit them, a very likeable family. I took with me – because I was ill at ease – I took a rucksack and put in some clothes, I do not know why, and a few nappies, and a small blanket for the baby, for Vitek, and we went. We were there at the outbreak of the Russian-German War in 1941. I will never forget how it happened, within half a day everything turned upside-down.

Historical Background

September 1, 1939: German invasion to Poland. About three million Jews were trapped by the Nazis following the rapid occupation, which took about three weeks.

On September 17 the Soviet army invaded the eastern part of Poland as part of a plan drawn up between the Soviets and the Germans, and today known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.



August 23, 1939. Signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in Moscow.

Poland, which was occupied by two of the powers (Germany and the Soviet Union), was divided into three parts: the western part, annexed to Germany; the central part, the generalgouvernement captured by the Germans, which was under the control of the German government; and the eastern part, annexed to the Soviet Union. After the German occupation, there were acts of violence against the Jews of Poland: murder, beatings, humiliation,

theft, damage to institutions and recruiting Jews to forced labour. Ghettos were established throughout Poland and the Jews were concentrated in them under especially harsh living conditions. Their systematic murder, the Final Solution, would begin only after the outbreak of war with the Soviet Union.

On June 22, 1941 the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union (and, of course, also the Polish areas annexed by it in 1939), breaching the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Soon, they controlled broad areas of those territories and reached the vicinity of Moscow.



The division of Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The white line shows the border that was planned according to the Pact which was signed on August 23, 1939. The blue line is the border that was actually determined on September 28, 1939. This border existed until June 22, 1941.

Chapter Seven

Memoirs of Riva and Yehuda

S o v i e t U n i o n 1 9 4 1 - 1 9 4 5

Eastwards, to the Soviet Union

Yehuda: So we went to telephone the post office in this town, Demidovka. It rings. From there: "*Vas? Vas?*"

Riva: The answer came in German. Germans were already in the city's post office.

Yehuda: We went to the Party Secretariat there and we told them about this conversation, and he told us, "If that's how it is, get out, flee". I understood that they did not know. We came out and we announced this news; we suggested that everyone should flee. The older ones, the elderly, said, "No, we are not afraid. What will the Germans do to us? We remember the First World War when we were also under the Germans and they did not do anything to us. We are not leaving". The young, for the most part, did leave. That same Avraham, the uncle, left on foot with several other people in the direction of Dubno – that is, to the east, towards the Russian border. The local police commandant told me, "If you want, I have a car. You can ride with me.

But I have only one place". What is one place? After all, I had a wife and child. He says, "I'm sorry, but I cannot, I must take the Party members. I do not have enough space. For you I will make an exception, I am ready to leave one place". In that case I was not going. After a while he said, "You know what? I have another idea. I have a cart and horses, take them". He let me choose between a carriage and a cart. I chose the cart. It was stronger and it could carry more people. I thought perhaps my family would want to go. I proposed this to the aunt but she did not want to go. She sat with the children and cried that her husband, Avraham, had left and had gone, and she was left alone with three children. He had left a few hours before that, it was all a matter of hours. I was not an expert on horses, I did not know how to handle them nor the cart, and then a young fellow from the town happened by. He said, "I'm going with you". He was sent to us from Heaven, this son of a cart driver. He said, "I was in the Polish army and I was in captivity with the Germans for two weeks. I already know the Germans; I'm not staying here". He really took care of the horses, and thanks to him we could travel with horses like lions.

Riva: As soon as we got the cart, it was kind of a miracle that I still cannot understand. It is hard to describe in words the atmosphere at the outbreak of the war. You hear the echoes of the war, the thunder of the cannons, see lots of people walking, passing through the town, the street, all going onwards, in the direction of the Russian border: on foot, by car and on carts, soldiers and civilians, children and adults. And you see all this. You are in the middle of a war. And I am holding you,

Vitek, in my arms. I do not let you out of my arms and I feel that the situation is tense, fateful, so I run with you after Father [Yehuda]. Wherever Father is going I run too, together with him.



June 22, 1941. The Germans invade the Soviet Union in a surprise attack.

Yehuda's younger sister, Bracha (Bouzke'leh), was also staying with the same aunt. She tried to telephone to Mlinov, but the phone lines had been cut.

Riva: Bouzke'leh was staying with the aunt at the same time as we were. She was a beautiful girl. At that time she was 16-17 years old, and I will never forget how I begged her to go with us. I pleaded with her, but she said no, she's going to go to her mother: she cannot leave Mother alone, she wants to go to Mother. We also offered to take the aunt and the children in the cart. She also did not want to go, did not want to. And we really begged. Bouzke'leh said "No", and ran back to Mlinov.

We fled with the cart and a pair of horses. Vitek with me, and the rucksack with me, and Yehuda. We fled to Dubno. We escaped from the Germans. As bad as it had been with the Russians, even if there was the fear that maybe they would take him to prison, there was no fear for our lives, people were allowed to

live. But the Germans – that was something different. There was a convoy. It is impossible to describe the convoy – many, many Russian and Ukrainian soldiers and Jews. Everyone fleeing. After a while, we passed the Zavod Scutt, the farm where we lived. We reached a small path that led from the road to the farm, and Yehuda says, "Let's go and get some things".

Yehuda: We had gone for a holiday after all, we had taken light things with us. What did we take there? A small suitcase with a towel and toothpaste and toothbrush, what you take when you go away for a few days. We were dressed in light clothes, because it was summer.

Riva: And I said, "No! We will not leave the convoy, we do not need things, we do not need anything. We need just to get away!" and if we had left the convoy and then gone into Zavod Scutt, they would have killed us, and that would have been that. We lost everything – I do not care. This was not the first time. When I fled from Warsaw everything went too. So what? I had good things there, beautiful: fabrics, silver and gold items, and furs, but I saw some Ukrainians there, at the entrance to the farm. They sat and looked at us fleeing, and I had the feeling – not just a feeling... afterwards we learned that whoever had tried to stray from the road, the Ukrainians attacked them and killed them.

Yehuda: There was huge confusion on the roads, masses of people were walking. There were also recruits that the Soviet army were bringing to Dubno. We thought we might go through Mlinov, so that we could encourage the parents and brothers and sisters to join us. It was, after all, in the vicinity of Mlinov. We would have had to turn off the road for a few kilometres to get there.

But Riva said, "No, we will not have time. If we leave the convoy we will be lost, we must continue". It was already afternoon, twilight. So we travelled straight on, together with the convoy. All the time there were planes above us and bombs all around. Bombs on the right, bombs on the left. Yes, yes, until we reached Dubno. We arrived late at night, and I had a relative there. The cart driver found a place for the horses, he knew people who had stables.

Vitek: The cart driver really helped, eh?

Yehuda: Yes, this fellow helped us a lot.

Riva: A lovely fellow!

In Dubno by chance they met Yehuda's brother Yaakov, his wife Batya, and Chaika and Dvorah his sisters, who had fled Mlinov. They offered them a place in the cart.

Yehuda: We went to sleep with our family, who lived in a suburb of Dubno. All night we heard bombs, incessantly. In the morning I got up early and went to the stable to the horses and to get on our way. After these bombings, it was clear that there was nothing to wait for. On the way, I suddenly met someone from Mlinov, and he asked me: "Did you see Yaakov? Your brother? He is here in Dubno".

Riva: We took the cart and we met them. Yankele and Batya (Yaakov's wife) and Chaika! They got in our cart and we travelled together.

Yehuda: Yes. And Yaakov told us that Dvorah was in Dubno. He and Chaika fled the house at night, in the evening, and walked all night. He said he also asked Batya (Yehuda's sister) to come with them, but she would not: she remained with Mother. And the little sister

(Bouzke'leh) wanted to go with them, but Mother would not let her – all sorts of things.

Vitek: Mother and her parents did not think of leaving?

Riva: No, they were old.

Yehuda: We collected Dvorah. She was convalescing and when the war broke out, she ran away from there and went home, and on the way, in Dubno, she met Yaakov. We took everyone into our cart, which was already almost full. On the way more people joined us, acquaintances, who jumped in the cart, although it was full to capacity! I do not know how many there were, 15 or 16 or 17 people. It was filled to capacity.

Riva: People would get up and walk behind the cart, and switch because they could not all sit at the same time. I was holding a small child, one year old, and Batya was pregnant with Mosik (Moshe).

Yehuda: When we went uphill most people, except for women with small children, would get down and walk to make it easier for the horses. There were even cases where people wanted to get on, and there was no room.

Vitek: So you said, "It is not possible"?

Yehuda: No, uh, we said it – we did say, and we did not say.

Vitek: It was obvious.

Yehuda: Yes, it was not possible. "Take us, take us" – where could we put you? There was nowhere, there wasn't even room for a pin. I remember we met more people from Mlinov – the Ukrainian commander of the militia that I organised there in 1939 also fled. I met an officer from the NKVD – everyone fled. They told us terrible things about the Germans. They were already there, they were raping and killing. Afterwards we heard from people who fled Dubno that the Germans had got there an hour or two after we left! So it became

very tense. I remember we came to a village and there was nothing to eat. We went into a Ukrainian house to ask for bread; they said there was none. Well, we went to look and we found a few loaves of bread. They, the Ukrainians, were mostly nationalist and anti-Semites; they were just waiting for the Germans. I remember on the way some spies were caught, Ukrainian locals who spied for the Germans.

Vitek: How did they know that they were spying?

Yehuda: They found them in the fields with the apparatus. When the Soviets arrived, they ran to the German side, and when the war started, the Germans returned them in airplanes to work for them. I remember one incident – we passed through a town and saw two people from the NKVD with a Ukrainian bound hand-and-foot.

Riva: They led him to the forest.

Yehuda: We heard a gunshot; they probably killed him on the spot. So the situation was very tense, I would say it was like being on a tightrope all the time, and in that way we reached the Russian border. That is, the border of the Soviet Union before the occupation of eastern Poland on September 17, 1939.

Riva: At the border they did not let us pass. People told us that every few hours they would open the gate.

Yehuda: They were confused. On the one hand, they did not want to let people from the capitalist territories in; on the other hand – the Germans were putting pressure on the situation. In any case, there was an order to open and we went through and travelled with the horses as far as Zhytomyr which is in Russian Ukraine, Soviet Ukraine. A big city.

Riva: Not far from Kiev.



June 1941. War refugees fleeing Hitler's armies eastwards.

Yehuda: We travelled that way for seven days with the horses, seven days and seven nights from the time we left the Demidovka until we reached Zhytomyr. And all the way, bombs on both sides, all the time. We would leave the cart, hide in the woods, and then get back in the cart again after the bombing had stopped.

Riva: The journey was very difficult, and at night it was even more difficult than during the day. The rockets were falling, a kind of big ball, red, green, and all kinds of colours, right around us. We would hear "z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z", then quickly we would get down, run, lie flat. Vitek, I would lay you down, and I would lie on top of

you, and we also did not have bread or milk. We did not eat anything until we reached Zhytomyr.

Yehuda: When we entered, Jews came immediately: "How much do you want for the horses?" They wanted to buy the horses and the cart. *Metziyas* (bargain). They wanted to buy cheap, *metziyas*. I said, "No, the horses are not mine, they are the government's horses. I got them from a government official and I will give them back to the government". Everyone laughed at me: "What a fool, what an idiot, in a time of war who makes such calculations?" But I did not give up. I went to the municipality of Zhytomyr and told them, "I received two horses, I want to deliver them to you. Please, give me a receipt". I was given a receipt that they received the horses and the cart, and we stayed there in a small refugee house for a day or two until we were told that we could continue by train. Indeed, the next day, I think, a train was organised and they put us on it. The train had freight cars for transporting cattle, and platforms. It was crowded, full of refugees.

Riva: I remember that we ran to one of the trains and suddenly I saw someone open my rucksack from behind with a knife and take out everything that was there, nappies for the baby and a little blanket and all kinds of precious fabrics that I was thinking of selling when I had no money – oops, it's gone! But we did not pay attention to these things. The problem was to escape from the Germans. To flee. And the Germans were advancing quickly. I remember when we reached Kiev, Kiev residents did not even think of fleeing. And we fled, we did not want to stay in Kiev for another day, only to flee. I mean, there was a feeling that the Germans are like a stormy sea that takes control. And

it was like that. We ran away from Kiev, and after a while, the Germans arrived there!

