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MANYA LIPSHITZ

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A Jewish Children's Commune in the Soviet Union in the 1920s

By

MANYA LIPSHITZ

Translated from Yiddish by Max Rosenfeld
and Marcia Usishkin

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For Eric, Tracy, Stuart, Russel,
Everett and Andrew.
With all my love.

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Authur's Preface

This book was originally written in Yiddish. It appeared in 1977, under the title *Bletlech fun a Shturmisher Tzait,* (Memories of Stormy Times). It was published by Diversified Publicity Bureau, which was headed by my husband Sam. A linotype operator by trade, he typeset the entire book and supervised its printing. All proceeds of the book were donated to the Histadrut Campaign, who established the Manya Lipshitz Amal Scholarship Foundation for deserving students of Amal trade schools in Israel. (Every year four students are awarded scholarships. The book was completely sold out).

The late Jewish poet, I. E. Ronch, who preserved the three children's magazines for fifty years urged us to have the book translated and published in English. He felt that the younger, English-speaking generation, should get the opportunity to learn of the educational and cultural activities in the Soviet Union in the early twenties.

Much has changed since. The world is not the same as it was then, in 1977. This is particularly true about the former Soviet Union.

Who could have imagined that a World Conference on Yiddish and Yiddish culture would be held in Moscow? Or that hundreds of thousands of Jews would be given the right to emigrate? Under the brutal Stalinist regime, Jewish cultural activities were completely eradicated. Hundreds of Jewish writers, artists and intellectuals were either murdered or sent to prison or concentration camps. All Jewish cultural institutions were destroyed. Anti-Semitism was rampant. The right to emigrate was non-existent.

Much has changed since then. The policy of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* led to greater freedom and a considerable amount of democracy for Soviet peoples, including Jews. The last few years saw a revival of Jewish cultural activities. With the relaxation of the strict emigration laws, over 300,000 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel in the last two years.

The revelations of the Stalin crimes at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party led thousands of Communists, from all over the world, including hundreds, possibly thousands in Canada, to leave the Party.

When we, along with many others, left the Party, we were denounced as traitors and ostracized by our former comrades. It was rather a traumatic experience. We left behind a lifetime of dedication to a cause that appeared at the time to be noble, and a movement that was considered the torch bearer of ideals. We were, however, determined to continue with our activities on behalf of Jewish culture, and to work for freedom and brotherhood among nations, and for the well-being of the Jewish community, here in Canada and abroad.

Those of us who left the United Jewish Peoples Order, banded together and founded the New Fraternal Jewish Association—a non-partisan organization active in the Jewish community. Some predicted we would not last more than a few months. "Disappointed people cannot build," they argued. We proved them wrong! Recent events in Europe, particularly in former Communist countries, have corroberated the position we took after the 20th Congress of CPSU.

My life spans almost the entire 20th century. It was a century of tremendous upheavals. I remember World War I and the early days of the Russian Revolution. I witnessed the traumatic events of the Civil War in Russia, the years of hunger and deprivation. I was horrified by the outbreak of World War II and by the tragedy of the Holocaust, in which six million Jews perished, including my husband's entire family which consisted of over 70 men, women and children. We witnessed the birth of Israel after 2,000 years of homelessness for the Jewish people. The Korean War, the war in Viet NAM, five Israeli-Arab wars, the Gulf War and numerous other conflicts are all part of the history of the 20th century. On the brighter side is the incredible progress in the fields of science, technology, medicine, aeronautics, communication, space travel and much more. A man landed on the moon in this eventful century.

When I came to Canada in 1926, the population of the country was less than 11 million. There were almost no social benefits. Canada has now become home to over 26 million, and we can boast of having one of the most progressive social benefit legislations in the world.

With the 21st century approaching, we realize that despite all these achievements, much has yet to be done. Our ideals for a more humane and just society are still to be achieved. However, we must never cease striving.

Two years ago, Sam and I celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary. It was a beautiful and festive affair, hosted by our children and grandchildren and attended by many relatives and friends, among whom were several of my former students—some are now grandparents themselves. Over the years, I have maintained contact with my students and am impressed with the contribution many have made to society, in their fields of expertise. We are proud of the achievements of many of my students, including our children and grandchildren.

We are still active in our organization and community. We take pride in the fact that we continue to enjoy the companionship of a group of people whose friendship extends over a half-century. Although we have experienced disappointments in our political activities, we never gave up our hope for a better and more just world.

—Manya Lipshitz

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my children and grandchildren, and to my many friends, who encouraged me to have my Yiddish book translated into English, so as to make it accessible to the younger English-speaking generation.

Many thanks to my friends Max Rosenfeld of Philadelphia and Marcia Usishkin of Toronto for the translation; and to J. B. Salsberg and Hersh Smolar of Israel for their valuable contributions to the book.

Sincere appreciation goes posthumously to my cousin *Benn*, for the illustrations.

And last, but not least, to my husband Sam for his encouragement, and for the many hours he devoted to planning, editing and proofreading. Without his assistance, the publication of this book would not have been possible.

Manya Lipshitz

INTRODUCTION

One January morning in 1972, as I was looking through the just arrived mail, the cover of the magazine *Yiddishe Kultur* caught my eye: in it was an article by the poet Isaac Elkhanan Ronch, "Yiddish Journal of a Children's Commune in the Soviet Union." The further I read, the more excited I became. It was part of my own life—the most interesting period of my childhood and early youth!

"For almost 50 years now," Ronch had written, "I have been safeguarding three bound volumes—original copies—written by hand on cheap paper. They had been given to me by the Yiddish writer A. Litvin, who had been a teacher in a Jewish school in Chicago. In 1923, when he left that city, he entrusted me with a gift that was given to him in the Soviet Union and he adjured me to take extremely good care of it. What he handed me were three Yiddish journals called *Komunar*, issues Number 4-5, May-June 1922, Number 6, October 1922, and Number 8, April 1923. They had been produced by the Twelfth Children's Work Commune."

Ronch wrote that he did not know in what city the commune had been located or what had happened to the children—the Komunars—or to the editors of the journals. With my heart pounding I read every word in the article. He had written about me by my maiden name—Margolia Kantorovich—and gave the names of my close friend Devorah Bialy and of other children who had written for the Yiddish journal. I stared at the photographs that accompanied the article and recognized myself, as well as many of the other children and the teachers. It *was* our

children's commune in Vitebsk! These *were* our journals—which I had edited! I vividly recalled the visit of the American guest in 1922 and I remembered the reception that we arranged for him, and the gift—the journals—that we presented to him. Years later, when I was a Yiddish teacher in Canada, I sometimes wondered what had happened to those journals.

I immediately wrote a letter to Itche Goldberg, editor of *Yiddishe Kultur*, telling him how I was "transplanted" from Bialystok to Vitebsk during the Polish-Soviet war in 1920, and admitted into the Twelfth Jewish Work Commune in Vitebsk. I described life in that commune, its cultural activities, and how the journals were published. My letter was printed in the March 1972 issue of *Yiddishe Kultur* : "The Transmigration of Three 50-Year-Old Yiddish Children's Journals" and it was signed with my present name, Manya Lipshitz.

A response to my letter came from fellow communar Devorah Bialy's brother. He lived in Florida and was married to the Yiddish poetess Hannah Safran. Then, on May 24, 1972, the *Morgen Freiheit* published I. E. Ronch's article, "History of Two Jewish Girls," in which he recounted what had happened to Devorah and me. Ronch and I exchanged letters. He said he would send me the three journals, on condition that I would return them!

* * * * *

I picked up the journals at the post office and took them home. Nostalgia, tinged with astonishment overwhelmed me as I leafed through the large folio pages. How could children between 10 and 15 years old have written so maturely, and in such pure Yiddish? These were three of a number of journals that we "published," handwritten, bound in hand-decorated or carved covers and illustrated with photographs of children and of life in the commune. What had happened to the other issues of the journal? Did they still exist somewhere in the Soviet Union? My brother Yekiel had saved some letters that I sent from the commune to my

brothers in Canada, and those proved to be useful in refreshing my memory.

I read my own work, including the one-act plays in verse which I wrote for the holidays that we celebrated in the commune. Where had the impetus for this come from? What had moved me, and the other young people, to write about our life and about the events in the commune? It was a difficult life—hunger, typhus, civil war, but the air was vibrant with enthusiasm for the revolution.

In our Children's Home—the Twelfth Work Commune—there was organization, firm self-discipline, and a love for creative work. It must have been a model institution. Teachers and writers would actually visit us to see how the new methods of education, labor and study were working. To a large degree, all this was surely made possible by the devotion of our three teachers: Ida (I no longer remember her last name), Sarah Moshevitsky and Nechama Doroshkin—the latter two from Bialystok, Poland. Nechama was also the director of the commune.

The teachers came to Vitebsk, in the then USSR in 1920 from Malachovka, where they had worked in an experimental school. Under extremely difficult conditions they began building a Jewish children's home, using Malachovka as their model. Episodes from that hard beginning were described by the children in *Komunar* Number 6, which was issued on the second anniversary of the founding of the commune—the Twelfth Jewish Work Commune.



Manya Lipshitz with the three issues of Komunar.

CHAPTER ONE

CHILDHOOD IN BIALYSTOK

The year 1920 in Bialystok was for me, as for many others of my generation, a time of profoundly moving experiences. I was the youngest of eight children. My sister Hannah, the eldest, was already an activist in the Left Poalei Zion movement (The left wing of the Labor Zionists). During the German occupation of Poland in World War I, many meetings were held in our house, in the "upstairs apartment" where Hannah lived. The young people who attended these meetings discussed a variety of subjects. I used to sit in a corner listening attentively. Once I found the courage to ask a question. Everyone turned and looked at me in amazement—and then they all burst out laughing.

By 1920 Hannah was married to Aaron Marmur, who was also a member of Left Poalei Zion. They lived in a nearby apartment building that belonged to a pair of Polish brothers named Zywinski.

Our house was located on the *Breyte Pyaskes* (Wide Sands) in the middle of a marketplace with little booths. Not only was it a small house, but it was wedged between two buildings—also owned by the Zywinski brothers. On one side of the house was Kowenski's barbershop; on the other, an apothecary.

Although my sister Hannah was pregnant with her first child, the mood in our house was very depressed, for my father was dying. In the courtyard, in a little shed, we had our bakery where Mother and my brother Shimon did the

baking. Mother would come into the house as often as she could and stare sorrowfully at father. She would bring him a hot meal, feed him and rush back to her work.

In the front room of the house you could almost always find our 80-year-old grandmother. Her eyesight was failing and her fingers were twisted by rheumatism, but on her face you could still see traces of her early beauty.

Father knew that his life was coming to an end. One day I heard him complaining tearfully to his only brother Shlomo Yaakov: what had he done to deserve such an early death, at 64, while their mother had lived to 86? (I myself had seen my father's mother only once, when we were still living in Sokolki, where I was born. One day my father took me along on one of his trips to Bialystok. There he led me to a small, neat upstairs room and introduced me to a petite old woman: "This is your *bubbe*." Then he left me alone with her. Since I didn't even know her, I was gripped by a sudden fear and burst out crying.)

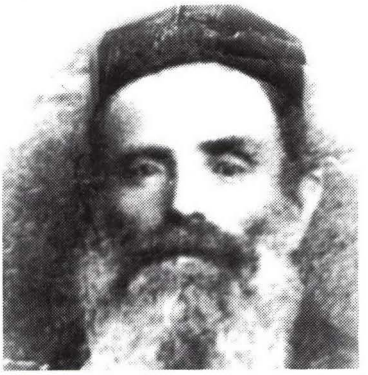
My uncle Shlomo Yaakov, [who was ten years younger than my father] used to visit his sick brother very often, Uncle Shlomo was a good-natured man and very capable. As a young man he worked for an architect and was part of the team that drew up the plans for the Great Synagogue and the Municipal Park in Bialystok.

As a child I was puzzled by the fact that these two brothers had different last names—my father's name was Kantorovitch and my uncle's Rabinovitch. Later I learned the reason: their mother didn't want them to be conscripted into the army, and since an only son was exempted from serving, she registered them with different surnames, and it worked.

(My Uncle Shlomo Yaakov, along with his wife and youngest daughter, were killed by the Nazis. He was immortalized in a painting by his son Ben-Tzion, a noted artist in Paris, known by his professional name *Ben*.)

On March 22, 1920, two weeks before Passover, my father died. Before he died he requested that he be dressed in a white shirt and that my uncle be summoned. He was then

propped up in bed and held up as he recited the *vidu*, the confessional prayer. He turned his head to the wall and murmured several times, *"Kinderlekh, Kinderlekh"* and then he drew his last breath. It was the first time in my life that I had seen a human being die. I was unable to cry, but a heavy sadness enveloped me. I wanted to run away somewhere and escape from my sorrow. The only place I could run to was a movie theatre, and no one knew where I went.





Manya's parents: Zechariah Joseph and Kayla Kantorovitch.

My father left the world a broken man. The hard life of the Jews in Russia and Poland at the turn of the century affected our family deeply. For a Jewish husband who was basically a student of sacred learning it was difficult to support a large family, and although he tried various ways of earning a livelihood none of them succeeded. The entire burden therefore fell upon my mother.

After she gave birth to her ninth child (one little girl had died before I was born), she went to Bialystok and learned the trade of baking pastries. When she returned to Sokolki she taught that trade to my brother Abba. When they finished baking the goods, they would pack the pastries in boxes, and Mother delivered them to Krinik and other nearby towns for sale. She travelled with the help of an old peasant whom we called *Dziadek* (grandfather), in summer by wagon and in winter by sleigh.

My sister Hannah was a teacher of Russian. After she qualified, she began giving private lessons, mostly to young

women who came to the house. She taught me to read and write. She also taught my brother Yekhiel (Julius) and was so successful that he was admitted to a Russian *gymnazie* (high school). My father used to grumble that she was 'corrupting' all the children, turning them into *goyim*, and that Jewishness in our family would end with him. Hannah was my spiritual mentor. Mother was always too busy earning a living and could not spend much time with the children.

One summer, when I was about five, Hannah took me on vacation to Sidri, a small town nearby. The natural beauty of that hamlet is still etched in my memory. Years later I wrote a poem about it called "Mein Shtetele" which I published in *Komunar*.

Sokolki was famous for its tanneries and leather products. My oldest brother Hershel worked as a skinner in one of those tanneries. He lived in his own little house, which also served as a meeting-place for young people who had been influenced by the 1905 revolutionary movement. Later, when pogroms broke out in Bialystok and other cities, Hershel and his friends organized a Jewish Self-Defense. From 'unknown sources' he acquired weapons and hid them in a hay wagon. He was arrested and faced trial and probable exile to Siberia, but Mother made the long trip to Grodno to see the Governor. She handed him an envelope containing a hundred rubles, and the trial never took place.

In 1910 Hershel emigrated to Eretz Israel. A year later Hannah followed him, then Yekhiel did the same. Left at home, besides my parents and grandmother, were Abba, Faivl (a bootmaker), the younger boys Shimon and Mayer, and I. From the letters that came from Eretz Israel we learned that Hershel was digging wells in the desert—now Tel Aviv. He was also an armed guard in an orchard. Hannah was picking oranges in Rishon L'Tzion. Yekhiel was studying at the high school in Herzlia.

(During World War I, Hershel was expelled from Eretz Israel by the Turkish government. He then went to Sydney,

Australia, where he changed his name to George Kantor. His only daughter, Canadian writer and novelist Aviva Layton, now married to Leon Whiteson, himself an architect and writer, presently lives in Los Angeles. Yekhiel was mobilized as an officer in the Turkish army.)

Around this time, Abba suffered a nervous breakdown, which the doctors said was due to overwork. For a while he stayed at home, but then he was admitted to a hospital near Grodno. Shortly afterwards we received news of his death. We never learned where he was buried.

In 1912 we moved to Bialystok, bought a small house on the *Breyte Piaskes* and set up a bakery there. The two younger boys, Shimon and Mayer, became Mother's assistants. My brother Faivl married and moved to his own apartment.

In Eretz Israel Hannah fell ill with malaria, and just before the outbreak of World War I she came back home. When she recovered from her illness she turned her attention on me—I had been a little neglected. She gave me a good scrubbing, bought me a new dress and enrolled me in Gutman's *gymnazie*.

The Germans had already occupied Bialystok, and the language of instruction in the schools was German. In addition to German, we studied French and the Bible in Hebrew. It is remarkable how young children can so easily learn three languages, in addition to other subjects in the curriculum. Some facility in those languages has remained with me to this day. When the Germans left and the Poles reoccupied Bialystok, Polish became the language of instruction once more.

In the spring of 1920 the Poalei Zion in our city learned that two of their members from Minsk had been arrested by the local Polish authorities and charged with espionage. One of them was named Lipshitz (no relation to my future husband). Everything possible had to be done to get them out quickly, because their lives were in danger. Hannah, despite her well-advanced pregnancy, took meals to her comrades in prison every day. The organization succeeded

in bribing a guard and that's how Lipshitz was smuggled out. The other prisoner fell ill and was moved to a hospital. Some time later both of them managed to cross the border and return to their families in Minsk.

In May, Hannah gave birth to a beautiful blue-eyed baby, who was named Joseph Zechariah, after my father. The joy in our family was boundless.

Soon after, Poland and the newly established Soviet regime were at war: the Red Army advanced rapidly, capturing vast areas east of the Vistula. Anti-Semitism grew more intense in Poland and the persecution of radical leaders was stepped up; the nationalist *Endek* (National Democratic) press was filled with Jew-baiting articles, and placards were posted all over the city with anti-Semitic caricatures and slogans against the "Jew-Communists."

Meanwhile the Red Army continued to move closer and closer to Bialystok. The Polish army retreated, the shooting died down and the city was relatively quiet as the Bolsheviks were about to enter. We had hung blankets over all our windows, so that no light could be seen from the outside. The gate of our courtyard was locked and barred with a heavy beam. I was staying with my sister, helping her with the baby. On the evening before the Bolsheviks rode into Bialystok, there was a loud banging on our door. Five Polish soldiers, with revolvers in their hands, burst into the house. One of them put his gun to Hannah's head and yelled "Give us your money!"

Hannah remained calm. She had thirty dollars in the house, which she had received from America, and had hidden behind the wallpaper in a corner of the room. She went directly to the hiding-place, took the money out and handed it to the soldier. He began ripping the wallpaper off in other parts of the room, while the other soldiers turned the house upside down looking for valuables. They sifted the ashes in the stove. They even searched the baby's crib.

It happened that I was in bed with a cold. When I heard the commotion I started screaming. One of the soldiers put his hand over my mouth and stuck his revolver in my face.

I could feel the cold metal of the gun on my skin. "Quiet or I'll shoot!" he yelled. I stopped screaming.

The soldiers grabbed some things and stormed out. The next day we learned that these same thugs had raided the "Narrow Sands" and killed Hershel Grochowski, an ironmonger. We also learned that our courtyard gate had been opened for the soldiers by our landlord Zywinski.

The Red Amy continued its advance and reached the gates of Warsaw. The Bolshevik offensive reached the outskirts of Warsaw. The French government, alarmed by the progress of the Red Army, intervened by sending in its Army, under the leadership of General Weygand. In the decisive battle that followed, the Bolsheviks were soundly defeated and driven back as far as the Ukraine. In Bialystok there was panic. All day long, wagons carrying Russian soldiers and their weapons rolled eastward through the city.

Hannah came running home, packed up a few necessities and rushed over to Mama's house with the baby. With her was Devorah Bialy, an orphan of about my age who lived nearby and helped her with the child. My brother-in-law Aaron rushed home from the bakery. They all said a hurried goodbye and ran to the railroad station.

I pleaded with my mother to let me go with them. She was so bewildered that she couldn't answer me, so I ran to the station, where a line of freight cars stood waiting, jammed full with people. The train was just about to pull away. I ran alongside the cars, calling "Hannah! Hannah!" At the last moment, as the train started moving, I heard her voice. Someone stretched out a hand and pulled me up.

For three days that train crawled over the 150 kilometres to Minsk, frequently shunted into sidings, so that the military trains might go through.

Many of the young people from Bialystok who hadn't been able to get on the train started out on foot. Some of them were caught by Polish soldiers and shot. A year later, when I began to get letters from home, I learned that every day my mother had gone to look at the bodies that were brought back to the city. She wanted to see if any of them were her children. I also learned that my family had heard rumors

that I had died in Vitebsk, and my Uncle Shlomo Yaakov had said *kaddish* for me for an entire year.

When the train finally arrived in Minsk, Aaron went directly to the Poalei Zion Club to get Lipshitz's address. We rode to his home, where his wife, an actress, welcomed us with open arms. To Hannah she said: "I shall never be able to repay you for saving my husband's life. You can all stay here with me as long as you wish."

But we were not destined to stay there very long. The battle-front kept moving closer to Minsk. We had to get away.

This time we headed for Vitebsk in a crowded passenger train. On the way, we were treated to another portion of anti-Semitism. A Soviet army officer, obviously drunk, made a long, vitriolic speech about how there were too many Jews on the train and that they had taken the best seats. My sister Hannah did not let him get away with it.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHILDREN'S COMMUNE IN VITEBSK

The first offer of help we received in Vitebsk came from people in the Left Poalei Zion, which at that time was still legal. They assigned my friend Devorah and me to the Seventh Jewish Children's Commune, and before long Hannah was there too, working as a teacher. She and her husband and their child lived in a small room on the premises. It was already October. There was no wood for a fire and the autumn chill pervaded the whole house.

Later that month the teachers from Malachovka came to the commune to recruit some of the older children for a new Jewish Children's Commune, and Devorah and I signed up. Thus began our life in the newly formed Twelfth Jewish Children's Work Commune.

To house the new commune, the city administration had designated a two-story building on the bank of the Dvina River, near Vitebsk, at 1/2 Vodoprovodnaya Naberezhnaya Street, which was close to the municipal waterworks. Although the house sat on a fairly large and attractive lot, the interior had been grossly neglected: it was very dirty, all the windows were broken, and a frigid wind blew the dust from room to room. The children and the teachers did their best to fix up the place, but it was no easy task.

To illustrate how much work was required to put some semblance of order into that building, let me quote from our own writings about those early days, published in *Komunar* Number 6.

Soreta writes:

When we arrived at the Twelfth Commune, Devorah, Margolia and the teachers were already there. The first thing I did was inspect the house. It made an awful impression on me. Dark, cold, cavernous rooms. Dirt everywhere. I was sure we'd never manage to make it habitable. We lit the stove in one of the rooms and made some tea. Miss Ida suggested that we select one of the children to be in charge of the food products, which would be a more organized way of going about it. For that job we chose Devorah Bialy. This made us all feel better and we went to bed. Thus ended my first evening in the commune.

Sorka writes:

At first, I had some peculiar feelings about the commune. The dining room was tiny. Margolia's room, where we all used to gather, was all cluttered up. The other rooms were filthy. There weren't many children in the commune and it didn't seem to be a very happy place. At night we slept on bare wooden beds; during the day they were used as dining tables. But once we began sewing some straw mattresses, things began looking brighter.

Mishka Seligson writes:

As soon as I arrived in the commune, I was taken to the dining room. It looked more like a stable. Nechama and her committee were there. A little later the room was cleaned up and I began to see that it was, indeed, a dining-room. That cheered me up.

Julius Freedman writes:

When I came from the Seventh to the Twelfth Commune, I found it cold and dirty. We knocked down a stall and used the wood to light a fire. At first we all lived in one room; it was the bedroom, dining-room and recreation room all in one. We began

cleaning the other rooms and repairing the windows. In a few days, the place was clean. I've learned a lot since then.

Margolia writes:

The room into which we first settled looked like a freight car. The beds were wooden bunks, stacked one upon another. They were piled high with all kinds of goods, bedding, groceries and other assorted items. The three teachers who shared the small adjoining room asked us all to gather for a meeting in the common room. Here they informed us that we, the children, were in charge of the house and would be responsible for its maintenance. We were to build our own lives independently, but they, the teachers, would help us.

When I was chosen to be part of the Textiles Committee, I felt very proud. I could appreciate how different this was from my home in Bialystok, where I was regarded as a child who should not be involved in adult concerns.

* * * * *

The first year at the Twelfth Commune was a very difficult one. The economy of the country was in ruins. There was a serious shortage of food. The currency was almost worthless. I once found a half-million ruble note in the street. I spent it all on a one-pound loaf of bread.

The children were our first concern. Food for the commune came from a government store. We would go there—summer with a cart and winter with a little sleigh—and collect our rations. Meat we got only rarely. There were times when we ate coarse barley three times a day and washed it down with hot water sweetened with saccharine. If a drinking glass broke, we never threw it away, because we couldn't replace it. So we drank out of the chipped glasses, but very carefully.



Children of the Twelfth Jewish Work Commune in Vitebsk (1922). Manya is at the centre of the top row, wearing kerchief.

Our bread contained straw that scratched the insides of our mouths. It wasn't doled out to each child in individual portions, but was cut into slices and set out on platters on the table. The teachers were trying to set an example of good manners. The older children managed to restrain themselves and ate slowly, but the younger ones could not control themselves—they would stuff their mouths, and even before they had swallowed the bread, would grab another slice.

The house was very cold and we didn't have enough firewood. From time to time we were given frozen logs that had probably just been taken off the rafts on the Dvina River. When we sawed them, slivers of ice flew up with the sawdust, and getting the wood to burn was very difficult. It hissed and steamed. When we washed the floors the water froze.



Sewing circle in the Commune, with teacher Leah, left. (1922).

Despite all this, our commune was a model of cleanliness: the beds were made up with clean, white sheets, and the children were always neatly dressed. There was a sewing workshop in the institution and with the help of Leah, one of the teachers who was also a seamstress, we made our own clothes.

For our baths, we were taken to the city. It was a long trip. We had no warm clothing, and in winter our freshly–

washed hair froze stiff and hung down in icicles. So we decided to organize our own bathhouse. There was a little hut in the yard with an old brick oven. We filled it with rocks, lit a fire in it and poured water over the hot stones. The children bathed in the tubs in which we used to wash our clothes, and I remember one *Erev Pesach* we baked cornmeal *matzo* in that same brick oven.

Because of the food shortage, the younger children became weakened, and the physical development of the older children was slowed down. Some contracted scurvy, as a result of the lack of vitamins, and the doctor prescribed ascorbic acid. All these hardships notwithstanding, the activities of the commune, physical and cultural, proceeded normally. We were very proud of our commune, especially of our self-administration, which encouraged initiative and made us eager to work and to learn.

In one of my letters to my brothers in Canada I wrote that they should not call our commune a *priyut* (orphan-home) because that word did not express the essence of our institution at all. It was not an orphanage in the old sense of the word. It had a new form of socialist education, under which thirty friends 8–to–15–years–old live together. Even the teachers were not supervisors, but simply older friends, with more experience, and therefore able to help us when necessary. We were completely independent, responsible for our own lives, which we ourselves were shaping.

This is how we used to spend our days:

At 8 in the morning we got up, cleaned our rooms until 9:30, then had breakfast. Until one o'clock we all worked at our duties, which usually consisted in mending our own clothes and preparing lunch. After lunch came our cultural activities. We studied in accordance with new methods. For example, for nature study we gathered in small groups, observed the processes that take place in nature, and then we wrote essays about what we had seen. We also studied music and art. We had a literary circle that administered a library for the whole commune, and we published our own journal. In summertime we cared for our garden.



Study group in the Commune, with teacher Ida, centre.

I myself worked on the City Committee of the children's communes, which organized conferences and was active in the community at large. Every activity that the commune undertook was organized and carried out by the children.

CHAPTER THREE

HUNGRY TIMES

The winter of 1920-21 was a very severe one. With starvation in the aftermath of the civil war came a typhoid epidemic. People dropped like flies. The disease did not leave our commune unscathed.

Hershke was an ll-year-old boy with red hair, blue eyes and freckles. He had come from the Ukraine. His parents, both active Communists, had been killed by General Denikin's soldiers. Hershke was a quiet child, thoughtful, intelligent, not one to talk about his earlier life. Usually you could find him in a corner somewhere, reading.

One day Hershke complained about not feeling well. He was running a high temperature. The doctor diagnosed it as 'spotted typhus' and had him moved to an isolation barrack, at the opposite end of town. The next morning I took Hershke a pot of food, but when I told the nurse that I had come to see Hershke she looked puzzled, as if she were trying to place the patient I was talking about. Then she suddenly remembered. "Oh, you mean the red-haired boy? Last night . . .he died."

One day I got a message from my brother-in-law Aaron: "Come at once." I hurried over to the Jewish Children's Commune, which was quite a distance away, and was confronted by a distressing scene. Aaron, holding the baby, was pacing back and forth in their small, cold room; the baby was wrapped in a blanket and had a bandage on its head; Hannah lay in bed with a high fever, a victim of

typhoid. Aaron explained that the child had caught cold and developed an ear infection. Because they could not get the required medicines and the doctor did not have the proper instruments, the infection had been neglected; and now the baby needed a mastoid operation.

I took the child from him. The baby was pale and was having difficulty breathing. All that night we took turns walking around the room with the child in our arms. At one point I lay down on the sofa and fell asleep. I don't know how long I slept but I was suddenly awakened by Aaron's tearful cry: "It's all over... it's all over..." The baby had died in his arms.

Hannah lay in a stupor. From time to time she whispered the child's name, but we did not tell her what had happened. In the morning she was moved to the isolation barracks.

Aaron went to the market every day to try and find food to take to Hannah. She gave him her ration of bread, which she was unable to swallow. Aaron suffered terribly from hunger pangs. I, too, went to the market every day. Perhaps a farmer would show up with milk to sell. But almost every store in the marketplace was closed.

The typhus epidemic raged. Hundreds of people died, but by a miracle my sister survived. When we brought her home she looked more dead than alive—emaciated, doubled over, her head shaven. We knew what her first question would be, and we dreaded it. "Where is the baby?" Until this time we had told her that the child was in the hospital, but now we had to tell her the truth. The terrible news shattered her completely. For days she lay in bed, weeping.

When she was strong enough to get up, she insisted that she and Aaron must leave Vitebsk immediately. The next day, they returned to Minsk.

All this had a very depressing effect on me. I could not overcome the feeling of loneliness and desolation. The teachers and children tried to cheer me up and, in time, the work routine in the commune did bring me some relief; but I was left with a persistent longing for my mother and sister and the family.



"The baby had died in his arms."

The war between Poland and the Soviet Union came to an end, and in the summer of 1922 Hannah and Aaron returned to Poland. Mother and my brothers, who by that time were in Canada, reproached her: Why had she left me all alone in Russia? The truth was that I did not want to go back to Poland, even though I had several opportunities to do so. There was something that held me in the commune. I knew that if I went to Bialystok I would never return. I also felt that the Bialystok chapter of our family's history was at an end.

When Poland became an independent state, life for the Jews became even more difficult. The exorbitant taxes, along with the official policies of anti-Semitism, forced many Jews to try to emigrate. My brother Mayer had already emigrated to Germany in 1919; and about that time my brother Shimon had made a down payment of 12,000 marks on a parcel of land in Eretz Israel. He had asked Yekhiel, in Rishon L'Tzion, whether it would be advisable to open a bakery there. Mother was eager to settle in Eretz Israel, because since childhood she had been fascinated by the idea of farming and working on the land.

For me, life in the commune was a succession of new experiences. I was stimulated by the organized life of work-plus-study. The comradeship among the children and the dedication of the teachers were inspiring. And the beauty of the landscape! To some degree, I lost my shyness and my reserve and became creative and socially active. Nevertheless, I missed my family, and a letter from Bialystok or from my brother in Canada meant a great deal to me.

My close friendship with Devorah Bialy alleviated my homesickness. She and I were bound together by our mutual memories of Bialystok and by our experiences in the commune. Whenever she received a letter or package from her brother in America I shared in her happiness. Devorah was a very serious person and an able organizer. Any work committee she was in charge of functioned like clockwork. Whenever she was in charge of the kitchen,

meals were always ready on time and never scorched—no mean achievement when most of the pots and pans were made of skimpy tin. Devorah's group also distinguished itself in gardening duties, while she was constantly striving to deepen her knowledge in the field of nature studies. I loved my friend Devorah and respected her.

In the last half of 1922 the economic situation in the country and in the commune began to improve. From the American Joint Distribution Committee came help: condensed milk, cocoa, rice and other provisions. Crates of shoes arrived—all of them with pointed toes and mostly in small sizes. We used to rummage through the boxes in which the shoes were all mixed together and whenever we found both shoes of a pair a great cheer went up. Also from America came warm clothing. Thanks to this care, the younger children began to look a little healthier, and the older ones blossomed.

There was one burley youngster of about fifteen—Sholem Wittenberg—whom the kids called *Der Borets* (The Boxer) because he had a pair of powerful fists that he used freely whenever anyone started up with him. The Gentile boys in the neighborhood got a good taste of that medicine. The streets around the commune were full of thieves, who once stole a whole shipment of goods that we had received for making clothing for the children.

Sholem was an intelligent youngster who loved to read. But he also liked to play pranks and tease the other children, especially the girls. One day in early spring, when the ice on the river was beginning to break up, we noticed that Sholem was halfway across the river, jumping from ice floe to ice floe. In alarm, the teachers and several of the older children ran down to the riverbank, shouting for him to turn back, and one of our neighbors, a fisherman, even ran down with a large net. But Sholem reassured us. He leaped back across the ice floes without getting wet and then, once returned to the shore, he stepped calmly into the ice-cold water and strolled by us, dripping wet.

That same day we called a special meeting, at which Sholem was sharply reprimanded. Some time later I asked

him why he had done it. "I don't know," he replied. "I guess I was just showing off."

Although the various children's homes were all under the supervision of appropriate government agencies, many of the institutions were in poor condition, and the children there were being neglected. We were the fortunate ones, and the achievements of the Twelfth Children's Commune were on a very high level, due largely to the people in this particular institution. In the reminiscences of her first day in the Twelfth Commune, Sorke wrote:

> Around four o'clock, four children from another Commune—Yankl, Sholem, Binyomke and Mulye—came to visit. They asked to see the administrator. When we told them we didn't have one, they didn't believe us. They went into the next room, lit a fire in the stove and began singing songs about orphanages. One of those songs was very popular at the time. It went like this:
>
> *Ikh vel shtarbn in a priyutish bet,*
> *M'vet mikh bagrobn vi-nisht-iz mistame.*
> *Keyner vet nisht kumen mikh baveynen*
> *Nisht kayn tatte, nisht kayn layblekhe mame...*
>
> (I shall die in the bed of an orphanage,
> They'll probably bury me in an unmarked grave.
> No one will come to mourn for me
> Neither a father, nor my real mother...)

We stood around the stove and sang *Far Di Hentlekh, in Di Ringen* (Hold hands, form circles) and Stera danced. It was a lot of fun.

Yet, for all that, the times were hard. The revolution and the civil war orphaned thousands of children, who grew up living in gangs, with the older kids taking care of the younger ones. In summer they went around barefoot and in rags; in winter, they put on big army jackets, pulled their

hats down over their ears, wrapped their legs in rags, and lived on whatever they could beg or steal. The authorities didn't know what to do with them, and tried putting them in children's homes; but most of them could not accept any discipline and ran away.

The older children in our commune would often go on *subotniks* (volunteer Saturdays) to help clean the roads, repair railway tracks and similar tasks. One day, at the railroad station, we saw the following scene:

On the platform sat a group of homeless children, dirty and in rags. One of the older boys was holding a younger one on his lap and delousing him. On the tracks stood a passenger train. One youngster, his face black with mud and soot, was walking alongside the coaches, playing a harmonica and keeping time with two wooden spoons. From the train windows people were tossing pieces of bread to him, as well as an occasional coin. The conductor chased him away, but the boy kept coming back. After the third whistle blew and the train started to move, the boy, nimble as a cat, dived under a car. There he would find a space into which he could crawl and like many other kids, travel from town to town. Some of those children grew up to be honest; others joined the criminal underworld. And some were killed as they rode the trains in this way.

The natural beauty of the landscape around our commune had its effect on the children. They wrote about the wide Dvina River, the log-rafts, the ships that sailed up and down the forest and the fields. There was no lack of poetry about spring, autumn, and winter snowstorms.

I wrote to my brothers:

> Early spring is the most beautiful time of year for us here. The snow glistens silvery-white on the surface of the river, which meanders along and then vanishes behind the hills. The hillsides have turned black. High on the riverbank stands our house, ringed by trees that are still bare, but studded with swollen buds that will burst open at any moment and release their new leaves to the free, shining

world. The children will sit on the bridge, warming themselves in the newborn sun...

I am sitting here on the veranda that overlooks the river. The dog is jumping happily around me, tugging at me and probably wondering how I can sit still when all other living creatures are so exhilarated. Apparently the canine soul is also stirred by clear, wonderful spring air...



Cildren of the commune at work in the garden. Manya is second on the right (1923).

At the beginning of summer 1922 I wrote to my mother in Bialystok:

> You have no idea how beautiful it is here in the summertime. The starflowers are in bloom all around the house. So are the apple-trees and the cherry-trees. It's hot, but a cool breeze is always blowing from the river. We work in the garden half-undressed, and we all have a healthy tan. People who pass by think it's a children's sanatorium.

Our cultural work found its climax in the concerts that we presented on the first of May and the seventh of November. We wrote the plays ourselves, built the sets and made the costumes. To such events we invited the children and teachers of other communes, as well as other community workers.

We were helped by our teacher Abrasha, a handsome young man with blue eyes and blond curly hair. A Tolstoyan by conviction, he really loved "working the land." He would photograph the children at their various duties, at their studies, at the theatre presentations. He was full of interesting ideas, and the children loved him. Where had he come from? Well, our teacher Nechama went to Moscow to take a refresher course and she brought him back to the commune. Later they were married.

Our art teacher, a painter named Malkin who lived in Vitebsk, helped us with the stage sets. His wife, Rivka Chayot, was my sister's friend from Bialystok. There is a story about Malkin that is still fresh in my memory.

The City Council, on advice of the *Yevsektsie* (Jewish Section of the Communist Party) decided to confiscate the Great Synagogue of Vitebsk and convert it into a Pioneer Club for young people. One Saturday morning the Jews organized a protest demonstration against this plan. They attempted to break into the building, but were dispersed by the mounted militia.

Malkin, who had been commissioned to decorate the walls of the Pioneer Club, then categorically refused to do so. The building thus remained empty for a long time and no Pioneer Club was ever established in there.

Eventually Malkin and his family moved to Moscow, and whenever I visited that city I was a guest in their home. I recall vividly one of those visits. It was the day that Lenin died. All night long, a seemingly endless line of people moved slowly in Red Square, passing before his coffin in the Hall of Trade Unions. The weather was bitterly cold, and people warmed themselves around bonfires. Early on the day of the funeral I went out to Red Square. Although the Malkins lived nearby, on Okhotny Ryad, it wasn't until evening that I was able to push through the crowds and get back to their home.

Moscow had an extraordinary attraction for me. I first saw the city in August 1923. Devorah, Yankl Dworkin, Falia Gutkovich and I had been chosen by the members of the

commune to attend the opening of the Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow. The scope of that exhibition was astonishing: every Soviet republic was represented by its own national production, livestock and agriculture. Trainloads of delegates and visitors came from all corners of the USSR to see the Exhibition and its many pavilions.

When I returned to Vitebsk I began thinking about going to Moscow to study. I wanted to enroll in a medical course at Blonsky's Academy. I always had an aptitude for working with children, and I wanted professional training in child psychology. But my dream of attending the Academy was not to be: I couldn't afford to go.

On the eve of *Yom Kippur*, 1922, I received the sad news: my grandmother had died. She had been our 'second mother' in Bialystok—always cooking, cleaning the house and feeding the children. In homes with a large family, such as ours, the children did not sleep in separate beds. Two at the head of the bed and one at the foot or on a cot, sometimes even on a straw-mattress on the floor—that was the rule, not the exception. I always slept with my grandmother. The foot of the bed was the cat's place, and sometimes she curled around my neck, like a fur collar.

Hannah wrote to me describing how Grandmother had died. Calling my sister closer to her bedside, she said: "Hannah, you're a smart girl! Tell me, is there really life after death? You hear that rooster crowing out in the yard? It, too, wants to live. Pray for me, Hannah. I've hardly lived in this world."

This was true. All her life she had worked hard. Left a young widow with four small children—my mother, nine years old, was the oldest—Grandmother did not like the idea of her children having a stepfather, so she raised them herself, housing and feeding them until they were married.

In our commune there was an accepted attitude toward work and workers: no matter what happens, the work had to be done. The day I received the sad news about Grandmother happened to be a *subotnik* (volunteer day). We were in a race with time to get the fruit picked off the trees

and the vegetables gathered from the garden. Somehow the hard work eased my grief.

The economy of our commune was suddenly enriched: we were given a cow. This was due to the efforts of our teacher, Abrasha. He wanted the children to have milk. He also had a plan for the future, that we should be given an estate and become a farming commune. (In *Komunar* Numbers 4-5 I wrote about our dreams and plans, our hopes and disappointments.)

Yankl Dworkin, a 14–year–old and I were assigned to milk the cow. In the yard there was a little barn where we kept our rabbits. We fenced off a corner for the cow and installed her there. At first we were a bit scared to get too close to her, but we had a lot of help in learning this new skill from Maria, who lived in the neighborhood and worked in the house.

When the cow was ready to calve, the commune went topsy-turvy. Each child had to express an opinion about what kind of calf it should be. Finally Maria announced that the calf was almost ready to be born. Then she went home. All night long the Cow Committee sat in the barn. The poor animal writhed and groaned in pain. The actual delivery began in the middle of the night, and I became more and more frightened and reproached myself for not having asked Maria to stay. I ran to get Nechama to help, but when I reached her bedroom I didn't have the heart to wake her. When I got back to the stall, the newly born calf already lay on a pile of hay and the cow was licking it clean. It was a little red bull with a white spot on its forehead.

When the time came to sell the calf, it was a sad day in the commune. To console the children we bought a curly black sheep which soon became fast friends with the cow and followed her around wherever she went.

* * * * *

My brothers in Canada were unduly worried about me. The newspapers there were full of reports about the famine in Russia. In my letters I told them that the children were

getting enough to eat, that we were provided with everything we needed. (I told them that I myself had gained 13 pounds.) Moreover, you could now buy anything you wanted in the open market, if you had the money. In 1922 the Soviet government introduced a New Economic Policy—NEP. Overnight, stores and businesses were opened, farmers brought their goods to the market and people who had money could buy whatever they wished. The government began stabilizing the currency and introduced the gold ruble.

Occasionally a letter from my brothers was accompanied by a few dollars. But it often happened that someone had opened the envelope and removed the money.

In October 1922, our commune was two years old. We arranged a birthday party at which the children read their reminiscences and impressions of the commune and its beginnings. From the Jewish Commissariat we received gifts—warm scarves for the girls and shirts for the boys. Meanwhile, the letters from Canada became more and more insistent. Mayer lectured me: "When you grow up you'll understand better. Milking cows and picking potatoes is not the main thing in life. In America you can go to school too."

In my reply I assured him that we were not only working but also going to school and that we already had some impressive results to show for our efforts. We had issued five journals; we were studying the works of Yitzhak Leybush Peretz; we had organized study groups for history, nature, mathematics and Russian. I explained how we were studying language: we select a Russian play and each student chooses a role. We perform these plays in the evening and discuss our work, thus learning not only dramatics but public speaking. We were planning to dramatize the stories that we were reading. We would learn writing and grammar, and the history of the times in which the stories took place. "As for my future," I wrote to my brothers, "there are great opportunities here—Jewish technical schools, Jewish universities, and don't forget—*the language used is Yiddish!*"

I concluded that letter with the words: "I am certain that I shall see you all one of these days. I'm very much interested in America. But first I must become independent. I have changed my language of instruction so many times I don't want to do that any more. Don't worry about me. I'm in good health, I feel strong and I'm content with my life."

The Twelfth Jewish Work Commune was designated a model institution. We were given a twelve-acre estate of rich farm land, along with cows and horses, fields, orchards, gardens, woods and buildings. It was a beautiful estate that had once belonged to one of the wealthiest landowners in Vitebsk. The location couldn't have been better—on the riverbank and close to the railroad. Its approach was through a lane bordered by tall poplars and magnificent flowerbeds. In the orchard a stage had been set up. The main building itself had once been a palace. After the revolution it housed a military and agricultural school, where flora from the northwest region of Russia were collected. The overall plan called for the opening of a 7-year Yiddish school in the district for 200 children, in addition to the commune.



Editorial board of the magazine Komunar. Manya is third from the right (1922).

Some of the older children were drawn into youth-work outside the framework of the commune, and I became active in the municipal children's commune. At one of these

meetings I delivered a talk on children's clubs generally, and as a result, I was elected to the commission that was assigned to organize such a club. I was also involved in organizing an event to help starving children in Germany, at which we raised 50 gold rubles.