Yehuda: Also along the way, on the train, they bombed. They bombed the trains because they thought the trains might be carrying soldiers, possibly ammunition. And they bombed all the time, all the time.

Riva: There were instances when the train stood still during the bombing, stopped, and we would climb down to the sides of the tracks, in case the train would be hit. They were aiming at the train. That was the way we travelled for a few days until we arrived in Kiev.

Yehuda: In Kiev they gathered all the refugees in a large park in the city centre.

Vitek: That was the first time that you were ever in Kiev?

Yehuda: Of course. Until now we could not go there because there was a border.

Riva: The day was hot, those were hot days. The beginning of July.

Yehuda: They gathered us all, and I remember the next day, on July 3, we heard Stalin's first speech referring to war. There he used these slogans that accompanied the entire war – "*Nashe Dielo pravoyeh my pobiedim*" ("Our cause is just, and we will win"). And everyone listened with awe and reverence, "Stalin has spoken!"

Vitek: How did you hear it? It was on loudspeakers?

Riva: Yes, loudspeakers.

Yehuda: Yes, they knew that Stalin would speak. The whole country heard him, all of the Soviet Union heard him.

Riva: The whole world heard.

Vitek: I think there were a few places in the world that have not heard it.

Riva: No. Everyone heard of it.

Vitek: In Southern China there may have been someone who did not hear it.

Yehuda: The Soviets did not put loudspeakers in China, but in the USSR they placed them everywhere.

Riva: In Kiev we met Genrich's family [Riva's brother-in-law, the husband of her sister Feigel]. Genrich was, after all, from Kiev, and he had a family that we had always thought about. Feigel told us to visit them. We had the address and the name. Life in Kiev was continuing as normal, children going to school and people going to work. Although they were already standing in line to buy bread, they made every effort to maintain normality. We looked for them and we went to them, I with a baby in my arms, and Father. I will never forget meeting this family, one of the most interesting families I've encountered: Genrich's sister, a beautiful woman, I remember she had her daughter and another child, and her eldest son who was a pilot in the air force and she did not know anything about what was happening to him. By the way, I learned later that he was alive. This woman, she was the first who helped me. First of all, she gave me some clothes for you, Vitek, so that I would have something to change you into. I also remember I bathed you there; it was the greatest thing for me. Soap and hot water and all that. These were the first things I dreamed of doing – to bathe and to have clean clothes. And they also gave us something to eat and something for the road, and even a spoon. I mean, she gave me some things that would help me along the way. We parted with many tears. They remained in Kiev, but we left.

Yehuda: They stayed.

Riva: The Germans killed this family, only the son who was a pilot survived. All the Jews of Kiev were killed at Babi Yar.

Babi Yar was the "valley of death" of the Jews of Kiev. On September 29-30 1941, the Germans murdered over 30,000 Jews there.

Yehuda: I remember the head of the family praised Stalin highly, that it would be he who would save us. At that time many Jews felt that Stalin was the Redeemer, the Messiah.

Vitek: And that was your feeling?

Yehuda: Of course! Certainly, I was glad that he agreed with me. Even Orthodox Jews were talking in superlatives about the Soviet regime. Although it inhibited the economy and the ruble and the zloty and merchandise and everything, but he saved our lives! They knew that when the Germans came, they would destroy.

Vitek: They knew that?

Yehuda: They knew. They knew that the Germans, the Nazis, are anti-Jewish. They did not imagine the extermination camps because they did not yet exist, but they had heard of Kristallnacht and that the Jewish trading houses and factories were being taken, that Jews were being murdered. And here the Soviets came and Jews had freedom of action. Maybe not traders, maybe not speculators, but you were alive.

I want to add that not only this family helped us, the entire population of Kiev surprised us in a good way: people came out by the roadside with baskets, with boxes, with pots, all kinds of things – food, and clothing for the children and adults – extraordinary assistance for refugees from the war! Also, they invited people into their homes. This was not

organised by the authorities. I imagine the authorities did not object, but they did not organise it.

We later found out that the only way to continue from there was by boat, on the Dnieper. So we went to the Dnieper, to the riverbank. The shore was flooded with people. Crowds of people. Thousands, many thousands of people. There were a few boats with engines and other towboats which were towed.

And crowds on the shoreline, and it turned out that only women carrying small children were being taken onto these boats. Men were not accepted at all nor even older children, because there was not enough room, so first of all women and babies, and then, if there was any room, and if there was time, the others were allowed to board. Of course, even this was enough to fill the boats to capacity. Then Riva with Vitek, a little baby boy, went where she got the ticket and passed. I did not. I was not allowed on the boat nor was Yaakov nor Chaika, nor any of the others. I stayed on the shore. We all remained on the shore.

Vitek: And Mother, meanwhile, got on the boat?

Riva: Hoping that Father would soon get on.

Yehuda: So I walked around along the coast, looking for some way to reach them.

Vitek: Surely there were others like you who were trying, right?

Yehuda: I don't know. Could be, I did not think about the others. I thought about how I could get there. I saw that it was impossible to scale this wall, so I went a kilometre and a half, or two kilometres, until I could no longer see the boats, until I could no longer see the

people, there was nothing. From there I walked back along the banks of the Dnieper, on the low bank, and came out underneath the pier. I reached the boat and I somehow managed to get in, pushing in among the people.

Riva: And suddenly I saw him.

Yehuda: Yaakov and all the others stayed there waiting. We sailed. We arrived at a town on the banks of the Dnieper, Cherkasy, then the boat with the engine returned to Kiev to take other boats, and our boats were left in the middle of the river. We saw the city in the distance. There was a very long bridge because the Dnieper is wide there. It was an iron bridge that was used by trains as well as cars. We were just 100 or 200 metres from the bridge, and at night – bombing! The Germans bombed the bridge, and the bombs did not fall exactly on the bridge, but next to the boats as well!

Riva: They fell all around.

Yehuda: Here and there, and huge waves of water... unimaginable panic broke out on those boats, the vast majority of the passengers being women and children. Hysteria. People wanted to jump into the water and did not know what to do. Crying and voices and shouting and screaming. I was usually quiet because I was used to the situation of war bombings. I went up on deck and counted the bombs – 17 bombs fell. In the morning, the motorboat returned and continued onwards with us, and as we passed near the bridge I saw some three or four bombs had nevertheless hit their mark.

Riva: There was a rumour that they had caught a spy who was flashing signals to the German pilots.



The bombs of German planes in the skies over Russia, summer 1941.

Yehuda: Such rumours were rampant. We saw how the gendarmerie, the police and the military, caught people and accused them of spying. I imagine that a lot of these rumours were not true. We carried on. It seemed to us that we saw Yaakov and the sisters on another boat, but we were not sure because it was too far away to be able to hear or see well. Then it turned out that they really did continue in one boat, but we never met again until after the war, we did not see them again. They may have disembarked at the same place, but a day or a few hours after us. There were crowds of people, everyone was concerned with moving onwards...

We continued with the boat. All the way, at night, we could see the bombing. There were mines and factories that caught fire. In the morning, we arrived at Dnepropetrovsk where they told us we were being

moved to a train. The Soviet Army had organised it. They brought carts with bread and everyone received a loaf of bread.

Riva: There was also milk for the children, and a little hot water.

Yehuda: But barely any, there was not much. The train was very crowded, and that's how we reached Stalingrad. There we stayed in a sports stadium. A lot of people, all of them sleeping in the grandstands. We were there a day or two and then again they put us into boats on the Volga, and in these boats we continued in the direction of Astrakhan. We thought they would leave us in Astrakhan. As far away as possible...

Riva: Far, far, far away.

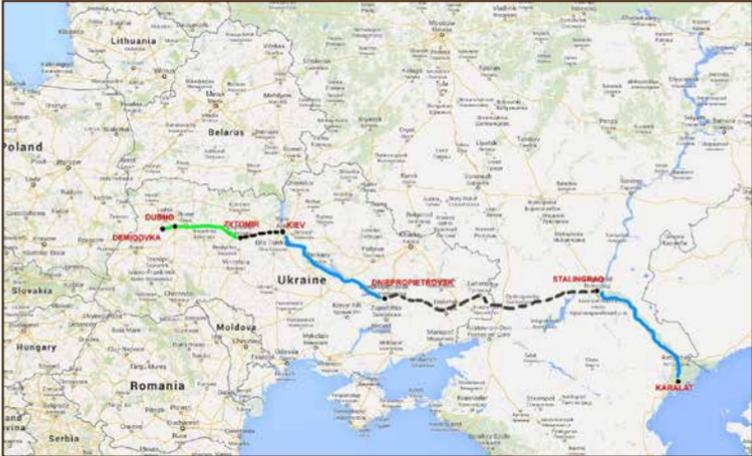
Yehuda: As far as possible from the front. When we were on the way, in Kiev I seem to remember, I went to the authorities and said, "I want to volunteer with the partisans, to fight!" They asked me, "Are you alone?" I said, "No, I have a wife and child". "So no. Only after you've made arrangements for the woman and the child". So, we thought they would leave us in Astrakhan, because usually they left people in a big city – Kiev, Stalingrad, Dnepropetrovsk. In our case, they did not leave us in Astrakhan. We continued onwards. We asked where we were going. They gave us no information. There was no plan and there was no information. Where were we going? No one knew.

Riva: There were a lot of people travelling with small children who cried. Women who fled from the Ukraine and remained without their husbands, alone.

Yehuda: Yes, and some of these boats contained several hundred people. There were probably some 500-600 people in each boat. They transferred us to the Volga delta where

the Volga divides and spills into the Caspian Sea, and we went into one of the branches of the delta. There the people from two boats disembarked in a village called Karalat (Каралят). But we called it Hamaralat, because there were lots of *hamarim*, lots of mosquitoes, masses, I'd never seen anything like it! In the evenings they looked like clouds. It was a small village located on a narrow strip of land between the two branches of the Volga. There was almost no land; there were hardly any farmers there. There were two collective farms, *kolkhozim* which survived by fishing, and there was a small garden in which there were cucumbers, perhaps, tomatoes, but no fields, no agriculture, and most of the work was done at sea, fishing. Everyone, almost everyone, except the officials, were in boats at sea, almost all year. They came home once or twice a year. The families received part of the owners' wages, and received mostly fish, which was the staple food there. No work, no factories, nothing else to do.

And here came the refugees from the Ukraine, people who had no idea about fishing. The conditions were very poor, the housing and all that was very poor. We were with a family we met along the way on one of the boats, a Jewish family who came from Kiev – Ida and her father Moshe. His wife, Ida's mother, had forgotten some documents, I do not know what, something important, and she got off the boat in order to get them. They never saw her again. Apparently the Germans caught her... she went and did not return, and he remained with the girl, who was eight or nine. With them were Moshe's sister and her husband. Four people. We met and became friends with them. He was very nice, very friendly. We arrived together in Karalat and we lived in the same house.



The escape route of Riva, Yehuda and one-year-old Vitek: from Demidovka through Dubno to Zhytomyr (indicated by the green line) in a horse and cart. From Zhytomyr to Kiev (in black) by train. From Kiev to Dnepropetrovsk (in light blue) by boat on the Dnieper River. From Dnepropetrovsk to Stalingrad (in black) by train. From Stalingrad to Karalat (in light blue) by boat on the Volga. In total nearly 3,000 km.

Riva: We were given an empty house, and there were holes in all the walls. The walls were made of straw, and when there was a wind the straw would fly around. Three or four rooms, and each of the families was allocated a room. I managed to get some kind of a small cot for you, Vitek, with a mosquito net, so the mosquitoes would not get you. We ate a lot of fish, it was the only thing that we could get, and there was no salt. We had to eat fish without salt, and I will never forget that – it was awful. And the second thing was the mosquitoes which gave us no respite. We would light bonfires. We could not get rid of them, we did not know how to get rid of them. And all the people told us that the mosquitoes came more to us than to them, because we were new and the mosquitoes were

already used to them. It was a terrible thing: we lived in a sea of mosquitoes.

Yehuda: We were there a few weeks. As time passed, all those who came with us escaped, and I say "escaped" because it was forbidden to leave. For me, you know, what is forbidden is forbidden. For all the others what was forbidden was not forbidden. And because once a day or once in two days a boat would come from Astrakhan, people would hide away on the boats and slowly people disappeared. Every day there were fewer people there, until only we remained (that is, the families who lived in the house). So I went to the local committee, "I want to work! How long will I live at your expense?" Where to work? Fishing. I do not know how to do it, I have no idea. Besides, I knew that if it would be cold we had no warm clothes. We were afraid of this fishing, we were afraid to leave the families at such a time and go out to sea. There are those who are used to this kind of a life, are settled, and they have furs and they have chickens. And our families are here with nothing, and winter is approaching! It was already August. Finally, we decided that we would try. We went to the fishing *kolkhoz* and said we want to go out and fish. They agreed, but what did they give us? Only boots. We went with a boat to the Caspian Sea, and at the Caspian Sea we reached the fishing trawlers. There they separated us, putting each of us in a different boat.

Riva: I remember – after Father went fishing I sat and cried. Just cried. My feeling was that the women there weren't safe, the women of the village. They did not work, stuck there with their children, we almost never saw the men, either they were in the army or

they were away fishing, and the women wore clothes with patches on top of patches, while the children ran about barefoot. I was terribly lonely because Father went out fishing. Not for long, but this time was the worst time for me. I dreamed of him and wanted to quickly escape from this Karalat.

Vitek: You did not know people there?

Riva: I knew them, but did not really know how to talk with them. The women were depressed, there was depression. I stayed with Moshe's sister and with the girl, Ida, and you, Vitek, you were the main occupation of all three of these women. Ida and her aunt both loved to play with you. You were a year and a few months old. You had started to walk, you started walking fast and running quickly. You even started talking.

Yehuda: If we had stayed there you could have been a captain.

Vitek: Today, I might be a fisherman.

Yehuda: Meanwhile we were on the ships in the Caspian Sea. The arrangement was this: each ship was separated from the others by the distance of the horizon. I mean, each ship remained in one place and didn't move, and saw around it a circle of horizon, and smaller fishing boats would go out from these ships, each with five or six people. Some of these boats would go out fishing with nets and return in the morning with the catch. I would sit and take fish out of the nets. The fish were caught in the nets by their heads, and could not get their heads out again. You had to push the entire fish through the hole and, if it was a wider fish, you had to make it smaller, just push it out while it was alive. It floundered and slipped. So I was just sitting in the boat and taking out those fish, and there were fish all around on my

feet, up to my knees, over my knees. I was entirely covered with wet fish, I was wet through. The night was cold, especially at sea, because there was a cold wind. It was an experience that I remember to this day because it was intolerable. A small boat, like a walnut shell on the sea. I was wet, shivering with the cold, and I got seasick. I calculated that after two weeks of fishing like this, the only trousers I had would be ruined by the sea water, and I did not know if I would fall ill there, because I did not have warm clothes.

In the morning I was tired, totally fatigued, really exhausted. And then, too, we did not stop working, because when you returned to the ship you started to wash the nets, clean them, hang them up to dry, prepare them for the next night. I was worn out and they told me, "Go lie down". The Russians are good people, kind, and they themselves cleaned the nets and I lay down and made a calculation: nothing will come of this. I will never be a fisherman, this will never be my profession, and this is now a time of war. I will work here, and do not know for how long, two weeks, one month, two months. My health will be finished, and so will my clothes. They will not give me other clothes. The family is there. This is not a solution. I decided that there was no other way out – I had to go back. In the morning, a sailing ship used to go by, collect the fish and take them to a floating factory which would process the fish and pack them in boxes. When the boat came by, I got on it and I went to that factory and waited for an opportunity to return home.

All three men returned the same day. Exactly the same thoughts were in their minds. We all

returned and we decided that we had to move on, there was no point staying there. Forbidden or not – we needed to search, try to find a legal way, and if not – then an illegal way to leave. There was no other way out. We went to the committee and said, "Gentlemen, we were here, we tried, there is no other work, we cannot adapt to it and we ask you to give us permission to get out of here. We want to leave with permission". We persuaded them. They said, "Well, we understand, but we have instructions from the authorities, we cannot help". I said, "So, I ask you to give permission only to me. The family will stay here, as a bond. I want to go to Astrakhan and lobby the government for the family". They agreed. I travelled alone to Astrakhan and the situation there was terrible: crowds of people in the streets, refugees, and the authorities did not allow anyone to come. We knew where Feigel was. Riva's sister lived in Siberia, and we thought that in this case we had no choice but to try to go there.

Onwards, to Siberia

Riva: Firstly, to get out of Karalat. It was a terrible place. We eventually left without a permit. We approached the boat, the gatekeeper let us get on, and we got on.

Yehuda: Yes, yes, I wrote them from Astrakhan, "Come, make every effort to leave". And I would go every day to the coast, at the times when the boats arrived from Karalat, to see if they were coming. It took a few days, until at long last they came. We set up "home" in the street. We got a place on a part of the pavement, and

organised ourselves there, we lived there. We went to ask for permission to travel to Kazakhstan, to Feigel. We said that we have a sister there and that we want to go there. And eventually all of us, together with the families who were with us, received permission to go there.

Then, we boarded the ship that brought us to Guryev which is now called Atyrau. A coastal city in Kazakhstan, on the other side of the Caspian Sea. Guryev is an oil city. The entire surroundings are full of vast oil fields and Guryev is the centre. There they put us in a huge house, it was *Dom Nachalnikov* (the Officers' Home). A large club. There were several hundred refugees there, 200 or 300 refugees. And they welcomed us there very warmly. They took care of everyone, found us food and tried to find us suitable clothing, also for the children.



Guryev – oil city. Photograph from 1938.

Riva: Hot water.

Yehuda: I remember the Kazakhs government officials who spoke Russian, of course, tried very hard. The Party secretary sat there daily, and the administrative director of the Local Council also sat there. The highest authorities in the city came to the refugee centre every day and took care of everything and talked to everyone: the head of every family, everyone

who was alone, everyone, and asked him how, what, who, why and wherefore; what is their profession and where had they worked, and tried to send us to work. Exceptional organisation and outstanding treatment, and exceptional attitude. When my turn came, I told them I was once a member of the Communist Party, I had been in prison. And I also had certificates from Mlinov where I was Chairman of the Local Committee and so on. Okay, I showed them the papers, with stamps and everything, so they said, "Good, we will send you to a good job. We will send you to be '*instrookto*' (instructor)", and they gave me an address and a name.

I had to travel by boat. I arrived at the place, and the local secretary tells me, "Sorry, but the place is already taken, we got someone else". I was like a poor man standing at the door, new and strange, and whoever comes first gets the job. I went back, and I told him, this Kazakh, the Party Secretary, what happened. "What? How did he tell you that?!" He picked up the receiver and called him, but there was nothing to do, the place was filled. "We will arrange another job for you". And they arranged for me to work in a tailor's workshop. There were actually two parts to the shop, one selling ready-made garments and one providing bespoke tailoring. Individual orders. About 30 people worked there: needle workers, seamstresses, tailors and cutters.

I needed to be in charge, that is, the manager of this factory. All of the materials were under my supervision: fabrics, buttons, needles and threads. I received jobs and sent jobs out, and supervised to make sure that the work was progressing well. The

work was really good, and if only there was someone else in my place then it could have been even better. Thus, for example, all sorts of government officials came, and one wanted to order a leather jacket, and one wanted to order a suit, and everyone wanted to come without an appointment, and they hinted that I would get something. I said, "No, gentlemen, there is a queue". Meanwhile the holiday arrived, November 7, the anniversary of the Revolution, and each of them wanted something for Revolution Day, but nothing was made.

Riva: The work I got in Guryev was in the hunters' cooperative. Father was once a fisherman, and here I was in the hunters' cooperative. They were hunting wild ducks. And I worked as a secretary. The manager of this cooperative was Kazakh, a very, very pleasant person. I think it was one of the best jobs I have ever had in my life. Once I got the job, I was then able to arrange day care for you. I brought you early in the morning; I would run in the rain and in the winter to bring you to the day care centre. Then I ran to work.

My work was good. I would do the accounts, how much money they needed to receive. Apart from that, twice a week, I would distribute bread to them. They would bring a lot of bread from the warehouse, and every worker would receive bread according to the number of people in the family. I had a list and I distributed according to that list. I would often bring home these ducks from that same place. Fat geese, ducks, wild ducks. Now, if it was someone else in my place, as Father said, they would have taken it for themselves. They looked at me like I was crazy: I

just distributed the bread exactly, without taking any. The manager saw this, so he appreciated me. Because I worked with integrity and because I was fast – I would understand quickly, do the accounts quickly. He would come to our house, you remember, Yehuda? He came with a cart...

Yehuda: He would bring coal.

Riva: He was concerned. He loved you, Vitek, very much. He was concerned that it should be good for us. We had a large flat, there was hardly any furniture. We slept on the floor, I remember, on mattresses, and you had a small bed. And everything would have been good if you had not become ill. You got the first sickness at the day care centre, and at that moment I decided that I would take you out of there. Then we decided together that Moshe will not look for work, Moshe will stay at home and look after you, and we will work, because it would be a shame for me to leave my job. What I brought home was not for me, it was for all of us. We had a very special commune.

Yehuda: We were together all the time. Moshe would stay at home. He cooked, he cleaned, he prepared for us, he was the *balabuste* (housewife). We both worked. And the second couple too. Then you got sick.

Riva: The first illness was a very serious eye infection. You got infected from different children who were ill. Other than that it was very cold and you got a cold, and you apparently got pneumonia with a very high fever. And I, of course, I was completely crazy. And this man, the manager, would come, bring us coal, bring sweets, make sure that it would be warm in the house, that it would be good at home, that we would

have enough to eat. Then Yehuda brought a blanket and all kinds of things.

Yehuda: Yes. I remember you were really very sick. One official brought me small biscuits, and said, "I heard that your son is sick, so here, I am giving you this for your son". I told him, "No, thank you. My son really is sick but I do not take any presents. I have money, whatever I need I will buy from what I earn". I understood that this was supposed to be a bribe for me to advance his order, and I wanted to be blameless. That was how we worked. I worked there for three months. During that time I got warmer clothes for Riva, padded with cotton, to be warmer for the winter. As one of the workers I paid for it, but relatively cheaply. For you I got a small blanket, also made with cotton wool. There they sewed quilts and there was a fire and some of the blankets were slightly damaged so they were sold cheaply to workers. At half the price, a quarter of the price. So I bought a blanket like that for you. And that was actually profit, in addition to the wages I received, it was the only side income. I did not want to be given any presents.

After three months in Guryev, Riva and Yehuda decide to keep trying to reach Feigel, Riva's sister, who lived in Siberia.

Riva: After I saw that these illnesses were not something simple, we decided we were going to Feigel. She was in a town called Turgaistroi (Тургайстрой), in Siberia. During that time we were in contact with her, we received a telegram from her and she invited us to come. She even sent us money for a ticket. We decided that we were leaving even though we were getting along quite well, but there was no point

in continuing alone if you already have a family, a sister, so you should be together. We resigned from our jobs and travelled on the first transport, on the first train, in the direction of Akmolinsk (today Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan), in the north of the country.

Yehuda: We decided we were going and winter was approaching. It was not easy. We had no clothes.

Riva: We had no clothes, and we were going to Siberia. Still, we decided that we would go. The only coat I had was one that Father had made for me. It was short, and that was what I wore all the time.

Yehuda: And there was none for me, I had a thin coat I had brought from home.

Riva: Then we packed our belongings, two and a half things, we bought the tickets and we were off. Feigel was in Turgaistroi. Genrich, her husband, was still in prison, in the camps, and they had no contact. She was alone with three children. She did not know about him; she only found out afterwards.