I began to feel, however, that I was outgrowing the children's commune, and asked the Pedagogic Council to release Devorah and me from our duties on the commune committees so that we might work in a wider-ranging community. We were turned down. Instead a new plan was discussed to allow older children to leave the commune and, together with other young people, to form a Jewish agricultural youth farm. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of this plan.

CHAPTER FOUR

AT THE TEACHERS' ACADEMY

The older children in the commune were beginning to feel restless. Perhaps that is characteristic of adolescents, but it seemed possible that life in the commune was inhibiting our intellectual growth. In any case, it became clear that the older children had reached a time when they should leave the protected, collective life of the children's home and begin their own personal development.

For two-and-a-half years I had been happy in the commune. I graduated from the school, which in itself was a miniature society. I had learned to stand up for my rights, to criticize that which I believed to be unfair and to accept criticism when I deserved it. In a word, I had learned how to challenge, as well as how to defend. But I had also grown up; the society of younger children had become too restrictive for me. After you've been stewing in your own juice for a few years, the juice is used up, you dry out, you grow dissatisfied, and you become moody.

In September 1923, several of the older children went away to school. Sholem Wittenberg, who had always been interested in political-social studies, went to Minsk. Doba enrolled in a technical school. Devorah went to an agricultural college in Kiev. I was accepted into the Esther Frumkin Pedagogic Academy, which was located in the center of Vitebsk. I still had to stay at the commune, however, because there was no room in the Academy's dormitory.

The school was housed on the first floor of a two-storey building. On the second floor was located a 7-year primary school. On my first day there, I walked into an embarrassing situation because I looked much younger than my age. As I came into the classroom the teacher said: "Little girl, the children's classes are on the second floor..."

The student body was diverse. There were younger people who came from other schools, as well as older people, workers mostly from Byelorussia and the Ukraine, as well as from Uman, who were there to augment their knowledge and become Yiddish teachers. The transition from the highly structured life in the commune to the more adult environment in the Academy was not easy for me. And because of the long journey to my quarters in the commune it was impossible for me to attend the evening lectures or participate in all the groups I had registered for. I simply did not have the energy to make a second trip into the city and then back again. This state of affairs sometimes depressed me, but when one is young, such bad feelings don't last long. You go through a sort of zig-zag of emotions that's hard to explain, especially to yourself.

Our October celebration in the commune went well that year. I wrote a play in verse, interspersed with songs, which as it turned out, was the last time I would do this in the commune. I also had a big part in the play; in fact, I played three roles. We had only one week for rehearsals, but everything went smoothly and we had a successful performance. It was a season for partying. That same week I went to a different party every evening and all of them lasted till way past midnight.

Then came the vacation period and my mood changed. I couldn't do any work, and just sat in the commune feeling as if I were suffocating. My childhood was definitely over. I had no further interest in the life of the commune. We were in the dead of winter, and the winds blowing off the river piled snowdrifts that were higher than our heads.

The new year arrived and the commune held its annual New Year's party. The next day I went off to the Academy



Students of the Teachers' Academy in Vitebsk. Manya is second from the right, fourth row.

and partied again until four o'clock in the morning. After the party we all got into *droshkys* (horse-drawn carriages) and rode into 1924—my fourth year in Russia.

I finally found a place in the dormitory. The building was old but clean, with whitewashed walls. The rooms, each shared by three students, had high ceilings and big windows. Of my two roommates I remember Charna most clearly: she was tall, big-boned and she always had a serious expression. Though no older than I, she was more mature, and created around her an aura of serenity, of industriousness. Since there was a shortage of books at that time, whenever we received an important book, she would read it aloud to her two roommates.

The furnishings in the dormitory were primitive. There were basins and running water, but no bathrooms, so from time to time we were given passes to the city baths. The bathing schedules were posted on the walls, and going to take a bath was a great event. Such excitement. Everyone was busy washing and ironing—not that we had much clothing, but no one felt deprived. The lack of material possessions didn't worry people much in those days.

The kitchen and dining room were in the same building as the classrooms. We were given three meals a day—simple food, but nourishing enough.

The Pedagogic Academy was completely different from that in the commune: no longer were our lives organized for us, except for the discipline of studying. Here there was a fellowship among the students and a comradely relationship with the teachers and the administrators. The students were provided with room and board plus a small stipend and free train tickets for a trip home during vacations. It was a four-year course, the first three years being a middle-school program. During the fourth year the concentration was on pedagogy and practice teaching in a primary school.

There was a sense of urgency in completing the four-year curriculum. The times we were living in demanded the rapid preparation of Yiddish teachers, for many Yiddish schools were being opened and there was a shortage of teachers. In addition, there was also a rapid growth of Yiddish cultural institutions, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, theaters, government agencies, academies of higher learning, even courts that were conducted in the Yiddish language. Writers were creating a rich Yiddish literature. It had therefore become a matter of urgency to develop a Yiddish intelligentsia that could serve the large variety of cultural institutions. To accommodate this need, Yiddish teacher seminars were opened in Vitebsk, Minsk, Kiev and other cities.

One gets an inkling of the rapid growth of Yiddish schools and cultural institutions in the Soviet Union from an article written by Esther Rosenthal-Shneiderman (a teacher in that school system) about a Yiddish pedagogic conference held in Moscow in 1926: "Yiddish state schools in the Soviet Union now have an enrollment of 150,000 children. In the past year the number has jumped by 25%.... 750 new Yiddish schools have already been opened.... Sh. Palatnik's forecast seems fantastic—that in the next five years the number of Yiddish schools will be increased to 1000!"

Quoting this, Shneiderman adds, in an article in *Zukunft* (1976): "That was 1926, the Golden Age of Yiddish cultural development in the Soviet Union..."

Students in the fourth (and last) year of our course had to be provided with high boots, because most of them had to practice teaching in small towns, where the autumn rains and the deep mud made high boots a necessity.

The greatest emphasis in our studies was placed on Yiddish language, Yiddish literature, mathematics, nature studies and political science. I don't recall that we ever studied any Jewish history. Of the teachers, I remember most clearly Zabludovsky, a tall, handsome man with a goatee. Also, Kaletsky, our math teacher. He was slightly hunchbacked, with a shock of grey hair, a black moustache and smiling eyes. Both of the men came from Bialystok.

Although I've forgotten the name of our literature teacher, I remember the fervor with which he read to us from Peretz, especially *Di Goldene Keyt* (The Golden Chain). The teacher came from a Hasidic family, and was ecstatic when he spoke of Reb Shlomo, the hero of the story, who strives to see that the spirit of the Holy Sabbath day should never end. Reb Shlomo kept putting off the *Havdala* service because that would bring back the ordinary weekdays, with their attendant worries and hardships.

We, students, were inspired by the words that I.L. Peretz put in Shlomo's mouth:

> Let the world be destroyed!
> And we, the shabbes-and-yomtov Jews,
> We Jews with the "special Shabbes soul,"
> Will walk across its ruins,
> Singing and dancing...
> We Sabbath-and-holiday Jews,
> We don't ask, we don't beg,
> For we are strong and proud...

To these exalted words we gave our own interpretation: We must destroy the old order and build a new, beautiful world. At that time, in the springtime of our lives and in the springtime of the revolution, we did not yet know that there

would come a time when not only the old world but also the new one would destroy not only Peretz's shabbes-and-yomtov Jews, but also our pure, childish faith. But in those days that's how we really felt: proud, singing Jews.



Study group at Teachers' Academy in Vitebsk. Manya is third from the left, front row (1924).

We studied hard, but we also enjoyed ourselves. We had parties galore; we put out a 'living newspaper'; we made up rhymed couplets parodying our teachers and other students. On one such occasion, I wrote a rhymed parody, to the tune of a popular folk song, about the teachers and students. One of the students was a fellow named Dunietz. (I don't remember his first name.) He was one of the older students, a serious and intelligent young man who taught Political Economy in the lower grades. After graduation he was sent by the Party to Minsk, where he was appointed leader of the Communist Party organization. After the Stalinist crimes were exposed in the famous speech of Nikita Khrushchev, at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, it became known that Dunietz

was among the many Jewish intellectuals who had perished in the purges.

We took part in activities outside the framework of the Academy: public meetings, literary lectures, other events. Occasionally, writers would come from Moscow, Kiev or Minsk as visiting lecturers. It is the unusual that sticks in the memory. I recall the time when the Yiddish poet Aaron Kushnirov spoke to us. When he finished his prepared remarks he struck a dramatic pose and began a recitation of one of his own poems. In the middle of a verse he suddenly stopped—he could not remember the rest of the poem. Embarrassed, he apologized for not having a copy of his book with him.

Quite a few amorous relationships developed among the students. There was a young student, Jacob Spitzer, who came from Uman in the Ukraine. He was very attractive, with a mop of curly blond hair and blue eyes. He was extremely popular with the girls. I took a liking to him, but was too shy to make him aware of that fact. I remember one evening, during a general students' meeting in the Academy, I kept staring at Jacob, who was sitting at the other end of the room. I left before the meeting was over and went up to my room. I opened the window and looked out. It was a warm evening in May. The air was thick with the aroma of blooming lilac; the sky was full of a myriad bright stars. Looking at the stars, I suddenly had the sensation of floating in the air and embracing the whole universe.

The students took advantage of the free transportation, provided by the government. Some of us travelled during school breaks, either in groups or individually, to many places in the Soviet Union. On one of my trips to Moscow, I brought back a gift for Jacob. We happened to be alone in the corridor when I mustered enough courage, went over to Jacob and gave him the gift. He embraced me and tried to kiss me. But I instinctively turned and walked away. I could never really understand why I defied my desire to be kissed by the young man of whom I was enamored.



On vacation in Simeyz (Crimea). Manya is first on the left, top row (1925).

Was it subconscious fear that I may be hurt in the long run, or was it the result of a deep-seated, age-old notion of Jewish family upbringing, that a girl must preserve her purity?

As I've already mentioned, my brothers in Canada occasionally sent me a few dollars. With this and with the free train tickets given to students, I was able to travel to Moscow, Leningrad and other cities, either by myself or with other students.

On one visit to Moscow I went to a performance by the Jewish State Theatre—which was then flourishing—to see Shlomo Mikhoels and Binyomin Zuskin in Sholem Aleichem's play, *200,000.* I was impressed by their expressionist style of acting and by the set designs of the Meyerhold Theater. I visited the Kremlin, museums and art galleries, and many historical places. In Leningrad I visited the Hermitage, the Royal Palace on Tsarskoya Sielo and the *Aurora*, the ship that fired the first shot at the Tsar's palace in the 1917 revolution

I spent two summers in the Crimea, at Simeyz on the Black Sea. When the train crossed the narrow strip of land that links the peninsula with Perekop in the Ukraine, one of the passengers told me that during the Civil War the water

on both sides was choked with corpses. Bitter battles had been fought there between the Red Army and the White Guardists. Now it was the site of a magnificent vacation resort. The sea and the warm climate brought people of all classes—government officials and factory workers alike—to this spa.

My own accommodations were very modest. I stayed at the home of a Tatar family. Held together by clay, the house had no windows, so that the heat would not get in. I slept on the earthen floor on a thin mattress.

When my money ran out, the young Tatar women took me along to their jobs—picking grapes that grew on terraces on the hillside. Unaccustomed to working in the heat, I was extremely tired and thirsty by noon. The girls took me into a cool wine cellar, where one of them filled a glass with white wine and handed it to me. The others stood around me in a circle, waiting to see what would happen. (They themselves were forbidden by their religion to "imbibe.") I gulped down the cold liquid and to their amazement no disaster struck me. But I have to admit that my legs started to feel a bit heavy, and I fell sound asleep among the small trees.



Students of Teachers' Academy. Manya is in the first row on the right (1925).

On my first day in Simeyz a friend and I ran down to the beach, where we sat down to cool off in the shade of a high cliff. Suddenly we became aware that a little further down the beach there were groups of people, women and children, in the nude. And further along were men, also nude—in those days there weren't enough bathing suits to go around. My friend swore she would never go into the water that way. But a few days later both of us were down there with all the other women on the beach, swimming and sunbathing. Whenever we saw a man in the distance whom we recognized, we covered our faces. Lying on the beach in the nude seemed such a natural thing to do, that no one was shocked by it.

* * *

Jacob's friend David, was a gentle young man. On many occasions he told me that he loved me, but I did not share his feelings. When at the end of the third school year I decided to go to Canada, David accompanied me to the station. I cannot remember what we talked about, but I remember my excitement about the forthcoming trip. The train arrived and we said goodbye. I looked out from the window and waved. David was leaning against a wall, a sad, dejected look on his face. I could not forget that look for a very long time.

When Lenin died and Stalin became General Secretary of the Communist Party, a great debate began, and whole pages of *Pravda* were given to the "struggle against Trotskyism." Groups of us met to discuss whether or not it was possible to "build socialism in one country." At that time we knew nothing of—nor could we even have imagined—the bloody consequences of this ideological struggle in the Communist Party.

Fortunately for me, as Stalinism took hold, I was no longer in Russia. In September 1926, I left for Canada. And among the possessions I took with me was a certificate from the Pedagogical Academy (written in Yiddish) which read:

This is to certify that Kantorovich Margolia arrived at the Vitebsk Yiddish Pedagogic Academy in 1923 and completed three courses of study. She did not take the fourth year course because in 1926 she left for America.

Signed by: L. Koletsky, *Director*,
and Woltchak, *Business Manager.*

CHAPTER FIVE

I GO TO CANADA

In March my brothers in Canada brought over the rest of the family from Bialystok, and sent a steamship ticket for me. The temptation of seeing my family and the opportunity to visit America were too great to resist. But because I thought I would return to Vitebsk to complete my course at the Pedagogic Academy, I made sure to get a 'return trip' passport. (In those days, such passport fees were very high.)

I was a member of *Komsomol*, the Communist youth movement, and wondered if there was such a movement in Canada, and how I might get in touch with it. I therefore had gone to the Youth office of the *Comintern* in Moscow before leaving Russia and asked to see the Canadian representative. They referred me to a handsome, red-haired young man, who assured me that, indeed, there was a Communist youth movement in Canada and that the comrades there "would know where to find me." When I was in Canada, I learned that the red-haired young man was Stewart Smith, who later became one of the leaders of the Canadian Communist Party. He, along with many others, left the Party in 1956, after the revelations at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

I arrived in Rotterdam two days after my ship had set sail for Canada. Since this ship made the voyage only once a month, I had to wait until there were enough passengers signed on for the next trip. In Rotterdam I met several

young women who were also going to Canada. Together we explored the beautiful sights of the city and admired its shops and the variety of merchandise. I bought myself a pretty dress and a pair of elegant shoes.

At last we set out to sea on the Dutch liner *Wyndham*, which docked in Halifax. From there I took the train to Montreal, where I was greeted by my sister Hannah, her husband Aaron, my brothers Shimon and Mayer, and a few family friends. At first, however, none of them recognized me as I approached Hannah. When I mentioned my name, she let out a shriek:

"Look at her! A real person! A healthy girl with rosy cheeks!" Apparently my healthy appearance relieved her of feelings of guilt, for having left me behind.

At their home, everything was ready for my reception. My brother Fayvel and his family were waiting for me, as were Hannah's three small children. Most important, my mother was there too, and I embraced her fondly. I had never before seen her cry, but at that moment her eyes glistened with tears of happiness. I looked at her more closely. She seemed older, and her shoulders were beginning to sag. But, for all that, she was soon busy in the kitchen, preparing the festive meal.

The evening passed with everyone in a joyous mood, accompanied by conversation, questions and answers, outbursts of laughter and exclamations whenever I recognized friends and neighbours from the old country.

The next day I had to begin thinking about more practical matters. How would I earn my living here? Not yet fully prepared to become a teacher, I decided it would be prudent to learn a trade. On Main Street in Montreal there was a ladies' hat store, in the back of which stood several machines for making straw hats. The owner of the business 'taught' the new immigrants how to make a hat-frame out of straw, how to start on the rest of the hat—and then left them to sink or swim. For this 'training' his fee was a hundred dollars, a substantial amount in those days. He promised $50 a week wages after a couple of weeks. Since

he didn't keep his students long enough to teach them anything, he produced mostly incompetents. I was one of his victims, but I did manage to get a job in a hat shop. At the height of the season even unqualified workers like me could find employment at the trade.

In September, 1927, I went to work as a Yiddish teacher in the Peretz School on DeBullion Street where the well-known pedagogue and writer, the late Jacob Zipper, was then director. It was a supplementary school, which the children attended in the afternoons. The curriculum included Yiddish language and literature, writing and singing. Since it was my first experience in classroom teaching, I had a problem with discipline, but Jacob Zipper encouraged me and assured me that I would become a good teacher.

The other teachers on the staff were very competent and gifted. The Peretz School had built around itself a commendable social and cultural environment.



At the World Conference on Jewish Education in Jerusalem, July 1962. Manya is second from left, first row.

In 1926 Montreal had the largest Jewish community in Canada, with almost 60,000 of the country's total of 150,000. It also had a roster of well established Jewish

cultural institutions: the Peretz School; the Folkshule under the noted educator and cultural leader, Shlomo Weisman; the *Folks Bibliotek* (Jewish Public Library), established by the Yiddish and Hebrew writer Reuben Brainin; the daily Yiddish newspaper *Kanader Adler* (Canadian Eagle) founded by Hirsh Wolofsky, prominent community leader and edited at that time by Israel Rabinowicz, writer and musicologist.

The Jewish Library was already beginning to play an important role in the cultural life of Montreal's Jews, for in addition to lending books, it sponsored lectures and literary evenings. The library and the newspaper attracted a group of Yiddish writers and poets, including Ida Maza, I.J. Segal, Moishe Shafir, Sh. Perl, Sholem Shtern and others. Later more Yiddish writers settled in Montreal, among them Melekh Ravitch, Rochl Korn, Israel Shtern and others. They all occupied prominent positons in Yiddish literature.

Adjusting to the new environment of Canada was very difficult for me. Although material conditions were better, spiritually I felt disappointed. After the richness of Yiddish cultural life in the Soviet Union, and after the mood of exhilaration that inspired the young people in the early years of the October Revolution, the left-wing movement in Montreal seemed provincial and irrelevant.

When I completed the first season at the Peretz School, I decided to take a trip to New York. There were two reasons for my decision. I felt that I still didn't have sufficient knowledge to be a good teacher. In New York City there was a Jewish Teachers' Seminary that had evening classes, and I saw an opportunity to improve my training. And the concentration of Jewish cultural forces and activities in New York was tremendously attractive to me.

At that time, my brother Yekhiel was living in New York. With his help I was able to move in with a family friend in the Bronx, on Crotona Park North, which in those days was a clean and beautiful neighbourhood. My plan was to find work in a school or kindergarten, and in the evenings to attend classes. But although Jacob Zipper had given me a written recommendation, I could not find work in any

Jewish school. I found employment in a ladies' hat factory and joined the Millinery Workers' Union.

I registered for the full course at the Teachers' Seminary, four evenings a week, from 7 to 10. Teachers were highly qualified, every one a well-known personality in his field. Joseph Opatoshu, renowned Yiddish writer, taught writing style and literature; Sh. Niger, literary critic, taught Yiddish children's literature; Hayim Schauss taught Jewish history; Professor Ginsberg algebra; Hayim Greenberg, world literature and philosophy. In addition, there were classes in English, Hebrew and Child Psychology. I jumped at the chance to learn and to absorb as much as my time and strength would permit.

In addition to my courses at the Seminary, there were always other stimulating events that took place in New York. I recall debates between Moishe Olgin and Dr. Hayim Zhitlovsky, or between Olgin and Sh. Niger; an evening with Moishe Nadir, or a Leivick evening. I saw many plays in Maurice Schwartz's Art Theater. And there were Isadora Duncan's dance performances with the children of her school. There was the Metropolitan Opera, the Ballet, and I even went to sports events at Madison Square Garden.

It was in New York that I met Ethel Davidson, a former student of the Vitebsk Pedagogic Academy. In America she had married Zalman Davidson, a grand-nephew of Mendele Mocher Sforim, the 'grandfather' of Yiddish literature. Zalman had in his possession some manuscripts written by his great-uncle. The Davidsons introduced me to exciting groups of writers and cultural leaders.

I would leave the house at six in the morning and ride to my job in the packed subway. After work I would go to classes at the Seminary or to some cultural event, and return at midnight or later. During weekends I was busy with my Seminary homework.

But nine months of this intensive life took their toll: I was perpetually tired, and my fatigue was relieved only by the loving, impassioned letters from the man who was to become my husband, Sam Lipshitz.

In June 1927, after the final exams at the Seminary, I returned to Montreal.

CHAPTER SIX

A NEW DIRECTION IN MY LIFE

In 1929, Sam Lipshitz, who worked as assistant librarian in the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, was fired from his job because of events in Eretz Israel, when Arab terrorists murdered 69 *Yeshiva* students in Hebron. Following the Moscow line, the Communist Party of Canada hailed that Arab pogrom as a revolt against British imperialism. Not surprisingly, the Jewish community in Canada was outraged. As a result, Israel Rabinowitch, editor of the *Kanader Adler* and chairman of the library's board, called Sam into his office and told him that anyone who identifies with the Communist Party's position in this matter, could no longer work for a Jewish public institution.

Sam then went to Toronto and found work as a typesetter in *Der Yidisher Journal*, a Toronto daily newspaper.

On January 20, 1930, Sam and I were married.

My brothers Shimon and Mayer Cantor were at that time owners of the Bucharest Hall on Main Street in Montreal, where wedding parties and similar celebrations were held. Without consulting us, they went ahead and arranged for a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. (I had previously asked Mayer to keep the ceremonial part to an absolute minimum.) When Sam and I entered the hall we were taken aback by the festive tables, the flowers, the red carpets, the traditional *chupah* and the large crowd of family and friends who had been invited.

Mother beamed with pleasure. Mayer had another surprise

for us. Under his jacket he had concealed two little white doves, their feet tied together by a long white ribbon. As soon as the ceremony was finished, and while we were still standing under the *chupah*, he released the doves and they fluttered above our heads, winding the ribbon around us.

It was a joyous beginning, but it resulted in a lot of heartache for Sam and me. A few days after the wedding, Philip Halpern, editor of *Der Kamf*, organ of the Jewish Communist movement, printed a sharply worded editorial headed "KOMSOMOLS ARE MARRIED BY A RABBI UNDER A CHUPAH." Among other things he wrote: "Their justification for this is that they did it out of consideration for the feelings of their elderly mother. Well, what will they do when the time comes to mount the barricades, will they also ask permission from their mother?"

When we returned to Toronto, the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth Organization summoned both of us to a special meeting at which we were charged with conduct unbecoming young communists. The entire meeting was run like a trial. The 'prosecution' made long speeches about our tasks as young Communists in the struggle against religion. Finally they asked Sam what he had to say in his own defense. Very calmly, Sam replied:

"I acknowledge that I made a mistake and I promise that I shall never do this again."