Vitek: So where did she get the money for tickets?

Riva: She managed there. Until the Second World War broke out, from '39 to '41, my Mother would send her parcels and more parcels, and she was known there, she would barter. That was how she bought the cow and a small house, everything like that. Now, we started the trip from Guryev to Siberia, and it was a trip of a few weeks. We started "rolling" on trains. I will never forget the dirt. Everywhere there were people sitting and looking for head lice. The women – checking each other. The children. There was a disease of lice on the trains. I remember how I protected you, that G-d forbid, you should have lice.



The continued escape route of Riva, Yehuda and Vitek: from Karalat to Guryev (marked in light blue) on the Caspian Sea by ship. From Guryev to Akmolinsk (in black) by train. From Akmolinsk to Turgaistroi (in orange) by lorry. Overall – almost 3,200 km. The total distance of the escape route was about 6,200 km over a period of seven or eight months.

Life in Siberia 1941-1945

The following sections are based on Riva's memoirs as told to Vitek in the 1990s.

Riva: We arrived in Akmolinsk, and from there we continued to Turgaistroi, a distance of about 500 km. We travelled most of the way in an open lorry. The only protection we had were old newspapers that the drivers gave us and some blankets for you, Vitek. I will never forget this period. To this day, I cannot bear to think about it. Different people helped us, and Yehuda and I also, we helped each other. Yehuda helped me and I helped him. Later, when we were in Israel, we argued, but then we did not argue. A difficult situation affects people, makes them want to help each other. Very much want to help. Harsh conditions created such a situation.

How did we reach Feigel? We arrived at the house by horse-drawn sleigh. It was a very harsh winter and they told us, "Get down here". And we did not understand what they meant by "get down here". Everything was white, everything was covered with snow, we did not understand where to go. Then we realised that we were standing on a roof and it was Feigel's house. We arrived on the roof. We met her. We both cried. Suddenly she sees her sister with a child. Vitek was ill at the time, with a high fever. On the one hand it was a great joy, and on the other hand, Feigel was very concerned – where was she going to put us? She lived in one house, in one room with three children, and with another family of an elderly couple with two grown children, and suddenly her sister came with her husband and a year-old baby who was seriously ill. She was very worried, but pretty soon we were given a kitchen with a bed from a Kazakh woman, Baiyan, and she fell in love with Vitek. I will never forget Baiyan. She was a simple woman, could not read or write, did not know anything. She had beautiful black eyes and shiny black hair, and she had this kitchen and another room, and she let us live in the kitchen.

After that we forced Vitek out of the illness thanks to a little Jewish woman doctor from Kiev who helped us. Later she helped us when Dani got ill. We lived near Feigel, and Yehuda was still with us, but soon they took him to *Trud Armia* [Work Army – working units of men and women who were recruited to help at the front], which was in Akmolinsk. And later he volunteered for the Polish Army. But even before that he was in the Soviet Army.

Yehuda was lucky. People were selected from the *Trud Armia* and sent to the Russian Army. And he was also selected. After he underwent very hard training in the winter [he would tell things about this and it was hard to understand how they withstood it...] they chose a group of people, and he was among them, and sent them to go through another, more difficult, course for commanders. And from the course they sent them into battle. Then he – it is not that he fled, perhaps he even did it on purpose, but Yehuda usually behaved like this even when we travelled together to Feigel – when they stopped at railway stations he would run to look for food, and more than once arrived back at the last minute. This time, they sent them into battle, and at one of the stations the train left and he remained behind. And here is the argument – whether he remained behind deliberately or really did not make it back in time. In any case, they arrested him. Then he was really in mortal danger. They claimed that he had deserted, while he claimed that he did not desert. What saved him were the documents from Mlinov. He was head of the Council of Mlinov, and he had affirmative documents with him. He claimed that he did not run, he wanted to fight. But that is what happened, and they kept him in prison. After that, he often said he was sure that he would not see us again, and that he would not survive. In the end, all of a sudden one night, Yehuda appeared. Very miserable, with shabby clothes, back from prison. But he appeared!

Vitek: Did you know he was in prison?

Riva: No. I did not know anything, but I kept waiting for a letter. On the last postcard he wrote that they are approaching the border to meet with soldiers, ready

for the war with Hitler. And then time went by and there was no letter, no letter, and I was crazy with worry, and then suddenly one night he appeared. They sent him to the Military Police near us. And again they started to interrogate him. And why did they not send him to war? Because at that time a law was passed stating that all soldiers from Poland, Ukraine, Belarus should not be sent because they were dangerous. The Germans could use them. And therefore the law was not to send them into actual battle, but rather to send them to *Trud Armia*, and *Trud Armia* was quite a different story. It was not a real army. And it was not at the border! They decided to send him back to *Trud Armia* in Akmolinsk. And there he himself requested to go to the front. At that time refugees from the Polish regions could join the Polish Army being formed in the Soviet Union. It was the army of General Anders, but he did not want to go there. The fear of anti-Semitism. They had just started establishing Polish Communist units, the *Armia Ludowa* (People's Army); Wanda Wasilewska was among its founders. He wrote me a short letter, and asked to consult with me.

Meanwhile, Dani was born (March 15, 1943). He was already a few months old, and you [Vitek], you were three. I took Dani, this baby, and you were left with Feigel and her children. I travelled with Dani all this difficult route to Akmolinsk, and there I met with Yehuda. He explained the whole situation to me and I thought, why not go? Everyone is going to fight, so why not? So I spoke my mind, that yes, I thought it would be good for him to go. I was also afraid, because they were looking for him and had arrested him, and I thought it would be better for him to leave.

At the same time he also saw Dani, but Yehuda was very involved with himself. He was not relaxed.

Vitek: You mean he had a choice? He could also not go?

Riva: He could maybe stay longer in the *Trud Armia*, because he himself had submitted an application that he wanted to go.

Vitek: What did he do in Akmolinsk?



Yehuda in *Trud Armia* uniform.

Riva: In Akmolinsk he worked for *Trud Armia* as a plumber. He had a friend, a really extraordinary friend, a really close friend. He taught him how to work, what to do – he did not know anything himself. This fellow put him to work and was with him all the time, and I also really liked this fellow. I knew him then, a very likeable man. Not tall but full, and with a happy, laughing face. He was lucky. This man saved him because Yehuda did not have a profession and they would have sent him to the trenches and all sorts of things, and this way they worked at the train station. Built the railway onwards, onwards, deep into Siberia, and he worked there as a plumber. The friend instructed and taught him, and Yehuda had a gift for plumbing, he understood it.

There were other Jews, also Poles, who volunteered for the *Armia Ludowa*, and they were all sent to a meeting point. There Yehuda's name was changed from Yehuda Mohel, actually Judka Mohel, to Waclaw Tracz. Among the volunteers there were Jews, members of the underground Party, and the intelligentsia; most of the other volunteers were Polish workers. Thus most of the division were Poles with minimal education, and actually those who had any knowledge and were able to be commanders were the Jews. They were looking for Party members to be commanders in this battalion. Then he was selected. They decided that he did not look "Jewish" enough, and that he cannot be Judka Mohel. He should have a non-Jewish name, and they gave him the name Waclaw Tracz. I do not know why he actually received this name. There may have been papers with the name of Waclaw Tracz. He also believed that after the war there would be no Jews and Poles – and everyone would be Polish. And suddenly

I got a letter from him: "To the honorable Mrs. Irena Tracz", and inside the whole story and explanation, and signed "Wacław Tracz".

Vitek: Tell us what happened in Turgaistroi at the same time, what was happening with you?

Riva: At that time I was alone with two small children, and even though I received tremendous help from Feigel and her children, I had to work, otherwise I could not have managed to exist. Luckily I managed with my work in a small children's day care centre. Turgaistroi was a mining town where they excavated wolfram [wolfram, also known as tungsten, is a hard metallic element used in the construction of aircraft]. There were no men and the women worked with the wolfram, so there was a creche for babies which was open 24 hours. They started looking for people who could work, and I was probably the only one who had documents, and I had finished a seminar and I had an education. In the meantime, I also knew how to speak Russian. It was an excellent place because there was food for the children, milk and porridge.

They rather quickly discovered that I knew how to write *lozongim* [slogans]. So they brought me red cloth and in white letters I would write: "*Stalin, noshe solntze*" [Stalin, our sun], "*Stalin, atietz naroda*" [Stalin, father of the nation), "*Nashe dielo prawoyeh my pobiedim*" [Our cause is just, and we will win] – all kinds of slogans. That was the custom. I never believed that you can influence a person with slogans, but there they had great faith in this sort of thing. They would hang the signs inside the mines, and also at the entrance to the mines. This work also solved my heating problem: so that I could write in the evening, in the dark, they

brought me large electric lamps and we discovered that this warmed the room. I lived in one room with the two children and another woman. She had been in Siberia longer than I had. It was a shack with rooms, and in every room of the shack lived women, only women, with infants, or with older children.

They would come in the evening, sit around on the floor, and I was in the middle at a long table that we had built from planks. I would write, and they would sit and sing. I was very excited about this – they sang so beautifully, Russian folk songs. And sometimes we would hear the howling of the wolves through the window. The wolves would come very close to the shack, very close. But we were not afraid. We were strong. I remember that once they brought me logs, pieces of wood, and put these below my window, so that I could use it to heat my home and for cooking. It was like receiving a medal of excellence because I worked hard. Both during the day with the children and in the evenings, with the slogans. I will never forget it – I got up in the morning and found that it had all been stolen. Not one log remained. That was it, this was life. During the entire period in Siberia there was great hunger and there was nothing to eat. My teeth fell out. I was a young woman without teeth. The doctors said *avitaminoza* [lack of vitamins]. I think it was because I was nursing Dani and did not have enough food.



A rare photograph from the war years:
a house in Turgaistroi.

During that period I discovered Mańka. I met her mother and father, who were Poles, and there were not many Poles there. They had a lot of children, and I was coming and going all the time and I needed someone to take care of my babies. You [Vitek] were also still a baby. I talked to them and they sent me Mańka. She really saved me and both of you. She knew how to sing, she was nice, cheerful. The woman who lived with me was so old and always looked angry, and Mańka was jolly and happy. She would change your nappies and your clothes on my bed, and she would sing. I found it very pleasant. Mańka was maybe 13 or 14 years old. Blonde. She had thin plaits and blue eyes and she laughed so beautifully... I made friends with her parents. They were Poles who were expelled because they had settled on sacred Ukrainian soil. They had eight children, and Mańka was one of the oldest. I remember they said, "Maybe Mańka can help you, maybe she can earn something?" and really she did earn it. I do not remember how much I paid her, but I remember I would give her all kinds of clothing from Feigel. Feigel still received parcels from Israel. I would give her everything I could. And Mańka came with us to Wrocław after the war, you must surely remember that? And only after a while her parents came and took her.

Vitek: Of course I remember. Tell us a little about Turgaistroi. Who were the people who came there?

Riva: It was a large mixture of people. First of all the Kazakhs, who were residents of the place. There were not many of them, but they were the older ones. Among them were men, and very beautiful women. The houses we lived in belonged to the Kazakhs. Then they started

to take the men into the army. Baiyan's husband was taken to the army. Then there were people who had been expelled, Poles from Belarus and the Ukraine. And then there were just ordinary Russians who had been sent there for all sorts of reasons. All of them had been deported, all of them bore some kind of stigma.



Wolfram mine at Turgaistroi.

Vitek: But we were there voluntarily.

Riva: Of course, we had not been expelled, we came ourselves. And that was our miracle, that we had not remained in the places where we had lived before. Many Jews remained. They asked us, "Why are you fleeing further? Stay here already". I did not want to, because I saw the Germans and I saw people who had bombs dropped on them. I saw it with my own eyes and I fled. So we ran to Feigel. It was a very difficult and complicated journey to Siberia. Very difficult and complicated.