The strained atmosphere relaxed as everyone burst out laughing. And Sam has kept his promise.

As time went on, this manner of combatting the influence of organized religion by arranging *Yom Kippur* parties and by mocking deeply rooted Jewish customs and traditions was dropped, perhaps for tactical reasons, because it antagonized so many people.

The beginning of our married life coincided with the first signs of the severe economic crisis of the 1930s. Our blessed country Canada, with apparently inexhaustible natural resources and its abundance of wheat and corn, was gripped by economic paralysis. The number of unemployed workers mounted from day to day. There was

no such thing as unemployment insurance, no assistance from the government, and thousands of jobless workers, especially younger people, hopped freight cars and rode across the length and breadth of our country in search of work. But they rarely found it.

Inside the overflowing silos, that stood on fertile land, the grain rotted and was eaten by mice, while Canadians had no money for bread. The discontent of the suffering population sharpened its militancy: mass demonstrations for jobs and food broke out everywhere; thousands of Canadians from all parts of the country took part in the hunger marches to the nation's capital.

This discontent took other forms, however. A fascist movement emerged, led by Adrian Arcand in Quebec. Some government circles and sections of big business, while professing to be alarmed by this movement, secretly supported the budding fascist organizations. The government, for its part, revived Section 98 of the criminal code which prohibited "advocacy of the overthrow of the government by force and violence." That law provided that anyone whom the government considered "a subversive element" could be arrested and sent to prison for many years. (Section 98 which was adopted in 1919 during the Winnipeg general strike, had never before been invoked.)

In Europe, fascism had gone on the offensive, as Hitler's rule spread over large areas of the continent. The Nazi ideology was also making inroads on this side of the ocean. We were aware of the terrible dangers that faced the Jewish people and we were convinced that the Soviet Union and the world Communist movement were the only forces actively fighting the danger. We, therefore, devoted all our energies to the work of the left-wing movement.

Naturally, these trying times affected our personal lives as well. When our first child was about to be born, we had no money even for the doctor's modest fee. I therefore went to stay with my mother in Montreal, and there, on March 7, 1931, our daughter, May, was born.

The growth of fascism and Nazism in Europe and the

threat this represented to the Jewish people, increased sympathy—among working people and intellectuals—for the political left, which was perceived as the leading force in the struggle against war and fascism. The civil war in Spain aroused people to action, and disproportionately large numbers of Jews volunteered for the International Brigades fighting on the side of the Spanish Republic. Canadian volunteers organized the MacKenzie-Papineau Batallion. Jews and non-Jews alike went overseas to do battle against Franco's fascists. Several of our close friends died on the battlefields.

This was the burgeoning period of the general Communist movement, including its Jewish section, despite illegality and repression. The left wing movement gained substantial influence among the general population, and its representatives were elected to government bodies, to provincial legislatures, and to city councils—in most cases, from neighbourhoods with substantial Jewish populations.

In the United States and Canada, large social and cultural organizations were built under left-wing Jewish leadership, such as the International Workers Order in the U.S., the United Jewish People's Order in Canada, a network of Jewish children's schools, choruses, theatre groups, newspapers, the *Yiddisher Kultur Farband*, summer camps for children and adults.

With all this activity, the Communist Party needed professional, full-time organizers. Sam was asked to give up his job as a printer and become a Party functionary. Our dedication to the movement left no doubt as to what our answer would be, for we believed that it was the only correct step to take. I didn't give a second thought to the difficulties that would ensue from that decision, especially for me and our child.

Party work kept my husband busy from early morning to late at night—organizational duties, meetings, cross-country trips. The Party had very little money, however, and paid its functionaries a minimal salary. I went to work as a teacher in the Morris Winchevsky Jewish School of the

Labor League, a left-wing fraternal organization in Toronto, which had split off from the Workmen's Circle in 1926. Twenty-five years of my life were to become bound up with that school, except for a brief period after my son Yosl (Joe) was born on June 15, 1938.

In the mid-1930s, disturbing reports began coming from the Soviet Union. The assasination of Kirov and the waves of repression that followed; the show trials against the most prominent leaders of the revolution; the mass arrests; the disappearance of Yiddish writers and cultural leaders such as Moishe Kulbak, Izzi Charik, Moishe Litvakov; the shutting down of the Yiddish newspaper *Emes* and of Yiddish schools. It was very difficult for followers of the left–wing movement and supporters of the Soviet Union to understand. It was their quasi-religious faith that was being tested.

Many intellectuals and working people who grasped the true significance of these events left the movement. Jewish Party activists sought rational explanations: "A natural process of assimilation... a progressive phenomenon... Jewish parents in the Soviet Union don't want to send their children to Yiddish schools, therefore these schools are declining..." These rationalizations, however, did not really answer all the questions. They certainly did not eliminate the unsettling doubts.

Other serious and disturbing questions arose among large sections of the left–wing, pro-Soviet movement at the very beginning of World War II. The shocking news of the Hitler-Stalin pact was devastating. It was incomprehensible that the Soviet Union, which was held up as the "main bulwark against Hitlerism," should suddenly sign a pact with that same bloodthirsty fascist regime. Loyal followers of the Communist movement and Soviet sympathizers found themselves in a state of utter confusion.

The Communist Party, which had followed the line of the Soviet Union, came out against the war, characterizing it as "imperialist". In consequence, the Party was outlawed by the Canadian government under the provisions of the War

Measures Act. Many of its leaders were sent to prison or to internment camps. Others went underground. My husband was one of those who went into hiding. For their families this was a particularly difficult time.

Then came Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. The Party immediately reversed its position and proclaimed the war as a just, anti-fascist and people's war. The main concern became total mobilization to help the war effort against Hitlerism. The Jewish community set aside all differences and united on the sole aim of defeating fascism. The Canadian government decided to release the leaders of the Communist party from internment camps and prisons, so that they could help mobilize the labour movement for the war effort. Among Jews the influence and esteem of the left-wing movement was on the rise again.

Unemployment in the country disappeared. A large number of women—young and old—were drawn into the labour force, especially in war-related industries, such as the manufacture of uniforms, ammunition and transport vehicles. Thousands of young Jews, far beyond their proportion to the general population, voluntarily enlisted to serve overseas, so that they could take a direct part in the war to defeat Hitlerism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TEACHING TWO GENERATIONS OF JEWISH CHILDREN

For over 25 years, I was a teacher in the Morris Winchevsky School, which was influenced by the ideology of the left-wing Labour League (later the United Jewish Peoples' Order), just as the Peretz School that was part of the Jewish Socialist Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) or the Borochov School, of the Left Wing Poalei Zion movement, or the Folkshule (later the Bialik day school) which was part of the Labour Zionist movement. It was quite natural, therefore, that the Morris Winchevsky School should devote a major part of its curriculum to the labour movement and to life in the Soviet Union. We taught Yiddish language, we taught about labour struggles, and about friendship among peoples. In the early years we did not teach Jewish history, nor did we celebrate Jewish holidays. Later on, after several conferences of Canadian and American teachers, it became clear to us that this was a big gap in our curriculum. We realized that we had failed to acquaint the children with the cultural heritage of their own people. This became particularly apparent to us in the period of rising fascism and World War II. Not until then did we grasp the idea that the struggle which the Jewish people waged for existence throughout its long history could only serve to strengthen us, to provide spiritual fortification for the difficult times we were going through.

We then introduced as an integral part of the curriculum

the history of the Jewish holidays, such as *Chanukah* and the struggle of the *Hashmanaim* against foreign domination, Passover and the spring festival of liberation from slavery, Purim and the fight against anti-Semitism and against all the Hamans in many periods of history.

Moishe Feldman, who was then principal of the Winchevsky School, was an authority on Jewish learning and devoted much of his time to developing a course on Jewish history. Acquainting the children with Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets helped to improve the understanding of the close relationship between Jewish ethics and the struggle for human rights and universal values. With the participation of the children we wrote and presented dramatizations based on the words of these prophets. Presentations made at the end of each school year were very important to the life of the school. They were produced in a large theater and a great deal of effort went into their preparation, working with all the children, from kindergarten to the higher grades.

All of this, of course, was related to contemporary life, to the battle for justice and against war and fascism, and to the struggles of working people for better conditions.

In those days, most of the children came from Yiddish-speaking homes, so it was much easier for the teachers of Yiddish. There were close ties between school and home, not only ideologically, but linguistically. The students attended *shule* five afternoons a week, after public school hours, and it never occurred to the parents that it was too much for their children to attend two schools in one day.

We accomplished quite a lot with those children. I had one seven-year-old boy in one of my classes—Perry Brooks—whose family lived at the eastern end of the city, about eight miles from the school. He made the trip every day, winter and spring, by streetcar. And he wasn't the only one.

The parents on the School Committee carried out their duties with love and devotion. They supported the teachers in the self-sacrificing work of building the school. There

were times when teachers weren't paid their meagre wages for weeks, but this did not affect the quality of their work, and their dedication produced results. Several of the students who distinguished themselves in public school attributed their success to the training they received in the Jewish school.

In later years we organized more advanced classes during the summer months, where graduates of our higher grades studied to become Yiddish teachers. Some of them later taught the younger children. Among the teachers in the higher grades were people prominent in Jewish life, and it is gratifying to know that many of our shule children grew up to be attorneys, engineers, physicians, architects, writers, cultural leaders, and professors in Canadian universities. Almost without exception they retained an interest in Jewish life and Jewish problems.

After World War II the social and economic composition of Canada's Jewish population had undergone a fundamental change. The first generation of Jewish immigrants were mostly factory workers. Their children, however, were mostly white-collar workers or professionals—doctors, lawyers, technicians, government employees. Only a small percentage remained in the labour force. The destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis, the establishment of the State of Israel, along with the changed social status of the second generation—all of these brought about a change in the psyche of the next generation of Jewish parents. A unique phenomenon took place: the children of non-religious immigrants began seeking a path back to their people through religion. A large number of wealthy synagogues and temples were built—including schools for children.

Today the great majority of young parents, including graduates of the various secular Jewish schools, send their children to the synagogue schools or Talmud Torahs, and this has greatly weakened the secular Jewish schools. The Morris Winchevsky School, for example, became a Sunday school; the number of children in the Workmen's Circle and

Borochov schools declined drastically. An exception are the day schools which teach both general and Jewish studies; but there are not too many of these schools.

The precipitous drop in the number of students in the secular Jewish schools, the restriction or abolition of Yiddish language classes in the Talmud Torahs and similar educational institutions is greatly distressing devoted teachers and activists to whom the Yiddish language is very dear. For several generations the secular Jewish schools made their contribution to Jewish cultural life. While there are now more students in the Temple schools and Talmud Torahs than ever before, the Yiddish language—the national treasure of Jewish people—has gradually been eliminated from their curricula, to the grievous loss of the entire Jewish educational system. The elimination of Yiddish has even proved detrimental to the study of Hebrew.

Happy memories of my work in the school and summer camp remain with me to this day. The educational program of the camp was a continuation of the school program. Our motto was: *From school to camp and from camp to school.* Out in the fresh air, with the fields, woods and river all around us, being with the children day and night, teaching seemed more like play than work.

Every Saturday the campers put on a concert, and sometimes a dramatic presentation. Each Sunday there was a salute to the camp and the ceremony of raising the Canadian flag. The children, dressed in white, with red kerchiefs around their necks, sang camp songs, under the direction of the music teacher. When all the children gathered together, they filled up almost an entire field. It was a magnificent sight for the staff and the parents who came to visit.

The beginnings of Camp Naivelt under the auspices of the Labour League (later the United Jewish People's Order) were very modest. A group of members of the Women's organization (which subsequently joined the Labour League) decided to give their kids an opportunity to enjoy the open air during the summer months. They rented a place near a river not far



Sunday morning salute to Sholem Aleichem at Camp Naivelt. Platform is named after famous teacher Janush Kortchak, murdered by Nazis.

from Toronto (in Rouge Hills), built a few bungalows and signed up the first 20 children. The women volunteered their services, which kept camp tuition fees at a minimum. (This was during the Depression years.)

From these modest beginnings came one of the most beautiful children's camps in the country. (We called them *kinder-kolonyes*.) In 1936 the Labour League bought Eldorado Park—a hundred acres of woods, meadows, a river, hills and valleys. In the early 1940s I worked there for several summers as Head Counsellor under Camp Director Shmuel Korn, a noted Jewish educator and cultural leader from New York. The camp accommodated more than 200 children, as well as several hundred adults and guests, some of whom came from the United States. In addition to the teaching staff, which included teachers of music, arts, crafts, and sports, there were 40 counsellors, most of them graduates of the Morris Winchevsky School.

Each weekend, and especially on Sundays, buses and cars crowded with people rolled into the camp. Entire families came to enjoy the day in the country.

Over the years, hundreds of children attended Camp Naivelt. Now as adults they still fondly recall the beautiful surroundings, the happy times, their beloved teachers, now gone—Shmuel Korn, Z. Yachnes, Leybl Basman, Nechama Yanovsky and others—who taught there at one time or another.

In later years, Camp Naivelt suffered the same fate as the Morris Winchevsky School. The prevailing McCarthy red-baiting atmosphere frightened away many campers. Mainly, however, it was the devastating revelations at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party about the horrible crimes committed under the Stalin regime. Like an earthquake, this shook the entire left-wing movement, among them its Jewish followers. The camp continued to shrink and finally closed down. Half the land was sold to the local muncipality, which then converted it to a new park. The site, which had once been a summer camp that resounded with the voicess of happy children, is now overgrown with weeds.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RETURN AFTER 36 YEARS

As fate would have it, I had an opportunity to visit my native Bialystok once more, and even go into the house I left in 1920.

Towards the end of June, 1956, my husband, Sam, and I travelled to Poland and the Soviet Union. Our first stop was Warsaw. By that time the city had been almost completely rebuilt, but most of the ghetto area was still a vast field of rubble.

With joyful anticipation we met our friends Marek Bitter, Anatol (Natek) Wertheim, and Michael Mirsky. Sam had become close friends with them when he went to Poland in 1945, right after the war, as a member of a Canadian delegation sponsored by the Canadian Jewish Congress. Bitter, Wertheim, *and* Mirsky came later to the United States and Canada as part of a delegation of surviving Polish Jews. We also met Hersh Smolar, David Sfard, Binem Heller and other leaders of the Jewish Cultural-Social Association of Poland.

After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, and after the rebellion in Poznan, Poland was in turmoil. We attended many public meetings, as well as private gatherings, where there was no end to discussions about the latest events. Countless issues were debated; many previously-held beliefs and opinions were examined and re-evaluated; anti-Semitic feelings surfaced, even in high government circles, and many Jews planned to leave Poland, among them people who held high government posts.

I recall an evening in the home of the Wertheims. The frightful magnitude of the crimes committed by the Stalin regime had already become sickeningly clear. All of us were agitated by the same question: how could we possibly explain all the horrible events, even to our own satisfaction? Later that evening Anatol Wertheim went with us for a walk. The building in which he lived was in an area of the ghetto that had been rebuilt. "When they were digging the foundations here," he told us mournfully, "they found a hundred skeletons."

A full moon illuminated the field of rubble nearby. I felt as if the shadows of multitudes of murdered Jews were pressing in on me from all sides. I had difficulty breathing.

I wanted very much to visit my native Bialystok, so at the first opportunity we made the trip.

The "Wide Sands," where our house stood, along with the neighbouring smaller streets, had survived the war unscathed. We arrived there on a market day. The cobblestone streets, the wooden booths, the farmers with their horse-drawn wagons—it all seemed the same, as though nothing had happened in the interim, except that now everything looked smaller and shabbier to me.

Certain things about our old house were etched in my memory. When I was a little girl, a small birch tree had sprouted in our yard. I used to measure my height against it to see which one of us was growing more quickly, and after a couple of years the tree overtook me. When I left home, however, it was still a slender sapling. In later years, whenever I thought about it, I felt certain that the tree, as well as the house, would have been destroyed in the war. But when I walked into the yard and the first thing I saw was a tall, sturdy birch tree, I was very happy.

A Polish woman approached me and asked if I were looking for someone. I told her that we had come all the way from Canada and that I had once lived in this house. Very politely she invited us in and we answered her questions about life in Canada. The upstairs looked completely different than I had remembered it. There was now one

large room in place of the several small ones. All that was left was the tiled stove in the middle of the room and the window below the roof where I used to sit and look out at the marketplace and lose myself in childhood reveries. It is difficult to describe the emotions one feels on revisiting the scenes of childhood and the shadows of a vanished life.

I went to see my Uncle Shlomo Yakov's house. The street was the same, but the house was no longer there. Only a vacant lot.

When we went to visit the graves of my father and my grandmother we found the Jewish cemetery so overgrown with weeds that we could not find their location. An elderly Polish woman who saw us wandering around told us that peasants came here from time to time and carted away the best-looking marble gravestones. This bothered her, she said, because she and her husband had once been the caretakers here. She asked if we could persuade the authorities to repair the fence around the cemetery.

From there we went to the ghetto cemetery. After the war the Polish authorities collected the remains of the dead from several places, buried them in a mass grave and constructed a monument to the 68,000 murdered Jews of Bialystok and nearby towns. At one streetcorner in the rebuilt center of the city hung a tablet bearing the inscription: "On this spot the Nazis shot and killed the leader of the Bialystok ghetto."

We visited a woodworking co-operative that employed a number of Jews who had come to Bialystok from various places. They crowded around us, wanted to know about the Jews in Canada, and asked us to help them locate their relatives in America. Practically every one of them wanted to get out of Poland as soon as possible.

In the courtyard of the co-operative sat an old, decrepit man. Our guide, Mr. Zigelnicki, who was then chairman of the Jewish Committee in Bialystok, told us that the man's name was Psachye and that he was a former Bundist, who had been arrested by the Russians at the very beginning of the war. Recently Psachye was released from a Siberian

labour camp where he had served 17 years! 1956 was the year when many Polish citizens—among them a good number of former Polish communists—returned from Stalin's *Gulag*. Each one had a horrifying tale to tell of the inhuman treatment in the camps.

One man who had just come back to Warsaw from such a camp was the noted Yiddish poet Moyshe Broderzon. With him was his wife, Sheyne Miriam. We went to their hotel to meet them. The joy at seeing a living Jewish writer from Russia was mixed with sorrow over what had happened there and for the first few moments none of us could utter a word. Only our eyes revealed what we were feeling. Then the wise Broderzon said softly: "There are times when silence is louder than words."

Broderzon had much to tell about his experiences both in Moscow and in the prison camp where intellectuals were often singled out for particularly harsh punishment. As a result, many of them died. Many had committed suicide. Broderzon told us that what kept him alive was his strong desire to survive the bad times, and his determination to persevere.

Broderzon had brought a long letter from Binyomin Zuskin's wife in Moscow to his daughter Tamara who was then living in Warsaw and whom we went to see. She had not heard from her family in Moscow for 13 years. A physician by profession, she is a very kind, compassionate woman. The letter which she read to us described in detail how her father, the great Yiddish actor and close friend of Shlomo Mikhoels, had been arrested and later shot by the KGB, and of the degrading humiliation the family had suffered.

When she finished reading the letter, Tamara opened a drawer and took out a handful of medals that she had been awarded in recognition of her heroic work in the Red Army, with which she served during the great Soviet offensive that resulted in the capture of Berlin. She tossed the medals angrily on the table. "And they still dare to say that Jews did not fight on the battlefields against Hitler!" Early in

1958 Tamara emigrated to Israel to join the staff of the Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel Aviv.

For Sam and myself, the visit to Poland was a harrowing experience. From Bialystok to Krakow, across the length and breadth of the country, all the cities and towns where hundreds of thousands of Jews had lived before the war were now *Judenrein.*

We travelled to Radom, Sam's birthplace, and went to the apartment where he and his family lived before the war. Nothing had changed. The city had survived practically untouched. But Sam's entire family had been taken away and murdered by the Nazis, together with most of the other Jews in the city.

Our visit to the death camp at Auschwitz—which stands as a witness to man's inhumanity to man in the 20th century—filled to overflowing the cup of our spiritual anguish. For me this visit was particularly painful, because it was my first trip to Poland since I had settled in Canada. For Sam, however, it was the third trip since the end of the war. In November, 1945, he and H.M. Kaiserman were sent as a delegation of the Canadian Jewish Congress, to investigate the plight of the surviving Polish Jews. He saw the extent of the catastrophe right after the war. In 1949 he visited Poland for the second time.

But such trying experiences bring people closer together, and we formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. Many of our dearest and closest friends from Poland now live in Israel.

At the end of July we went to Moscow where, one week later, Tamara arrived and brought the tragic news that Moyshe Broderzon had suffered a severe heart attack and died. It was only a few days before that we witnessed the thrilling scene on that Sunday morning in the Jewish State Theater in Warsaw, when hundreds of people packed every corner of the auditorium at a 'welcome home' for their beloved writer, who had miraculously survived. Sam and I had interrupted our vacation on the Baltic Sea so that we, too, could participate in the welcome. Before we left for

Moscow we had said goodbye to Broderzon at an intimate gathering of friends in the home of Hadassah and Binem Heller. That same week Broderzon died. Perhaps the sudden transition from extreme hardship to so much love and happiness was too much for his weakened heart to bear.

Thirty years after I had last seen it, Moscow at first sight still looked the same: the same Red Square, the same Kremlin, the beautiful Church of St. Vasili with its picturesque cupola, the long line of people waiting to enter the Lenin mausoleum, the Gorky Boulevard—everything was almost as I had left it.

But the more I got to see of the city the more changes I began to notice. Many new buildings, wider streets, broad boulevards. The Metro subway, where each station looks like a palace of colored marble and crystal chandeliers, the magnificent sports stadium, the University, the Park for Culture and Recreation, the All-Soviet Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition many times enlarged and more beautiful, the museums, libraries, art galleries, theatres, the glorious performances of the Bolshoi Ballet, and many, many other new things that we managed to see—it was fascinating.

All this beauty, however, was overshadowed by the sadness that we experienced whenever we spoke with ordinary Soviet Jews or Jewish writers who had just returned after long years in the Soviet prisons or labour camps, or when we met the widows of the executed Yiddish writers and poets.

We were not surprised by the contrast between the new and the old sections of the city where one could still see ancient wood-shacks. We understood that there was a drastic shortage of apartments because so many buildings had been damaged or completely destroyed during the war, while the population of Moscow had increased very rapidly. No matter how many new dwellings were being built they could not keep up with the demand. We were not too disappointed, either, by the difficult economic situation, because we understood how widespread the destruction

was during the war, the enormous number of Russians who died on the battlefields, and that it would take a long time to replace all these human and material resources.