We met one family, a mother and two sisters, from Kiev. One sister, the eldest, was a doctor, and the other sister was so young, conceited. I remember that Dani became ill, very ill. He had an illness, a type of diarrhoea that was very difficult, and he lost a lot of fluids. He was in a critical condition and there were no medicines. The sister who was a doctor devoted

herself heart and soul, heart and soul she devoted herself. We needed penicillin, and I do not know how she was able to get it. Her mother came to me and took out a kind of big scarf, and there, under this scarf, was a *Siddur* [a prayer book]. I see the *Siddur* before me now. She kissed it and gave it to me, and said, "Put the *Siddur* under your baby's pillow. One can only pray. We do not have doctors, we have no help, perhaps help will come from the *Siddur*". I picked up the *Siddur*, I picked up Dani, I put it under his pillow and cried and cried and cried. I thought perhaps my Mother would also have done that. Suddenly I, a communist, believed in the *Siddur*. It was a critical situation. And the next day, little by little, the baby's condition improved. Slowly. Someone came, looked at how he breathes, and said, "Well, the child will be fine".

I told this to Yehuda and also, of course, to my sister Feigel. I remember the woman's face like it was now. She was a gentle woman, short, and she brought me this *Siddur*. Before that, when I went to give birth to Dani, she was sick with typhus, and the hospital was in a *lepianka* [a mud house]. A hospital with two rooms. One room was the delivery room and the other room was for typhus patients. I will never forget that I was afraid to scream while I was in labour so as not to wake her, so she would not know, and she would be calm.

This was a very nice family who afterwards underwent a severe crisis. The second daughter, the conceited one, fell in love with a local boy who had excelled in the army and was wounded. He came... a fellow who barely knew how to read and write. He

received a medal, and suddenly became the hero of this entire small town, and the girl decided she would marry him. Her mother cried, "He is not for you". Nothing helped – they got married. Quite soon after, he began to hit her and started to get drunk and she ran away from him. After that she escaped somewhere else in order not to be near him. Another acquaintance was someone from our town, Stolin, who would visit Feigel. He was a friend of Genrich, a tailor. He was a well known tailor in our town. His whole family was killed before his eyes, a rocket or whatever, and he was left alone. He was also one of the people you could talk to. But the most interesting was the meeting with Rachel'ka, my friend. I met her in the big city, Akmolinsk.

Vitek: Did you know Rachel'ka before that?



Rachel'ka Sygnet,
a family friend,
at work in Akmolinsk.

Riva: Certainly, we were together in prison in Palestine [she was a Communist], and we would also meet in Warsaw. Completely by coincidence, I met her in Akmolinsk when I came with Dani to meet Yehuda. She really saved me when she said, "Come to my house with the baby to sleep", because I had to travel the following day. I was in her flat. She went to work and I remained with Dani and there was nothing to eat. I remember how I looked for something in her flat, and suddenly I found a jar containing white powder and it turned out that this was powdered milk. To this day I will never forget how I fought with myself – whether to take some milk powder or not. Should I take or not? In the end I took some, I boiled water and Dani had something to drink.

One time, when I returned to Turgaistroi, the Secretary of the Politburo [the regulatory agency of the Communist Party] summoned me for a conversation. You know, it was not really Politburo, it was some part of the Party which we were all scared to death of. I was horrified. We were afraid of these people, we were afraid of politics. I did not tell anyone that I was a Party member. He summoned me and started asking questions, and I could not understand how he got to me! Why all of a sudden? Then it turned out that Rachel'ka was in Akmolinsk and was connected with them, and they knew she was a Party member. She had told them she had a friend who was with her in the Party and was living in Turgaistroi. The great miracle was that I was with two babies. He started to come to the house, to see what I was doing, who I was meeting. They were just waiting to catch someone.

Vitek: Why did they suspect someone who was a Party

- member? Why it was dangerous to be a Party member?
- Riva:** That was the period during which the old Party members or those from outside the country were suspected of being spies. They thought we could be dangerous for them, and so it was a period when I could not write to Yehuda because I was afraid – of being arrested, that they would make me tell them something, that I would work for them – all sorts of things.
- Vitek:** Why did Rachel'ka work for them?
- Riva:** I do not know if she worked for them. I think they forced her. They told her she must, so therefore she gave them my name because she did not have anyone else's name to give.

Later, Riva has other recollections from the period she spent in Siberia. By now, she has already had a stroke and not everything is clear.

- Riva:** Vitek and Dani would play very nicely together. There was a seamstress in Siberia, and they would take the wooden bobbins of sewing thread and make very beautiful toys with them. They put pieces of metal for wheels and built carts. They would put vegetables in them and play: "Who wants potatoes? We are selling cheap!" There was another child, a friend of theirs, a Russian boy, not Jewish, and they learned to speak Russian. There was also a Russian girl named Natasha. She would ask, "Do you want to be my friend?" And they would always say, "Yes, sure". They would play hide-and-seek. Whoever won would clap their hands. She had blue eyes, blonde hair. Her mother was a seamstress. I remember it to this day.

In the small town where we lived there was a high mountain in which there was wolfram, a hard metal used to make aircraft. The Russians paid a lot of money for it. There were workers who were extracting this metal with their hands, with hammers. Looking for it, finding it, removing the metal, weighing it, and the Russians would buy. We were lucky to be there. The Russians would give produce in exchange for the wolfram – flour, milk, jams. We would all look for tungsten and sell it for groceries. Even Yehuda, when he came for holidays from the army, would join in the work. Then I organised a kindergarten there. I had two small children and I had to feed them. I was hungry. All the time in Siberia I suffered from hunger. Three years. We lived next to a small river. Sometimes we would go fishing. Then we put the fish in the sun and dried them. If we had salt we would cook *shchi* [soup]. Salt was very expensive. We had no oil or butter so we could not fry them. The fishermen had no rods. I think that when the river was frozen, they would make a hole in the ice and the fish would come to the surface. That is how they would catch them. The children saw how the adults did it and imitated them. The fish helped us a lot. I cooked semolina porridge for the children. If there was salt, it was delicious. People would catch birds. I would buy them, clean them, and the birds could also be cooked. Perhaps swallows, I'm not sure. We would make bird soup. If I had salt. First of all I would add the salt, because without salt it was not at all tasty. If I had semolina, I would put in semolina. If I had milk, milk powder – I would put it in, and pieces of bird.

Over time, American Jews got organised, perhaps

as part of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), and sent us packages. Sometimes they also sent tea and sugar. That was something. It was very cold out and you were hungry. The tea was nice.



Yehuda in Polish army uniform, immediately upon his enlistment in May 1944.



Russian samovar.

I remember that there was a man who had a samovar, a device into which you put water and set it on burning coals. You boiled it and the tea was wonderful. If there was sugar, it was really something. But usually there was no tea or sugar. I remember how my teeth fell out one by one, as if my gums were made of butter. Within a month they all dropped out. It happened to other people. The hunger was terrible. You go to bed without food and get up

without food. Yehuda was at war. He came sometimes for a short holiday, only a few times. The children did not even know him. Whenever he would come, he would come with frozen fingers, almost white.



Yehuda sends home a souvenir from the Polish city of Lublin, which was liberated by the Russian and Polish Army in July 1944.



Yehuda (right) with fellow officers at the front in 1944.

Chapter Eight

Riva's Memoirs

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After the war, on the way to Poland

At the end of the war, when the Germans began to withdraw, Riva and the children left Siberia.

Riva: After a while, in 1944-45, when the Russians had started to have some success in the war, they started talking about transferring the families of military personnel from Siberia to places with better conditions. Both Feigel and I were families of military personnel. Rachel'ka came to me from Akmolinsk to travel with us. All the families, also Mańka and her family, decided to move from the harsh conditions of Turgaistroi to the easier conditions in central Russia. We travelled by lorry, and then they moved us to a train which reached the environs of Kiev. There they did not suffer the kind of hunger that we had known, and I remember that the first thing that we bought was a full sack of onions! We were hungry for such things, we had neither onions nor garlic, so the first thing we bought was a large sack of onions. They were delicious.

Vitek: I remember a long train journey. There were two families in each carriage and a stove in the middle, and the door was open a little bit and there, next to the door, stood a sack of onions.

Riva: It was the journey from Siberia to better conditions. At the same time Rachel'ka went with us, and Feigel was on the same train, just in a different carriage. They moved them to a different town nearby. From this trip I remember the story with the cat. It really upset us that they would not let us take the cat. He was a regular cat, but we really loved him, especially you and Dani. We were not allowed to take it under any circumstances, and then the cat ran after us. We were in lorries and the cat ran after us.

On May 8 1945, the Germans surrendered and the war ended. Riva and the children settle in Wrocław, which had just been liberated from German occupation. Yehuda was still serving in the army.

Vitek: You wanted to move to Poland?

Riva: Yes, I wanted to. I wanted to.

Vitek: Why?



The family settles in Wrocław, in a flat on Pocztowa Street. In the right photograph: Vitek and Riva, In the left photograph: Vitek (on the right) and Dani. 1947-1948.

Riva: The situation in Siberia was temporary, and I knew that maybe finally Yehuda would be discharged from the army and the situation would change. Naturally, I wanted [to go to Poland]. We lived with Rachel'ka. Feigel was in a town not far away. At the beginning it was very difficult in Wrocław. They brought us to a large school, where we were received in one of the rooms. And you or Dani, I do not remember who, got a high fever! Very high fever, and we were very worried. Rachel'ka ran and arranged a flat. It was not so great – I think it was one or two rooms and a kitchen. That's it. We moved and our situation was already better. We were afraid to be in a refugee centre with young children, and now we had our own flat and we could keep it clean and so on. At this time Rachel'ka was still with us and Mańka too. Yehuda joined us in this house.



Vitek (on the right) and Dani. 1947-1948.

Vitek: What did you do in Wrocław?

Riva: At first I did not do anything, but then Rachel'ka made contact with the Jewish Association. They were a serious group, and they suggested that I organise a kindergarten for the children of people who came out of the ghettos – the people who gathered in Wrocław, because Wrocław was a rather important centre for Jewish refugees. Yehuda arrived in the meantime. I remember that he came wearing a large bandage on his head – he had had some sort of a car accident in the army – but it healed quite quickly. I remember the meeting with Yehuda was a bit strained. I do not know what happened; the children did not run to him, even though we spoke all the time about "Father, Father". I was quite reserved, as was he. It passed. He was not there long but he decided that this was not a good flat for us. He returned to the army, where they gave him a transfer to the Polish Army garrison in Wrocław. Then he found the flat at 20 Pocztowa Street. We had all kinds of problems, but in the end we moved there. We even knew the people who had lived there before – a woman and a man she had saved, protected. He was a Jew and she was not. His name was Elias. We bought the flat from them, and, after they had left, another military man wanted to live there instead of us, and there was a great fight. He took a lot of things from there. A lot of things. He had a higher rank in the military. But Yehuda said, "Sorry, this is our flat". And he also had an official purchase document.

As time went by, Riva and Yehuda understood the enormity of the tragedy that had befallen European Jewry and tried to find out what had happened to their families.



1947-48. Vitek at the window of the flat at 20 Pocztowa Street in Wrocław.



October 2014. Vitek (on the left) and Dani in front of the house at 20 Pocztowa Street in Wrocław. The flat that they lived in was on the first floor. The window above the entrance is the same window shown in the previous photograph.

Vitek: At that time did you know what happened to the families who remained in the Ukraine?

Riva: We knew very little. We knew that the contact with my Mother stopped when the Germans invaded the Ukraine, after the outbreak of war in 1941.

Vitek: So you did not know anything?

Riva: There were rumours. Rumours that they had been killed. We did not know about the camps, for example, we did not yet know about this, but as we came near to Kiev we met Jews from the area, and there they already knew that all the Jews in Kiev had been killed.

Vitek: You thought there was a chance that you would find people still alive?

Riva: After the war, we travelled to Stolin to check. The letters I wrote to Stolin during the war were returned. I remember how we parted from Yehuda's family, and I said goodbye to my Mother, who lived far away from there, in a letter I sent to her. I remember that I wrote and I cried, I wrote in Yiddish: "*Mame Tayere*" [my dear Mother]. I sat and cried. We were not allowed to send it to Stolin, I sent it to Israel, to my sister Sarah, and they sent it to Stolin. All the letters were returned.

We went to Stolin, Yehuda and I, by car. The children stayed with the nanny in Wrocław. The house stood the way it always had. Lovely, empty. We went through the door and everything was gone. Nothing remained. Even the shop – empty. Apparently the locals took everything. We met Zeiger Macher there, the watchmaker. I knew him and he knew me. A Jew. He did not know what happened to my Mother.

We were there for maybe a week. I was afraid there. I thought maybe the locals would attack us.

We stayed at the Flasnuyok Family hotel. They were Jews, they knew me from before. Their daughter was a friend of my sister Saraleh, the mother of Talila. Right up until the 1960s, I thought maybe my Mother was still alive. I kept asking people from Stolin and no one knew. Only when I met Baška [a neighbour from Stolin] in Haifa, she told me what had happened. They took my Mother, my sister Ziporah, her husband and the three children. They had to dig their own grave and they murdered them there. Baška told me. She managed to escape, hiding on the balcony of her house. No one remained of the family – Ziporah, Shloime Gershonovitz her husband, and the children – Moteleh (Mordechai), Yaakov and Yitzchak. Moteleh already had a fiancée and they were to get married.

In the 1960s we had a meeting of people from Stolin in Haifa. We sat and we cried. Yaakov and Yosef (Riva's brothers) escaped from Poland and came to Israel [they arrived in Israel with official certificates of the British Mandate government, which Yochanan Ben-Zakkai, the husband of their sister Sarah, got for them. They travelled from Warsaw to Trieste by train and continued from there by ship].

Then we went to Mlinov. Yehuda already knew what had happened to his family. The Nazis entered Mlinov a few days after we fled. Yehuda's entire family hid in the cellar – the parents, Batya, Bouzke'leh and Yenteleh. They sent in hungry dogs. The dogs found them and the whole family was shot. The house in Mlinov was abandoned and completely empty. Yehuda was crying. We were also there for a few days and then returned to Wrocław.

Letter from Yehuda's brother

In 1944 Yaakov (Yasha) Mohel wrote a letter to his brother, Yehuda, telling him about the fate of their family in Mlinov. The original letter – which includes the testimony of a woman named Sarah Neyter who was present at the time of the massacre – though it was not preserved, was later reconstructed by Yaakov. Here is the reconstructed letter:

The massacre of the Mohel family (testimony)

While I was still a refugee in Uzbekistan, a few months after the liberation of our regions in Volhynia from the Nazi gangs, we received a shocking letter from a girl from the town of Murvicz [Jewish name for the neighbouring town called Murwica] – Sarah Neyter. Unfortunately, because of our many travels, this letter was lost. But every word was engraved in my memory, so I will certainly not falsify anything if I reproduce the contents from my memory. And this is the content of the letter:

The terrible distress, torture and troubles that we had to bear at the hands of the Ukrainians and Germans when they arrived in Mlinov cannot be described. However, I just want to let you know how your family was murdered – an event that I witnessed.

Sometime before that, they forced us, the Jewish girls, to work in the fields that had previously belonged to the graf (Count) in the Polish village of Smordov (Smordwa). During the severe autumn and winter they would make us run, half-naked, still in the dead of the night, to do exhausting labour. On the way, when we passed the river

Ikwa, they forced us to go into the water which was cold as ice as they joked and made fun of us. The work was very hard and we were beaten with whips when we tried to rest.

I worked in one group with your sister, Bouzke'leh, and I remember that she would cut a portion of the 100 g of bread we received per day, for 12-13 hours of hard labour, and she would bring it home to her parents and her sisters, who did not even get this 100 g. I remember how some nights we used to hide so no strangers would see us, and we'd meet and then Bouzke'leh would read for us the poems she wrote. Hard to imagine how she was able to, how she mustered the emotional strength and courage to write poems under these inhumane conditions. Her poems were poems of anger, hatred for the German executioners and their Ukrainian collaborators.

This continued for weeks and months, as heavy as lead, until the final liquidation of the remaining Jews began.

Everyone looked for a place to hide, but there was no chance of escape. Your father arranged a hiding place in the kitchen. He cut two planks from the floor and fitted them exactly, and he hid the whole family under these floorboards. He invited me to join them in this hiding place. But I did not like the look of it. I decided to hide in your house, but inside the top of the chimney.

I placed a plank between two bricks and I settled there. I stood there inside the chimney for three days and three nights without food or water, with only my nightgown covering me. This was October 1942. There were cold winds blowing. It was raining. Fairly often I lost consciousness from exhaustion. I felt that the end was near. But on the third day, I was roused from my unconscious

state when I heard the murderers noisily entering your flat. They searched everywhere and even in the kitchen. I heard them find the hiding place... I heard them take your family out of the hole one at a time. They stood them against the wall and killed them all. My ears are still ringing with Bouzke'leh's words. She told them: "You can kill us, but my brothers will avenge us. Our spilled blood will not forgive you. Your end is close". After these words there was a shot and everything went silent.

I do not know how I found the strength, but I continued sitting in the chimney until the evening. In the middle of the night I emerged from the chimney and thanks to the darkness, despite the cold and the rain, I was able to get out into the fields.

Like a hunted animal I ran through fields and forests. I found a hiding place, and after years of suffering I am now free.

That is the short story about the murder of our family. Father, the Lord's servant, was coincidentally not at home at the time of the murder. He had probably gone looking for food for the family. When he returned they were all dead. He walked through the streets in desperation, with no comfort, until the next day when they killed him, not far from the slaughterhouse where he had worked for many years. And so came about the bitter end of the family of Leizer Shohet, his wife Hanna-Leah, and their daughters – Batya, Bracha (Bouzke'leh) and 12-year-old Yenteleh.

Yaakov Mohel

On November 4 1944, Yehuda answered with his own letter to his brother, Yaakov, which actually was preserved with the family's papers. Here is Yehuda's letter:

The letter written by Yehuda to Yaakov

4.11.44

Dear brother!

Yesterday I received your letter. I did not cry. No. I was cold and hard as rock. Only my heart was beating: tock-tock. If I could, I would have done something extreme. I was awake until midnight, unable to sleep. All the time the suffering faces of our loved ones passed before my eyes. Yes, our unforgettable Bouzia told the truth. Her brothers will avenge her. Avenge their suffering and ours. Nothing will stand in our way in the fight to destroy this monster.

Yes, my beloved brother! The monument that will be established on the grave of the innocent victims, ours and all those who suffered like us from this monster, will be built from tens of thousands of these fascist dogs and the ocean of cursed blood. This monument is already being built, and soon the building of it will be complete. All the free nations in the world are building it shoulder to shoulder, all the people for whom freedom is precious will take part in this tremendous effort. And my brick will not be absent in it, for the shocking murder of my sisters and my parents, without any fault on their part.

Revenge will come. But our family will be no longer.

We will bow our heads before their terrible death and swear to avenge them.

I shall keep your letter as if it were a holy book, like a distant echo from these beloved creatures which will add strength to my struggle.

The photograph of our Mother is being kept in our house, and Riva is watching over it.

With a kiss,

Wacław



Mass grave in Mlinov in memory of the victims of the Mlinov-Murvicz community, who were wiped out on Tishrei 28, 5703 (October 9, 1942). Photograph from the end of 1944, after the liberation of the city.

Riva and Yehuda built their lives in Wrocław. Riva established and ran a kindergarten and Yehuda served with the army as the person responsible for regional security on behalf of the Party.

Riva: I had a kindergarten in Wrocław named "Janusz Korczak". Korczak was my teacher when I studied at the Teachers' and Kindergarten Teachers' Seminar, a teacher of psychology. A most gifted teacher. He had an assistant, Mrs. Stefania Wilczynska. He used to run a newspaper for children. The children themselves wrote daily articles for it. There was a queue of mothers who wanted to register for the kindergarten in Wrocław because it was known as being a very good kindergarten. I found good kindergarten teachers. One was Ania, who had a problem with her legs. She was from Warsaw, from a poor home, so they could not help her, perhaps they did not even try. Ania was a

good teacher and the children loved her very much. She was able to tell good stories. In each class we had a library. Every class was for a different age-group – two, three, four. I bought suitable books. There was a rug on the floor and the children played on that. I bought toys: dolls and building-blocks. I was the headmistress, I would come every day to check the classes and the teachers and I would make comments if necessary. It was a Jewish kindergarten with classes conducted in Polish. There were also non-Jewish children there. I would go to the kindergarten every day by bus.



Riva with Dani (on her left) and Vitek in their flat in Wrocław in 1949.

The period in Wrocław was very positive for me from the point of view of work. My work in the kindergarten went well. I had very good relations with the staff and with the parents, and the Jewish

organisation really appreciated this because our institution had a good reputation. At that time you were both in kindergarten, not mine, in a different one, but after a while you transferred to ours. Perhaps just for a short period because after that you went to school.

While I was doing this work, I was offered all kinds of other jobs, and eventually I was offered the job of the district supervisor in Wrocław. I accepted that job and it was very pleasant, the relationship with the kindergarten teachers was excellent. At that time our neighbours were the Tzibulski family, and we became friends with them. At one point Sala and Almi, whom we already knew from Palestine, came from France and had a flat nearby. At first, they stayed with us and afterwards moved to a flat near us. So the children had friends and Sala was often with us.

Yehuda was in the army, he loved the army and the uniform (the uniform was here with us, in Afeka, but was stolen from the shed downstairs). He had a high function in Wrocław – he was responsible for issues of security on behalf of the Party.

In 1950, the military decided to transfer Yehuda to Warsaw, and after a while the family joined him.

Vitek: Why did they transfer him to Warsaw?

Riva: In my opinion the transfer to Warsaw was not a promotion, it was actually a kind of demotion. There had been an unpleasant event. There was an inspection one night and they found the key to the cupboard where he kept secret things. He closed it and did not remove the key; Yehuda was sometimes distracted. He

received notification that this was not good, but they left him alone for a while. Since he held a high position and he was also a Party member, they transferred him from Wrocław to Warsaw, and there, even before we joined him, he was allocated a room.



In the flat in Wrocław in 1949 with friends. On the right the Tzibulski couple, sitting in the centre their old friend Anka Straubbaum, and on the left Riva and Yehuda.

They gave him work as a teacher, a lecturer in Marxist-Leninism at the Officers' High School. He lived in a room next to this school, and it was hard work for him. It was not easy for him to prepare for lectures. He became ill several times with ulcers, and I naïvely thought that there was some connection between the work, which he did not like, and the state of his health. He also underwent surgery for stomach ulcers. I remember something funny when I came from Wrocław to Warsaw to visit him after he became ill. I was wearing a thick scarf on my head. I went

straight from the frosty weather outside to his room. So the doctor said, "Oh, here comes your mother!" I remember!

We were still in Wrocław and he was given a flat on Marymoncka Street in Warsaw. I remember we were waiting for him to come. Yehuda obtained military lorries for the transfer. The children and I were already in Warsaw and waited for him to arrive with the lorries. We waited for a long time, they were late, and then Yehuda told me that one lorry had overturned. It turned out that there was a cupboard in it – we had a nice cupboard in the children's room – and he put all the books into this cupboard and tied it on to the lorry. It was so heavy that this cupboard pulled the whole vehicle over and it overturned. It was a miracle that they survived. They fixed the cupboard afterwards, and we even brought the books with us to Israel.



Yehuda rising through the ranks of the Polish army: Captain (on the right), Major (in the centre) and Lieutenant Colonel (on the left).

Vitek: Tell me, this was the worst period of Stalinism. People disappeared, went to prison. What did you feel? What did you know?