But what shocked us was the psychological damage done to the Soviet people by Stalin and his 'administrators.' Fear, mistrust, the be-careful-what-you-say attitude, or saying what you didn't mean, and then later, even when you began trusting someone, to say just the opposite—that sort of behaviour we met everywhere at every step.

I recall an evening we spent in the home of a Yiddish writer. We had made plans to go to a Yiddish concert the following day. As we were saying goodnight, the writer whispered: "Remember, tomorrow evening, when we see each other at the concert, you don't even know me." Such a fear of meeting with foreigners seemed to us to border on insult.

In Kiev, on the Kreshchatek, we stopped several Jews hoping to speak with them. The look in their eyes was one of terror. They turned on their heels and left us standing in disbelief.

Tamara introduced us to Guta Margolis, a veteran Communist who had worked closely with Lenin. Guta had much to tell us about the brutal physical punishment to which she had been subjected by the KGB interrogator after she had been arrested on false charges. At that time she was convinced that some sort of upheaval had brought fascists to power in the Soviet Union.

When we visited Esther and David Markish at their home, Esther told us about the agonizing days they lived through, when the Yiddish writers were being arrested and taken away one after the other. Minutes before Markish's arrest she had managed to hide the manuscript of his last great work, *Milkhome* (War). The KGB agents confiscated all the manuscripts they could find in the homes of the writers and destroyed them. She told us about the difficult years she spent in a labour camp, the tragedy of not knowing what had happened to her husband and the other writers, the shattering news of executions on Stalin's orders.

In Moscow we also met Nina and Natalie (Tolka) Mikhoels,

the daughters of the great Jewish actor. Their voices trembled as they spoke about their father's murder in Minsk, and about the fire that had been set in the museum of the Jewish State Theatre that destroyed irreplaceable historical material, as well as the costumes and photographs of Shlomo Mikhoels and other Jewish artists.

We also met a few Canadian acquaintances who went back to the Soviet Union in the 1930s to stay. One of them, Manya Shur (now deceased) told us that a number of old Communists committed suicide after the revelations at the 20th Congress.

Despite all this, there was still a glimmer of hope among some of the Yiddish writers and cultural leaders that with the forces that had survived the Stalin terror they could begin to rebuild Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union. In Moscow and other cities they organized Yiddish concerts to which masses of Jews flocked hungry for the sound of a Yiddish word. Sarah Rotboim, whom we met at the home of Esther Markish, told us that she was preparing a full repertoire of new material. We heard that a Yiddish theatre was about to be opened in Moscow. Unfortunately, this turned out to be no more than a rumor.

What a painful paradox! The country that sacrificed so many lives to defeat Nazism was now infected with the poison of anti-Semitism. And this anti-Semitism was not solely a result of Nazi propaganda at the war fronts and in the territories they had occupied, as some people tried to have us believe. It was actually encouraged by top government agencies. Today that fact is clear to everyone.

People told us that after the arrest of the Jewish doctors in 1953 and the blood-libel against them, Jews simply were afraid to show their faces in public. They were insulted in the street, on the streetcar, in the subway, at work and in their own apartment buildings, where neighbours would constantly harass them.

Our visit to Moscow coincided with the official visit of a delegation from the Canadian Communist Party headed by its then General Secretary, Tim Buck, with J.B. Salsberg as

a member of the delegation. Among other questions, the delegation discussed with Soviet leaders the attitude of the Soviet authorities toward Jews, and the Jewish problem in the Soviet Union. Later we learned from Salsberg and others that Khrushchev, in the course of the conversation with the delegation, had made anti-Semitic remarks which shocked most of the delegates.

We returned to Canada deeply disturbed. My own experiences in the Soviet Union were especially painful. This was the country where my youthful ideas were formed, where I spent years in the children's commune and at the Pedagogic Academy which had influenced me for the greater part of my life. After my visit, however, so many questions surfaced, so many of my values had to be re-examined. We did not abandon our belief in the ideals of true freedom, nor did we give up the struggle for a better world. We are deeply convinced that humanity will eventually find a way to fulfill its eternal dream of creating a world of freedom, of justice, of peace among nations. But this will never be brought to fruition by means of a brutal dictatorship.

October, 1986, marked the 60th anniversary of my emigration to Canada—six decades that shook the world; decades that were filled with historic events that would have been more than enough for many generations. It was my fate to be part of the generation of Jewish immigrants who left the cities and towns of Eastern Europe inspired by the ideal of a better and more beautiful world and encouraged by the positive achievements of the October Revolution, and by the emancipation of Jewish people and its culture in the early years of Soviet power.

The influence of my home and family, my education in the Twelfth Jewish Work Commune and the three years in the Pedagogical Academy laid the foundations for my teaching career in Canada. These were years of happy, productive work. It was a joy to be a Yiddish teacher to two generations of Jewish children. Whenever I told a child that I had taught his or her mother or father, the child would stare at me in astonishment as if I were some sort of prehistoric creature!

Both teacher and children remember fondly the effective

method of teaching through dramatizations of episodes in Jewish history and literature, or the Jewish holidays. I was one of the generation of Jewish teachers, most of whom were educated in Eastern Europe—idealistic, self-sacrificing men and women who bore the heavy burden of teaching children, and of building the Jewish schools.

It is a joy to meet a young person—sometimes a mother or father with children of their own— who ask: "Manya, don't you recognize me? You were my teacher in shule!" For those who I sometimes do not recognize because they have changed so much over the years, as well as for those with whom I have kept in touch, I have retained a deep affection, as though they were my own children or grandchildren.

There were also times of great pain and sorrow. Hitler's murder of one-third of the Jewish people orphaned our own family. My husband's entire family perished in the Nazi concentration camps. He is the sole survivor. Of my own more distant relatives, no one is left.

Morally, the worst time for us came after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party with the exposure of the crimes committed in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, in particular the heinous execution of the leading Soviet Jewish writers and artists and the uprooting of every sign of Jewish cultural activity. For those who had placed so much hope in the new social order in the Soviet Union it was a traumatic experience.

After 30 years of devoting all his energy and talent to the left-wing movement, my husband, Sam Lipshitz, together with the well known Jewish communal and political leader J.B. Salsberg and a large number of others, left the Communist party. I was one of that group. We were profoundly disillusioned; but there were some among us, who still believed that with Stalin gone, many of the wrongs committed against the Jews would be rectified. We could not imagine, even then, that the Soviet Union would become a centre for the dissemination of anti-Semitic propaganda, of hatred toward Jews and the State of Israel. What a wide chasm between those years of hope and faith and the present moment!



Paul Robeson with children of Morris Winchevsky School in Toronto (1952).

CHAPTER NINE

MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS

As I read the three journals of the Twelfth Children's Commune 50 years after their publication, a flood of memories swept over me of my youth and of those days of idealistic hopes and beautiful visions. It was I.E. Ronch's question, "What happened to those children?" that moved me to write my reminiscences of those times, as well as of the subsequent years in Canada. I had no intention of writing an autobiography and certainly not a history of my generation of Jewish immigrants who contributed so much to the development of the Canadian labour movement, to Canadian culture in general, and to Jewish culture in particular. Some day, a Canadian writer will immortalize that era.

The printed word goes a long way. Perhaps somewhere there are students of the children's commune who will respond to these memoirs and tell us what did happen to those youngsters. The response I received to Ronch's article from Louis Bialy, Devorah's brother, may be a beginning of more accounts.

I began this chronicle with a brief description of my home and family and I conclude it with a few words about those who have gone to their eternity.

My dear mother lived for another ten years after she came to Canada. She was 76 years old when she died in 1936. For her, living meant working hard, so she took on the burden of managing my brother's business—the Bucharest Hall—which included overseeing the observance of *kashrut* (dietary religious laws).



Manya with her three brothers: From left Philip, Sam and Julius Cantor.

My brother Mayer died at age 46, leaving three young children. My sister Hannah, who died at age 76, never did make peace with the difficult immigrant life. Nevertheless, she brought up three bright, well-educated children: Rose Michaels, a social worker and teacher, who lives in Tel Aviv; Ben Marmur, an engineer, who recently moved to Toronto; and Julius Marmur, professor of biochemistry at Einstein University in New York City. My brother Hershl died in Sydney, Australia in 1962. He was a cultured man, beloved by all who knew him.

My brother Faivel Cantor died in January, 1976. At 86, he was still active in support of *Histadrut* (Israeli Labour Federation) in Montreal. Two months after his death my brother Shimon Cantor died at age 78. All his adult life a businessman, he was the major provider in the family. His son, Maxwell, expanded the modest beginnings of my brother's bakery into a whole chain of Cantor's Bakeries in Montreal. Yekhiel is my only surviving brother.

It is not easy to be the youngest in the family and watch one branch after another falling from the tree. My only



Toronto delegation at First World Congress For Yiddish, in Jerusalem, (1976).
Manya is second from left, front row.

consolation is that the family is growing and bringing into the world a new generation of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Our own children have grown up to be respected professionals who make a valuable contribution to society, each in his or her own field. And of course, the grandchildren—nothing but *nakhes*!

I wrote these concluding words in Jerusalem, a day before the opening of the World Conference on Yiddish and Yiddish culture, to which Sam and I were elected as delegates. And it is symbolic that Jerusalem should be the site of a conference where representatives of 16 countries have gathered—writers, teachers, cultural leaders—to discuss ways of building and strengthening Yiddish language and culture.

All the evil forces in the world that have sought to destroy us have failed to do so. The Jewish people, its culture in Yiddish and Hebrew, are alive in the State of Israel and in dozens of other countries. After every cataclysm we arise again, bind our wounds, restore our faith, and go forward. In the words of our great poet H. Leivick:

Ikh heyb zikh oyf vider un shpan avek vaiter...
(I rise again and keep marching forward...)



Manya greeted in Jerusalem (1980) by President Itzchak Navon.

Afterword

by

J. B. Salsberg

For over fifty years, since her arrival in Canada, I have known Manya Lipshitz, or as she was known by her maiden name, Margolia Kantorovitch. She came from the Soviet Union, and the first thing I noticed was her hair, made up in two long braids and her face without makeup. I soon realized that this newly arrived, young, intelligent woman, was serious in all her endeavours.

She was often seen at Jewish cultural affairs in Montreal and in the Jewish library. Later, after she married Sam Lipshitz, I met her more often. She was engaged in the social and political activities of various organizations.

For many years now, there developed a close, comradely relationship between us—a relationship which is of considerable importance in my own life. I have known Manya as a Jewish teacher, as a mother, and as an exceptionally fine human being. I have known her as an active worker in many fields of endeavour, particularly in the fields of culture and education. The more I have known her the more eager I have been to learn how her fine character developed. From observations at close range I have concluded that the main characteristic of her personality is her ability to combine her roles of educator and devoted activist with a rare, genuine modesty.

I often asked myself, what were the sources that shaped and influenced her character—the great qualities that reveal themselves every time one is in her company or participating with her in communal activities.

When Margolia Kantorovitch was a teacher in the Montreal Peretz School, she met Sam Lipshitz, who at that time was on the staff of the Jewish Public Library, and also an active member in the left-wing Jewish youth movement.

Sam was a leader in cultural and political organizations while Manya, busy with her teaching, still found time to participate in the same organizations. Sam was the editor of Yiddish and Anglo-Yiddish publications, including a left-wing Yiddish weekly years ago. For the past thirty years Sam has edited Fraternally Yours, the monthly magazine of our organization, the New Fraternal Jewish Association. For twenty-five years he edited the monthly magazine, Voice of Radom, with readers in many countries where Radomers reside. Manya too was engaged in journalistic activities and was a frequent contributor to several publications. While Sam was more widely known, as he is to this day a leading spokesman for several organizations, Manya, in her own quiet way, has made a considerable contribution.

They are the parents of May and Joe (Yosl). May and her husband Gerry graduated from the medical faculty of the University of Toronto with the top final grades—May earning the gold medal, while Gerry was awarded the silver. Their son Yosl, since his youth, was an avid student of mathematical science. He is now a world-renowned mathematician, head of the mathematical department at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. Both children grew up in a Yiddish speaking, social and cultural environment, and this is now the case in the homes of both May and Yosl.

Manya was not only mother to her children, but also their teacher—a role she is continuing today with her grandchildren. I am well acquainted with Manya's teaching career, beginning almost thirty years ago when she was the teacher at Yiddish educational institutions with which I was ideologically connected. Thus I had the opportunity to closely observe Manya's work.

In my opinion Manya possessed the qualifications that define a great teacher. She attained, to a very high degree, something of which not many teachers can boast—the

genuine love of her pupils. It must give great satisfaction to Manya, when she meets former pupils who express their delight at meeting their teacher. Quite often she meets children of her former students (whom she refers to as 'my grandchildren'), who have heard from their parents many fond memories of their Jewish school days and of their beloved teacher Manya. I consider this quite an achievement.

For Manya, in her role as both cultural and social activist, there is no gap between teaching and communal activities. To this day, it is still natural for her to undertake the task of celebrating Jewish holidays with both children and adults. She has the ability not only to inspire and awaken a desire in children to partake in a play about Chanukah, or other Jewish holidays and historical events, but to encourage them to recreate scenes and texts which they would recite. Thus Manya, a creative, cultured person, possesses the ability not only to produce and direct historical events, works by Sholem Aleichem and other Yiddish writers, but also to add her own creative changes that make the given piece better understood by children as well as adults.

In addition to preparing cultural events, Manya also helps raise needed financial support. Nor does she consider it below her dignity—but rather as her responsibility—to sweep the floor of the hall, to put out the chairs, decorate the walls, and then preside over the affair.

I have often wondered how Manya acquired those fine human characteristics that are seldom found in others. That became clear to me a few years ago, after I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with three recently discovered magazines, titled *Komunar*. These were hand-written, edited, and assembled by youngsters of the children's commune in Vitebsk, Byelorussia, where Manya lived for several years after the Russian revolution. The three magazines were rediscovered recently in the archives of the late Yiddish poet, I. E. Ronch, who in turn obtained them from a Chicago Yiddish teacher, A. Litvin. The

magazines were given to him as a gift by the children of the commune, when he visited there in 1922.

These magazines revealed a whole new world and helped me understand the character and personality of Margolia Kantorovitch. The Twelfth Children's Work Commune (the full name of the home) was home for children, separated from their families or orphaned during the revolution and civil war. In the commune the children received an education that emphasized individual and collective responsiblity in the life and welfare of the commune, and an understanding of the great events occurring in the outside world.

Manya came to the commune in 1920. The hand-written, bound journals prepared by thirteen to sixteen-year old children, remain a source of understanding and of great educational value to this day, and likely for many years to come.

When Manya was separated from her family in Bialystok, and finally landed in Vitebsk, she was only thirteen years old—an age that is considered very young indeed in North America; an age when most children live without worries or great responsibilities. But in the Twelfth Children's Commune, Manya, and other children, was responsible for the welfare of the institution. In other words, children of thirteen or fourteen were entrusted with the entire responsibility which is normally undertaken by adults.

The task of furnishing the home, obtaining linen for the beds, getting food, preparing meals, even acquiring wood for the oven, looking after one another, and taking care of the younger children, bathing them and cleaning their clothes—all these tasks were performed by youngsters in the commune. And, later on, when the commune acquired its own cow, they took upon themselves the responsibility of feeding and milking their new addition, and when the time came, even assisting in the delivery of a newly born calf.

They grew up in an atmosphere of complete cooperation, with the understanding that there was no task too big or too small or that was below anyone's dignity. The children

learned from each other. Quite a number of them developed into talented writers. They often discussed problems of the world, not confining their discussion to the U.S.S.R. In other words, it was a world in miniature. The children developed into responsible men and women, with great love for learning, prepared—after leaving the commune—to take their rightful place in the life of the country, and in particular, of the Jewish community.

Manya—the teacher, cultural worker, and activist—was in my opinion greatly influenced by the ideals and the unique education that she received in the commune. These were, basically, the elements that helped shape her personality and character.

There were other children's homes in the Soviet Union at that time which failed in their tasks, and from which many of the children simply ran away. But the Twelfth Working Commune managed—despite the catastrophic conditions of that time—to create a climate that attracted homeless children, changed their lives, and prepared them for their rightful place in society.

Where did the children of the Twelfth Working Commune derive their strength to create such a model institution?

When I read the journals that are fortunately preserved to this day, I came to the conclusion that the institution and the children who lived there derived their moral character, their world view, and their inspiration from the general atmosphere that prevailed at that time in the Yiddish cultural milieu in the country. As I read the essays and poetry that the children wrote, and later reading Manya's memoirs, it became clear to me that the teachers and activists were the best product of the Jewish secular movement at that time. They were people who dreamed, worked, and sacrificed for the cause of a new world. They were Jews who saw no contradiction between their revolutionary outlook and their desire to further the development of a cultural life for the Jewish people, based on justice and brotherhood. That was a generation of Jewish intellectuals who marched in the front ranks of the

Russian revolution and made a great impact on the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe. The Polish Jews regarded the Red Army as the liberator not only of Poland, but, above all, as the liberator of the Jewish masses both in Russia and in the reborn Polish republic, where Jews were already experiencing persecution and anti-Semitism. They saw in the Russian revolution the vanguard of a just new world, a world in which the Jewish people would have the opportunity to achieve the greatest potential of cultural, social, and national freedom. This was the generation of the Jewish intelligentsia that eagerly joined the general revolutionary struggle, without ever forgetting—and perhaps as a consequence of—their Jewish roots.

The creative, idealistic and devoted Jewish intellectuals imbued the children of this commune, as well as others, with a love for the Yiddish language, Jewish literature and culture, along with a positive attitude and respect for physical labour.

It is noteworthy, and certainly not accidental, that when Manya reached the age of sixteen and had to decide about her own future, she was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, her family pleaded with her to come and join them in Canada. On the other hand, she had a deeply felt desire to stay in the Soviet Union and become a Jewish teacher. Her brother Mayer, of Montreal, urged her to choose Canada, where most of the Kantorovitch family then lived. Manya replied as follows: "There is no need for you to worry. You should realize, that you don't have to be concerned about my future. Tremendous opportunities exist here—Jewish academies, Jewish technical schools and Jewish universities. And, above all, you should not forget that the language in all of these institutions is Yiddish."

This excerpt from the letter she wrote to her brother in 1928 clearly shows the kind of outlook that Manya was forming at that time: technical institutes, teachers' colleges, universities, institutes of learning where one can specialize as a Jewish teacher—and remember the language was Yiddish.

It is no wonder that when Manya had to make a decision about her career—following her preference to stay in the Soviet Union, rather than go to Canada—she chose to enter a Jewish pedagogical institute, even though, at that time, she had the opportunity to enter the university of her choice. She enrolled in the teachers' seminary in Vitebsk, where she was the youngest student in her class. After three or four years of study in the seminary, her knowledge was considerably enriched, and her aspiration to become a Jewish teacher was finally realized. Her experiences in those turbulent years of her youth have formed the personality that has become so close and dear to us.

* * * * *

And now, a few words about her own writing that was published in the children's magazine, a publication of which Manya was also the editor. I was amazed when I read her articles and poems, as well as the work of the other children. I could hardly believe that this was written by thirteen to fifteen years-old children.

I do not consider myself a literary critic nor an expert, but it seems to me that Manya's early writing demonstrated a profound talent that was unfortunately neglected in later years. I often wonder why she did not pursue a literary career. The articles in the magazines, that I had the opportunity to read, are decidedly of lasting value.

What did Manya write? She wrote poems, essays, and what she calls mini-plays, that the children performed. They were written with such maturity and talent that when I read, for instance, the one-act play *Spring*, I just had to read it over again. I was impressed by the literary quality of the play, its fantasy and its lyrical verses. I was astonished that it was written by a fourteen-year-old girl, and in such rich and beautiful Yiddish! In my opinion, that one-act play deserves to be included in modern Yiddish school books as reading material and also for live production by students. It is as timely now as it was in those years. The same can be said about the other children's writings in the magazines.

* * * * *

Finally, a conclusion that to me is not a very happy one. The glorious aspirations, the tremendous contributions and the sacrifices of the generation of which Manya and others were part and parcel, like the Left Poale Zion, the Bundists, and the non-party Jewish inteligentsia who attempted with enthusiasm and love to utilize the opportunities that the revolution was supposed to create, ended tragically.

I, like Manya and her husband, and hundreds of thousands of Jews, and millions of non-Jews, believed that a new epoch had begun, one that would lead to a new world of unlimited opportunities and complete freedom; an epoch of friendship and peace among nations (like the vision of the Prophet Isaiah). For all of us, the later developments in the U.S.S.R. were a source of terrible disappointment.

We are certainly grateful that Jewish universities, Jewish academies, and institutions of higher learning existed. Furthermore, we are grateful that Yiddish textbooks, newspapers, and magazines were in circulation, as Manya tells us in her memoirs. But this makes the tragedy of the destruction of Jewish institutions that much more painful. We were swept by a sense of revulsion, that compelled us to re-evaluate many previous concepts, and draw some conclusions that we could never have contemplated in the past. Many of us realized that you cannot attain the ideal of a just new world by means of a dictatorship and its subsequent oppression. It is not possible to create new cultural values by destroying the most creative cultural individuals. It is not possible to inspire faith and devotion, when those who preach such faith to the masses—Jews and non-Jews—are being destroyed.

The Soviet Union under Stalin and his minions, was led on a path devoid of the idealism and morality that inspired the people of the U.S.S.R. for so many years. Most of those who had participated in the education of Manya perished, together with the schools and institutions, not because Jews forsook their interest in Jewish education, but because the Stalin regime was bent on destroying every vestige of Jewish national and cultural life within the Soviet Union.

* * * * *

It is to the lasting credit of the Workmen's Circle school teacher, A. Litvin (of blessed memory), who was entrusted with the treasure—the three magazines of the Twelfth Jewish Childrens' Work Commune—and who made sure that they will not get lost. Thanks are also due to the Jewish poet and writer, the late I.E. Ronch, who preserved the magazines for fifty years.

And though I find it difficult to express, in strong enough language, the condemnation of the acts of destruction, vandalism, and murder perpetrated by Stalin and his cohorts, I nevertheless feel grateful that there are still individuals who were not demoralized by the vicious and cynical developments of the later years. For it is these few who remained loyal and committed to Jewish culture and education, and who continued working under the most dlfficult circumstances for the ideals that were destroyed by the Stalinist regime.

Manya inherited the best and most valuable legacy of the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia: Jewish creativity, devotion to the Yiddish language, and to the Jewish people. She continues her cultural activities to this day and will, hopefully, do so for many years to come, together with her husband Sam, her family, and all of us who respect and love her as a unique person endowed with a truly noble character.