Riva: No one disappeared around me. We just heard here and there, this is happening in Russia but not in Poland, we did not know that they were taking people to prison. But we knew they were dismissing Jews – that we did know. From the army. But this was not the Party and it was not Gomułka, and it was not Stalin. It didn't even occur to us. At that time I still believed, I would come to Party meetings. You know, faith in the Party was really something horrible, it was like a switch in the brain; they brainwashed us, and our faith was huge. When the problem of the doctors, the Jewish doctors, arose, I said it does not seem at all feasible that the doctors suddenly became that way. We perceived this as being anti-Semitic, just that. But also I did not speak about it at Party conferences, because the grip on the members was becoming harder. I mean, they started not to believe Yehuda, to look at him more suspiciously. I had contacts in Warsaw, I was with Zofia Woźnicka – Zosia – who was the sister of Wanda Wasilewska, the Party Secretary at the Polish Ministry of Education. I had a very good relationship with her, so that I didn't feel it, I didn't feel it.

Doctors' Trial

Blood libel against Jewish doctors in the Soviet Union, which took place at the end of Stalin's life. On January 13 1953, the Soviet Union announced the prosecution of nine doctors, six of whom were Jews. The doctors were charged with membership of a Jewish organisation related to the Joint [Jewish Joint Distribution Committee], who planned to kill leaders in the Soviet Union using medication and by poisoning. It was argued that in the past the doctors had

caused the deaths of two Soviet leaders, including Andrei Zhdanov, and they were now planning to cause the death of five senior and highly decorated military commanders. The doctors were being called in the Soviet media "Jackals in White Coats" (from the word jackal, a carnivorous mammal). Also the memory of Shloyme Mikhoels – who was the Director of the Jewish theatre and was murdered on Stalin's orders – was vilified by the Soviet proclamation that he had been the go-between of the JDC and the defendants. At the same time, there were rumours about the expected mass expulsion of Soviet Jewry. Less than a month after the death of Joseph Stalin, on April 4 1953, an official statement was published in Moscow saying the doctors had been released because it was found that they were innocent and their confessions were obtained under duress. Later it was said that those responsible for the plot were arrested and punished.



"Pravda" headline of January 13 1953, announcing the exposure of a "conspiracy" of doctors.

Riva: I remember when Stalin died. When he died I cried like a little child in our house. I lay in bed and cried! So what? So what?

Vitek: That means that all this time you just did not know, you did not think, you had no idea at all?

Riva: Just after the 20th Party Congress, they picked us up secretly, in Warsaw, the Party members from the Ministry of Education, and they read us parts of Khrushchev's speech. Only then did we open our eyes, although not everyone did. Previously we had not argued about these things. We did not argue. There may have been those who thought in their heart of hearts, I cannot tell you.

Vitek: They executed them. Whoever had been a great Communist yesterday became an enemy and a criminal the next day. Didn't the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact bother you?

Riva: Yes, Molotov-Ribbentrop really upset us, but we said, "Everything is done for the benefit of the Revolution, in favour of the Revolution, for the benefit of the workers". And we were afraid, we knew it was wrong, but it did not come from Stalin.

Vitek: They were all wrong except for Stalin?

Riva: Oh, yes. He did not know about it, he did not know about it. There are some things, Vitek, do not ask me these things.

Vitek: I'm curious, I'm curious.

Riva: I cannot give you an answer. We were blinded. Yes, now I see it. To this day, Simcha says to me, "but whatever it was, the idea of Socialism remains!" To this day, she says that to me! You must understand, these are things that people want to repress. They do not want to talk about it because it is hard for them

to live with it. That's how I see things. I repress it because I found it hard to live with it. Yehuda handed in his Party membership card when the Russians reached Budapest, but I still remained.



Riva's Polish Communist Party membership card, which she never gave up.

Vitek: In 1956 Father handed in the card?

Riva: Yes, he gave it in, did not want to be, and sent them his card. I did not believe. Maybe I believed, but I said I did not want to leave the Party. Maybe the Party could save something. Before that we did not talk or argue. We were afraid; there was an atmosphere of fear. I remember this very well, the atmosphere of fear. When Father went to Moscow about Eliyahu Globerman [a relative of Yochanan Ben-Zakkai, Riva's brother-in-law], I was terribly frightened. We were very afraid. But so what? We did not talk about it. It was difficult for us to live with it, so we did not talk. Hadassah and

I would sometimes talk about it – what happened to us? It is not a normal thing. We are people who think, who argue – why did we experience all that? This is a tragic situation that none of us had gone through before. I often think how we handed over our young lives, during the times of the underground with the beatings that we got, and all that; I do not want to think about it. We were in Warsaw for a long time and I did not go to see the ghettos and the camps. I rejected that. I could not live with it. And this is the same thing. It is the same. You should know that.

In March 1953, after the doctors' trial, Yehuda was discharged from the Polish Army without any explanation, as part of the first wave of expulsions of officers of Jewish origin (additional waves took place in 1956-57 and in 1967-68). Yehuda started working at the publishing house of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, as director of the department in charge of anti-air defence of the institutions belonging to the Ministry (printing houses, publishing companies, etc.). He worked there until July 31, 1957.

In 1956, political change began to take place in Poland. Gomułka was appointed head of the Communist Party, and he led certain democratic reforms. Suddenly, it was possible to travel to Israel and even to make aliyah. Riva and Yehuda went to visit their families. Following the visit, they filed documents in order to leave Poland and move to Israel, but after a short time they withdrew their application for reasons not clear to us. One possible explanation was their desire that Dani and Vitek finish high school in Poland.

In 1956, when Stalin's crimes became known publicly, Yehuda handed in his Party membership card. He decided to become a "Jewish worker", leaving the clerical work in the

publishers' office. He was given a job at the Yiddish newspaper Folksstimme as an operator of the Linotype lead typesetting machine. He remained there until his aliyah to Israel. All the while Riva continued to work at the Ministry of Education as a supervisor of kindergartens.



An example of a letter of refusal, one of many, from the Polish Interior Ministry: "In response to your letter dated 30.12.60 regarding the issuing of a passport of immigration to Israel, I hereby inform you that the Minister, after further consideration, has decided not to overturn the negative decision of the Passport Office".

In 1960, when Riva and Yehuda again applied for permission to leave Poland, they were refused once more. For nearly two years, and without explanation, the Polish authorities refused to allow them to leave the country.

Finally, at the beginning of May 1961, their request was approved. On May 31 1961, they took a train to Vienna, got on a plane two days later, and on June 3 1961, they landed at Lod Airport. There, waiting for them, were many family members who received them with warmth and love.



Riva and Yehuda in their flat in Warsaw before they left Poland. Photograph from 1960.



Dani (right) and Vitek before they left Poland. Photographs from 1960-61.

Chapter Nine

In Israel, after 1961

Yehuda and Riva left no recorded or written documentation from the period of their life in Israel after 1961. This chapter briefly tells the story of their lives from the date of their *aliyah* until their final days as written down by Vitek and me from our memories:

At the beginning of June 1961, Riva and Yehuda, with their two sons Vitek and Dani (Zenek), arrived in Israel as new immigrants. Yehuda was then 53, Riva 50, Vitek 21, and Dani was 18.



June-July 1961, a few days after the *aliyah*. Standing (from the right): Vitek, Riva and Dani. Sitting: Yaakov (Yasha) Mohel, Yehuda's brother, and Feigel, Riva's sister.

Because Yehuda and Riva were completely fluent in Hebrew and had a large and supportive family, they adapted to life in Israel very quickly. Within six months they had purchased a flat in an immigrant housing estate in the Tel Aviv neighbourhood of Afeka (41 Sharsheret Street, Flat 3 – now known as Barkai Street). Upon settling in Israel, they changed their names from Wacław and Irena Tracz, to Yehuda and Rivka Ben-Eliezer (Vitek and Dani kept the surname Tracz).

Yehuda

Yehuda had meticulously planned what he would do when he came to Israel. He had a profession that he had obtained in Poland – a print typesetter – and he thought of opening a small independent printing company. This did not prosper, and a few

months after making *aliyah* he began working as a teller at the Loan and Savings Bank (which later merged, in 1974, with Bank Hapoalim). He held this position until his retirement in 1974, and for a few years after that he continued to work as a supplies officer at the central branch of the bank.


מדינת ישראל
משרד הפנים - אגף לעליה ומרחם

תעודת מספר 48229 ✻

חוק השמות, תשס"ו-1956, סעיף 17 - תקנה 5 (א)

תעודה המעידה על שנוי שם

זאת לתעודה כי האדם/האנשים המפורטים) סטה שזוהו), לפי המעוף 11 לחוק, את השמות) כולה(לן) :-

השם החדש		השם לסני השיוני								
שם המשפחה	שם הפרטי	סדרה	שם זמני					שם המשפחה		
בן-אליעזר	יהודה	6	7	2	3	6	5	1	סרץ	וצלב
בן-אליעזר	רבקה	6	7	2	3	6	5	2	סרץ	אירנה

המערך: תל אביב (מערבית) דפנה (מזרחית) 2 אצל בן-זכאי (מספר הבית)

תיקף השמי הוא מתאריך התעודה.

ניתנה בלשכת עליה ומרחם ב" תל אביב כיום 19 לזרש יולי אב שנת תשכ"א 1961

אכ/

מ/ר - 159/67




Change of Name Certificate. Despite the fact that Riva's official name was Rivka, all of the immediate family and old friends called her Riva.

Clerical work did not satisfy him. He wanted to engage in public activities, and returned to his childhood preoccupation: vegetarianism. He became a strict vegetarian, gradually becoming completely vegan, and then enrolled in the National

Association of Vegetarians and became active within its ranks. Over time, Yehuda found the organisation to be insufficiently pure and radical (for example, he was very angry when the organisation opened in its ranks to people who ate fish). He initiated a separation and became president of the more radical wing, which was also responsible for the organisation's journal. He devoted considerable time and his own money to this subject. At the same time, he cultivated an impressive home garden in front of his flat where he grew flowers, herbs and vegetables.

In the 1970s, he suffered a severe heart attack, after which he had bypass surgery in London in 1980. Yehuda died of heart failure while he and Riva were enjoying a stroll in Eilat, on May 16, 1989.



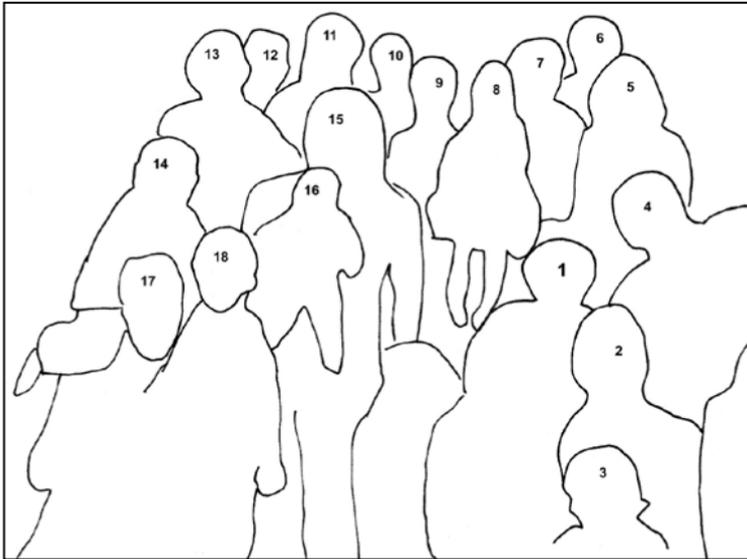
Last photograph of Riva and Yehuda together – a trip to Eilat, May 16, 1989, about an hour before Yehuda died.

Riva

In Israel, Riva began working at the Ministry of Education, doing exactly what she had been doing in Poland: supervisor of kindergartens. The Ministry of Education recognised the experience she had gained during her work in Poland. She was extremely successful in her work. In 1976, she retired and immediately initiated a special project, supported by the Ministry of Education, designed to help pre-schoolers who were not fluent in Hebrew (mainly the children of immigrants). As part of the project, she developed and established a Hebrew learning centre, which these children attended one day a week. Following an inspection carried out by the Ministry of Education – which reported significant and impressive progress among children – these centres were established throughout the country. Riva coordinated the project for several years with great success.