J. B. Salsberg

THE WORLD OF OUR YESTERDAYS

by

Hersh Smolar

Hersh Smolar is a prominent Jewish writer, who lives in Israel. A former leader of the post-war Jewish community in Poland, he left that country in 1968, at the height of the intense wave of anti-Semitism inspired by the Gomulka regime, following Israel's great victory in the six-day war. Mr. Smolar spent many years in the Soviet Union before returning to Poland in 1946.

THE WORLD OF OUR YESTERDAYS

"...and for you, once more, a world like yesterday..."
Chaim Nachman Bialik

Crisp is the evening air in the Tatra Mountains of Poland. So crisp that the barely expected breath almost reaches the brain. And then comes such a rare feeling of rejuvenation and relaxation. Transparent is the Zakopany mountain air, so transparent that the most remote corner in the valley below is amazingly visible.

At the moment, however, our eyes and thoughts are not turned in that direction. For all of us, for me and my two Canadian guests who, in the 1950s, had come to visit Poland, the land of their birth, there arose a distant, a very distant past, which had many, many similarities for Manya and me. And it was about this that she was speaking.

It began with talk about that most horrifying event in Jewish history—the mass murder of more than a million-and-a-half Jewish children, in the Nazi "final solution." And then the hour had come to restore whatever remained: First of all, the lives of those Jewish children who had survived; and so, we opened a Jewish children's home in the Tatra mountains, hoping that the clear, crisp air there would help restore the stolen years of childhood, when, one terrible night, came a gang of Polish allies of the Nazis and murdered everyone there.

We talked about the fate of the Jewish child throughout history, and what had happened to all of us when we were still very young in years, but hardly in experience. Manya told us about her wanderings during the chaotic times after

World War I, far away from her native Bialystok, separated from her family when she was only about twelve. And then she told us about the Twelfth Children's Work Commune in the far-off city of Vitebsk.

Vitebsk. For some, the name recalls a city embroiled in the events of 1917 and of the civil war when Jews enthusiastically greeted the Revolution. For others, Vitebsk recalls the Art School of Yehuda Penn with its galaxy of artists headed by Marc Chagall, who remained a 'Vitebsker' all his life.

For me, Vitebsk recalled the strike of the elderly Jews. This was at the height of the civil war when hunger and typhus ravaged the population. Only children and the elderly were provided with the barest necessities. And in the midst of all that the people in the Jewish Old Age Home declared a hunger strike! They refused to touch either the soup or the scraps of meat that were served to them because it was not kosher. But this was not only about food. They sent a telegram of protest to the President himself: Chairman of the All-Soviet Central Executive Commitee, Mikhail Kalinin. And from him came an immediate reply (oh, how distant, how legendarily distant those days now seem): those guilty of serving non-kosher food to the elderly Jews in the Home must face a trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal...

Manya's Vitebsk was quite a different one. For her the city began with the Twelfth Children's Work Commune and its radically new way of life.

They had various names, these hastily organized groups of children who had to be rescued from homelessness, from neglect, from the danger of being killed in the headlong rush of events. Most of these groups were given high-sounding names, fiery ones, like revolutionary slogans. But all of them, whether in the Byelorussian city of Vitebsk or in the Ukrainian city of Kiev, and by whatever name they were called, were institutions that served as substitutes for what had been cruelly taken away from the children, in many instances along with the very lives of their parents, sisters, brothers—the warmth of home and family.

Destiny decreed that my own youthful years (actually I had already ceased being young) should be similar to Manya's—children's communes, youth homes, children's homes. Though I was older than Manya, I was admitted into the Jewish Commune known as Home for Young Workers, located at Number 17 Mikhailov Street in Kiev.



L to R: Sam, Manya and Hersh Smolar at Zakopane, Poland (1956).

Our Youth Home was already the last step in the custodial system. From there one went out into the real world. (Life, it was called there.) In reality, because of the times and the circumstances, we were already accustomed to the prevailing stormy way of life. Most of us (including myself) were Young Communists; some of us (again including myself) were activists. Naturally, like the youngsters in the Vitebsk work commune, we could not limit ourselves to the internal life of the institution—the self-governing bodies, the committees, the journals and wall newspapers.

We already had duties outside the youth commune. We were primarily responsible for the younger children in the homes who needed our help. They trusted us, depended on us as one depends on older brothers or sisters. Most of the

people in our Home had come from other children and youth facilities and felt a strong attachment to them. So we spent our "free days" there, feeling like part of the administration and speaking with the administrators and teachers as equals.

In turn, they depended on help from us. They were not able to handle the younger kids at critical moments, in the same way as those of us who had ourselves lived through the crisis. (Sometimes we even relived it with them...) So there was a load of work for every one of the "old heads."

It was hardly a rare occurrence for a whole roomful of children to have a wakeful night. One of them would suddenly wake up screaming in terror, jump out of bed with his eyes half-closed and start running...with everyone chasing after him. And when we brought such a child back we had to get him to sit down and cry with him. None of us could sleep any more that night. We comforted him, held him in our arms, promised him faithfully that there would never again be any shooting, killing, burning of houses and seizing of mothers and fathers.

"Nights of Bad Dreams" we called them—nights when "first aid" was needed to save the bleeding souls of orphaned children.

In general, however, the children were kept very busy. They covered their pain with their games. They studied, they hiked, they went on trips, they sang. Poets from their own ranks (like Manya) composed their own hymns, wrote their own humorous songs about the other children, and they didn't spare the teachers either. They celebrated holidays at every opportunity. On such occasions they invited us as guests. There were songfests and dances. It seemed as if the wounds of orphanhood were being healed. That was the essential function of the children's homes, of the youth communes, of the young workers' groups.

As a Komsomol activist it fell to my lot to see with my own eyes the lasting damage done to the children. My various assignments took me to Jewish towns where traces of the pogroms were still very visible, chiefly in the frightened,

anguished eyes of the children. Everywhere—so many orphans! 200,000 Jews were killed in 1520 pogroms in 911 towns and cities, leaving behind 300,000 orphans. The need for help was urgent. It had to be given even before the relief came from America and from Canada, where the Jews had helped to collect and purchase clothing, medicines, food.

Worst of all was the danger of an epidemic of scabies. The victims were primarily children—and we did not have the means to combat it. Scabies is a disease that attacks its victims after the initial wounds are healed, leaving white spots on the heads of the children and causing baldness.

I came to Uman, the city that David Bergelson often visited when he was in nearby Ochrimeva, the home of Leyb Kvitko and Ezra Finenberg and Moyshe Khashchevatski. It was more than one could bear. So many refugees—and no place for them to live. The children slept in the Talno synagogue. More than 300 children with scabies. Many others with tuberculosis. Those children had to be separated at once from the rest. We put as many as we could in a sort of children's home in Uman; the others went to Kiev.

Then I went to Talno. There the children had been stricken with scurvy. Of the 400 students in the local Yiddish school, only one-third were attending classes, the others had no clothes to wear. I'm sure Dr. Hershl Reminik, the Soviet Jewish scholar, remembers our meetings at that time.

And in Tarashche, Jews were returning to their homes—but there were no homes. Revolutionary peasants had already moved into their houses. In that town there were 40 orphans and 190 semi-orphans. What could we do with the children—let them die of cold and starvation?

In Horodishche there had been 800 Jewish families. Only 300 families were left. The Jews there had decided to resist the pogromchiks, and organized a self-defense. They fought for Jewish lives and Jewish honor. But now it was heart-breaking to see what had become of the children who

survived. In Berditchev the Jews were not sitting idle either: they set up a special home for the children suffering from scabies and they placed more than fifty children there.

What could the Jews do, however, in the small pogromized town of Boslov? Half the Jewish children there had scabies. Would there be an entire generation of Jews whose distinguishing mark would be their bald heads?

Returning to Kiev, we listened to the smothered, restrained cries of pain and we came to a decision: emergency aid, at once!

The Jewish Social Committee (YIDGEZKOM) was formed. To its aid came the American Workers Relief Committee, headed by the noted writer Ben-Tsivyon. The Joint Distribution Committee brought with them transports of food and clothing, but primarily medicines and new equipment (still unknown in Russia) that healed the sores on the heads of the children, and cured the tuberculosis and the night blindness.

The healing and the curing was possible. But mending the souls—that could not be done with medicaments or equipment. That had to be done by Jewish cultural workers, of whom the best and most dedicated were the teachers.

Many years later Gershon Gorochov became a Yiddish linguist—that was during the years when there was a Yiddish Department in the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. At the time I am writing about, however, Gershon became Director of the Second Jewish Youth Home in Kiev, on Nikolayevska Street (later Karl Marx Street). Assisting him was the blond, good humored, congenial Fingerov, who could calm the most disturbed child with his healing, caressing words.

Motl Shapiro was already a well-known Yiddish poet whose writings were often recited at literary evenings in the Jewish Workers Club on the Kreshchatek. When the literary group *Vidervuks* (Regrowth) was formed, they published his first book of poems. Motl went to work—to save Jewish children—and became Director of the First Jewish Youth Home, at Number 12 Kreshchatek.

Jasha Resnick was not simply a mathematician, he was a born mathematician. Years later he would become professor at the University of Kiev. But at that time he accepted the responsibility of organizing a Jewish children's home in the most populous Jewish neighbourhood in Kiev—Podor. His brother Lippe, a noted Yiddish poet, came to help him and together they organized the first Yiddish teachers seminary in the Ukraine, whose function was to train as many qualified Jewish teachers as possible.

Jasha Brownstein, still a young student at the University of Kiev, was an active member of the Left Poalei Zion. He went to the directors of the Department of Yiddish Education (Halmshtok and Kushnir) to volunteer his services and was given the very difficult task of working with older Jewish youngsters. He proceeded to organize our Home for Young Jewish Workers and, in the process, became a friend to every one of us, an equal among equals. (Actually he wasn't much older than we were, anyway!)

And when Itzik Kipnis came to Kiev from Sloveshne, he immediately enrolled in pedagogy courses, so that he could become a Yiddish teacher.

From Dovid Hofshtein's house came his sisters Chava and Sara and his brother Shmuel, to work with Jewish children who had survived the pogroms. The youngest of the Hofshteins, Shifra, attended Resnick's seminar, so she could become a teacher.

And so it went—in Kiev and in Kharkov, in Vinnitse and in Zhitomir. And the same in Malakhovke, near Moscow. There, Marc Chagall came to the editor, Shvartzman, and offered to work with the children in the home that served as a laboratory for new pedagogic ideas.

And that's how it was in Odessa—in that famous "Children's Republic" of the educator and innovator Rivess, and at the YEVRABMOL, the Home for Young Jewish Workers.

Many, very many, were saved. Everything possible was done to fulfill the instruction of that great friend of all children, Y.L. Peretz: *Lomir derlebn vos mir hobn nisht*

derlebt—may we live to see that which we have not lived to see—that a smile will return to the faces of Jewish children.

Not always did it happen, and not for everyone. There were cases when one could only weep. How difficult it was for me to watch the tears form in the eyes of my good friend Shimon Dobin Shimoni...

It happened during one of our frequent walks. He—the Yiddish writer whose hair was already gray—and I, a 15-year-old hothead. A deep friendship had developed between us, although all the odds were against it. He was a confirmed Menshevik, an enemy of the existing system, which in my eyes was the embodiment of humanity's best and noblest dreams. And we did not avoid political discussions—sometimes arguing at the top of our voices! He—a pioneer of the Jewish labour movement in the Ukraine (a Labour Zionist even before Borochov) who later became a leader of the Bund and a well-known Jewish literary scholar and critic, and I—well, never mind!

I knew that my attachment to Shimon stemmed from the way he always treated me as an equal. But mainly it had to do with none other than Sholem Aleichem! Shimon had once showed me a pack of letters he had received over the years from Sholem Aleichem. And in one of those letters the writer sent regards to Shimon's son Kheml, a friend of mine. (Today he is a well known literary scholar in Leningrad.) And this is what Sholem Aleichem wrote: "Regards to Khemele and Zemele." When I read that, my eyes filled with love and admiration. Imagine! A friend of Sholem Aleichem's!

So it happened one day that Shimon Dobin proposed that I go with him to the First Jewish Youth Home in Kiev, where he would read to the children from Sholem Aleichem's work. Of course, I agreed.

Loud, friendly "good-mornings" greeted us as we entered. Soon the children took seats, some on benches and some on the floor. Everyone listened attentively to Shimon Dobin's well-intoned readings, with emphasis on the funniest parts of Menachem Mendl's letters from Yehupetz-Kiev to Sheyne Sheyndl in Kasrilevka. The children were

attentive, serious, not a smile on anyone's face. I was the only one who laughed out loud—but I cut it off when I noticed that all eyes had turned towards me in puzzlement.

Going home, we walked together in silence for a long time along the side streets, avoiding the busy Kreshchatek. I tried not to look at Shimon's face. I had noticed that as he closed the book, a large tear dropped from his one good eye. "They have lost the ability to laugh!" he suddenly cried out, stopping in his tracks and looking at me with fire in his eyes. "They have been rendered unhappy for the rest of their lives!"

I tried to reason with him, explaining that the content of the letters was foreign to those children, who knew nothing about that time, that milieu, those events. Shimon dismissed my argument with a wave of his hand.

Much later I realized that he had been right. People of all ages, of all nationalities, still laughed heartily at the stories of our great writer Sholem Aleichem. But they, the children of the First Kiev Youth Home, did not laugh.

Jewish educators used to meet frequently and read their well-thought out and thoroughly documented papers on pedagogic themes. They would debate, criticize, sometimes needle each other. "Gershon Gorochov wants all the youngsters in the Second Youth Home to grow up to be poets, scholars." "At Jascha Resnick's they are educating all the girls to be prima donnas, ballerinas; they are hiding from them the harsh truth about reality outside the youth home." "At Motl Shapiro's school the children were learning simple trades—they would grow up to be workers, practical people."

This kind of talk was only peripheral, however, to the very serious discussions on how to impart more joy to the lives of the children. Noah Lurie had just begun editing a children's magazine in Kiev, called *Freyd* (Joy). What they really wanted was to ignite in the hearts of these unhappy children the 'divine spark'—the latent talents that exist within everyone. The Kiev School and its ideologue, Jascha Resnick, maintained that the principal aim should be to

develop individual abilities, the whole personality, and that this could be achieved only by small collectives that do not overwhelm the individual.

Not all the teachers agreed with this. Some believed that the time had not yet come for the ideal situation that Resnick outlined. First, the youngsters in the homes must be healed, freed of their nightmares, given back at least a part of what they would have received in their own homes from their own families. Failing that, Jascha's ideal would be confronted by the stubborn resistance of the children.

These endless arguments did not stop the normal, busy life in all the children's homes and collectives: meetings of the self-administration, study groups, preparation of wall newspapers, literary events, political discussions. And all this took place after the regular school hours, after the workshops in the Jewish trade-union technical schools, where some of the young people were training to become qualified craftsmen.

No, the life of these Jewish youngsters was not gray. They received the boundless warmth, love and devotion of their teachers and educators. Individual attention to each child always determined the agenda of the frequent pedagogic council meetings, with representatives of the young people present. This concern for the individual, his virtues as well as shortcomings, was always handled discreetly, and the children responded.

* * * * *

The pages of the *Komunar*, produced by the Twelfth Children's Work Commune, show that the situation was the same in far-off Vitebsk, where Margolia-Manya and Sorke and Jascha and Devorah and Zyama—all of them with the same lovely Jewish names, as the youngsters in Kiev—left part of their childhood years. Like the people in Kiev, many of them regained the ability to love—especially nature, springtime, woods and fields—to find friendship, kindness, warmth in their comrades who had suffered the same fate.

Two of us who were in the Jewish Youth Commune, at Number 17 Mikhailov Street in Kiev now live in Israel. Whenever we meet—Miriam Vilshanski-Zevin and I—we recall with deep gratitude and affection those individuals who tried so hard to help us, to ease our loneliness, our longing for near and dear ones, the loss of those who perished. The Jewish youth homes and the children's communes played a great national and humanitarian role, as rescue stations, as healing institutions, for the wounded souls of Jewish children.

Let us remember them with reverence.

THE CHILDREN'S WRITINGS

Prose and poetry, written by the children of the Twelfth Children's Work Commune, and published in the issues 4, 5, 6 and 8 of the magazine Komunar, 1922 and 1923.



Cover of *Komunar*, No. 8, April, 1923.

MY SHTETL

Do you know that little shtetl
Crisscrossed by little streams?
Do you know that little shtetl
That used to fill my dreams?

The swiftly coursing little stream
Meandering along its way,
The whitewashed little houses
With their roofs of straw and hay.

The fields of shimmering stalks
The sandy yellow road
Stretching silently toward the sky
So far, far away.

Behind our little house
An apple orchard blooms
And the watermill keeps turning
Morning, night and noon.

And I, a little girl,
Toss pebbles at the wheel,
Which tosses them right back —
A little game we play.

Soon other children gather
And we sit along the bank
Of that busy little stream
Playing in the sand.

When dusk descends upon the stream
I run home happily
And soon fall sound asleep
Upon my Mama's lap.

Do you recall that little town
Of trees and summer grass?
I see you don't remember it —
Too much time has passed...

— *Margolia Kantorovich*
Komunar, 1923



"...And soon fall sound asleep."

THE THAW

Do you hear it raging down below,
Hear it seething, hear it roar?
The frozen, icebound river now
Has freed itself of winter's claw.

See, then, how it breaks its shackles,
How the giant slowly rises.
Now he stands up straight and tall,
Shattering the stubbourn ice.

Look, there goes half the river,
See how big it is, how broad,
Pushes thunderously at the mountain,
Pulling trees up by the roots.

And the liberated water now
Appears between the cracks.
The waves assault the grottos
But the ice is still compact.

From down below, a dire warning:
"Ice, it's time! Your time has come!
The winter's not enough for you?
Move on, move on, and disappear!"

The water, now victorious,
Is greeted by the sun,
Which sprinkles it with gold and silver
From the river, freed of ice.

—*Margolia Kantorovich*
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

SPRINGTIME

From under the dreary snow
A blade of grass or two appear.
Rivulets splash and churn.
Spring is here! Spring is here!

The sun swallows up the mud-puddles.
The earth's all covered in green.
Signs of life reappear,
Springtime is changing the scene.

New sounds are all around us
Welcome guests arrive —
Good-morning storks and swallows!
Good-morning trees and flowers!

The sun observes, warms, caresses.
The air vibrates with scents of spring.
All Nature is now creating.
Long live spring and the song it sings...

—*Devorah Bialy*
Komunar, 1923

NIGHT

Straight from the city
Night comes to the field
Rocks the woods to sleep
And the flowers as well.

All is swathed in darkness
Except for the stars.
A breeze skips so softly
It can barely be heard.

The night is secretive
Everything is still.
The flower is asleep —
And the tree on the hill...

—Devorah Bialy
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

I HOLD A BOOK BEFORE MY EYES

I hold a book before my eyes
And slowly turn its pages.
Pictures float by in a row
Eagerly I examine them...

Here is the room, dark and dirty,
You can barely see the faces.
The darkness is relieved only
By a flickering light.

The wind rips through the shutters,
Shadows hover uneasily.
Now a little group arrives
To build an independent life.

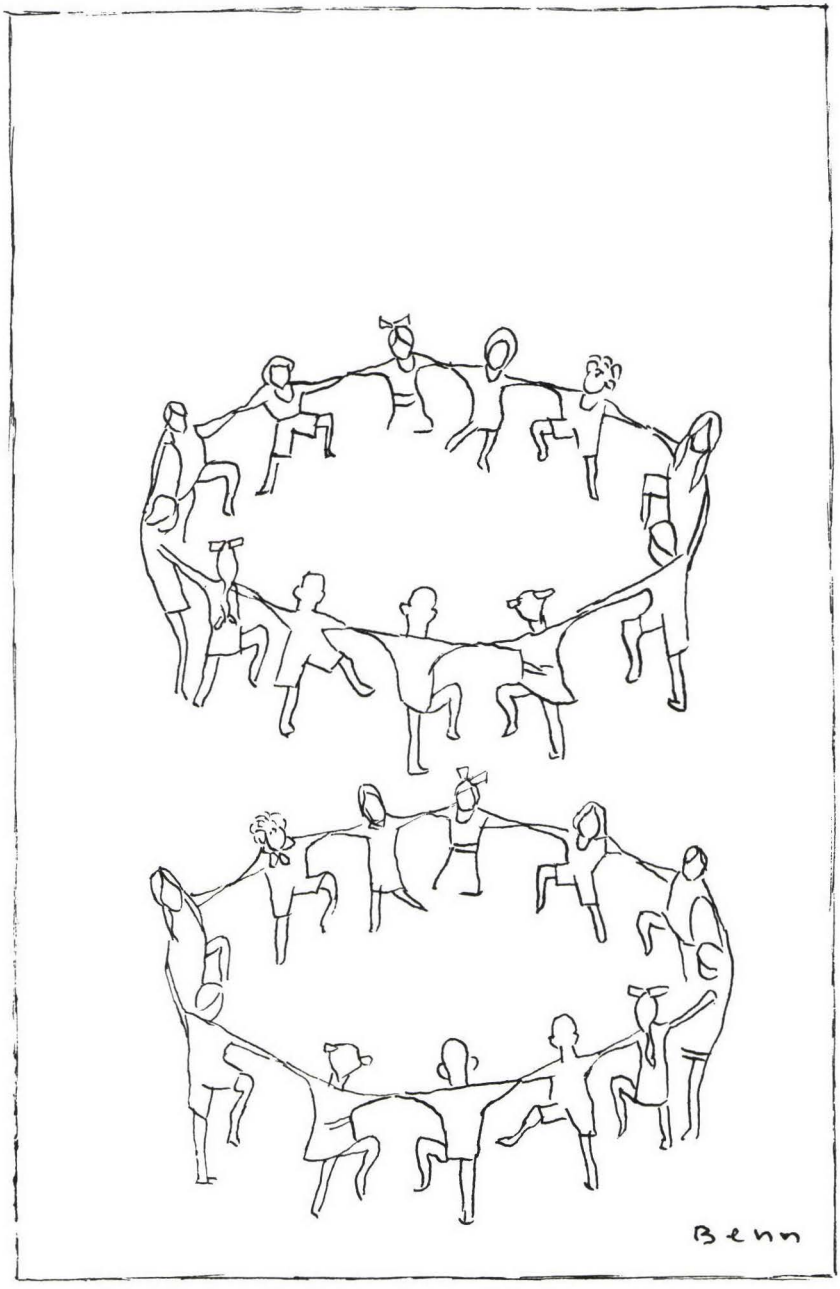
The future still lies hidden,
Wrapped in impenetrable shadows.
The road that they have taken
Is difficult and uncertain.

Now that same room is clean and tidy,
The house repaired, the walls repainted.
Children dance in a whirling circle
Celebrating a great accomplishment.

Voices ring out, proud, exultant,
Faces beam like heavenly suns.
Only a month—one month—has passed
And they have found the way.

Now I see a palace
Where children weave and create.
I study closely every picture,
For this is the Book of Our Life.

—Margolia
Komunar, 6, October 1922



"...Children dance in a whirling circle."

SPRING

Spring has come. The sun sends down its rays, warm and bright. The snow darkens. Here and there one can see bare earth and last year's yellowed grass. The river has already spread to both banks. The golden rays of the sun frolic on both sides of the river. The dark water is turned into pieces of gold and sparkling diamonds.

The children emerge from the winter cold and warm themselves in the sun in a charmingly contented way, their faces shining with happiness. Even the windowpanes in the old houses smile brightly. The trees, whispering in the cool breezes, bring each other the good tidings: very soon they will be putting on their new green frocks and soon the birds will come and build their little nests and sing their beautiful, endearing songs.

The world is being born anew. Everything is trying to throw off the winter's burden as quickly as possible and refresh itself. The streams flow unrestrained, awakening from their long slumber. One wave strives to overtake the other, the more quickly to catch up with spring.

—Devorah Bialy
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

ABOUT SHOLEM

You may have heard about our Sholem more than a year ago, but now I want you to know him a little better.

All day long Sholem would sit and read his books. In the evenings he would take off his shoes and stockings. His 'American' pants—too long and too wide—hung on him like a pair of potato sacks. In that costume he would climb up on a table, lean on a cane, and stand on one leg. Then he would swing the other leg in the air like a monkey. This he called his evening sport.

After he did that for a while, he would get off the table, catch his breath, and then you would not even recognize that 'other' Sholem who sat in a corner all day long with a book in his hand. He would wind himself up to the point where he'd start poking people in the ribs with his cane until they hollered. That sport he called 'fiddling.'

Sometimes he would start up with Devorah, who was mild-mannered to a fault, but if you kept it up until you got her goat, then there was no telling where it would end. One time she hit Sholem with a stool. Another time she swung at him with all her might and her fist connected with his jaw. One day Sholem was playing around in the sewing room with a soccer ball. It happened that Devorah was being fitted for a new dress. He picked up a board and started fanning her with it. Leah, who was pinning up the dress, couldn't stand it. She yanked the board out of his hands and started whacking him with it. He hit her with the ball. They returned blow for blow. The other kids stood around laughing and egging them on. This kind of entertainment happened quite often.

Last year Sholem asked for two weeks leave to visit his father. Before the two weeks were up, however, a letter came from Sholem: he couldn't wait the two weeks, he wanted to come back right away. The two weeks passed, a whole month, two, three—we didn't hear another word from

him. Six months later, when everyone had given up hope of ever seeing him again, he showed up.

The place was in an uproar. I ran out. Sure enough, there he was, the same Sholem. We shook hands. I looked him over from head to toe. No, he was not the same; he had changed somehow. As he went into the bathroom to wash up, he slapped his chest a few times, as if to say: "Look, folks, here is where I've grown up, in my heart!"

The next day we learned that Sholem had come back for the purpose of enrolling in the Pedagogic Academy. For several days I went with him to the Academy. They laughed at him. What! A young kid like that wants to become a teacher? A whole week went by before he decided it would be better for him if he stayed in the commune...

Sholem acquired a nickname in the commune—'Boretz' (boxer) and for good reason. Whoever tried to take him on alone had no chance. We therefore organized a collective approach—seven or eight of us at a time. Sholem fought back like a wildcat. Just as we thought we had overpowered him, he broke away from us and started tossing us around as if we were balls. And it was we who had to retreat.

One Sunday morning Sholem went out to go skiing. On the way he was stopped by a gang of local toughs. Sholem dared them to come on one at a time. A crowd gathered. Sholem made short work of his first opponent. The gang sent in their best fighters. Sholem returned as good as he got. They sent out a guy who was two heads taller than Sholem. "C'mon, kid," he taunted Sholem. "Let's see what you can do with me!"

The fight began all over again, but Sholem was only human. He came home with both eyes blackened and blood gushing from his nose.

Long after his wound had healed, Sholem said he would still like another chance at those guys. Whenever a gang attacked us, we immediately called for Sholem and he would come to our rescue. Now we are not afraid of anyone, except Boretz, of course...

—Folye Gutkovitch
Komunar, 8, April 1923.

FIELDS

This morning the first young frost
Appeared upon the sleeping ground
And put a silver gleam
Atop the fields of golden brown.

Like oceans, the fields spread out
In vast and limitless expanse.
And Father Frost, protectively,
Has put his arms 'round Mother Earth.

Far off on the horizon
Fields lie hidden beneath the sky,
As darkened woods have blanketed
The Earth, and heaven too.

Into the transparent air
A quickening freshness now has spilled.
In every sleeping field
Light and winged breezes blow.

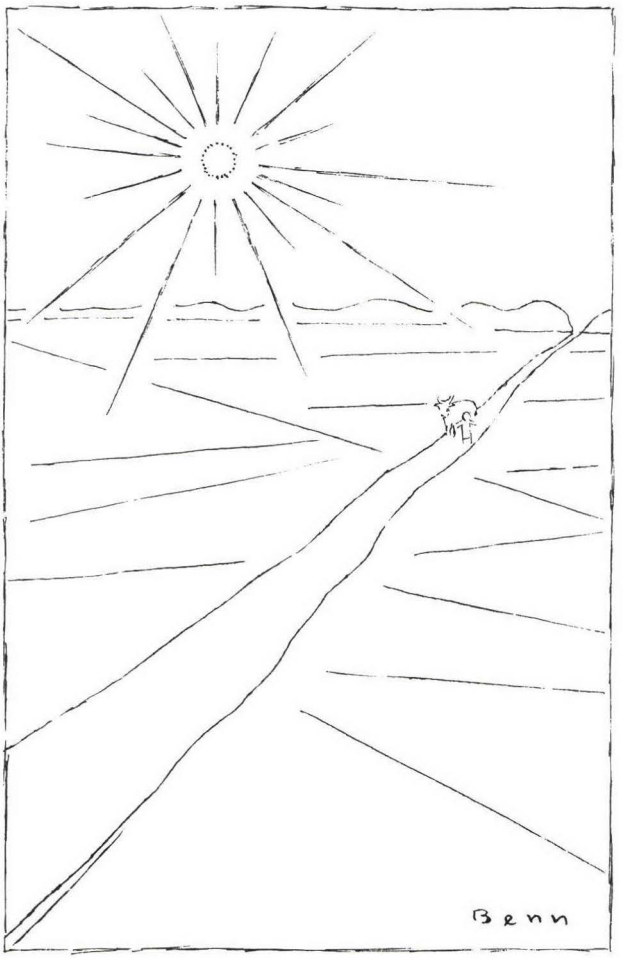
From afar comes a road
Shoots past the open fields,
Divides them from each other
And disappears into the sky.

I set out upon that distant road
Taking with me one red cow.
Beast and human how insignificant
In an ocean full of suns.

Oh you fields, wings of earth,
Tell me, where do you end?
Where do you join the limits?
Or don't you even have an end?

The breadth, the farflung distances,
The gleam of sun on woods,
All of that belongs to you,
It is you, O free and open fields.

—*Margolia*
Komunar, 8, April 1923



"...I set upon that distant road."

A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE COMMUNE

"And what's new in your commune?" Shimon asked me, among other questions. I had met him by chance in Polotsk. Shimon was a pale, dark-eyed boy with a typically Jewish face. He was well known in Polotsk even among pious Jews, who once wanted to break his bones because he had brought several Hebrew teachers to court on charges of beating children. But he was lucky and managed to save his skin.

"Well, I'll tell you," I said. "The old schools with their strict discipline, their dry-as-dust learning, their tedium, the authoritarian attitude of the teachers, keeping the rich kids separate from the poor ones—all that failed to satisfy not only the children, but also many of the teachers, who sought and found new methods of teaching. They established school councils and all sorts of communes and colonies. You begin thinking of communes as being very similar to prisons, where children are isolated from the world and where the teachers are permitted to beat the students."

"Exactly!" replied Shimon. "That's my opinion! I can even give you an example—the Polotsk commune, which is across the street from our Technical school. Sometimes I happen to walk in there, and I see and hear how one of the teachers grabs the kids by the collar, or how the other teachers insult the children with words that are usually reserved for the marketplace. And the children, watching such a good example, imitate the teachers. Some of them even do a little business in the *tolkuchke* (flea-market). In this commune there are such people too. Even I still remember when we were both in the Fifth School—you were always in hot water with the teachers. So if your commune is like that too, I don't envy you. But I don't believe those things about you. Maybe you've become a teacher's pet!"

"The Polotsk commune is a bad example, true," I

responded. "But not every commune is like that. Our commune, for example, is just the opposite. It is self-governing, which means there are no paid employees, and all the housekeeping is in our hands. We don't have any servants—no cooks, no cleaners, no janitors. We do all the cooking ourselves. And it's good, tasty food, believe me. We have a duty roster that includes every comunar. Some of our time is spent on house-cleaning, cooking, sawing firewood, getting provisions.

"The rest of the day we're in one of the two workshops. The sewing workshop was there right from the start. The woodworking shop is only a few months old. We work three hours a day, that is, until lunchtime. At 3 o'clock we go to classes, where we study in groups or 'circles.' We have circles in nature study, in literature and in political subjects, Russian language. Personally I like the political one the best.

"The other circles are also interesting. We learn by making oral reports. That's obligatory for everyone. The highest legislative body in the commune is the general assembly, which is divided into committees: the household committee, the sanitary committee and several others. The Pedagogic Council is responsible for the commune and supervises the work of all the groups and circles. We have a small garden which we try to cultivate along scientific lines.

"Among the kids in the commune there were a few lazy ones, or passive ones, who took only a small part in the work of the commune. I was once one of them. But there were fewer and fewer in that group, thank goodness."

—*Sholem Wittenberg*
Komunar, 8, April 1925

EXPERIMENTING WITH SEEDS

Ask any inexperienced person whether a seed can grow without soil and he will tell you: no, it can't. But that's exactly what we wanted to find out: whether the seed really does need the soil, or is there something else involved. In general we wanted to learn how the seed does survive. That was the purpose of the experiments.

In my first experiment I 'planted' the seed on a brick and covered it with a piece of cloth, so it would have enough warmth. I had baked the brick, so there was no possible nourishment in it for the seed. The sun did not reach it and there were no green leaves that could provide food for it. Yet it grew even more quickly than it would have in the earth!

From this we could deduce that, first, the seed contained nourishment within it from the previous year. Second, the seed did not even need the soil; it needed only nutrients to survive. Later, however, it would need nourishing sap from the earth.

We also concluded that the seeds, in order to grow, need a certain amount of water and heat. When I watered them too much, they rotted and did not grow. They also need a moderate temperature (zero to 50 degrees), not too hot and not too cold. I tried the same experiment during the winter—the air was too cold. Nothing happened. In the summer, under normal temperature, the seed grew. If the temperature is too hot, the seed burns up. For that you don't even need any experiments.

Now we wanted to see if plants need air, or if they can live without it. I planted peas in two bottles: one was air-tight, the other open. In the open bottle the peas sprouted continually. In the closed bottle they grew for a short time and then stopped growing. Why?

I lit a match and dropped it into the open bottle. The flame continued to burn. In the closed one, it went out

immediately. From this we learn that there was a lack of oxygen to enable the match to burn. In another experiment I planted the same peas in a test-tube and sealed it so that no air entered. The peas grew for a certain time and then stopped. Then I put some clear limewater into the test-tube. The water became cloudy.

From all this we may conclude that plants do breathe, they need air, like a human being. The plants, when they used up all the oxygen, stopped growing. Second, because the match went out, and because limewater absorbs carbon dioxide, it became cloudy. This proved that plants inhale oxygen and exhale carbon monoxide. If they had had enough oxygen, they would have continued to grow.

—Devorah Bialy
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS OF THE COMMUNE

First I was in the Seventh Commune, but I had dreams of forming a new one. One fine morning three teachers from Malachovka came and told us that a new commune was being formed—the Twelfth. They asked for volunteers to help build it. Several of the older kids volunteered. Then many of the other children demanded that they too be enrolled in the new Commune.

Only six of the volunteers were accepted at first. The three teachers —Nehama, Sarah and Ida—told us that we could not all go to that commune because it still had no heat and all the windows were broken. As soon as everything will be ready they would let us know. And then they left.

I was unaware of all this because I had gone out before Nehama, Sarah and Ida arrived. Doba, Stera, Folya and the other three had packed up their things and left. As I came near the house I heard a great commotion inside. When I entered, some of the kids came running, all excited, and told me that the three teachers had come and that they had already left, taking Doba, Stera and the others with them. I was very upset at being left behind. All night long I dreamt that I had gone to the Twelfth Commune and that it was exactly as I had imagined it.

The next morning I got up early and wanted to leave, but the other children objected and tried to get me to stay. Finally I ran out and I didn't stop running until I reached the Sixth Commune.

There I stopped, not knowing where the new commune was exactly. At the Sixth I asked for directions, but while I was doing that, I noticed Margolia and Stera out in the street. I ran out and asked them a lot of questions. Margolia told me how they had arrived there at night and found it cold and dirty.

We started walking and we walked a long time before we

came to the little hill at the Vadaprovodna Station. Stera pointed to the commune—it was a big, brown building. Margolia and Stera went in first and I followed them into a place that was so dark, I couldn't see where I was going. I put one foot in front of the other and bumped into something, but I kept on going until we came to a room where there was a bit more light. Bundles were piled all over the floor and on a couple of beds. Then I saw two other rooms that also looked dirty. I couldn't see any more rooms because it was too dark.

This situation didn't last long, however. We tackled the work energetically. We put in new windows. A month later they brought dishes and pots. We cleaned up the rooms. All the children were happy and in good spirits.

Now, two and one half years later, we can realize what we went through in that time. We can see the organization and the extent of independent work. The journals, the cultural activities, the study groups—all these things, meant a lot to us.

So far as the household is concerned we now have cups for everyone. Compare that with our first day in the commune, when there were no more than three cups in the place and we had to wait our turn to use one. We can say that work is our joy and our pleasure.

This is the only place I know where each person has the possibility of developing his abilities and ideas and to achieve a creative, independent life. And therefore I appeal to all our friends: be progressive, build and create. I congratulate all of you on the occasion of the two and one half year existence of our Commune and I hope that in the future the Commune will reach the heights about which we dream...

—Masha Malkina
Komunar, 8, April 1923

ABOUT OUR COW AND OUR LAMB

It is two months now since they brought the cow. When the weather turned warmer, we let the cow out into the yard every morning and afternoon to take a walk. One day she ran off. All the kids started hollering for Sholem to run and catch her.

Another day she broke out and got as far as the church, which was quite a distance away. We were eating our supper when we heard someone yell: "The cow got away!" Everyone jumped up from the table, some picking up a rope, some a towel. Sholem was the first one out.

Another time, both the cow and the lamb ran away, and we didn't even know it. Luckily, two boys in the neighbourhood found them.

About our lamb. Wherever the cow went, the lamb was sure to go. It was not a happy lamb. Always looked sad, except whenever someone gave it a piece of bread. Then it livened up and would even follow you.

One day a really terrible thing happened to the lamb. We let it out into the street—and all of a sudden, it was gone. We started searching for it, we ran to the church, we asked all the neighbours. But no one had heard it or seen it. We went back and looked in the stable again. We heard something moving behind the hay. We looked. And there it was, the lamb, standing quite calm and chewing away for all it was worth.

We all burst out laughing.

—Joel Freedman
Komunar, 8, April 1923

A HOT SUMMER DAY

It is a hot summer day. The sun is shining brightly with its fiery rays, lavishing them upon the entire area, as far as the eye can see, all the way to that border between earth and sky. And the sky is like a bottomless deep-blue sea, without a single wave or the faintest tremor. Far off, on the horizon, hang little snow-white, silvery clouds. Calmly, calmly, the sky spreads out over the earth, enveloping it in its bright blue veil.

And the earth is motionless, like the sky. A barely perceptible breeze skips by from time to time with a caressing "good-morning." The earth stirs for a moment and then remains still again. It seems to be so utterly still, yet everything on earth is full of life. Somewhere in a little bush a bird chirps away, busy with her young. Over there a tiny worm burrows deep into the ground. And nearby, on a hilltop, charming little black and brown figures move to and fro. Beneath each blade of grass, thousands of living beings swarm and dig. In truth, the earth is not as still as it appears to be.

Thousands of brilliantly colored flowers. And each flower pushes its head up, reaching toward the sun. It seems that it wants to be noticed. Across the green, many-hued carpet arise yellow, white, red, dazzling little bees and butterflies. They rush to a flower, kiss it lightly, and fly off to another.

A festive mood also prevails among the cornstalks. Tall and slender, holding their heads a bit to the side, they sway back and forth as if in prayer. Amidst them, twinkling purple and blue cornflowers, swaying together with the stalks. From a distance they fuse into a green-white sea that breaks into waves beneath every gust of wind, and the wind fondles and caresses it, and from deep within comes a long, delicate twittering. From under the corn a cool breeze rises, saturated with moisture, a gift from the river. The bright blue mirror glistens, gilded by the sun. It is calm and sedate, but trembles at the least touch of the breeze.

Here and there, on the brilliant blue surface, emerge human forms that disturb the stillness of the water, splashing with their hands and feet as they roll in the bleached sand of the shore, filling the air with their shouts. The water picks up the sounds and carries them away among the scorched, sandy hills, where they disappear together with the river, into the green forest. The forest, a radiant gold, with its green, bristling crown, swallows everything up and is still again...

Sometimes, from beyond the forest, comes a long, deep hoot and from behind the hills appears first a speck and then, growing larger and larger, a cheerfully advancing steamer. It pushes onward, bringing with it happy tidings from other cities, other fields, other climes, another life. It stimulates and stirs up the river, and long strips of water rush to the shore, slap it playfully and meander back with the foam.

A light breeze comes up and mixes all the scents into one. It also brings the aroma of fresh hay, of meadow grass and flowers, falling in a row beneath the glistening scythe of the sun bronzed farmer. All the living sounds merge into a single melody that restores and refreshes the soul.

—*Margolia*
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

HOW I BECAME A MIDWIFE

We named the cow "October" because she was brought to us on October 25th, the anniversary of the revolution. Some of the children were not too pleased with the name, but they got used to it.

Saturday, December 3. We went out to feed the cow. Then we called Maria to tell us when the cow was due to deliver her calf. Maria came and examined her for a long time and said: "I would suggest that you all sleep in the barn tonight. It could happen very soon."

What a long, long day that was! Every hour dragged like a year. Finally, evening came. We ate our supper. Margolia, Masha, Motl and I picked up the necessary supplies—blankets, pillows, books, a bench, a few other things. The cow's 'home' consisted of three stalls: one for the cow, one for the new calf, and one for fodder. We occupied the two empty 'rooms,' which soon looked like small peasant huts. In the middle of the floor we put the blankets and pillows. On one side we placed the bench and several stools, along with the box containing our rabbits, which hopped out every once in a while and settled down close to our faces as we lay on the floor. Overhead hung a lamp, which we turned down low.

From the other stall came Masha's voice: "Yankl, are you asleep?" Her question woke me up. "No, I'm not asleep."

"Do you hear the cow moaning?"

I turned up the lamp and went to check. Seeing me, the cow began twisting and turning and then lay down and moaned like someone wrestling with death and begging for help. We tried in vain to calm her down. Masha, seeing that the cow's time had come, got all upset. "Oh! We must get Nehama! We can't take responsibility for this! Yankl, don't touch the cow!"

I insisted that at two o'clock in the morning we didn't need to go knocking on Nehama's door. Masha and

Margolia disagreed with me and went to fetch Nehama. But the cow couldn't wait, she started giving birth. We rushed around looking for hay, for straw. When we sat down to catch our breath, 'October' lay down and we noticed something black come out. I removed the membrane. The newborn calf began moving its lips. The cow took a deep breath and stood up. We tried to take the calf away from her, but the cow wouldn't let us come near enough. The calf tried to stand up. After a lot of effort we finally separated them.

Weakened and weary as she was, 'October' kept mooing for her baby and we had to give it to her. She immediately began cleaning it up, all the while moving around as if she were expressing her joy in having given birth to such a pretty little calf, which was red with white spots.

We studied the new creature more closely and noticed that it was a bullock. This was something we hadn't expected, and it was a most regrettable development. Since it was a bull, it would have to be sold. Such a pretty little animal!

In our weariness, however, we could not dwell too long on that. One after the other, we fell asleep. And thus ended that memorable night.

—Yankl Dworkin
Komunar, 8, 1923

WE RENOVATE

For the past few days our Commune has been in a mess. The pile of boards in the yard, the wood-shavings that curl up and stick to our shoes, the shingles flying from the roof like bombs, the constant banging on tin and metal—all of this proclaims that major renovations are going on in the commune.

Four or five workmen were there every day. Now and again a short, fat little man showed up. He had a scrunched up face, stubby fingers, a round paunch, and talked so fast to the workmen that he seemed to be swallowing hot noodles. He always gave them instructions, dragging them from place to place, and then he left. People called him 'the podriatchik' (contractor).

Up on the roof there was a lot going on too. One man was wielding a hatchet, another dragging a long pole. They were ripping up shingles; after each tug, a groan; after each blow of the hammer, another groan. The roof protested—and also groaned. And we children crawled around on all fours, helping to clean up the roof. Soon the shingles were flying from the roof like hail. In the midst of all this we felt as if we were the Red Army attacking the White Army, which stood below us. We took up positions behind the chimney and hurled the shingles to the ground with a shout: "Down with the Black Hundreds! Long live the Reds!"

Once the roof was cleared, however, we were no longer enemies. We slid down the ladder. Down below there was already a mountain of moss-covered shingles, with their ominous rusty nails. There was no help for it—we had to stack them in the barn for the winter. Some of us used a wheelbarrow, some used their bare hands. One tried to outdo the other. We kept running back and forth. Suddenly—ouch! A rusty nail in somebody's foot. The wounded 'soldier' dances away toward the house on one foot and another takes his place.

Beneath the roof was a well into which the debris was

falling. We had to cover it. I found a wide piece of wood, waited for the right moment, and raced to cover the well. Crash! Sand and sticks came flying from up above. I covered my head with the wood. The falling debris thundered above me like an erupting volcano.