Riva's 93rd birthday in Tel Aviv, November 22, 2004, about six months before her death. In honour of her birthday all of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, from Israel and abroad, gathered together:



1. Riva 2. Maya Nicholas (Tracz) 3. Billy Nicholas 4. Yaron Tracz 5. Tamara Varite (Tracz) 6. Vitek Tracz 7. Dalia Tracz 8. Sophie Nicholas 9. Irena Valt (Riva's carer) 10. Talila Ben-Zakkai, the daughter of Sarah (Riva's sister) 11. Naomi Tracz 12. Danuta Valt, sister of Irena 13. Yael Ne'eman, Dani Tracz's partner 14. Guy Tracz 15. Racheli Shoval (Tracz) 16. Or Shoval 17. Ethan Shoval 18. Yehonatan Shoval.

At the same time, she continued to work on various projects related to children's literature, and even published two books of children's stories that she compiled and edited. Later, in the 1990s, she taught children's literature at a seminar for kindergarten teachers and was a much loved and admired teacher for hundreds of kindergarten teachers around the country. She worked with dedication and tremendous energy until the age of 87. In 1998, she fell and broke her pelvis, after which she found it difficult to walk and stopped working. From then on, she lived with a full-time carer. Riva died at the ripe old age of 94, on April 4, 2005.



The graves of Riva and Yehuda at the Kiryat Shaul cemetery – block 24, zone 2, row 2, plots 13 and 14.

Epilogue

A year before his death, in June 1988, just before his 80th birthday, Yehuda wrote a text intended for his sons and his grandchildren, in which he tried to summarise his life. This is what he wrote:

Reaching the age of 80

They say there is an old Chinese curse which goes like this: "May you live through interesting times".

In the eyes of a European, this is more of a blessing because to live through interesting times should be interesting.

But it was not. The ancient Chinese wisdom correctly assessed that "interesting times" are days or years when the historical development of human society flows faster and faster, and it changes its forms more and more frequently, exposing people – especially those who in their childhood and their youth knew more moderate forms of social, political and economic development – to serious trauma. It deprives them of peace and they live in constant tension and fear of the future, the shocks of which are hard to predict.

Unfortunately, this clever Chinese curse became a reality in the generation in which I lived. And so the 80 years I lived through were filled with complications and with frequent,

fast and troubling changes in our situations, and were full of physical and mental suffering.

By the time I was six years old, the First World War had broken out. Deaths and injuries, bombs and burnings, fear and panic, hiding in basements, worrying about the immediate future – these are the images fixed in the memory of a boy of six, and I see them still as if it had all happened just yesterday.

Escaping in terror from the city with basic items loaded on to a small cart that Father had assembled from a small wooden box on four small wooden wheels, and then seven years of wandering from village to village, in exile, under conditions of terror, of war pursuing us on the one hand, and harsh living conditions on the other. We returned to the town from which we had set out, but our living conditions continued to be burdensome. I was 13, I wanted to study. It was impossible to think about being accepted as a student in an institutional school at the age of 13 into class A or even B, yet I had a strong desire to learn.

I knew how to read from the age of five or six. I acquired some education independently. I decided to hire myself out as a teacher of Judaism, Hebrew and mathematics for the children of Jewish families in the villages. In almost every village there were two or three Jewish families whose children attended Polish school, but they had no knowledge of Judaism (Bible, prayers, Hebrew) and I also helped with general subjects. I taught during the winter (six months) in several villages, and in return I earned a ton of grain. I sold it in the spring, and in the summer I had private lessons with a Polish teacher for a few months. I did the same thing the following year, in the winter – teaching in the villages. The second summer, I studied Hebrew with a private teacher and this was all the education I had as a child. I will not tire you with descriptions of all the different and strange events in my turbulent life. Some of them I've described

in the recordings that you have, and some are still to come (I will try to complete them). What I wanted was to emphasise and to give you a clear description of my childhood and youth here as this does not appear in the recordings.

Yesterday, I read an article about the boys who came from Ethiopia to Israel. There is a description of their living conditions in Ethiopia, and I saw myself as in a mirror. For example, miserable thatched houses, a few small poor shops where women sit (the owners study Torah in the *Beit Midrash* or at home), dressed in rags and waiting for a customer who never comes.

There were no appliances in their home. There was no tap because there was no water to flow in the taps. They brought the water, alone or using a water pump, from a well or the river, carrying a yoke and two buckets; we would store the water in a barrel in the house. There was no electricity and we used kerosene lamps or candles.

There was no toilet inside the house. Instead, outside there was a hole over which a kind of shed had been erected and inside there was a seat made of planks. Toilet paper – no one knew what this was. They would tear up old newspapers which would hang in the shed.

Transportation: between the villages and towns people would go on foot or, at most, in a horse-drawn cart when travelling distances of tens of kilometres. Bicycles had also not reached us and when we saw a car for the first time, we looked upon it as a wonder of the world. I remember how the cinema (moving pictures) came to us for the first time, and my older sister was lucky enough to get money to buy a ticket of which I was very envious, of course.

A gloomy, heavy atmosphere pervaded everything. Older people and children were dressed in shabby clothes which were often torn and patched. Roads only existed in the big cities. There

was no school apart from the *cheder*. There was no doctor. The barbers of the town usually served as "physicians". They applied leeches or cupping glasses. We also had a medic, the priest's son-in-law, who was asked to attend in the event of illness. These were the conditions in which I lived during my childhood and youth. And in these conditions of this primitive subculture, I survived the hardships of the First World War, experiencing a constant battle for survival in a home afflicted by poverty, without any prospect of an education, of development, and a victim of national and financial discrimination (anti-Semitism).

At the age of 13, I decided to go out to work, but where would I find it? It just so happened I had a friend whose father had a construction business. At that time they used huge bricks. With his connections and in exchange for pennies, this man kept me busy smashing the remains of the bricks, which would be mixed with concrete. With the first money I earned I bought a wristwatch.

Since I was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair and I took seriously the prospect of emigrating to Israel, I decided to learn a trade. I went to Lutsk to learn welding. I lived with a family which was not blessed with wealth. I remember how I longed for a piece of bread when I passed near a bakery on the way to work from which the smell of fresh bread wafted.

After that, there was the *hachshara*, backbreaking physical labour – I sometimes worked two or three, and once four consecutive shifts – because it was necessary to preserve the *hachshara kibbutz*.

There followed *aliyah* to Israel, and again on the kibbutz – constructing roads and draining swamps, mosquitoes, suffering three types of chronic malaria. Then we left the kibbutz and went "underground" with no work. I was sent to prison and later deported. Finally, the Polish underground. After that, imprisonment and a four-year sentence during which I endured

a poor diet and a perpetual struggle. Throughout that time, I had no family close by and no saviour reaching out to help me. As soon as I left prison – war again, the first phase of the Second World War. Then Vitek was born, who was supposed to have been a girl and who should have been named Maya.

A year later – the Second World War in full force. Escape, a wandering, hard life. Siberia – hard labour in the mines. In the Soviet Army, in the school for sergeants – training from morning to night, in temperatures of minus 30-35°F and training at night in temperatures of minus 50°F.

Such were the conditions of my life during the Second World War until 1946-47 and I was already 40 years old, about the same as Vitek is today. And I had not had a single day that was quiet and peaceful. Since then, there have often been quieter times, sometimes stormier times, too, but always related to harsh living conditions which I will not go into here, so as not to elaborate.

And here, after all, despite the hard life, I have reached the age of 80, when all my family – parents, my only brother and my five sisters – died before me, some of whom perished in the Holocaust and some – all younger than me – died here in Israel.

A little while ago, I saw a scene from the film *Little Princess*. This girl, who lost her parents and finds herself beaten and despondent in an orphanage with a sadistic and money-hungry manager, always maintains that she is a princess until it turns out that she is the rich heiress of her father's fortune. Someone comments that the girl has suddenly become rich. "No", another replies, "she was always rich, even when she was poor".

I think to a certain extent that description fits me, too. Even during the worst of times I did not give up and I saw light at the end of the tunnel. During the hardest days in prison, I knew I was suffering as a fighter on behalf of a principle. In the Russian and Polish Armies, I knew I was a warrior against Nazism for

the freedom of nations, and above all to save the remnant of my people, the Jewish people. With such an awareness, suffering is always more bearable.

And here I have reached the age of 80. It is an age with no future, I will not live for much longer of course. There is only the present. With this, a man must walk towards his death. Is it frightening? Does it make me despondent? There are some people who have what is called "self-education". Throughout my life I coped thanks to this self-education. Thus for example, I argued that if there is a mound of difficulties before you, do not look at the mound as a whole, but isolate the problems one by one, and try to overcome them gradually, until you have overcome them all. When climbing a high mountain, look at the first step and the next, and start to climb. My theory was: do not burden yourself with worries if they will not bring positive results. That is why those around me called me an eternal optimist.

Also about life and death I adopted an independent approach, saying: death is an inevitable phenomenon, so there is no point worrying and fearing this phenomenon. One must get used to the idea and accept death as any other inevitable phenomenon in life. I have lived with this thought for many years.

Some time ago, I read the poems of the elderly poet Avot Yeshurun in which he writes, among other things, about the phenomenon of death: "After all, with death I return to the ground from which I was taken and it is as if I was returned to my mother's womb". I was influenced by this concept and I can state with certainty that I have no fear of death.

However, the problem of old age itself is also a problem that has to be dealt with because during this period I was still in the society of people and affected, to some extent, by the way that they relate to old age. The fact is that a lot of people display an attitude of alienation towards the elderly. They do not like to see the elderly. I looked for the reasons for this and asked

myself: is it because of the phenomenon of the helplessness of the elderly who are, as it were, a burden around the necks of healthy young people? But babies are helpless, too, yet their helplessness actually stimulates us because the phenomenon in babies is connected with freshness and the perspective of development, while among the elderly, the young already smell the earth calling to us, and that is what they are trying to escape from. Nor is it because old people are not aesthetic because, for example, an ancient olive tree, an old house, old utensils – we find to be lovely. An old man, for some reason, is not pleasing to our eyes. This is because we have not learned to come to terms with the inevitable.

There are some cultures which actually educate their people about death. They accustom the young people to the presence of death and, as part of this, they develop myths about death, to the point that they begin to scorn life and become almost eager to die.

These are the myths, for example, that surround harakiri in Japan, the Muslim car-bomb suicide attackers or the young Shiites in Iran who are sent to the front. This is, of course, death since the young people indeed receive training for death, but they distort the essence of life.

Enlightened human society must refer to life and to death with the same amount of respect. This is how people should perceive their capabilities and their boundaries. Of course one needs to invest the utmost in the things that concern life. But life has limits. The capacity of an individual during various periods in his life has limits, and there is a limit to the identity of an individual and one needs to learn these boundaries as part of one's understanding of reality. It is impossible to visit every place in the world. One cannot read all the books ever published. One cannot visit all the museums in the world. These are limits which need to be recognised.

The boundaries move, your capability as a youth is different from your capability as an adult. One capability increases, another decreases. However, if we are aware of this it helps us to concentrate and to choose, it allows us to better distinguish between the wheat and the chaff, and it lessens waste and missed opportunity, and enriches self-expression and satisfaction. Whoever suffers because of what he is unable to achieve, misses the opportunity to do what he can achieve.

Sometimes, people, for example, cancer patients, admit that they know how to make the last years of their lives better than the ones that preceded them. They sift their life through a sieve and reduce it carefully, and organise their world and leave a "clean slate" behind them.

We can learn from them as they reveal the secret of true existence by not trying to look to the past which has already gone, or forecast the future, which does not yet exist. Instead, they engage fully with the present. The boundaries of your identity remain the limits of your capability.

Riva and I have lived together for most of our lives – 50 out of 80 years. Everything that happened to us during that period, even when we were not together, we underwent together. Now, we grow old together and do not know which of us fate will take first.

According to statistics, there are more widows than widowers. Without exploring the reasons for this I share this fact. Therefore, I hope that Riva will bring me to our last resting place and not the other way around. But as long as we both live, I see the role of each of us to care for the other, and to help as much as possible to overcome the physical and the other difficulties of the other, so that we may end our lives on this planet with respect, so that our children and grandchildren can be proud of us.



Yehuda and Riva on a trip to London, 1988. Yehuda was 80 years old.