The inside of the house looked as if it had been hit by a tornado. At the entrance to the kitchen, the floor had been torn up, so we had to step over a cellar full of water. And at night, whenever I had to do this, my hair stood on end. All the windows were knocked out. The invading autumn wind was merciless, ripping pictures off the walls, sending our notebooks flying through the air, lifting tablecloths off the table. And the harder the wind blew, the harder the workers banged the roof. We all huddled together in the cold, our teeth chattering, but we kept hoping that tomorrow or the day after, our home would be a paradise.

As if all this weren't enough, the plaster started flying and sent us scurrying from one bedroom to another, seeking refuge. We were welcomed by our neighbours, but there were so many of us that it became too congested to move. In the morning the shouting started: "Hey, Barrack 21, time to get up! Hey, number 3, are you dead in there or something?" We leaped out of bed, ran to the dining-room and breakfasted on dust and plaster.

The dining room moved into the bedroom, the bedroom into the dining-room, everything was topsy-turvy, there wasn't even a place to sit down. Someone crawled behind the oven and tried to become invisible, but the Kitchen Committee was on the job and poured water on him.

Finally the confusion came to an end. We cheered this longed for moment when we could clean out the dirt. But that was easier said than done. It took an entire day before we were able to breathe freely. Exhausted, we sat down to rest. Suddenly, woosh! In all the commotion we never even remembered the broken windows. To replace them was no trivial matter. We had to confront the vicissitudes of a new renovation...

—Margolia
Komunar, 4-5, May 1922

MY DREAM

A hot summer day. I am walking through a dense pine forest. The air is warm, sultry. The sun does not have such easy entry into the woods, but it still steams everything. The atmosphere is torpid. Birds sit on the branches chirping dispiritedly. Here and there a bee drones. The inert flowers hang their heads.

I have reached the edge of the pine forest and entered a grove of birch and alder trees. The red berries wink and smile and call me. The more Nature's summer splendor beckons me, the bolder and prouder my gait becomes, because I see I am coming closer to my dream—to attend the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Commune.

Now I am entering the avenue of young birches, planted by the Komunars themselves. As you come closer, a fountain splashes. Around it are planted lovely clumps of flowers, so artistically and tastefully done that you can't tear your eyes away.

The Komunars come out to greet me warmly. How happy I am to see them! When I left, seven years ago, some of them were young children. Now they are grownup colonists, their skin bronzed by the sun, by the work in the fields. They are happy, cheerful, bright-eyed. I am entranced by everything I see, my joy is unbounded. I feel like a bird, released from captivity, that has returned to its old nest, which it built itself in the open woods. It flits from branch to branch out of sheer happiness. That is exactly how I felt.

I walk from one place to another. In the next courtyard, many buildings. In the first building large, bright rooms. A window reflects the rays of the sun; another window, bright red apples and purple plums. The branches, with their heavy loads, are bowed almost to the ground. In the workshops, walls crowded with slogans. The urge to work is almost palpable.

A little further on, a long barn, built according to the

latest methods for raising cows—a cement floor, a separate stall for each cow. Clean, bright. In the center of the yard, a pond covered with greenery. Now a duck dives into the pond, now a goose tearing the green sheet and leaving a stain of white water. Hens and roosters stroll around the yard. It all has the look of the new village barnyard. There is a large vegetable garden, from which comes the sounds of lively singing. On one side of the garden is a broad meadow. The Komunars stand in the field, mowing the hay and loading it into wagons.

On the other side is a pasture for cows, sheep and horses. They stand with outstretched necks, swishing their tails, looking for a bit of shade. In the distance the scythes glisten, cutting down the corn. One sheaf after another is tied. People work joyfully. The sun begins to set, the air cools down. The sun has turned into a fiery ball. Voices call to one another. Everyone gathers with their scythes and sickles. Singing happily, people return from their labours.

—Devorah Bialy
Komunar, 8, April 1923

THE FIRST GENERAL MEETING

The room we first moved into looked like a freight car. The beds, stacked on top of each other, were piled high with all kinds of goods, bedclothes, food supplies. Nehama, who occupied a small room together with Ida and Sarah, came in and told us to report to the general meeting.

All day long we talked about it. I was moved by a strange feeling, a feeling of awe and expectation. I wanted to know what sort of event a general meeting was. I imagined it to be a very serious occasion. I began to feel very serious myself. Even the room, with its dimly burning lamp and the shadows on the walls, seemed to be somehow calm.

Finally we were all present. We sat on beds, on bundles. Nehama, opening the meeting, proposed the election of a secretary. Doba nominated Folye. Devorah nominated Margolia. When I heard my name mentioned, my heart skipped a beat. I felt myself blushing. What did I know about being a secretary? I tried to say something, but I spoke so softly that nobody even heard me. People held up their hands. Folye was elected. He pulled out a chair, set a lamp near it, and whenever anyone spoke, he wrote something in a notebook.

So now I had seen a general meeting and I knew what a secretary is supposed to do. I felt a pang of resentment. I could have done that too. Big deal — writing in a notebook! Why did I decline the nomination? I began studying the assembly. It consisted of 12 children and three leaders. Most of the children were from the Seventh Commune— they seemed more at home. It was apparently not the first time they had attended a general meeting.

The front row at the meeting was interested in what was going on. Behind them, near the oven, sat Chaim and Joel, two boys who had just arrived. By Joel's sleepy eyes you could tell that he understood nothing of what was happening, but when everyone raised their hands to vote,

he raised his too. Chaim, nodding off, hit his head against the oven and woke up with a bang.

We discussed the question of organization. We elected a Sanitation Committee and a Textiles Committee. The leaders stressed that we ourselves were in charge of running our house, that we must be independent and that we would have to build our own lives. I felt proud. How different this was from my home, where I was regarded as a child who had no right to say anything... Here, however, we would be running our own affairs. And they chose me to be on the Textile Committee! The very next morning I wrote a letter to my sister telling her proudly that I had become manager of a manufacturing operation that was so extensive that if adults were running it they would make a big business out of it.

—*Margolia*
Komunar, 6, October 1922

MY LIFE IN THE COMMUNE

I arrived in the commune on October 2nd. Before that I had been in the Seventh Commune. When Ida came to register children for the new commune, Hannah, Lyuba, Basya, Meier and I all signed up. But nothing further happened.

One day Shimke, Hannah and I went to visit the new commune to see a relative of mine there. You may even know him—his name was Folye. But as we were approaching the house, Folye came flying out to greet us:

"Guess what! Zyame and Hannah have been accepted into our Commune!" Of course, we were very happy to hear that.

When we entered the house, Sarah asked us to take off our coats. But Sareta, Masha and Doba were angry. Sareta complained that Hannah and I had been admitted, but not Meier. She was on the verge of tears. This was too much for Hannah; she started putting her coat back on. So did I. But Nehama stopped us from leaving and we stayed.

Nehama gave us rulers and we started measuring the windows, the floor and other such things. At first we lived in Margolia's room. There was a dining-room, a bedroom and a common room. All the other rooms were dirty, so we had to clean them up. Then we sewed straw mattresses. We also chopped up a stall to use for firewood. We had no other wood.

I remember sitting at the first general meeting as if I were drunk. When everyone raised their hands, I did the same. Since then I've learned a great deal. At a general meeting I now know what to vote for. But I think that Doba, Masha and Sareta are still angry with me because Hannah and I were accepted into the Commune and Basya, Lyuba and Meier were not.

—Zyame Gutkovich,
Komunar, 6, October 1922

SPRING

A one-act play

Characters: Father Frost, Winds (1, 2 and 3), Uncle Snowman, Crow, Sunbeams, Various flowers, birds, etc.
Stage set: A forest in winter.
Enter: Father Frost from amidst the trees.

FROST: My legs are rather shaky
Or perhaps I've walked too much
Or else old-age has come
Or maybe my time is up.
(sits down)
Apparently my strength is waning
Not like in the good old days
When I used to go a-riding
On harnessed unruly winds.
Like a young and mighty bird
I'd soar from land to land
My mouth a frosty breath
Rattling everybody's teeth.
One cold brush-stroke
And the world is a riot of color
Besilvered and bejewelled.
Beauty reigns supreme.
A wave of my magic wand —
And the world is bewitched.
Look there at all those trees
The branches silver-coated.
You think that I, a ruler,
Will submit to such weakness?
No, I still hold in my hand
The frosty key to life!
Winds and storms and Uncle Snow
No trivial forces they,
And they are all good friends

Of mine, as is the Night.
Deep within the forest
Is the palace where I live.
But what about the field?
And where's my friend The Wind?

(Raps three times with his stick. Pause)

WIND 1: *(howls, comes flying in)*
Good-morning, Father Frost
From afar I heard you call.
Tell me what you wish of me.

FROST: You did not come today
When I summoned you...

WIND 1: I was tangled in the branches
Couldn't free myself.

FROST: Have you lost your strength,
Your stormy, howling verve.
Is something wrong with you?

WIND 1: It's the accursed Sun!
I am only one
Against that mighty force
Whose strength increases every day.
What will the outcome be?

FROST: And where are all your troops?

WIND 1: The northern winds are weakening
I'm very low in troops
Just when massive armies
Are advancing from the south.

FROST: *(jumps up)*
Silence! You're a coward!
Don't you dare retreat!
You're supposed to be my power
And this is still our time.

WIND 1: No, my lord, don't forget
That we are northerners
And when you die...
So do I.

FROST: Whatever has been freed today,
All the waters everywhere,
You can still defeat
With the coming of the Night.

WIND 1: I await your orders.
And I shall obey.

FROST: *(sits down)*
So long as I control the ice
I shall the ruler be!
Oh! My back is killing me —
I'm going to lie down a while.
(lies down)

CROW: *(flies in)*
Caw—Caw —Caw
Look at this old loon.
How heavily he breathes!
His bones are giving way,
This ailing Prince of Cold —
Caw—Caw—Caw—

FROST: Hey, you croaker,
Cut it out!
You think you're
In the street somewhere?
Remember where you are!
And who are you mocking there?

CROW: You! Old Father Frost!
You're through
And you don't even know it!
Look at your threadbare coat,
See what the Sun has done.
You're full of wounds, old man,
That's why you're hiding here!
Caw—Caw—Caw

FROST: You scarecrow witch!
Who sent for you?
What sort of praises
Did you sing for me
When I first arrived?
You bowed and scraped,
You told the world
About my virtues,
How I chased the birds away
So you could rule the roost.
You who've learned
To brag and bluster,
You swore allegiance
First to me
Then to the Sun.
But your oath means less
Than a droplet in the sea!

CROW: Caw—Caw—Caw
Quiet, Uncle, quiet!
The world is fast asleep.
When morning comes
You'll be a bygone hero.
Caw—Caw—Caw
(flies away)

FROST: Dastardly glutton!
Afraid of its shadow!
Kisses the feet of the new king
And spits in the face of the old...

WIND 2: Dumb, dead, frozen, cold —
That's the news from the forest.
We did our work well
We got help from the Night.
I thought we'd lost the battle
Everything was melting
Dissolved by the rays
Of the torrid Sun.
But when the Sun set
We attacked the water
And it turned to ice.
We snaked along the ground
We climbed the cliffs.
We jumped the fences
We assaulted the trees
We made sport of the Sun
And whitened the woods!

FROST: Bravo! Bravo!
That's the way it's done!
The world is still ours.
Frost and snow
Are still the king.
Wind! Keep up your dance
Jump and leap and prance
Fly to the battlefield
And bring me the latest news!

WIND 2: I fly away, I fly away
And won't be back till break of day...

FROST: So all's not lost?
(rubs his hands)

(In the distance, howling and whistling of winds. Dawn breaks.)

FROST: *(restless)*
What's all that noise?
What does it signify?
Oh, the sky is turning red.
The battle now will be decisive.
Fight for life! Fight to the death!
Don't dare retreat!
Don't dare betray us!
(the tumult grows louder)

FROST: Oh! The battle grows fiercer
The heavens grow light.
Is it time to go?
Not yet! Not yet!

WIND 3: Things are very bad, my lord.
Our reign hangs by a thread...

WIND 2: *(blows in)*
Father Frost, did you not see
How I trembled hopelessly?
The forest is still dark
And it's still very cold.
But not so in the field!
The whole world grows red
You can't look to the east
With the naked eye.
Sound of drums and trumpets.
Bands of angels fly about
On rose-colored wings.
White doves come to greet them
From all directions
With pink blossoms in their beaks.
And in the midst of this

In a fiery chariot
Drawn by fiery steeds and lions
Rides the rosy princess.
And the whole celestial procession
Coming from the south
On mild and friendly breezes
Smilingly greets the earth below
Whose rocks and trees, it seems,
Are happy to return the smile.

WIND 2: And down below we stood
Screaming, whistling, smashing,
Blowing with all our might,
While black crows and mortal men
Wreaked vengeance on us
Treating us like criminals,
Breaking our bones with iron bars.
And now there's no place left for us.
So let's hitch up our wagon
And beat a quick retreat...

(Enter Wind 1. Uncle Snow, enfeebled, leans upon him)

UNCLE SNOW:
Oh, where am I? Dead?
Everything here is white, not red.
Oh, how pleasant here,
With all our friends.
(The winds lead him to a seat)

FROST: What happened to Uncle Snow?
He looks more dead than alive.

WIND 1: Fleeing from the red folk
I came upon him
Lying in the street
Covered with mud.
I helped him up
And brought him here.

FROST: And a good thing, too.
I'll soon revive him.

(Frost and winds blow on Uncle Snow, who stands up)

UNCLE SNOW:
I thank you, Father Frost
You saved my life.
I'm as good as new again..
I'm very very. happy.
Now I'm Uncle Snow again.
I can make things white again
With my downy feathers.

(From afar, sounds of music, drums and trumpets. One side of the stage grows brighter)

WIND 1: Look, the Sun is coming closer.
In another moment
It will reach the forest.

UNCLE SNOW:
Oh, I'm melting!
I feel —

FROST: The game is almost over —

(From behind the mountain comes the Sun, surrounded by its rays. The stage grows bright. Sun raises its hand in a gesture of command. Slowly the Winds disappear. So does Uncle Snow. Everything turns green and bright.)

SUN: Greetings, 0 beloved Earth,
Rivers, Woods, Grass and Flowers!
I have returned to you
From a distant journey.
Dear, good children!
I have freed you from Winter.

I have sent him back to sleep
In his demon-land up North.
Wake up, Nature, from your slumber!
(to beams) And you, my bright eyes,
Disperse to all the corners
And announce my coming...
(The beams scatter in all directions)

SUNBEAM: 0 sweet little flowers
I see you whole again
I come to you from far away
From heaven's splendor.
I am a messenger of the Sun,
Come to bring you life and joy.
Millions of miles I flew
In the twinkling of an eye.
And on the way I passed
Many suns and stars.
I bring the fragrances of heaven
And its myriad colors
As a gift to each of you.
Awake, you stars of earth!
The Sun now shines upon you.
(Sings to the flowers)
Shtey oyf, du khanele
Makh oyf dayn eygele!
Shtey oyf, kleyn Rosele,
Bagris mikh, Feygele,
Un du, Pionele,
Du, royter Monele.
Genug geshlofn shoyn!
Es laykht shoyn, Zunele.
Bapootz dos veldele
Farshayn dos feldele.
(Awake, little pansy, open your eye; awake, little rose, and you, little peony, and you, red poppy, you have all slept long enough. The sun is shining. Decorate the woods, bedeck the fields.)

Note: the Yiddish word for pansy is "khanele's eygele."

FLOWERS: Mother Earth! How beautiful!
So many sunbeams! See how they shine!

SUNBEAMS: All together, little flowers,
Let's all dance around!

(Backstage, sounds of singing. Enter flowers, birds, singing)
Green earth and azure skies,
Spring has finally arrived.
Voices ring out in praise
Birds sing out in many ways.
Green earth and azure skies,
Spring has finally arrived.
All the flowers now awake
From their long, deep slumber.
The air is full of sweet aromas,
Of singing and of joy.
And the new grasses
Sway lightly in the breeze.
And the clear little brook
Leaps and dances on the stones,
As the Sun's bright rays
Lightly kiss the waves,
And the little fishes
Swish their little tails.
Green earth and azure skies,
Spring has finally arrived.
From the upturned earth
Little worms emerge,
Blinking their tiny eyes
Against the blinding light.
And young bees buzz about
Skipping from flower to flower.
Green earth and azure skies,
Spring has finally arrived!

CURTAIN

—Margolia
Komunar, 8, April 1923

EPILOGUE

A YIDDISH JOURNAL FROM A CHILDREN'S COMMUNE IN THE SOVIET UNION

For almost 50 years now I have treasured these three original bound journals, a gift from the noted Yiddish writer A. Litwin, author of Jewish Souls. (His poem, *Zhamele*, has become part of the treasury of Yiddish songs.) Litwin himself was an indefatigable collector of folklore.

Toward the end of 1923, when he was leaving Chicago, where he had been director of the three *Arbeter Ring* schools for a short time, he entrusted me with a gift that had been presented to him in the Soviet Union. He adjured me to guard it with my life. What sort of gift was it?

Three hand-bound and handwritten volumes of *Komunar*: Number 4-5, May-June 1922; Number 6, October 1922; and Number 8, April 1923. All of them produced by the Twelfth Children's Work Commune.

I must confess that not until recently, almost 50 years later, did I begin to read them. The reason was this: I simply found them extremely difficult to read, because published in a single copy each, they were written by hand on coarse paper and the ink blurred.

Litwin died years ago, and I didn't know where that commune was located. I do not remember, whether Litwin ever told me where he received them. I do recall, though, how happy he was to get them. It was right after the civil war in the Soviet Union and this commune was made up of homeless children whose parents had perished. The children had been found wandering on the roads.

The three issues of *Komunar* are all the same size—$8\frac{1}{2} \times 12$ inches. Each issue has a different cover, made by the children. The cover on number 4-5 is made of wood, with a drawing of a forest and three children at work. Number 6 is made of sackcloth stretched over wood; the words are embroidered. There is also the picture of a house with a red flag on top. Number 8 is also made of wood, but carved into the wood is the date of the issue and a picture of a house and a tree.

The name of the editor is not given. The writers are almost the same in all three issues. Where no author's name is listed, I assumed it was written by a teacher or rewritten from published materials. In the three issues there are two one-act plays. Both of them without names of the authors. Reading them, one immediately recognizes that they are not the work of children, but of experienced writers *(Ronch's impression here is incorrect. All the material in Komunar was written by the children. In several instances, contributors [including myself] wrote more than one piece for the same issue, and in such cases the author's name was omitted from some of the pieces. M.L.).* The children of the Commune probably staged all of them.

The Yiddish in the three issues is delightful. It contains no Russianisms with one exception, where the writer used the word satirically: Our *otchotnost* (accounting) by Leybke Madis.

The names of the writers, as well as the names of other children mentioned, are all genuinely Yiddish. A few of the children must have studied in a traditional *cheider* at some time, since they often use expressions from the prayerbook. The themes of the poems, articles and humorous sketches reflect the life of the writers. Living close to nature, they write about spring and autumn, winds and trees. Learning how to live in a communal setting, they describe how they felt when they found themselves at a general meeting, for example, or about the physical appearance of the commune, or about living with other children. And they don't hesitate to criticize anyone when necessary.

But let them speak for themselves.

Contents of Komunar Number 4-5: "Spring" by Folye Gutkovich; "The Thaw," a poem by Margolia Kantorovich; "The First of May," a play in verse; "The Night," poem by Devorah Bialy; "Our Fantasies," by Margolia; "The Fields Are Asleep," poem by Doba Chanina; "The River," by Hannah Gutkovich; a poem by Avrom Shmoilovich; "Experiments with Seeds" by Devorah.

This issue was apparently handwritten by one child. The handwriting is good and the spelling is correct, but they apparently didn't believe in paragraphing or punctuation, so it is difficult to read. Space does not permit me to deal with the content or the style of writing, although for philologists and teachers this would be a worthwhile effort.

Issue Number 6 is "dedicated to the second anniversary of the commune." Here we learn that the commune was located in the area between Polotsk and Malachovka, since the children talk about travelling between those two places. Sorka writes on her "Impressions of the First Day in the Commune." She and others write that their first impression of the place was that it was very dirty. But they attacked it with rags and water and brooms (which they made out of twigs) and soon they had a clean place to live in.

Yashka Zelikson writes about "My Arrival at the Commune," Yankl Dvorkin about going "Into the Woods for Brooms," Joel Freedman and Soreta write "Reminiscences."

Folye Gutkovich's composition "A Night on the Street" deserves special mention. First, the style. It begins: "One day a friend of mine from the Archereiska *datcha* visited us in order to get acquainted with our commune. Well, what was there here for him to see? Nothing. And I must tell you that when evening came, there was not even a place for him to sleep." So Sholem, one of the members of the commune, offered to give up his bed and sleep outside in the street. He and Folye were both given permission to do this.

"We put on our coats around five o'clock. With a blanket and a heigh-ho we went outside to taste the autumn night. The night happened to be on the cool side, but it was

beautiful, the moon was shining brightly. We both lay down with our faces to the sky and looked up until we fell asleep... Our friends came out to see what was happening with us. Yes, we were really sleeping out in the street. Probably good and frozen. We laughed at them, but nevertheless we knew that our noses were really a little cold."

In that issue of Komunar there is also a humorous piece about "Our Renovations."

Number 8 contains material by several of the previously mentioned writers and some new ones. For example, Sholem Wittenberg writes on Folyes dream; Masha Malkina on the two-year existence of the commune; and a poem by Yashka Zelikson.

Each issue has 30 pages. Number 6 has nine postcard size photos pasted in. The photographs (of children and leaders) are still clear.

The children in this commune were probably 8 to 12 vears old. What happened to them? What they wrote about themselves and their life is extremely interesting. At that time the children were more interested in making mattresses to sleep on and in working independently than in playing games.

—I. E. Ronch

Yiddishe Kultur, New York, January 1972



Time Remembered

by

Manya Lipshitz

At last the English translation of Manya Lipshitz's Yiddish original—the true story of her rediscovery of her youthful writings in journals from a Russian commune in the early years of the Revolution.

What is presented here is not only the story of a remarkable literary find, but also the story of a remarkable Jewish educator. All who know Manya Lipshitz, and those who do not, will recognize in *Time Remembered* a poignant retelling of the universal story of immigration to the North Americas and the looking back that inspired composers such as Dvorak, especially in symphonic works like *From The New World.* This nostalgia also inspired many other artists, writers and creative human beings. *Time Remembered* is a book to be cherished from an author already lauded in the community in which she is known.

With contributions by J. B. Salsberg and Hersh Smolar